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The 28th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

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Issue 51a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

First Session

Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Speaker
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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)
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Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (AL),
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Fawcett, Hon. Kyle, Calgary-Klein (PC)
Fenske, Jacquie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC)
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W)
Fox, Rodney M., Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Fritz, Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC)
Goudreau, Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (PC)
Griffiths, Hon. Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC)
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Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC),
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Jeneroux, Matt, Edmonton-South West (PC)
Johnson, Hon. Jeff, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (PC)
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McQueen, Hon. Diana, Drayton Valley-Devon (PC)
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Quadri, Sohail, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)
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 Premier
Rodney, Hon. Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
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Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC)
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 Leader of the Official Opposition
Starke, Hon. Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Towle, Kerry, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W),
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Weadick, Hon. Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC)
Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (W)
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC),
 Government Whip

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 61

Wildrose: 17

Alberta Liberal: 5

New Democrat: 4

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Luan	Strankman
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Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

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Casey
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Kubinec
Sandhu
Sherman

Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee

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Eggen	McDonald
Goudreau	Saskiw
Lemke	

Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee

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Johnson, L.	Young
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Amery	Jeneroux
Anglin	Khan
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Bilous	Kubinec
Blakeman	Lemke
Calahasen	Sandhu
Casey	Stier
Fenske	Webber

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 24, 2013

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us pray. Let us be thankful for the voice we have been given, let us be thoughtful in how we employ that voice, and let us remember there are those who have no voice at all. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have many, many introductions today, so once again, in the absence of any specified time limit for introductions, I will ask you all to please be as brief as you can in order to allow other members the courtesy of having enough time to do their introduction. House leaders, I will again ask all of you to review this matter of introductions. We have had introductions that have gone from as low as 20 seconds in length to as high as over a minute in length, and we need a little tightening up on that, with due respect. Thank you, hon. members.

Let us start with school groups. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, leader of the Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some of the hardest working, smartest, brightest students in the country, two classes of students from Aldergrove elementary school, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark. Accompanying the first class of students today is their teacher, Elana McConaghie, and parent volunteers Kendra Nickerson and Julie Haskins. Accompanying the second class of students is their teacher, Doug Johnson; TA Anna Pietucha; and parent volunteer Iris Bruening.

Now, Mr. Johnson's class is studying FNMI traditions, specifically the Iroquois Confederacy and how it relates to democratic government. We may be the leaders of today, but these are the leaders of tomorrow. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Deputy Premier it's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you a group of 49 visiting students and their leaders from Caernarvon elementary school here in Edmonton. Like I said, there are 49 in this group, including group leaders Lisa Shemko and Susanne Venaas and parent helpers Kaye Ly, Jenny Chan, and Shelly Quon. They are seated in the members' gallery, I believe, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you as well, hon. minister.
Let's go to Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, please.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to rise and introduce to you and through you Ben Kembal, who is a work experience student in my constituency office of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. Ben is heading to university in September but, unfortunately, was just recently affected by the budget cuts. Ben works very

hard in my constituency office, and he's learning a lot. He's here today to see how the Legislature works.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, for your brevity.

Any other school groups? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce 27 students and teachers from Calder elementary school. They are here today to observe the proceedings in question period, and I wish that they could have the warm reception from everyone here in the Legislature.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, as well.

Let's move on now. Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the community sponsors of the School at the Legislature program. This program gives grade 6 teachers from all across our province an opportunity to relocate their classroom to the Legislature for a week. Seated in your gallery are Mr. Tim Downey, president, Priority Printing Limited; from CTV Mr. Lloyd Lewis, VP and general manager; Mr. Eric Rice, manager, production and interactive, CTV Two; from the Rotary Club of Edmonton Mr. Jack Clements; and finally, Mr. Ron LaFranchise, horticulturist and volunteer to our program.

I'd also like to formally recognize the support of CKUA Radio Network: Mr. Ken Regan, general manager; Ms Patti Pon, chair of CKUA Radio Foundation; and Ms Katrina Regan-Ingram, director of marketing and sales, who, regrettably, could not join us today. We wish to show our appreciation for this significant and ongoing sponsorship of the program. Our guests are seated in your gallery, and I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Sherwood Park, your first of two introductions.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise before you and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Gordon Weighell and his daughter Lindsay. Gordon and Lindsay were originally scheduled to attend session back in November, but the very first heavy snowfall of last year derailed those plans. I am extremely glad they have still made the effort and found the time to be here today. I would like them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Your second introduction.

Ms Olesen: It is again my pleasure to rise before you and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two of my constituents who are in attendance today. Todd Banks is the executive director of the Chamber of Commerce, and Chris Dugan is my favourite bill collector at Case Receivable Management in Sherwood Park. They are great volunteers in our community and good friends of mine. Would they please rise, and could we all please welcome them with the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and Leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two oppositions to – I have more than two oppositions, but I have two introductions. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly my guests from the Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater Alberta NDP Constituency Association. They're here to present a petition on an issue that has severely affected many Albertans, particularly those on low and fixed incomes, the price of electricity in our province. The petition asks the government to recognize electricity as an essential service and reregulate the industry. I would now like my guests to rise as I call their names and to receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly: Mandy Melnyk, Chandra Clarke, Jean Brehaut, Ron Monroe, Margaret Monroe, and Joyce Ollikka. Please join me in giving them a warm welcome.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, through you and to you is a constituent of mine, Rachel King. Rachel is in the process of completing a master's degree in counselling psychology at the University of Alberta and will be starting her PhD in the fall. The province's recent budget has made her concerned for the future of postsecondary education in this province. Rachel is also the sister of our director of research and communications. I would ask Rachel to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Patty McLeod. Patty is a vice-president of corporate responsibility for her employer. She and her husband, Dan, have two lively daughters, and Patty shares her energy and expertise on the boards of the YWCA of Calgary, the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, and the Calgary Economic Development Authority. Most importantly, Patty and her family are residents of Calgary-Glenmore. I ask Patty to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is Mr. Al Johnson. Al is originally from Montreal and as a chartered accountant accepted a six-month assignment to Calgary over 30 years ago. Al is a management consultant working in the nonprofit sector. I suspect, though, Al's biggest challenge in life has been as my husband. Thank you, Al, for bringing out the best in me. I'd ask Al to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two constituents of mine from Hinton, Shirley and Gino Caputo, who help make this the great province it is today. Shirley has served as trustee in the Grande Yellowhead public school division for the last 12 years, six of those as the vice-chair. In addition to her work with the school division, Shirley is chair of the Hinton Adult Learning Society, and she has volunteered with several organizations, which is important to recognize as it is National Volunteer Week.

Her husband, Gino, is a remarkable individual. Gino is a cancer survivor, being diagnosed with cancer three times. He was able to do his chemotherapy treatments in Hinton at the local hospital. In 1998 he was featured in the Facing Cancer magazine, encouraging expansion of local community centre cancer clinics. Gino is a strong advocate and fundraiser for the Hinton community cancer clinic, and it's one of the facilities that received government funding for upgrades recently. Gino's personal philosophy is to live life, love, enjoy everything, exercise, and not stress, words

that we all need to follow. Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to say that they're here in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the Minister of Environment and SRD.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 10 constituents of mine from Edmonton-Ellerslie: Telly Balanag, the president of the Filipino Womens' Association in Alberta; Fely Taylor, recently crowned as Miss Spring 2013 by the Filipino Womens' Association – and I had the honour of attending the event out in the snow two weeks ago – Beth Aperocho, the first president of the association; Flor Salanguit, the Filipino Retirees' Association's Queen of 2012; Arcy Arabe, the board director; and Rebecca Bengco, August Salanguit, Maria Aromin, all members of the retirees association. In addition to all of those people, we have Elena Monar from my constituency, who serves on my PC association. At this time all my guests have risen. Please accept our traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two outstanding constituents from my community and my constituency of Drayton Valley-Devon. Donna and Laurie Tkachuk are here joining us today for the first time in the gallery. Laurie has been a pharmacist in our community for a number of years, and together they have run a very successful retail business in pharmacy as well. In our community of Drayton Valley when we want something done, this is the couple we go to. Donna and Laurie are such outstanding volunteers and businesspeople, and they give so much back to our community and this province. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly my guests from the Coalition for Action on Post-Secondary Education, or CAPSE. CAPSE deplores this government's dramatic budget cuts for postsecondary education. They'd like to see the government stop demanding innovation from everyone except itself and instead demonstrate innovation to create new ways of generating revenue to fund essential services like postsecondary education. I would now ask my guests to rise as I call their names: William Anselmi, Micah Cooper, Dougal MacDonald, Kelly MacFarlane, Amina Mohamed, Carolyn Sale, Brianna Wells, and Janice Williamson. I would ask everybody to join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, the first of two introductions.

Dr. Swann: That's correct. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to introduce to you two Albertans that are fairly familiar to the Legislature. Over the last 10 years Eric Musekamp and Darlene Dunlop have attended the Legislature. Eric is a member of the Wild Rose Agricultural Producers, the largest producer-funded farm organization in Alberta, which, by the way, unanimously

called for mandatory WCB and child labour standards. Eric is also the president of the Farmworkers Union of Alberta, advocating for extending labour legislation to agriculture to protect child labourers. With him is Darlene Dunlop of the Farmworkers Union, to remind this government that just as women are persons, so too are farm workers, deserving of the same rights as other workers in Alberta. I'll ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

My second introduction is Mr. Peter Helfrich, a Calgary paramedic for 20 years and candidate in the Banff-Cochrane area in 2012, as passionate as I am about better government in Alberta. Please rise and receive the warm welcome.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly – that's a tongue twister – my guests from United Church Women. Donna Krucik, Louise Rogers, and Margery Wright are here to present a petition demanding that this PC government take real action on ending child poverty in Alberta. Many promises have been made, yet little to no funding has been allocated to tackle this serious issue. There are still over 90,000 children living in poverty in Alberta, a truly shameful statistic in a province as wealthy as ours. I'd now like to ask Donna, Louise, and Margery to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you three constituents from Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, leaders in our community. Elizabeth Sebest is a retired educator and also an avid gardener. George Sebest, her husband, is also a retired educator, and both are involved in the Pysanka Festival. Also from Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville today is Marcel Van Hecke. He lives near the wonderful community of Fort Saskatchewan. He's a farmer, and he's a developer, but he does actually live in Strathcona county. I would ask that they all rise and receive the warm greeting from this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Insulin Pump Therapy

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another example of why Albertans can't trust this government and another broken promise that affects vulnerable Albertans. Yet the Premier and her ministers ignore those promises, and they claim they're keeping their commitments. Just yesterday the Premier gave us a list, and she included insulin pumps as a promise kept. Nope. Promise broken.

Here's what one Albertan told me: "The election promise was for people with type 1 diabetes who would benefit from an insulin pump. They would have their costs covered. My vote was swayed accordingly as my daughter has type 1 diabetes. The only reason I voted Conservative was because of this promise."

Another Albertan told me of the ordeal that type 1 diabetics face each and every day. She said that a pump would alleviate those with type 1 diabetes from having to poke their fingers repeatedly every day up to 15 times or more. Then, to top it off, they can be injecting themselves as many as 10 times a day. I have received

over 30 e-mails from Albertans just like these two, and they're consistently saying that they need these pumps, they were promised these pumps, and they're not here.

Mr. Speaker, the original promise was for \$18 million this year and \$65 million over five years. This would have covered 1,600 Albertans this year and 6,200 Albertans in all. But after the election everything changed. Funding dropped to only \$5 million this year, leaving only 300 Albertans eligible for this coverage. That's a far, far cry from 1,600. If you do the calculations, it's about \$17,000 per patient, but the pumps are only \$7,000 per patient. One must wonder where the rest of the money goes.

Now, I don't know if this callous decision is due to this government's stunning fiscal mismanagement, the imaginary bitumen bubble, or whether the government just had to make some room to pay for those March 31 Alberta Health Services bonuses. At the end of the day the Premier made this promise, and you continue to take credit. Please do something.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. First main set of questions.

Prescription Drug Coverage

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the government's plan to reduce drug prices is a complete disaster. Yesterday in their latest bulletin Alberta Blue Cross confirmed it's a mess. It turns out the repricing and delisting of drugs has created a large number of supply issues. Many of the drugs that were supposed to be of a lower price aren't available, so many of the delisted drugs have to be relisted at a much higher price. Now, we warned several weeks ago that this would happen. The minister ignored the warnings. Is the Premier listening now to the reality of what he has done to our drug pricing plan?

1:50

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, the decisions that we made with respect to drug pricing are going to continue to allow us to ensure that there is appropriate access for Albertans throughout this province at a cost to taxpayers that is much reduced. There is no doubt that whenever we introduce change, there is some period of transition, but we have complete confidence with respect to this decision. Simply because the opposition fearmongers about this is no reason for us to change our mind.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've also been warning about the potential for pharmacy closures as a result of the minister's Fredicare plan. We've revealed information about drugstores in Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Banff, and elsewhere. There's also a pharmacist in the Premier's constituency who has made multiple requests to meet with her MLA to explain the impact drug prices are going to have. Since the Premier has so far refused to meet or even respond, what would she like me to tell her constituent on her behalf?

Ms Redford: Well, I think that it's very important for MLAs to meet with their constituents, and whenever there is a request, that certainly happens, Mr. Speaker. I'll be happy to meet with any of my constituents who have any view with respect to our decisions. But at the end of the day our circumstances are exactly what we've described before, which is that we've made decisions with respect to how to take care of vulnerable Albertans to ensure that drugs are available at a fair cost to everyone. We do believe that there has been fair advance notice with respect to transitioning

into a business model that allows that to continue, and we would encourage anyone who's running a business in this province to make the decisions that are necessary to maintain that business.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this Calgary drugstore in the Britannia mall in the Premier's constituency has operated there for more than 50 years, and the current owner, Debbie Boyle, has owned it for 22 years. She's worried about increased costs, reduced income, poorer service to patients, and potential closure of her business. This is one of dozens of stories that we've heard. Surely government MLAs must be hearing the same stories, yet the Premier and her Minister of Health continue to ignore pharmacists, ignore patients, and ignore reality. Why?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons that we have so many people that are worried about these issues is because of these continued unfounded allegations by the opposition that are continuing to make sure that people do not have confidence in the public health care system. In fact, I am very familiar with this business. I understand that it's a thriving business. I understand that people are concerned, and it's important to have these discussions. But one of the reasons that people are concerned is that we continue to see these unfounded allegations from the opposition spreading doom and gloom, which simply isn't the case.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. Second main series of questions.

Ms Smith: I'll be sure to pass that on to your constituent Debbie Boyle.

Health System Executive Expenses

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the government is sending mixed messages on health executive expenses. Now, some days the Premier calls it fearmongering when we raise issues about the Mayo Clinic, fancy dinners, charity write-offs, and attending political functions. Other days she wants us to make sure that all appropriate steps are taken to report it. Some days she says that it's all in the past, yet she hired Justice Wachowich to see if he can get some of this money back. So which is it? Are they serious about recovering wasted tax dollars or not?

Ms Redford: As said in this House last week, we have made the decision to ask for legal advice to determine, Mr. Speaker, where and whether it will be possible to recover costs that may come up over the course of time and to say that we can ensure that where it is effective and it is possible, we can take appropriate steps. But standing up in this House and pounding desks and saying that it all must be done doesn't actually give us the legal right to do it. We've asked for legal advice with respect to that, and once we receive it, we'll follow it.

Ms Smith: Here's the problem, Mr. Speaker. We've got two tiers of health care, one for health VPs and one for everyone else. Take Danielle King, a 17-year-old nationally ranked dancer who had a serious knee injury. She was told to wait up to three years for her operation. Instead she went to Cleveland for surgery so she could keep on dancing. She paid over \$11,000 for treatment. The out-of-province committee offered to cover \$613. Yet health VP Joanne Stalinski got automatic expense reimbursements for almost \$6,000

for a personal fitness trainer and a spiritual life coach. How is that fair?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to go back and dig out what the employment contract might have been for somebody seven, eight, nine years ago, but I do want to say this. If someone has gotten taxpayer dollars when they should not have gotten those taxpayer dollars based on the policies of the day, we will do everything in our power to recoup those costs. We will do everything in our power to achieve the cost savings for taxpayers. In fact, this leadership, this Premier, has delivered the most comprehensive expense policy of any province in this country.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it's not in the past. Executive contracts that have been approved by the current minister still offer all kinds of personal and health care perks that everyday Albertans just can't get. Health VP Alison Tonge's contract, which was signed in 2010 and subject to approval by the minister, allowed for up to \$15,000 a year for personal financial and tax advice, for club memberships, and other similar expenses. If the Premier is looking for places to cut, how about cutting the country club clause in health executive contracts?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it is not unusual to have health accounts in clauses in contracts. As a matter of fact, the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees . . . [interjection] We're talking about health clauses or health accounts. In fact, I can remember having a Members' Services discussion about MLAs having a health account. [interjections] If we want to have productivity, every business knows that you're going to have accounts in senior executives' contracts that will have benefits. I am sure AHS is looking at all of those benefits.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Hon. members, what is it that propels you to keep interjecting so much?

Mr. Anderson: We're not.

The Speaker: You're not? It's becoming abundantly obvious that you're getting a little bit more chirpy and more chirpy and more chirpy over here on the Wildrose side, and that baits stuff on this side, on the government side. Then we get Edmonton-Strathcona jumping in as well, having an out-and-out conversation across the hallway. Edmonton-Centre, I'm going to leave you out of it this time. Let's carry on with some civility and decorum the way we're trained to do.

The Leader of the Official Opposition. Third main series of questions.

Ms Smith: You'd think with \$400,000 incomes they could cover their own country club memberships.

Provincial Fiscal Policy

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are right to be disappointed in this government's handling of our finances. Disapproval of the financial direction is growing. Trust and confidence are shrinking. One need only look at the overall financial picture of the last few years to understand why. We've gone from \$17 billion in savings in 2008 to \$17 billion in debt by 2016. It's an average cash shortfall of more than \$4 billion a year. What possible justification can the Finance minister offer for this extreme fiscal mismanagement?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, what can I offer? I can offer schools. I can offer hospitals. I can offer roads. I can offer the best fiscal system in the country. I can offer a savings plan. I can offer living within our means, zero per cent increase in our expenditures. I can offer all of those things to Albertans because they need it today, not when they think the money might come in in the future.

I would even suggest that the hon. member might want to talk to her own town council in Okotoks, where they have borrowed some \$25 million. Why? Their residents need it now, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Smith: And Albertans are offering 26 per cent approval ratings.

Yesterday the Energy minister told us that bitumen revenue will be up, generating \$15 billion over the next three years. That's great. But these rosy estimates that he offers don't begin to erase the annual cash shortfall. Does this Finance minister ever expect that the government is going to live within its means, or is he still relying on energy revenues to one day bail him out?

Mr. Horner: You know, Mr. Speaker, we had six hours of estimates on my department, and it's amazing that in those six hours the hon. members opposite did not do the math on the projections of the next three years. They talk about \$17 billion in savings going to nothing. That \$17 billion is in those schools, those roads, and those hospitals. Over the three years, if they were to actually look at the economic plan, our savings will grow to \$24 billion, and net financial assets in this province are going to grow. We are the only province in Canada that has net financial assets per capita, and we will stay that way.

2:00

Ms Smith: We know that the Finance minister likes to explain that he's building Alberta. Well, we think he's just billing Alberta, saddling future generations with billions of dollars in borrowing without any plan to pay it back. Now, we already know that we're going to have \$17 billion in debt by the time Albertans are asked to choose their next government, and now we know we can't count on a windfall of energy revenues, so where's the money going to come from? How's the minister going to balance the budget and pay back all that debt?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I can refer back to the six hours' worth of estimates. The hon. member opposite must have missed a few of those hours because we talked a lot about the debt repayment plan. In fact, we talked about the capital debt repayment account that is in our business plan. We talked about the fact that, yes, there's \$17 billion worth of debt that's going to be on the books from the five-year period, both two years previous and the three going forward.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? A lot of that debt actually is for municipalities like the town of Okotoks, where we actually borrowed the money for them so they could get the best rate possible. Why? Because we have a triple-A credit rating that we are using, and 60 per cent of the people in that Leger survey said: use it for debt for capital.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie, you rose on a point of order during the Minister of Finance's final answer. That point of order has been noted at 2:01:05.

Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the leader of the New Democrat opposition.

Labour Protection for Paid Farm Workers

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, over a year ago the Premier promised in her leadership campaign to bring

paid farm workers under the protection of occupational health and safety. As a human rights lawyer the Premier is well aware that occupational health and safety laws are internationally recognized as a basic worker right, yet this is just another promise made, another promise broken. I expect this resistance to sensible regulation from the Tea Party on my right but not you, Madam Premier. Why have you broken this promise to a particularly vulnerable group?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, there are no promises broken. In fact, as this hon. member knows, there have been and there continue to be discussions with the agriculture sector in this province, the agri-industry in this province. The minister of agriculture and I have engaged in a number of processes. As the hon. member knows, just simply passing a law doesn't make everything right. It doesn't fix everything. There's a combination of education, regulation, enforcement, and engineering that goes into safety in any place, including agricultural workplaces, and that's a work-in-progress.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if this minister isn't tired of hearing his voice say the same thing year after year after year. Legislation is part of the solution. You know that.

Given that you also promised, Madam Premier, to bring paid farm workers under workers' compensation, which is only possible if occupational health and safety is in place, can you please stop the rhetoric and give a straight answer? When will you deliver on this promise?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would indicate that I was tired of hearing the same voice over and over again, but he injected a new piece into it this time. He referred to the Tea Party, and I thought that was rather refreshing. Tea is always refreshing.

It's a very serious subject, and the hon. member knows that doing one piece of the whole puzzle often is more ineffective than doing it comprehensively and together. Education, engineering, legislation, and enforcement are all pieces of the process. It has to be done right to be effective. This hon. member knows that.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that both the Wildrose and the PCs represent rural ridings. It strikes me as odd that neither stands up for paid farm workers, who, to state the obvious, live and work in rural areas. Again, to the Premier, if she's courageous enough to stand: how do you explain your shocking disregard for the human rights of your rural constituents, some of whom are children?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, this Premier, above all, respects the rights of children and, in fact, has tasked this minister to protect those rights of children each and every day. Children are the most vulnerable of our citizens. Children, if they have the opportunity to grow up, to succeed, to maximize their potential, are the future of this province, and this Premier has tasked this minister to make sure that that happens.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Edmonton public school board determined that they have \$18.9 million less to work with and 1,200 more students to teach. It took them awhile to root out all the hidden places where this government hid their cynical, dishonest cuts to public education, but there it is:

cuts that will lay off hundreds of workers, reduce the quality of education in our schools, and hand teachers an effective 10 per cent wage cut over three years. My questions are to the Premier. How can you possibly think that the quality of public education will not be affected with all of these cuts that are taking place here now?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I don't share the hon. member's concern over the quality of education in this province. The quality of education in this province is second to none right across the world, and it's going to continue to be that way. Even with the cost restraints that we've put into this budget – and there's no question this a challenging budget for everyone in every corner of the province, and education is no exception. But thanks to this Premier, when you look at the budget line items and when you look at the different ministries, it's obvious which ministries she protected, and one of them was Education.

Mr. Eggen: Oh, Mr. Speaker, really.

Given that Edmonton public schools actually added up all the cuts for us and found that they ended up holding the bag for \$18.9 million and that even if we break this number out across Alberta, this government has left kids short \$100 million, or \$225 per kid, how can the Premier possibly think, honestly think, that this will result in anything but larger class sizes, more students being left behind, and a whole big heaping helping of broken promises right through this next school year?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I find it absolutely fascinating to listen to this wild conjecture with respect to the impact of education cuts which actually didn't happen in this budget. What we saw in this budget was the ability to fund education more than many other departments. We were able to come to a deal with teachers, who were able to therefore be honest partners in education.

I understand one of the things that the school board did last night was to take a look at their own administrative salaries. We think that is a wise decision because it's important to make sure that they do what we do, which is make sure resources in the classroom are going to students.

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, given that this Premier has been prancing around with this teachers' agreement like she's just bagged a moose for her wall while at least \$100 million has been siphoned off school and classroom budgets – not all the teachers are signing it; that's for sure – why don't you drop the cuts to public education before the damage becomes irreversible?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the member agrees with me that the Premier did an incredible job in getting a deal with the teachers. That's just one of the many promises that she's delivering in education, including putting \$107 million back into education, including increasing funding for class sizes, increasing funding for inclusion, including passing the Education Act, and, most important of all for the sustainability of the system and as an example for our students, living within our means in Alberta.

Fort McMurray Education Property Tax

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, Fort McMurray is trying to get the government's attention on education taxes, and if their two elected representatives won't speak up for them, I will. Yesterday the mayor sent a letter to the Premier pointing out the inequities in her town. The mayor is upset and justifiably so. Her residents are paying a disproportionately high amount in tax and are receiving little in the way of new classroom space or support. To the Minister of

Municipal Affairs: do you care to enlighten the people of Fort McMurray as to why you are shortchanging them on schools and gouging them with higher taxes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the letter that the mayor of Fort McMurray wrote. I believe every mayor and every elected official should advocate on their community's behalf, and our two MLAs from the area have done a stellar job in advocating on their community's behalf. The fact remains, though, that we had a very unfair system which encouraged many Alberta taxpayers, education property tax payers, to have to subsidize other regions, which is patently unfair. We had to move to an equitable playing field, a fair system for every single Albertan in this province.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, given that Mayor Blake is also upset with this government's lack of consultation, saying that she is concerned the province failed to enter into discussions regarding the removal of the education tax cap in the back-in-debt budget, and given that this government claims to be accountable and transparent, I'd like to ask the Associate Minister of AT and T, who coincidentally represents the people of Fort McMurray: why in the world wouldn't you consult with the mayor before you and your government chose to increase the taxes in your community by \$16 million?

2:10

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, I know that this member is still somewhat new to this Legislature – it's only been a year – but he should know full well that the process that we have, the parliamentary privilege, means that he cannot discuss the budget. It has to be tabled in this House for members of this Assembly first, and you cannot go out and consult about what you're going to do in the budget and about policy changes that you may make. It's so that people can't abuse the system and make investments or make changes that they may profit from. That makes it fair to everybody in Alberta.

Mr. McAllister: I'm glad to see these MLAs are doing a great job of speaking for their ridings.

To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: given that this government has once again left Fort McMurray in a lurch when it comes to classroom space just like they did with the twinning of highway 63 and with promising and delaying a much-needed seniors' facility and given that you have just made Fort McMurray residents pay the highest education property taxes in this province, why is it that not one red cent from this additional \$16 million is going back into that community to help with education?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think this hon. member as the critic for Education should do a little bit more homework. Just like yesterday, when it was apparent that he had not read the Inspiring Education report, I wonder if he's actually looked at the budget and seen that the school divisions in Fort McMurray are getting the largest increases in the entire province. Likewise, I would ask the member if he will stand up there with me on the day we announce new schools in Fort McMurray that, based on Infrastructure's decision, may potentially be P3, or financed, schools and if this member of the Wildrose would support taking on debt and financing schools in Fort McMurray.

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, you rose on a point of order at 2:11, during the last member's last question.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Support for Vulnerable Albertans

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Human Services. We are all tremendously fortunate to live in a province that has been blessed with so much, yet we know that significant social challenges exist in every community in Alberta and that personal tragedies occur each and every day. In responding to personal tragedies as part of their job, first responders are all too often confronted with horrific situations that can leave them psychologically wounded and scarred. To the minister. This Legislature took action last year to support first responders. Can you tell me: has this actually made a difference on the front lines?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was my honour last year to be asked to carry Bill 1 on behalf of our Premier, that allowed presumptive coverage for PTSD sufferers in the first responder community. It was the right thing to do, and it was a promise kept. Since the act was proclaimed in December, 15 first responders have received PTSD coverage. [interjections] Apparently, they don't want to hear the answer. In the previous three years only four had received coverage.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Olesen: Thank you. Given that this government has made a number of commitments to address complex social changes and given that the promised social policy framework was delivered earlier this year and was called by some of the most in-depth government guide to social policy in 30 years, will the minister now turn that policy work into actions that will make a difference to the lives of Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, that's already happening. The social policy framework was completed – at least this stage of the discussion was completed at the end of February. It's already been utilized by government to look at issues as we went through the budgeting process, as we're proceeding through the RBB process, the results-based budgeting process. All policy decisions will consider the social policy framework.

But we haven't stood still while we've been consulting, Mr. Speaker. We've taken action to end homelessness. In fact, over 6,000 Albertans in partnership with our collaborating partners in communities have been housed. We've kept our commitment to AISH recipients, we're ensuring low and medium incomes have access to child care subsidies, and we've created an independent child advocate. Promises made, promises kept.

Ms Olesen: My supplemental. Given that promises have been made to address homelessness and that those without a home, including the chronically homeless, aboriginals, youth, and women and their families leaving violent situations, are desperately counting on these promises being kept and given that an interagency council was announced earlier this year, can the minister assure Albertans that a council is really something that will make a difference in something as important as breaking the cycle of poverty?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's promise to set up the Interagency Council on Homelessness is an important step forward on this promise to end homelessness within 10 years. We work with seven collaborating organizations across the province and a number of delivery organizations. The Premier's vision was to bring those agencies and those communities together in a council to jointly govern the process of how we identify and address the causes affecting homelessness and the result of how we deal with homelessness. That council is in place, it's working, and it's going to deliver on the promise to end homelessness in 10 years. It's exciting work for Albertans. It's very necessary for our communities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Calgary-North West.

Insulin Pump Therapy

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Health minister continues to undermine confidence in our health care system. Last year the Premier promised funding to cover insulin pumps for all Albertans who needed them to manage their disease. In January 2013 the Minister of Health said that 1,600 Albertans would be covered at a cost of \$18 million. Today there is only \$5 million, and only 300 Albertans will be covered. How could this government be so cruel as to promise thousands of Albertans hope when you clearly could not deliver?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, we just had the opportunity to have six hours of budget discussions. This member was there and heard very clearly the commitment from the minister on the insulin issue. The commitment was made very loud and clear on behalf of the government that this program is a work-in-progress, and the minister is completely committed to this program.

Mrs. Towle: I was there. He promised \$18 million in January, \$5 million at budget estimates.

Given that according to the Canadian Diabetes Association 6,200 patients should be eligible for these pumps and the minister promised to help 1,600 of them just two months ago, in January, but today is covering just 300 and given that of the \$5 million allocated, less than half is going to the actual pumps, what is the rest of the money being spent on, and why is it not being used to fulfill the Premier's promise to type 1 diabetics?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, I made it very, very clear that the commitment is in the budget. It's a budget item. The minister has defended it in estimates and is committed to this program. It will not be decided by politicians who gets the insulin pumps and who gets the support. Clinical advice from medical professionals will determine those most in need. We are committed to this program. Promises made, promises kept.

Mrs. Towle: Wow. Less than half of the budget allocated is going to fund these pumps. It's fewer dollars for fewer patients. But that's not the whole problem. Why was the Premier bragging about insulin pumps yesterday as part of her year 1 accomplishments when the only thing that's been accomplished is another broken promise?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, I know the member's commitment to her constituents and to those Albertans that are looking for support with insulin pumps. It's a line item in the budget. This budget will be passed, and it will be acted upon. I promise you that.

Mount Royal University Jazz Program

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, I had a call from a very upset constituent who is a member of the two-year jazz program that is on the chopping block at Mount Royal University. She's one of 45 talented musicians who feel they're being cheated out of a quality musical education. Can the minister of advanced education help right this painful situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand from the minister that the students that are currently in the program at Mount Royal University will be fully able to finish their entire program. That much we know for certain.

Now, we all know that many institutions have made very difficult decisions as a result of the budget, but the Minister of Enterprise and Advanced Education has said over and over that the impact on students should be the number one consideration.

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, again to the minister. Some of the students who have not yet entered the program are scrambling to audition for other programs in other cities, but some of them live in Calgary and have families, and they cannot relocate. How do we avoid losing talented musicians to other provinces?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to be clear that arts programming, including the fine arts, is important to all Albertans. I want to make it clear that the minister must review and sign off on any program closures, and it's my understanding that the Deputy Premier is working with Mount Royal University at this time. This minister, his department, and Alberta schools are committed to accommodating students in this province.

2:20

Ms Jansen: And finally, Mr. Speaker, again to the minister: how do we convince the nucleus of jazz talent in Calgary that we're still a city that values them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Arts- and culture-related education programs are important to Albertans and to this government. They enrich education in our communities and feed directly into the future growth and sustainability within our cultural sector, which is a huge contributor to our economy. Calgary's reputation for valuing the arts is well known from numerous festivals and events to the many world-class performers who live in Calgary or who pass through this city to perform. There is no shortage of incredible opportunities to experience arts and culture in the city of Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Secondary Ticket Sales

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. When the government had the opportunity in 2008 to stop online ticket scalping and protect Alberta workers, performers, et cetera, they responded with vague hand wavings about how protection would be offered through the new Fair Trading Act and to let the system work. Well, that didn't happen. Instead, we had Ticketmaster registering as a lobbyist in 2009 and – poof – scalping legislation went right

off the agenda. So to the Minister of Service Alberta. Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba have managed to protect their stage technicians and the ticket-buying public with legislation. What's Alberta's excuse?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member previously asked this question in the House, that is very closely aligned to the ideology that this member subscribes to, I would suggest that the member take a look and actually research the success of programs in other jurisdictions. For example, some of the jurisdictions that this member mentions banned scalping; however, if you go to any Internet site or actually visit any single venue, any concert date, you'll find a variety of people offering tickets for sale. Member, on this side of the House we're looking for solutions that actually produce real-life change.

Ms Blakeman: Well, as a result, you've offered absolutely no protection to people.

The minister likes to pretend that this problem is about bots. Mr. Minister, computers can't think. They are programmed by humans, operated by humans, and humans can be held accountable through legislation that is passed and enforced by humans. That would be you. When can Alberta expect consumer protection from this government?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, bots operate very similarly to a lot of the folks on Twitter from that side of the House. They're essentially machine-operated people that continue to just send out one tweet after another after another after another, hoping that somebody will watch and listen to their propaganda and their ideas.

The fact of the matter is that this technology has been banned by other jurisdictions, and those jurisdictions have found that there's no actual enforceable way to crack down on that technology. We're exploring options to see how we can actually bring in meaningful, long-lasting, productive change in Alberta.

Ms Blakeman: Well, back to the same minister. How much longer is this government going to dither given that secondary ticket sites are multiplying like rabbits? StubHub, Vivid Seats, TicketNetwork, Razorgator, Viagogo, Seatwave, SeatGeek: all of these exist where only TicketsNow flourished in 2008. Why aren't you doing something to protect people?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, this is really, really funny now because this particular member a question ago – not a minute ago, a day ago, just one question ago – implied that we were essentially working for Ticketmaster. Now with this latest question this member is essentially implying that we are allowing secondary sites to function in the province. So, Member, you should note that what you just asked would imply that you're working for Ticketmaster.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, did you wish to raise a point of order at 2:25?

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Unfortunately, they don't seem to be learning.

The Speaker: All right. A point of order has been registered at 2:25 from Edmonton-Centre during that last answer just given.

Let's move on now. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, you have ceded your spot to Edmonton-Strathcona.

Edmonton-Strathcona, please proceed.

Funding for Sexual Health Services

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we heard that recent cuts to sexual health centres meant these clinics will no longer provide low-cost birth control to women who desperately need it. Now, whether this is, as AHS suggests, just a review or whether it's a budget cut is actually irrelevant. What is important is that at-risk women in Alberta now have less access to affordable birth control than they did before. To the associate minister of health and wellness: why isn't this issue a priority for you?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm aware of the issue. The College of Pharmacists has raised this issue with AHS, and together they're working out a solution. I can guarantee you that those most in need of these drugs are continuing to receive them.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not what we're hearing from the centres.

Given that research clearly demonstrates that greater access to sexual health education and contraceptive methods is a fundamental pillar to long-term poverty reduction and given that this was a program to lower barriers for women to obtain contraceptives, can the associate minister tell us why this government isn't taking action to improve access to sexual health services for low-income Albertans rather than standing by while AHS cuts it?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, the member infers that this is a budget issue. It's not a budget issue. This is a simple issue. The pharmacists have an issue with AHS and the way this program is administered. It will be worked out. Albertans are protected. The minister is committed to this program and will continue to be.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, given that we've been given no assurances around timelines for when it will be, quote, worked out and given that appropriate and convenient access to birth control is the single best way to ensure women don't have unwanted pregnancies and given that the lost service will hurt women across the province, will this government take responsibility and direct AHS today to reverse the decision to cut off thousands of women from low-cost birth control?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, again I want to correct the member. The College of Pharmacists has raised an issue on the selling of these drugs. AHS is currently working on this issue to resolve this as quickly as possible. The minister and the ministry are committed to this program.

Funding for Hospital Infrastructure

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, recently the CBC released its Rate My Hospital report. It is very discouraging to see subpar ranking for hospitals across Alberta. Three Alberta hospitals received a D rating, which speaks to yet another government failure in both health care and infrastructure. This comes in addition to broken promises to build new health facilities in many communities. When will this government put the priorities of Albertans first so residents in Fort McMurray, Daysland, and Bonnyville can access the same level of health care as other Albertans?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, we know how important health facilities are to communities. He named one that's in my own constituency. We know how important schools are to kids and parents. We know how important roads are for our economy and

traffic. This is the same mantra of this tired old opposition that stands up and says to balance the budget and then runs criticism about why we're not spending more money. It's hypocritical.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, it's about priorities.

Given that conditions in the Daysland health centre are substantially worse than the average hospital in rural Alberta, will the minister admit that this government has failed to provide the community with the same level of care as the rest of Alberta and immediately take corrective action to get this hospital up to par?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, last Friday was a constituency day, and I was in Daysland talking to the town council, talking to people in the community, in the seniors' centre. The people in that community are incredibly proud of the doctors, the staff, and the hospital they have in Daysland. They know that we're continuing as a province to work with every single community to ensure Albertans get proper health care services, which means continuing to invest in the infrastructure for the people of this province.

Mr. Barnes: It received a D in the survey.

Given that residents of Bonnyville and the Lakeland area should receive the same level of care as other Albertans and given that results show substantially more patients are readmitted to the Bonnyville health care centre after surgery than other hospitals of a similar size, will the government commit to working with staff and administration to identify areas of concern and fix the issues that need fixing?

2:30

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, given the fact that the opposition claims they would spend \$4 billion on infrastructure but don't say where the money is, given the fact that they would slash the budget and continue to take infrastructure projects off the priority list, they are the last group that can comment on how we invest in this province appropriately. We'll continue to work with municipalities, with people, and with communities to build infrastructure, to build a stronger Alberta for the next generation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Seniors' Lodge Renewal Program

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Municipal Affairs announced nearly \$31 million for maintenance and upgrades to seniors' lodges throughout this province. This is certainly welcome news, but it's only a start. Those lodges need more than maintenance. Some need a complete overhaul, and some communities need brand new lodges. My question to the Municipal Affairs minister: can the minister tell us what he has planned in addition to the one-time maintenance funding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Griffiths: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Every year we work on our budget to make sure that we have maintenance funding so that the housing authorities can work on where the investments need to be. It's not necessarily just maintenance in each room; it can also be more vigorous maintenance in particular facilities. With the Alberta Social Housing Corporation in Municipal Affairs we're working very vigorously with our partnered local authorities on a long-term real estate strategy that will make sure we address those long-term infrastructure needs when it comes to seniors.

Mr. Quadri: To the same minister again: will the government build new lodges in addition to maintaining the existing ones?

Mr. Griffiths: Well, Mr. Speaker, looking ahead, the Alberta government plans on working very proactively to develop a long-term capital plan. It includes consideration of additional facilities. We know that the population of seniors in this province is going to grow from approximately 420,000 to close to 700,000 people over the next generation, and it's going to take significant investment and partnerships with our local municipalities and with seniors to make sure we meet those needs.

Mr. Quadri: To the same minister again: will the government be picking and choosing which communities will get the new lodges and where this funding is located?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We continue to work collaboratively with our management bodies. We know that they understand the situation at the local level. They provide the best input. I can say that staff are visiting and assessing facilities now so that we can understand the situation that we're in. We'll be working with our local authorities to address community needs and make sure that we put the investment in the right place.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by Calgary-Fort.

Assessing Supports for PDD Clients

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our most vulnerable continue to be impacted by this government's mismanagement and inability to communicate. The decision to shift away from community-based supports to outcomes-based supports may be a positive thing, but the minister has admitted to not knowing how this system will impact any individuals in the PDD system. With no planning, no consultation, and no feedback from those who will be directly impacted by this government's decision-making, how is the minister going to determine which supports will be cut?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, there's so much in that preamble that is just absolutely incorrect. Very obviously, we're not proceeding anywhere without some very thoughtful planning and working with our partners. That's exactly how we're going to continue to do it going forward. That's just ridiculous.

Mr. Wilson: Check the *Hansard*, Minister. You admitted it last week.

Given that the lack of communication with caregivers and families has resulted in anxiety and insecurity in communities across this province, when will this minister find the courage to advise parents, guardians, clients, and staff which specific programs will be cut as of July 1?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, we are indeed working with parents and families and service providers across the province, and over the coming weeks we will be travelling the province to visit with each and every one of them. The changes that we're trying to make are a logical and correct transition in services that we provide there. We, in fact, have the support of the service providers. I recognize that there's a transition issue. I'm doing everything I can to manage that.

Mr. Wilson: Given that this government has a history of ramming through decisions without proper consultation and this minister

has imposed an irresponsible and offensive three-month deadline to current contracts without communicating what to expect after July 1, when will the minister have the new outcomes-based contracts in the hands of our service providers and advise families what supports their vulnerable loved ones will receive?

Mr. Oberle: As I indicated in the last answer, Mr. Speaker, I recognize that there's a transition issue here. We do indeed have some trepidation in the service community out there and with some parents, and I'm working on that. We will ramp up our communications efforts. We will have contracts in place.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by Medicine Hat.

Access to Government Services

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have enjoyed the great success of privatization of government services such as registries and liquor stores. It benefits both consumers and service providers. This privatization process and business model was launched 17 years ago. Since then the Alberta population has more than doubled, urban community growth is high, and we've seen far greater advances in technology. My question is to the hon. Minister of Service Alberta. What is your plan to make the government more accessible and more open?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are moving forth with what I call an open government strategy that will allow Alberta citizens to be able to get access to services at their fingertips. We'd like to see a portal, a window perhaps, one access point for Albertans to a variety of online services, whether it be relating to the department of Service Alberta or the Department of Education to get transcripts. We believe that Albertans expect co-ordinated, sophisticated mechanisms and tools in place to help them get access to the best services at their fingertips.

The Speaker: Hon. members, please keep your conversations down to a dull roar.

The hon. member. Second question.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the same hon. minister. Look at the registries alone. Given that the number of registry shops has not been increased with the population growth and diverse needs, what is the minister planning to do in this area of service?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much. I'd like to thank the veteran member of this Assembly for a hard-hitting question. Mr. Speaker, the fact is that we look to see how we can best provide services to the Alberta public, which may include, potentially, the expansion of existing systems we have place, which could mean more services through more storefront locations. Also, as I mentioned earlier, it's very, very important that we find better tools and better ways to provide services to Albertans and the everyday Alberta public living in many, many different parts of this province to get them services online, right at their fingertips.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister: given that we must provide Albertans with government services at

the least cost to taxpayers and to consumers of services as well, what is your plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I'd like to thank the member for that very strong question. In fact, we're committed to making sure that we find the most value possible out of every single taxpayer's dollar that we spend on providing services to Albertans. Through our results-based budgeting process we're looking at a variety of different systems that provide services to the public to see how we can make them better, to see how we can provide services to Albertans more cost-effectively and more conveniently. It's very important that the public gets all the services . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Employment Supports for PDD Clients

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, this government is leaving vulnerable Albertans in the cold. The associate minister of PDD has swung his axe at front-line services for Albertans living with disabilities in my constituency as part of his \$42 million cut to day programs. Experts say this cut will send Alberta back 40 years in how we care for our most vulnerable. A 40-year setback from a tired 40-year-old government. Minister, the people affected by your cuts are scared as you're tampering with their lives. Will you do the right thing and stop downloading your deficit onto our most vulnerable citizens?

Mr. Oberle: Well, let's just dial it down here a bit, Mr. Speaker, and help the opposition understand that that wasn't a cut in the budget. We did transition \$42 million out of community access into community supports and into wages for front-line staff, which I sincerely hope that hon. member supports. Now, we're going to try to achieve a transformation in PDD care. I have assistance in employment supports in other budgets outside of the PDD program. I do recognize that we're creating some concern in the community, and we're working on that. I will work on a transition.

2:40

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, given that this minister plans to funnel these disabled citizens into work placements and given that the executive director of REDI, a group that specializes in finding work for disabled people, said that less than 1 per cent of these people could manage to hold down a job without added supports, will the minister admit that his vision is destined to fail?

Mr. Oberle: I absolutely will not admit any such thing, Mr. Speaker, and I will chastise that member for having a rather jaded view of the ability of disabled persons to lead productive lives in our society.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, you rose on a point of order at 2:41 during the associate minister's answer just now. It's been noted.

The final question, please, from the hon. member.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's from the experts, not myself.

Mr. Speaker, given that this minister says that he has a plan to transition these disabled residents into the workforce and given that he's put nothing forward in the way of details of that plan,

how can service providers, families, and clients trust this minister to replace these effective day programs before they are officially cut on July 1?

Mr. Oberle: You know, Mr. Speaker, the questions seem to be almost as if we're planning to turn people out in the street and expect them to get eight-hour-a-day jobs without any supports and get them off our rolls. The actual fact is that we fully recognize there are going to be ongoing employment supports. This is not about cost savings. This is about the dignity of persons with disabilities and their right to belong, to contribute, and to be valued in our society and about our duty – our duty – to support that.

Speaker's Ruling Preambles to Supplementary Questions

The Speaker: Hon. members, just before we carry on with our Routine, a number of our members over the last few days are getting a little bit carried away with the preambles, so I would ask you to please tighten those up for tomorrow. In fact, there should be no preambles, as you know. We've talked about this before. I want to commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who stood up and asked three good questions. There were others, but that one in particular I noted.

On that note, we're going to carry on here in 30 seconds with the continuation of Members' Statements.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: Let's go on to the hon. leader of the New Democrat opposition with his private member's statement.

Anniversary of Election

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, yesterday marked the one-year anniversary of the last election. Unfortunately, the government that Albertans thought they voted for is not the one they got. Whether it's seniors' drug prices, increased funding to postsecondary institutions, schools, teacher workload, full-day kindergarten, funding for municipalities, or ending child poverty, this government has proven over the last year that it cannot be trusted to deliver on the very issues that got the PCs elected.

First, in communities across the province and now in between the budget lines we have been chasing all of those broken promises, and it's an impressively long list. This government will tell Albertans over and over again, as if repetition creates reality, that times have changed. But when it comes down to it, there's one thing that really matters to Alberta voters, and that's trust. This Premier and government have repeatedly betrayed the trust of voters over the past year. So year 1 has been a never-ending list of broken promises and plummeting trust and support for this government.

An anniversary, however troubled, is not just a time to reflect. More importantly, it's a time to look forward. I have no doubt that we will continue to encounter the negative effects of this government's policies and budget in the next year, and we will continue to oppose them on those issues, but we will also continue to propose positive alternatives to the cynical politics of the day. Instead of simply talking about difficult decisions, we will be talking about investing in people. Instead of simply talking about the need to extract our resources faster and faster, we will be talking about a sustainable pace of development and the creation of jobs in

Alberta. Instead of talking about building Alberta in the interests of a few, we will be talking about building an Alberta for everyone.

So happy anniversary to this government, and sympathies on the failing grades.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt, but I think you have a group that's here that we did get permission to revert for, but we'll carry on with Calgary-Glenmore and keep looking for your group.

Salute to Families and Friends of Members

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we celebrated yesterday the election results of 2012, today I would like to speak to the families and friends who encouraged each of us to be here. An election campaign truly is a time when you learn who your friends are, those who look us in the eye and honestly tell us that our ideas, our speeches, and our campaign platforms are good or bad. These are the individuals who walked with us as we decided whether to stand for nomination and election or not.

The other team of individuals who stand with us through thick and thin are our family members: our wives, our husbands, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, children, and grandchildren. They contribute to and support our passion to be in public life. As MLAs we've all had discussions around the dinner table regarding money, policy, and the impact on the family. Our children see the newspaper headlines and see the media, where politicians are accused of good and not-so-good activities. Our family members love and support us no matter what their personal opinion is on current policy. We can be strong and attentive in our MLA roles as we rely on their continuing support.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, thank you to family and friends for helping us to achieve our goals and aspirations for our constituencies, and a special thank you to my husband, who has stood by me through thick and thin, as we celebrate our 31st wedding anniversary today. Thank you, Al.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Armenian Genocide

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, on the night of April 24, 1915, 98 years ago today, the Turkish government arrested more than 200 Armenian community leaders in Constantinople. Hundreds more were arrested, and all were executed. This was the first step in the annihilation of all Armenian families. Over 1 and a half million Armenian men, women, and children were massacred. Hundreds of witnesses reported these atrocities.

As the first genocide of the 20th century, the Armenian genocide was a precursor to the genocides that followed, acting as the prototype to modern crimes against humanity, including the genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Darfur, the Ukrainian Holodomor, and the Jewish Holocaust.

Mr. Speaker, a genocide denied is a genocide repeated. The international community failed to hold the perpetrators of the Armenian genocide accountable for their crimes, encouraging the most heinous and brutal dictator in world history, Adolf Hitler, to say as he planned the annihilation of the Jewish people, "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?"

Mr. Speaker, my grandfather Paravon Kalagian never spoke about the night he witnessed the people of his village, including his mother, being tortured and burned alive even though he never stopped reliving the horror at night in his dreams.

My grandmother Mariam Kalagian had an incredible capacity to love others despite the fact that she lost her entire family during

the genocide. She taught us that love was better than hate. Her story and lessons are not forgotten.

Mr. Speaker, we remember these atrocities like the Armenian genocide, the Ukrainian Holodomor, and the Jewish Holocaust because, as George Santayana said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

I wish to extend my heartfelt sympathy and expressions of solidarity to all Armenian people at this solemn time of remembrance. My grandmother was right when she said that love was better than hate, and if anyone in history should ever say again, "Who remembers?" we can say, "We remember."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

2:50 Sherwood Park Music Festival

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past week the 37th Sherwood Park Music Festival was held at Festival Place. Over the course of four very full days the festival played host to numerous performances in junior, intermediate, and senior piano; junior and senior strings; musical theatre; speech arts; choral; handbells; woodwinds; brass; and percussion. Judging in these different categories culminated in the grand concert on Sunday, starring the winning performers.

The Sherwood Park Music Festival has grown steadily over the years and now serves the counties of Strathcona, Beaver, Lamont, and Minburn. This growth occurs only because of the hard work and dedication of over 50 volunteers and another 50-plus sponsors. Each and every year these dedicated individuals make this important community event an extraordinary success.

From the Sherwood Park Music Festival winners go on to compete in the Alberta Music Festival, the first of which was established in Edmonton in 1908 under the guidance of Lord Grey, the same Canadian Governor General of Grey Cup football fame. There local winners join others from more than 35 other music festivals held annually in Alberta. Those fortunate enough to win the Alberta Music Festival are then invited to compete at the National Music Festival, hosted this year by Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario.

Dedicated to music appreciation and encouraging young performers and music teachers to pursue excellence in music performance, the music festival movement provides a framework and incentive for growth in musical knowledge and ensures those skills are passed on and continue to flourish.

Congratulations and thank you to all involved.

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

Workplace Safety

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April 28 is the day set aside to remember Albertans injured or killed on the job. I remember one who worked with me, Mel Ondryk. He was dedicated to serving our customers and helping his associates work safely. He knew the rules of safe rig moving and their importance. Mel was so knowledgeable and committed to following them that he became a driver trainer, one of our best. We called him By-the-Book Mel.

He trained many young drivers and swampers. They learned how to properly use load slings and load binders. He taught them the importance of the walk-around check before beginning a trip. He showed them how to secure loads and how to put on over-dimension signs and outrigger lights. He was patient and careful to cover all the safety procedures and everything else they needed to

know. They were taught the importance of following at a safe distance and how to calculate that, depending upon their speed and the weight of their load. When Mel said that they were ready, we had confidence that these new drivers would do a great job.

But while helping another driver during a rig move, Mel momentarily forgot an important rule, to establish eye contact to confirm that the other driver knew he was stepping within the radius of that truck's movement as it was backing up. Seconds later he was dead, knocked down and run over by the front tire of the truck as it backed up and the driver turned the steering wheel to correct the direction of his trailer. I lost a friend and his wife lost her sweetheart to a preventable, avoidable accident.

Safety rules evolve and develop over time as organizations anticipate problems and learn from them. I encourage all managers and their employees to be even more diligent in making workplaces as safe as possible. Co-operate, collaborate, and consult with others.

This Sunday let's remember all the Mels. In their memory may we resolve to be vigilant and safe.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we asked for unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests. Could we ask once again if that's still in place? The guests have now arrived.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, please proceed.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all hon. members a fantastic group of grade 6 students visiting from my constituency of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. The students from Destiny Christian School are sitting in the gallery along with their teacher Mr. Glenn Mullen and their parent supervisors, Ms Jaime Whitehead and Ms Roberta Bechtold. I hope they enjoy their time at the Legislature today, and I'll ask them to please rise and stand as my hon. colleagues provide the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Red Deer-North, did you have a petition? Please proceed.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to present the pheasant release program sustainability petition, that was reviewed and approved in format by Parliamentary Counsel. With the fourth instalment of this petition, I am presenting an additional 389 signatures, for a current total of 1,838 signatures from Albertans who are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to

take the necessary measures, including the introduction of proposed amendments to existing legislation, to ensure the preservation and enhancement of the pheasant release program, which has been an important part of Alberta's hunting tradition, heritage and culture for over 65 years.

Notices of Motions

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice that at the appropriate time I will be rising on a point of privilege

pursuant to section 15 of the standing orders. The matter relates to the conduct of the government yesterday with respect to managing House business in relation to the debate of Bill 20, the Appropriation Act, 2013. In particular, my rights and privileges as a member of the Assembly to within reason identify, draw attention to, and debate matters arising from Bill 20 were limited in a way that breaches my parliamentary privilege.

The Speaker: So noted. Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

Bill Pr. 1

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Canada Act

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Canada Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will simplify the organizational structure of the church and is therefore administrative in nature. The bill number is Pr. 1.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a first time]

Bill Pr. 2

Wild Rose Agricultural Producers Amendment Act, 2013

Mr. McDonald: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being the Wild Rose Agricultural Producers Amendment Act, 2013.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, please proceed. I understand you have two tablings.

Ms Notley: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have two tablings. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition which calls on the government to revise their policies to eliminate child poverty and its manifestations in Alberta.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of a petition which calls on the government to "take immediate action to regulate electricity prices, recognizing that electricity is an essential service."

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Highwood, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll table the appropriate copies of a letter from a physician in Calgary, Dr. Patrick Wyse, who says that he will retire early this year because "by not utilizing the collective expertise [of physicians in the community] the mayhem created in Alberta's health care system over the past two decades falls squarely on the shoulders of the conservative government."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood and Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings related to several questions that I asked this week about Alberta Health Services expenses. First, the employment contract between

Alberta Health Services and Alison Tonge: the requisite number of copies, five.

I also have a number of expenses from Joanne Stalinski for her personal training sessions with HigherSelf Fitness and Consulting, which I mentioned today.

Also, a number of expense forms related to expenses by Michele Lahey. I've got four different expense forms related to that, five copies of each.

3:00

In addition, the Pharmacy Benefact, which is the bulletin by Alberta Blue Cross that I also referenced today, where they acknowledge that the drug plan pricing changes have had a major impact on their delisting and some of the changes that they are going to be making not only at this time, but they also do say that additional process changes are going to be announced in future updates.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, were you trying to catch my eye because the clock hit 3 o'clock?

Mr. Campbell: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that we let 7(7) lapse and continue with the Orders of the Day.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, you have a tabling?

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table two documents that I referenced today. The first one is an article from Jamie Komarnicki with the *Calgary Herald*, dated January 13, 2013, where she did an interview with the Minister of Health. "The health minister said the government has set aside \$18 million in 2013 to fund the first free pumps."

The second document that I'm tabling is from the 2013 April 17 Families and Communities budget estimates committee for Health, wherein he states that actually only 300 people and only \$5 million will be put aside for the pumps.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings?

Seeing no others, then allow me to please table with you and for you the requisite number of copies of the School at the Legislature annual reports for 2010-11 and 2011-12, noting that the reason we are one year behind, so to speak, is because of the provincial election last year. Nonetheless, this is a very successful program, and I encourage you to become more familiar with the School at the Legislature.

Hon. members, we have a point of privilege, I believe, that has been noted here by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Hon. member, did you wish to proceed and outline your case for urgency?

Privilege Opportunity for Debate

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pursuing a point of privilege today under Standing Order 15. I'm pursuing this point of privilege on the grounds that my ability and that of all opposition members, in fact, to participate fully and fairly in second reading debate around Bill 20, the Appropriation Act, 2013, has been unjustifiably hindered by the actions of this government and therefore infringe upon my privileges as an opposition member. I also have some reason to believe that this will continue in the Committee of the Whole process and also in

third reading unless a remedy is achieved. There's no more important function for an opposition MLA than to hold the government accountable on issues of public expenditure. Please allow me to explain the nature of the actions in particular and touch on why I believe they relate to privilege.

Essentially, Mr. Speaker, yesterday several members of the opposition made repeated requests to representatives of the government caucus that different opposition members be allowed to speak to Bill 20. In response the government allowed one member of each opposition party to speak once before the government majority was used to adjourn debate in the afternoon. Then in the evening the government brought Bill 20 back to the floor with just enough time for one member of each opposition party to speak again before the issue had to be voted on under Standing Order 64(3) at 10:15 p.m.

Through this strategy roughly four hours of debate opportunity was lost to members of this Assembly. In other words, by using its majority to adjourn debate at will, the government effectively prevented up to 20 opposition members and a number of government members from having the opportunity to participate in debate on Bill 20 in second reading.

Now, as it is, Mr. Speaker, the government has previously used its majority to bring in our standing orders, and as I'm sure you are aware, we already have what some people might characterize as time limits or what others might even characterize as closure as a result of section 64 of our standing orders, which limit or put on a maximum amount of time that the appropriations bill can be debated. Indeed, as you know, the bill can only be debated for a maximum of one day for each stage. So now this new practice of the government, one that I've only seen in the last couple of years and to greater and greater degrees this year, to further limit debate by significantly limiting the amount of time allowed for budget debate within each of the days when we're allowed to debate, in my view, represents an excessive use of its majority by the government caucus.

As for timeliness, Mr. Speaker, you did indicate to the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview that he could not anticipate the actions of the government and use that as the foundation for his complaint with respect to privilege. As a result, we had to wait until what we had anticipated would occur did indeed occur. The matter was brought back by the government near the very end of debate yesterday evening such that second reading was completed with no time between the first adjournment and the last 40 minutes or so in the evening.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, there's no more important function for an opposition MLA than to hold the government accountable on issues of public expenditure. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, on page 819 states that the direct control of national finance has been referred to as the "great task of modern parliamentary government".

Page 820 of the same volume recognizes the fact that

Parliament must assent to all legislative measures which implement public policy and the House of Commons authorizes both the amounts and objects or destination of all public expenditures.

Now, as the Speaker knows, the Parliament consists of all elected members, not just the government. Of utmost importance to the role of Parliament is the role of the opposition in debating issues of public expenditure. Pursuant to this at page 831 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* it states that the House of Commons recognizes

two contradictory principles: that the government is entitled to get its financial legislation through Parliament; and that the

opposition is entitled to identify, draw attention to, delay, and debate, items that it feels need attention and discussion.

Marleau and Montpetit on pages 66 to 67 speaks to the issue of privilege and states that

any disregard of or attack on the rights, powers and immunities of the House and its Members . . . is referred to as a “breach of privilege” and is punishable by the House.

Erskine May, 22nd edition, on page 108 states that

any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results may be treated as a contempt even though there is no precedent of the offence.

Moreover, *Beauchesne’s* page 3, section 1, describes the principles of parliamentary law, and it states, Mr. Speaker, that they are

to protect a minority and restrain the improvidence or tyranny of a majority; to secure the transaction of public business in an orderly manner; to enable every Member to express opinions within limits necessary to preserve decorum and prevent an unnecessary waste of time; to give abundant opportunity for the consideration of every measure, and to prevent any legislative action being taken upon sudden impulse.

Mr. Speaker, it is my assessment that Standing Order 64, which essentially places a very significant time limit on debate in second reading for appropriation bills, is in place and more than meets the principle of orderly execution of business and avoiding any unnecessary waste of time, those principles that I just referred to in reference to the quote from *Beauchesne’s*. However, for there to be no unnecessary waste of time, there needs to have been an excess of time spent on the issue to begin with, and in this case there was almost no time given to the issue, which is the cause of my concern. Both myself as well as another member of my caucus were given no opportunity to speak to Bill 20 in second reading. In total, six of 26 opposition members were allowed to speak to Bill 20 yesterday.

3:10

Now, Mr. Speaker, it’s important to note that while estimates provide an opportunity for opposition members to question the government on issues concerning the budget, they do not afford the opportunity to engage in parliamentary debate. I know that what we will hear from the other side is, “Oh, well, you got 55 hours or whatever of estimates debate,” notwithstanding the fact that we’ve already had a conversation here around the fact that the number of hours for estimates debate was significantly limited to the opposition by this government in a previous decision.

Notwithstanding that, Mr. Speaker, this is different. The opportunity to debate Bill 20 is the one forum in which we are given the ability to debate the combined impact of the budget as it relates to all the departments of this government. There is no other such forum for us to talk about how: well, you know, maybe this cut here is okay, but when it’s added up with all these other cuts, it’s really not so okay. Or if I were a member of the Wildrose caucus, what I might say is: well, maybe this increase in funding right here is okay, but when added up with all these other increases in funding, it’s not okay.

There is a principle, Mr. Speaker, that the budget as a whole requires debate, not just the line-by-line, ministry-by-ministry discussions that we have in estimates. That is the debate which this government has limited significantly. They’ve already, as I’ve said, had the benefit of section 64. By using their majority to adjourn debate and then not bring something back, they’ve

actually, as I’ve said, on second reading itself limited the debate by about 50 per cent, roughly 4 hours.

Mr. Speaker, parliamentary democracies often see arguments over the principle of respect for the rights of the minority. *Beauchesne’s* suggests in section 3 that it is there to preclude “a Government from using to excess the extensive powers that it has to limit debate or to proceed in what the public and the Opposition might interpret as unorthodox ways.” If almost no time is given to the opposition to debate Bill 20, then we must surely conclude that debate has been limited to the most excessive level achievable, that of almost no debate, with all due respect to the six opposition members who were given the opportunity to engage in debate. Similarly, this also calls into question the principles of every member expressing their opinion and having the opportunity to engage.

In this case, I am arguing that the government is using its power of majority to unjustifiably and excessively limit debate on a matter that is of the utmost importance to this House and goes to the very heart of our roles as members of this Assembly. Mr. Speaker, the standing orders, which are put in place to ensure that excessive debate does not occur, are there. Moving forward in the way I’ve just described, I would suggest and I would argue, amounts to an abuse and a fundamental breach of privilege. That is why I’m bringing this to your attention now so that by your good judgment you can find a prima facie case of breach of privilege in this matter, and a remedy can be sought before the rights and responsibilities of the opposition to debate matters of public expenditure have been completely trampled upon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your consideration of my points.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Airdrie.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to support my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona in her question of privilege because I believe what we’ve seen here is interference by government in the performance of the responsibilities of a member. Specifically, this question of privilege is pinned onto the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, but it could just as easily have been pinned onto my colleague from Calgary-McCall, who was here yesterday afternoon and, in fact, whose name was on the list because he wanted to speak and was not allowed to.

We have a number of citations, Mr. Speaker, that recognize that the role of the opposition is to hold the government accountable. In *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 37, we notice that

it is indeed essential for the country that the shades of opinion which are represented on both sides of this House should be placed as far as possible on a footing of equality and that we should have a strong opposition to voice the views of those who do not think with the majority.

What I have seen in this particular instance, I would argue, is a changing definition of obstruction. There are a number of good definitions in *Erskine May*, in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, in *Beauchesne* around how members may not be interfered with or obstructed from pursuing their duties as members. Clearly, it’s been meant to deal with physically restraining someone – we have had an example of that here in this House – or getting in their way. We also had an example once where the doors were closed, and members were not able to access the Chamber and participate in debates.

I would argue that what we’re seeing here is this government moving into a new definition of obstruction. I will just give you that definition on page 61 of *House of Commons Procedure and*

Practice. “The House has the authority to assert privilege where its ability has been obstructed in the execution of its functions or where Members have been obstructed in the performance of their duties.” I believe that that is the case here.

Now, I was careful to check, and indeed I will put on the record page 117 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, in which it says: “In other words, just as a member is protected from anything he does while taking part in a proceeding in Parliament, so too must interference relate to the member’s role in the context of parliamentary work.” In other words, this is not about constituency work. We were here trying to debate the appropriation bill, and we are supported in being able to do that.

The standing order rules are our rules. We, hopefully, have all agreed to abide by those rules in the same way that citizens generally agree to have the police have a condition of power over them in exercising their authority. But I think that this government has abused our standing orders in the following way. They have used the parts of the standing orders to make a sum that equals a denial of the right to rise and speak in this Assembly.

Now, the government through the Government House Leader and the deputy leaders has presumed to create closure or time allocation. Now, under those circumstances you have to admit it, Mr. Speaker. You have to put that motion on the Order Paper. We don’t have closure anymore because it made the government look so bad, but now we have time allocation. But you have to put that motion on the Order Paper. There’s a day’s notice. Everybody can see what the government is going to do. There has to be a level of discussion, and then the time allocation can be put into place. But you’ve got to admit it.

What this government is doing by using different parts of our standing orders is that they are creating a sum total of silent closure: no notice necessary, no debate necessary. The motion for time allocation, Mr. Speaker, as you well know, is debatable, and it allows the opportunity for all to speak in opposition to that. What we’re getting now and what we’re experiencing now is time allocation or closure by stealth. They’re not admitting to it, there’s no notice in front of it, and we’re not able to debate it. It’s just implemented. That is, as you can understand, in my opinion, very wrong.

Worse than that, Mr. Speaker, this was predetermined. This wasn’t accidental. It didn’t happen as things rolled out yesterday. In fact, the Government House Leader had approached and communicated with opposition House leaders, proposing that one speaker per caucus per day was how he would like to proceed with things. Well, of course, I and other opposition House leaders responded pretty vehemently against that, saying: no; we have a number of people that wish to speak. Because of the way the budget estimates were done in legislative policy committees, we felt very strongly we wanted to speak to the total effect of the appropriation bill. We made that very clear. So it was predetermined that that was the way the government wanted to implement this, and they proceeded to do it. We had no notice, which we would have had, and no opportunity to debate it, as I said.

3:20

Further to that, we’ve had a recent change to the standing orders – these are some of the parts that I’m bringing together for the Speaker – not supported by the House leaders, in 59.03(7) in which the government, who used to have to get unanimous consent to revert to introductions in order to give first reading of the appropriation bill and struggled sometimes to get that permission unanimously, changed the standing orders so that they always got it. Our Standing Order 59.03(7) now reads: “Following the Committee of Supply’s report to the Assembly on the main

estimates, the Assembly shall immediately revert to Introduction of Bills for the introduction of the appropriation Bill.” Okay. Now we have to go to the appropriation bill.

Under 64(2) it says: “No appropriation Bill may advance more than one stage a day.” Now we’ve lost the first day of debate or the first day that we would usually have to prepare, notify people to come to the gallery, whatever, because the government has already given itself a head start on that. I disagree slightly with my colleague in that I don’t see 64(2) as a limitation. I read it that you cannot cram them together. In fact, appropriation bill debate in second, committee, or third could go on longer than one day, but it has to get a minimum of one day.

This is third of the parts, Mr. Speaker. Standing Order 64(3) says that once the appropriation bill has been moved for second reading on any day – I guess that this is the curtailment of it; you’re right – then the Speaker will interrupt the proceedings at the end of that day 15 minutes before regular adjournment time, which in this Assembly is taken to be at 10:30, so the Speaker would intervene at 10:15, and call the vote.

So now the whole debate has to take place between when it’s first brought up in second reading and 10:15. Indeed, what we had was the Government House Leader using the standing orders and his prerogative to organize the House business. He did it in a way that opposition members were denied an opportunity to debate. I had people here that wanted to debate. I had people here in the afternoon that wanted to debate in second reading.

As I mentioned yesterday, Mr. Speaker, we have specific themes that are to be respected in the debating of a bill. Second reading is to debate the principle of the bill, and we wanted to be able to do that. It’s considered inappropriate in debating in other stages of the bill to be trying to lump it all together although we certainly do take our leeway here in this House sometimes. Some of my caucus members are now denied that opportunity. They go straight into Committee of the Whole, if they can manage to be recognized, or try to speak in third reading.

Now, Mr. Speaker, adjournment is not debatable according to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. It’s supposedly used for the ordering of House business, but it should not be used as a form of closure, as a form of time allocation, and that’s what this government did. They used the adjournment in the afternoon knowing that they were going to come back very close to the specified voting time of 10:15 that evening, perhaps allow another speaker or two, and then call the vote. But they certainly curtailed the amount of time that was available, and they used the parts of the standing orders that are not meant to be combined to stop opposition members or any member from speaking. But, in fact, that is what this government and the Government House Leader have done. He has combined a number of parts of our standing orders to create a total that has the effect of denying the opportunity for members to speak.

Now, on page 594 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* it does go over the ability of members to speak and notes: “With few exceptions, a Member may speak to any motion that has been proposed to the House and which is open to debate.” Few exceptions.

In *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* on page 596 we have that the opposition is particularly recognized when we are debating supply. We know that, and I’ve raised this in this House before. We even recognize the importance of the opposition’s role with money matters by having the chair of the Public Accounts Committee always be designated as a member of the Official Opposition. So it is recognized in parliamentary procedure that the opposition is given a unique role and unique rights, I would argue, in holding the government accountable about money bills.

On 596 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* it says: "On supply days, the Chair may recognize Members from the party sponsoring the opposition motion more frequently." More frequently, not less frequently, Mr. Speaker. More frequently.

All in all, what we've had is an especially grievous coming together of design by the House leaders of the government, and it is especially grievous because the opposition House leaders had been so unhappy with the allocation of speaking rotation and time in the estimates debates. With a set of committees running concurrently on some days, not every day but some days, it's not possible for me or the members for Calgary-McCall or Calgary-Mountain View or Edmonton-Strathcona to be able to be in two places at once or to be able to take part in all of those.

I've been able to raise some of the issues that my constituents wanted me to raise, looking at the totality of the budget, but other members in the opposition have not, and that should not be happening. If it needs to happen, Mr. Speaker, then the government should use the standing orders that are in place to do that. If they wish to curtail debate, then use the processes that are there. In other words, stand up and admit it. Put the time allocation motion out there on the Order Paper. Everybody knows there are 24 hours. Put it on the floor, and we'll debate it. But don't sneak around using standing orders and putting them together in a way that it ends up with a result that, I believe, was never intended to be arrived at, and that is disallowing members an opportunity to speak in second reading on appropriation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to commend the two members that have already spoken, the members for Edmonton-Centre and Edmonton-Strathcona, on very, very thoughtful preparation and citations in this debate. I'm always learning a lot from both of these members, who very meticulously prepare for these sorts of things. My comments, thankfully, can be a lot shorter because they've covered, essentially, every possible citation on this that could be brought up and have done so very effectively, certainly the most important ones.

I'm going to just appeal to a sense of fairness and common sense to back up what has been said here. Obviously, we do have estimates debate. We do have 70-some hours of estimates debate. Of course, as you know, Mr. Speaker, those are broken up into different ministries. Two to six hours are given to each of those, and there's back and forth. There are very specific rules about what you can and cannot ask about and so forth. We go through that process. But as the previous members have clearly articulated, that is a very different process and a separate process from debate on the budget as a whole, in its entirety.

I have to say: think about the absurdity of this. The Official Opposition and all opposition parties have a very crucial and specific role in government to hold the government to account, especially on money bills, on appropriation bills. Really, if it's not our number one purpose in here, it's close. We're supposed to do that.

3:30

To give the opposition parties essentially a couple of speakers each, which is what we got at the beginning of this – but in some ways that's not true because that was a response to the budget. It wasn't a response to the actual appropriation bill before us. But that was the maximum that we were able to negotiate just to respond to the budget, two people from each party. Okay. All

right. We've got to move things along, so maybe that can be justified. By the way, I should say that I think more than two people per party should be able to respond to the budget, but okay.

For a minute it's moved into estimates. We move things along so we can get things going, so it doesn't get hung up too much in this House. The government wouldn't want to do that. But we get into estimates, and we go through the estimates process. Then it comes back, and we have the bill in front of us. Now we have a situation where, essentially, well, I've been able to speak to that bill in second reading, a couple of others have been able to speak to that bill in second reading, and that's it. So only literally two to three members of the opposition parties are able to speak to the budget in its entirety.

Think about the absurdity of that. It makes no sense. I mean, it's completely undemocratic. What possible justification could there be on that side of the House? What justification could our Legislature have for only allowing the opposition the opportunity for one or two speakers to respond to the budget in its entirety? The citations were very clear. Only in very rare circumstances should debate be limited with regard to bills, especially appropriation bills. In fact, the most limited that we are with regard to debate is on the ultimate money bill, the budget.

Mr. Speaker, I think that this is a very good opportunity for you to set a standard in this Legislature of fairness on this issue. We as opposition House leaders, obviously, are in the minority here. We can't change the standing orders. We talk about negotiation. Well, I guess you can say that House leaders negotiate. It's a negotiation. It's not exactly a fair negotiation because, really, the government can do whatever they want, but we call it that to all sound nice about it.

An Hon. Member: It's a democracy.

Mr. Anderson: Well, democracy doesn't mean you can trample on the rights of the minority. That's not democracy.

Mr. Dorward: You had a lot more time than I did.

Mr. Anderson: Well, you should have time, Member. You should have more time.

Anyway, I think that it's very appropriate that we... [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm sorry to interject.

Government members, please. Let's not get into this. This is a very serious point of privilege that a member has raised, and I would afford each of you the same courtesy if you were arguing a point of privilege that you felt strongly about. So please let's button it, and let's let this member continue on and finish his comments. Then we'll come to you if you wish to speak.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I think that the points have been made very clearly. I think that we have an opportunity to change the standard in here with regard to this particular issue.

I want to make it clear that the standing orders, I think, were never intended to limit debate on the budget in that way. Obviously, there was some kind of time allocation looked into, but there's nothing in the orders that would ever suggest that we should put the budget on the table, the appropriation bill, and immediately adjourn, have no debate on it, then bring it back so that a couple of people can speak on it, and then vote on it 15 minutes later. That's an abuse of that standing order. It goes directly against the privilege that every member of this House should have, on the government side and on this side, to respond

to the main piece of legislation that we pass every year, which is the budget.

I hope you will carefully consider that, Mr. Speaker, in your evaluation of this. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other speakers? The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the chance. I'll try to be as brief as I can. As you said earlier, a point of privilege is very serious but also is very rare. There's no doubt that the onus is on the member asserting it to prove it, and I don't believe that that burden of proof has been met today. I'd suggest to you that there is no point of privilege.

Mr. Speaker, as a government we have the privilege to set the agenda, and I think that's a very important point that we can never forget. I'd say that there's no lack of opportunity for the opposition to put forward their arguments. Under this Premier we increased the estimates to discuss the budget to 70 hours. When I first came here, it was three hours per ministry. We now have our bigger ministries where we're allowing six hours of debate, and I think that, you know, gives the opposition a chance to ask some really detailed questions of the ministers and the ministers a chance to give some answers back.

Mr. Speaker, the budget was introduced on March 7, and there's been plenty of time to debate its merits. I think that it is important that we've had debate on the interim supply bill, we've had debate on the budget, we've had debate on estimates, and we're having three debates on the appropriation bill.

I'd like to also say that, you know, there's been no direction from the Official Opposition on the number of speakers they wanted to speak to the bill. I can say to you that even last night there was opportunity for another Liberal and NDP member to speak to that bill, and . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please. I asked government members to not interject when opposition was raising its points. Now I'm going to ask Wildrose opposition and other opposition members: please don't interject when the government is speaking. It's got to be good for the goose, good for the gander, and that whole story.

Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, please continue.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To argue that the use of available standing orders to manage the flow of work in the Legislature can be subject to a question of privilege is the same as arguing that the government's use of majority vote is an abuse of privilege. There is a process to change the standing orders, but until they are changed, they will as written guide the efficient operation of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I want to leave you with this. It's one thing to say that something is undemocratic because you didn't have your say, but it's another thing to say that something is undemocratic because you didn't get your way. In this case I think that's where we are today, and I would suggest that there is no point of privilege.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. We've now heard from, in fact, all House leaders or deputy House leaders.

The purported question of privilege is actually a continuation of something that started in this House yesterday afternoon, April 23, during second reading in the debate on Bill 20, the Appropriation Act, 2013. At that time, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview rose under Standing Order 15(5) to raise a purported

question of privilege on this same issue, which is now being raised by a different member, in this case the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Yesterday's discussion of this issue can be found at pages 1952 and 1953 of *Alberta Hansard*. Because it was raised yesterday and I was anticipating it coming forward today, albeit not by this member – nonetheless, the issue I was anticipating coming forward – I had the benefit of one full night to think about it and one full day or thereabouts to consider a decision on it after I had heard the comments, of course.

With respect to the protocols and procedures notice of the purported question of privilege was in fact provided to my office by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona this morning at approximately 10:50, which means the member did meet the requirement of Standing Order 15(2). The basis of the purported question of privilege that was raised yesterday and which has now been reiterated here today is that the member's ability to perform her duties is being interfered with because debate, in her view, was limited on Bill 20, the Appropriation Act, 2013.

3:40

Yesterday's exchange on this matter and the discussion that we've just heard here today suggests that some members are alleging that their right to free speech or their opportunity to speak in this Assembly is being called into question. But I want to be very clear that members in this Assembly are in fact allowed to say anything they want here as long as they do it within the rules of this Assembly and/or within the practices and guidelines, that I've cited many times and which many of you have no doubt read, that come from other established practice books.

In the context of the comments about the rights and privileges of free speech of members let me start, first, by referring you to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, page 308, where it states the following:

The right to freedom of speech is not, however, absolute; there are restrictions imposed by the House on its Members, derived from practice, convention, and the rules agreed to by the House. For example, the Standing Orders provide for time limits on speeches.

And it goes on. In fact, a little later on page 308 it says the following:

The duty of the Speaker is to ensure that the right of Members to free speech is protected and exercised to the fullest possible extent; this is accomplished in part by ensuring that the rules and practices of the House are applied and that order and decorum are maintained.

The same point is found in *Beauchesne's*, sixth edition, at paragraph 77, which states the following:

Freedom of speech does not mean that Members have an unlimited or unrestrained right to speak on every issue. The rules of the House impose limits on the participation of Members and it is the duty of the Speaker to restrain those who abuse the rules.

Let us be reminded about those rules. In particular and as just one example, the time allocated to debate on an appropriation bill is limited by Standing Order 64, which all of you would know, because it sets a deadline for the vote. In fact, Bill 20, the subject of this purported point of privilege, is an appropriation bill. Hon. members, rules such as Standing Order 64 are, in fact, the rules that you as members have set for yourselves in order to conduct business in this Assembly.

Now, I am very sympathetic to the views expressed by Edmonton-Strathcona and by Edmonton-Centre and, for that matter, by Airdrie, and I certainly am not discounting the views of the deputy House leader either. These are all good, solid, valued, principled views that they have all expressed. In fact, I would

encourage everyone to read through that *Hansard* and hear what these members have said about the role of opposition and about the role of rules and how we're all bound to abide by them, because there's valuable information.

You can tell by the way a member stands up and presents a point of privilege or a point of order or chimes in with comments from him- or herself as to how much dedicated research went into that preparation. As Airdrie said, there's always something to be learned from that. Sometimes we can learn from his comments as well. There's a lot to be learned when House leaders of government stand up. There are things that we can all learn from each other.

I am sympathetic to what was said. I listened very carefully to it, and I reviewed it all in my mind last night as well, what was said yesterday. Standing orders, as Edmonton-Centre said, are our rules; we've all agreed to abide by them, or words to that effect. In this instance the standing order that we're asked to abide by was followed. It was not violated. Now, members can argue and they did argue that they don't like the wording of that or they don't like the application of it or they don't like the net effect of what comes out of a standing order that has what is frequently referred to as a guillotine vote capability. So I am sympathetic to that.

I'm also sympathetic to the fact, as I think the deputy House leader said or as has been said on similar debate in the past, that decisions do have to be made in this House and that rules exist for those decisions to be facilitated, whether we like it or not.

The rules governing the length of debate, the frequency of speakers who participate in that debate, and how long each member can speak: all of these rules are important, and all of these points are important. In considering the importance of these rules of debate and frequency and so on, we also have to remember that debates simply cannot go on endlessly. We would never arrive at any decisions. Think about that. That's why we have them.

I am persuaded by comments of fairness, by comments pertaining to common sense, and I am also well aware of how the decision-making process works both inside this Chamber and outside it. It's not infrequent for opposition members to disagree on some of the House rules. They may not have gotten it their way, and sometimes government doesn't get it their way either.

Someone mentioned the point of rules being negotiated. Indeed, they are negotiated. They are debated. They are thoroughly vetted through caucus mechanisms. They are vetted and debated by House leaders and deputy House leaders and their representatives and the whips, and the leaders chime in sometimes with their own people, so it's not infrequent that there would be differing points of view on that. In fact, that is one reason why I allowed a considerable amount of time to occur. We had a lot of healthy discussion here. The first speaker took nine minutes, the second speaker took 15 minutes, and the third speaker took some time less than that. The fourth speaker took even less time. Obviously, I didn't note it down. That's a considerable amount of time. Nonetheless, a lot of points were raised.

In my view, this matter is something that ought to be sorted out by the House leaders when they next meet to discuss and debate our standing orders, which are de facto our standing orders, our rules. Edmonton-Strathcona, you spoke. Edmonton-Centre, you spoke. Airdrie, you spoke. The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations spoke. You are all House leaders privy to those meetings.

The points you have raised from the opposition side are extremely important to the functioning of democracy, extremely important. I would ask government members to pay attention to what has been said here so that you can somehow alleviate the concerns that the opposition members have. I'm going to side with the opposition on that point of having those items addressed by you because opposition's role in this democracy is to hold the

government to account, and the rules by which they are asked to abide may not favour them all the time. They don't favour government all the time either, but there is always room for some improvement. I'm going to read those points again because I enjoyed the way that most of them were presented.

However, in the end there is no prima facie question of privilege at this time, and pursuant to Standing Order 15(7) that concludes this matter. We will now move on to the understanding that, please, members, I ask you to review all of what was just said in the last 45, 50 minutes of debate in this Chamber.

Let us move on to points of order. Hon. Member for Airdrie, you had the first point of order at 2:01. Proceed with your citation and your point, please.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first point of order, the point of order you referred to, is under 23, specifically (h), (i), and (j), but particularly (l), "introduces any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly." The Finance minister in debate today specifically said of the \$17 billion in debt that we referred to, which is the debt for borrowing for capital and so forth, that some of that money, some of that debt that we were referring to was money being lent to municipalities. He clearly said that. Now, that was a flat-out false assertion. There is no other way to put it.

I refer the Speaker to the budget, page 135 of the fiscal plan. It is very clearly laid out that the Alberta Capital Finance Authority right now has liabilities of roughly \$15 billion. That is the fund for the liability that includes money that is lent or that the municipalities use to borrow, that the government allows them to do, essentially cosigns for. That is very clear.

3:50

If you go down a couple of lines to liabilities for capital projects, you'll see alternative financing and direct borrowing. As you can see, this year that totals just over about 4 and a half billion dollars. Then that rises to just over \$8 billion this year, and then by 2016, as we referred to, it equals just barely under \$17 billion. That's what we referred to in this House.

When the minister stands here and says something that is patently false and knows that because it is in his own budget – and I've heard him belittle members of the opposition over and over and over again for not doing their homework, for not understanding the budget documents. You guys are fools; you obviously have no training. That is what I've heard him say many times, essentially paraphrasing. Then he comes into this House and says something that is so categorically untrue and accuses this member, meaning the Leader of the Opposition, saying that by railing against or by being against the \$17 billion in debt that is being taken out for liabilities for capital projects as per this document, she is somehow limiting what one of her towns, Okotoks, can do when borrowing for their capital projects. It's absolutely false.

Mr. Speaker, they talk a lot about scary over there. What is scary is a Finance minister that does not understand his own budget document or wilfully ignores it and says something that's categorically untrue. That is what happened here. That should not be a practice. When we ask a question in question period, we should get a truthful answer or at least some kind of an answer but not something that is in direct conflict with the document that the minister in charge has put on the table. That is not appropriate in this House, and I'd ask him to clarify and withdraw that comment and apologize for misleading.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess it doesn't surprise me that there's a little bit of confusion because the opposition has consistently said in this House and outside of this House that we are going back in debt, that we are going to incur \$17 billion worth of debt. The hon. member is absolutely correct, and I would point him to page 141 of the document that he was referring to, where it shows that in the out years we're going to borrow about \$12 billion, 12 and a half billion for capital projects, not \$17 billion. It does rise to that because we have debt from the past. We were in debt before. We can't go back into debt if we were in debt before.

You know, I can understand how this is starting to confuse Albertans because the opposition refuses to tell the facts to Albertans when they go out into their town halls and some of the places that they go to. I was a little confused about where the \$17 billion came from, so I assumed – and one should never assume, Mr. Speaker – that he was referring to the capital debt that we're going to incur and some portion of the advancing of loans that we're going to incur, because those numbers roughly add up to about \$17 billion, too, in the next three-year business plan. And we can talk about last night when the hon. member actually introduced an amendment to Bill 12 that would have cancelled all borrowing, which would have meant that the Alberta Capital Finance Authority would not be able to use the government of Alberta's guarantee, actually wouldn't be able to function, frankly.

I would point to and will table at the appropriate time the town of Okotoks' notes to consolidated financial statements, page 11, where it states that when 25 and a half million dollars worth of principal and interest is repayable, "debenture debt is repayable to Alberta Capital Finance Authority," which is us, which is part of the borrowing we've done and will do in the future.

So if the hon. member would like to clarify that we are not going back in debt but adding \$12.5 billion worth of debt and some debt for on-lending to farmers, customers of ATB, municipalities in his riding and his leader's riding, then I'd be happy, Mr. Speaker, to apologize for being confused about what the heck they're talking about. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure where we're going with that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, you know, we're getting more and more points of order from both sides here that are more points of clarification and so on. I don't mean to make light of it at all, but I don't know how many times I've stood and said that these points of order that are raised – I can't stop them from being raised, nor would I want to, but they do offer a chance for people to clarify their positions. I noted both speakers just now referred to different pages of a particular document for clarification and understanding and perhaps for definitions as to what is debt, what isn't debt, when did somebody go into debt, when did it start, when will it end, and whatever else.

There are various citations I could read, but I think I'm just going to stop here and say that there is no point or order, but I did appreciate the points of clarification that both sides have now had a chance to utter, and I'm not going to take more time on that.

Let us move on to item 2. A point of order was raised at 2:11 p.m., and that point of order was raised by the hon. Government House Leader. I wonder if there is a Deputy Government House Leader that wishes to speak to this.

Point of Order Questions outside Ministerial Responsibility

Mr. Campbell: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief. This is in reference to the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View asking a question to the Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin, the Associate Minister of AT and T. Basically, the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View maligned the minister by trying to put a question to him that he knows full well is within the purview of Municipal Affairs. I'd look under Standing Orders 23(h) and (j) as my citations. I'd also look at the *House of Commons*, 503, "make a charge by way of a preamble." Mr. Speaker, I'd also look at *Beauchesne's*, page 120, 409(1), where it's very clear. "It must be a question, not an expression of an opinion" or argumentative.

Mr. Speaker, the member asked a question to the Associate Minister of AT and T really about his advocacy for his constituency, not about his ministerial responsibilities, and I suggest that by doing so, he maligned the member by calling into question his actions representing his constituency.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. deputy House leader for the Wildrose.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure where the hon. member is coming from. The point of order was called on the third question, and the third question was to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I'm not sure if he's got the wrong information. That just simply wasn't the case. I have the quote here. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why is it that not one red cent of that additional \$16 million in education tax is actually going back to the community to help with education?

Of course, when the opposition asks questions, the government has the opportunity to have any minister answer that question. In this case the Minister of AT and T decided to sit in his chair and not answer it and not be accountable. Instead, the Minister of Municipal Affairs decided to answer it.

There's absolutely no point of order. The references that he refers to – I'm not even sure if he mentioned the citations in the standing orders. There's just no point of order.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, thank you both for being brief. Clearly, there's no point of order here. But just for purposes of clarity the point of order was raised right around 2:11 p.m. this afternoon, and it was during the third question; in other words, the second supplementary question. The Minister of Human Services rose when the person asking the question, Chestermere-Rocky View, said something to the effect of Fort McMurray being left in the lurch. I have partial Blues here, and that's what prompted the minister to rise, according to my recollections.

However, let us just be careful what we impute one way and the other and move on to the next point of order because there is no point of order here.

4:00

Hon. members, the third point of order was with respect to Edmonton-Centre, who raised a point of order during the third answer given by the Minister of Service Alberta. She has indicated that she is withdrawing that point of order only because she had to attend to some other urgency. However, I have the Blues from then, and I would just explain a brief cautionary point here to both the minister and to the Member for Edmonton-Centre, to be careful in our speeches to not impute any motives about people working for or at the behest of others or suggesting something untoward. Although she didn't ask me to raise it, in her absence I

do raise it only because of that purpose. So let it be known that officially that point has been withdrawn but with that cautionary note from me, please.

Item 4 on the point of order list is from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills or someone on behalf of.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll rise on this point of order. Again, it's Standing Order 23, specifically

- (h) makes allegations against another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member;
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

You know, on this side of the House the Member for Medicine Hat asked a question about a policy that he feels and I think the majority of us on this side of the House feel is going to hurt persons with disabilities. It's going to be harmful to them and to their future. That's a policy. We're saying that the policy is going to hurt people, and that's why we want it reversed.

Now, the minister then replied with a personal attack, saying that we on this side of the House have a dated view of persons with developmental disabilities, that his comments were belittling and essentially dismissing those with developmental disabilities and their ability to be a part of society to work and so forth. I don't have the exact Blues quote – hopefully, you can read it – but that's what was said.

Emotions run high in here, so perhaps this is a way of getting this off our chest. As someone who has an autistic son and a brother with a developmental disability who's looking for work right now, I really have a problem with personal attacks on either side saying that individuals do not care or belittling individuals or that individuals don't understand persons with developmental disabilities.

We can have policy disagreements. There's no doubt about that. But to come into the House and say that to people on this side, to demonize them – that's what it is. People who are callous and cold towards people with developmental disabilities are not good people, so to state that flat out is not only imputing false motives but is very likely to create disorder, especially with those who have very close loved ones with those types of disabilities.

Perhaps the best thing to do is to clarify for this member for the future that I can guarantee him that if a Wildrose government is elected in 2016 . . . [interjection] You can laugh about it, but I'll tell you one thing. We will treat people with developmental disabilities better than you have ever treated them. Do you want to know what we'll do? We'll make sure that instead of spending \$350 million on MLA offices, we'll put it on the front lines to those individuals who need it the most. That's what we'll do.

I would hope that we could have a policy disagreement on things and not have to resort to saying to members opposite and across the way that we don't care about people with developmental disabilities and their ability to function in society. That is absolute garbage, and it's uncalled for. We want to have a policy debate – that's good – but please do not demean us in that way.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's most interesting that the hon. Member for Airdrie would continually rise on a point of order about inflammatory language and then use an argument about whether or not they're going to win the 2016 election to make a point of order. That's nonsense. Let's just dial it back a little bit here, and let's explain what happened.

The hon. Member for Medicine Hat expressed an opinion. Whether it was his opinion or an expert's is not clear to me, but that's irrelevant. The opinion was that disabled persons are not going to be able to be employed. That's the way I interpreted that. I think I've got the quote very close. I said: I will chastise that hon. member for his jaded point of view. Something very close to that. I reacted passionately because I very strongly disagree with that statement, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that we have an employment rate of about 18 per cent in our disabled community in Alberta. Washington state has an employment rate of 70 per cent. So that statement, whether it came from that hon. member or an expert, is wrong, and that's why I reacted to it.

However, Mr. Speaker, I was passionate because I actually agree with the Member for Airdrie in his passionate statement about persons with disabilities. It is never ever my intention to offend the practices and proceedings of this House, and if that language is in any way unparliamentary, I freely withdraw it. Furthermore, if it offends the sensibilities of that hon. member, whom I clearly called an hon. member and believe, I'm also quite willing to withdraw it.

In doing so, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to issue a plea that I very, very much hope that the hon. Member for Airdrie will support. I think I heard in the preamble to that question and I know I've heard in other preambles to questions about this topic in this House the use of the words "these people." That harkens back to an offensive time for me, and I'm going to call a point of order the next time I hear it. That should not happen. When you refer to a group of people as these people or those people, I think the hon. Member for Airdrie would understand that that's offensive. Maybe he doesn't, but I will call a point of order the next time I hear it.

I freely withdraw my comments, and I apologize to the hon. Member for Medicine Hat, who's working very hard on behalf of his constituents, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. Issues pertaining to persons with developmental disabilities or any kind of disabilities or to people who are down in their luck for other reasons: they are very special people indeed. They deserve the utmost of respect. We've heard two very good statements given here. The associate minister has withdrawn his comments and apologized for them. That's a very good move, hon. member. Thank you.

With that, we're going to move on.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

Bill 12 Fiscal Management Act

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

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I must say that it's a pleasure to stand and move this amendment to Bill 12, the Fiscal Management Act, to improve government transparency. I have the original and requisite number of copies for the Assembly.

The Chair: The pages will circulate that, so if you'd just give us a minute or two and then you can speak to the amendment, hon. member. This would be amendment A7.

Proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that Bill 12, the Fiscal Management Act, be amended in section 10 by striking out subsection (3) and replacing it with the following:

- (3) A business plan must include the following:
 - (a) the mission, core business, and goals of the Government . . . or agency;
 - (b) the measures to be used in assessing the performance of the Government [ministry] . . . or agency in achieving . . . [its] goals; and
 - (c) the performance targets set by the Government [ministry] . . . or agency in achieving . . . [its] goals.
- (4) The business plans must be made public at the same time as the responsible Minister makes the fiscal plan public.

4:10

Since being elected last April 23, I've heard this government continually speak to the importance of transparency but continually fail to put those intentions into legislation. This is extremely pronounced in the weakness of the legislation that the Associate Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation brought forward with the government's whistle-blower legislation. I and the Wildrose believe that this is not good enough. Transparency needs to be law. The act must mandate what needs to be reported in ministry business plans. Sunlight is the best of disinfectants, Mr. Chair.

In second reading of Bill 12 I spoke to the complete repeal of the Government Accountability Act, which is what is happening under the Fiscal Management Act. When that Government Accountability Act was passed – it was passed in 1995 – it was the envy of the rest of our nation. We were the first – let me repeat that, the first – province in Canada to adopt a publicly reported results-based performance measure framework into our budgeting process. The act was designed to improve accountability between civil servants, elected officials, the government, and the citizens of Alberta.

Mr. Chair, according to the Taxpayers Federation and Mr. Derek Fildebrandt “repealing the Government Accountability Act will gut the most important accountability measures required by law. This will leave taxpayers without the most basic information required to know what their government is up to.” He goes on to say, “In theory, the government could present its entire budget on the back of a napkin with these massively reduced requirements in Bill 12.”

Mr. Chair, it is for this reason that I put forward this amendment in the exact language the Klein government used and thought important for government transparency. I want to make sure for my constituents and all Albertans that all future budgets will be presented in an accountable and transparent manner. Retaining this section of the Government Accountability Act, which this government now wants to repeal, will ensure that in future provincial budgets there will continue to be a qualitative and quantitative measure that has been designed to assess performance against goals.

Last Thursday I left the Assembly with this statement.

Without clearly articulated measurable . . . performance expectations, there will never be sustained improvement in government programs and services.

Effective decision-making in our democracy requires that Albertans have access to all the information in a reasonable, recognizable, and responsive format . . . It is never good for democracy when citizens question the authenticity and the accuracy of any government document, which inevitably leads to the perception that their government as a whole has failed them.

Mr. Chair, we have the opportunity here today to make sure that this doesn't happen. We can ensure that this direction from Klein's Government Accountability Act lives on in this new act, the Fiscal Management Act. Let's make sure there is a continuation of this positive impact of publicly reporting on government's performance, which has enhanced our transparency, strengthened accountability, and provided measurable and visible motivation for civil servants to improve services and programs for Alberta's citizens. Let's continue to improve the transparency of our democracy, not retreat into the opaque reporting requirements of budgets in past generations like Bill 12 will do.

Hon. members, please support this amendment rather than completely throwing away the Government Accountability Act, that was passed in 1995. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You know, we could put in there how many pages it should be. We could put in there how many pictures there should be, kind of like their budget. It has more pictures than pages. We could put in there things that are somewhat, I would suggest to you, common sense in terms of a business plan.

I would put Budget 2013 on the table to say that all of the things that the hon. member is looking for are part of the fiscal plan. They're part of the business plans. They are what a business plan is. In fact, the business plan has to be prepared for each fiscal year for all of the government agencies for that period and at least two subsequent periods. The major economic assumptions have to be made and prepared in that fiscal plan, including a comment on the effect that changes in those assumptions may have on the finances of the government in the fiscal years to which fiscal plan relates.

The mission, core business, and goals of the government are still going to be in our three-year business plans, the ministry annual reports, and the government-wide performance report Measuring Up, which has never been in legislation. It's something we do as part of our policy and our core business, so putting it into the legislation, Mr. Chairman, every time the Finance minister wanted to change some format in terms of the mission or the core – all of the information is there. For the hon. member to suggest that the information is not there or even for the Canadian Taxpayers Federation to suggest that the information is not there is not correct. It is in the business plan and will continue to be in the business plan.

So, no, I'm not going to support the amendment as proposed.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there others? The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't understand why you're now having the idea of voting against the Government Accountability Act. I mean, this was an act that was passed in this Legislature by a PC government. It was a communication tool for that government. Bill 12, the Fiscal Management Act, is a tool that does nothing more now than bring smoke and mirrors back into Alberta politics.

At the basic level the Government Accountability Act put into the provincial budget a quantitative and qualitative measure designed to assess performance against goals. Those were words that were used to describe that act by the PC government of that day. Why vote against it now? What's wrong with that wording? Let's bring it back. It was a very, very good piece of legislation, so why throw the baby out with the bathwater, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Horner: Well, hon. member, the rhetoric all sounds good, but the reality is that what we're doing is combining two acts, not getting rid of one. We're combining two acts into the Fiscal Management Act. It's going to implement all of the government policy decisions related to changes in the current fiscal framework. We're adding a savings policy. That wasn't in the other act; we're putting it into this one. We're blending them together. We're changing the debt ceiling, the way that we now have it. It wasn't in the other acts; now we're putting it in. Those are good things, hon. member.

Just to say that you're going to have a mission statement embedded in the budget or business plan – you can't tell me that that's your core value. Your core value is that you want financial information that's clear and concise, you want people to be able to read and understand what you're presenting in terms of those expenses, and you want people to understand what you're borrowing, what you're saving. All of those pieces are the core values, not the fluff that you're talking about.

I won't be supporting the amendment, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to remind the hon. minister of the debt retirement account that existed prior to Bill 12.

Now, section 10(3) right now reads, "The business plans must be in the form determined by the Treasury Board and must be made public at the same time as the responsible Minister makes the fiscal plan public." This doesn't state what must be in those business plans. This other language, this language that the Klein government wrote, states what must be contained in those business plans. I see no reason why we need to throw that away. That was very good language. That was very clear and concise language about what the government must report to the citizens of Alberta. They need to be the ones who make the decision on whether or not it's a good budget.

It's not up to the minister or to the government to decide what performance measures should be used in reporting on that. It should be, as it was in the other legislation, clear and transparent and put forward in a manner that Albertans could recognize, make a decision on, and judge the government on. This new wording, "business plans must be in the form determined by the Treasury Board and must be made public at the same time as the responsible Minister makes the fiscal plan public," to me means that you can change how it's going to be reported whenever you want.

Now, with Bill 12, that's what this is putting forward. The old act, the Government Accountability Act, the act passed by the Klein government in 1995, made a change to that. Rather than have the Treasury Board decide, it was put into legislation so that everybody understood what was coming and what would be in that plan before it was released.

4:20

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Chairman, the hon. member says that his complaint is that the government is going to be able to say what's in the plan. Yet his amendment says that the government is going to state what the mission is, that the government is going to state what the core businesses are, that the government is going to state what measures are going to be used, and that the government is going to set the performance targets. The opposition isn't going to set the performance targets. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation isn't going to set the performance targets. He's saying that govern-

ment is going to do all this. Well, that's what we do, and we will be doing that in a format that will be legible, easy for Albertans to understand, and will contain all of the information that is pertinent, as is the document that is before this House today. It has the environmental outlook. It has the capital plan. It has the savings plan. It has the operational plan. It has the overview. There is the Measuring Up document.

Hon. member, the performance plans and targets that we do are not part of a step-by-step legislative process where we have to set out the number of pages and those sorts of things. You're asking if the government is going to do it. Of course the government is going to do it. That's what the government does. Even in your amendment the government does it all.

So, no, I'm not going to accept the amendment.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much. I just wanted to comment very briefly on this issue. I think that the issue here, of course, is trying to improve accountability and limit the opportunity for the public relations department of the government, with all due respect to the public relations department, to come up with the kind of language that they've been using as a means of suggesting that they've met their goals, like: we're going to collaborate, and we're going to work towards the future; that's what we said that we were going to do when we said it, and now we're doing it. That's all they ever say. Then, of course, it means nothing when you actually try to dissect or analyze the pablum that is coming out of the Conservative message box these days.

Just looking through the business plan right now – the minister says that it's already in the business plan – I have to say that I'm not convinced that they're actually meeting the objectives that he suggests they are. There are a number of elements in the business plan where the performance measures are not given on an annual basis. They might be given every two or three years at this point. It's very discretionary.

As well, we have instances where in the Ministry of Human Services you have on one hand – I mean, I really just don't know where they come up with these things. The goal is that vulnerable Albertans are protected and supported in times of need, and then one of the performance measures is about percentage of children and youth who received child intervention after their file was closed. The question is: well, how many files are closed? Really, the issue is: how many children are being subject to abuse, and what are the measures of that, and is that going up or down? How many children are using the food bank right now, and is that going up or down?

So for the performance measures that currently exist, I would suggest that you actually have legislation like this so that we could decide whether, in fact, a reasonable person would actually suggest that what has been produced here amounts to a performance measure. That might be a good thing. Perhaps having legislation would promote a practice within government to say that, well, let's just put on our objective hat here and say: does this thing we put in here actually amount to a performance measure of the goal that we just outlined? In fact, you can probably go through a third of the items in this business plan and find that there's very little connection to the goal they've identified and the performance measure they put out there. Percentage of clients who feel that getting a little bit of money improved their life a bit: really? That's a performance measure? I mean, it's all of these sorts of subjective satisfaction measures. Those aren't performance measures, for heaven's sake, Mr. Chair, and I think the minister knows that.

You know, I'm looking at one that says that a priority initiative is to work with partners. It's this lovely collaboration word. Apparently, a Conservative cabinet minister cannot get up in the morning without repeating their collaboration mantra to themselves in front of the mirror for 10 minutes before taking off to potentially talk to media in the future. Nonetheless, we're going to collaborate with communities and stakeholders so that opportunities are created for Albertans to succeed, and through that, our priority is going to be that we're going to eliminate child poverty. Then you get down to performance measures, and it's the percentage of AISH clients who believe that their benefits help them live more independently. Really? I mean, one is hardly a performance measure of the other.

Perhaps if this amendment were passed, there would be an obligation for there to be a rational connection between the goals which the government puts out in its press releases and the performance measures to which it holds itself accountable.

That's all. Thank you.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Chairman, the hon. member just made my point. This amendment doesn't speak to the quality of the measures or anything else. We can have a good debate about the quality of the measures. The measurements that the hon. member was just complaining about are the measurements that this basic amendment would put back in in terms of the legislative requirement. I don't disagree that we should have robust discussion about the measurements and how we measure and the targets, but this amendment would not solve the concern that the hon. member has just put on the floor.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: I can't help it. It's so much fun when we get to have a bit of a debate, but I'll be brief. I guess my argument is that, in theory, if there is an obligation in legislation for there to be a goal and an associated performance measure, there might actually be an objective forum; for instance, in an administrative review application in front of a judge, where the judge would actually be asked to render a reasonable, objective decision on whether one is a reasonable performance measure of the other.

Right now, with it just saying that it's up to the government, well, no objective observer is ever going to wade into it because the legislation clearly says that it's up to the government to do whatever it wants.

The Chair: Are there others?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: The question has been called.

[Motion on amendment A7 lost]

The Chair: Now back to the bill. The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have an amendment that I'll circulate.

The Chair: That amendment shall be A8. If you would circulate that through the pages, please, and give us half a minute. Then I'll let you speak to it, hon. member.

Proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair. This amendment refers to Bill 12, section 13. If you turn to section 13 right now,

you will see that it's talking about the ministry annual reports. What this amendment does is add a subsection after subsection (4) which would say:

(5) In addition to the requirements of this section, ministry annual reports must incorporate any changes to format, timing and content recommended by the Auditor General or state explicitly in the report why the Auditor General's recommendations have not been adopted.

Now, I think that this is a very reasonable amendment. I think that what this is meant to do is that if the Auditor General comes back and says that there's something missing from these annual reports or that there's something that needs to be added to these annual reports for clarity purposes or whatever or to comply with accounting principles, whatever the Auditor General might think, this government will make sure that they will incorporate those recommendations from the Auditor General. I think that this is very important.

4:30

I think we're seeing an example of it now. There was just a letter written by our colleague from Calgary-Buffalo asking for the Auditor General to examine whether the government had complied with its legislation when they put Budget 2013 forward, to see if the consolidated financial statements and budget, et cetera, were prepared in accordance with generally accepted principles that could be understood by Albertans.

Now, it may be that he comes back and says: yes, they have been. Certainly, we've heard from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and we've heard from many others who have said that they don't think that that's the case. If the Auditor General were to – of course, this is speculative – come back and say, "We've got some problems here; you need to include this; you need to change your report" or consolidated statements or whatever, such and such, "in order to comply with generally accepted accounting principles" or whatever, what have you, this amendment would make it incumbent upon the government to adopt that recommendation and implement that recommendation.

I think that this is a good safeguard. I think it's actually good for the government, too, because it allows the government to show that it's willing to be transparent, that it's willing to abide by an outside, third-party, independent source when it comes to ensuring that the consolidated documents and annual reports are indeed up to snuff and up to standard. This would be something that as chair of the Public Accounts Committee I think would be very helpful.

We work very closely in the Public Accounts Committee, and there are many members in this House on all sides who work with that committee that are dedicated to making sure that the recommendations of the Auditor General are implemented. We spend most of our time in that committee doing that. We think that it's important. The Auditor General, in my view and, I'm sure, in most views, is one of the most if not the most important officers of the Legislative Assembly, and his recommendations certainly should be given the utmost weight. That's why I like the idea that if the Auditor General says, "Look, something is missing here to make this a truly transparent document," why not implement it? I think that that would be very important.

I would say, too, that we did originally want to introduce a budget officer. We got a letter from the Calgary Chamber of Commerce outlining their idea for a provincial budget office, and it's very well worded and a very good argument. It specifically says that we should have a third party, essentially, to audit or be able to make sure that the numbers that the government is putting out there are indeed accurate, that they aren't playing around with

the numbers, being a little bit too rosy or underrosy. The provincial budget officer would guard against that.

Now, I've heard the minister say that we don't need that because we've got an Auditor General. Okay. Great. I still think it would be good to have a budget officer. But if we have the Auditor General, if that's what the minister has said and he trusts that that budget officer is unnecessary because we have an Auditor General, then let's put it into law. If the Auditor General comes with a recommendation that says that the government needs to alter or incorporate any changes to format, timing, or content, et cetera, that should be added.

Let's be clear. This doesn't bind the government. We're not saying that you don't have any flexibility here. It specifically says at the end that they can either accept those recommendations or state explicitly in the report why the AG's recommendations have not been adopted. It doesn't bind the government's hands. It gives them the ability to say that if they feel something is just so outrageous, which would probably be very rare – but let's say that it happened – they can say: no, we didn't do it, and we didn't do it because of X, Y, and Z.

I think that this would be a good amendment, and I hope that the members opposite would support it.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Interesting, interesting amendment. I went to the budget documents, and I went to the tab titled Response to the Auditor General. In the response to the Auditor General's package of the plan, which is something that we do as a matter of course in response to the Auditor General's recommendations, which come from the report of the Auditor General of Alberta, which are done every year and which we have to reply to, there are Auditor General's recommendations on Transportation, on inspector confirmation, on timeliness and completion, on Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, on Executive Council, on Treasury Board and Finance. The Auditor General has made recommendations as it relates to Treasury Board and Finance, as it relates to AIMCo.

You know, interestingly enough, Mr. Chairman, as part of the response to the Auditor General's recommendation we as the government have to put our response right there, right next to it in the column. The reality is: why would you put one clause into the Fiscal Management Act that relates to one thing when you have all of these other recommendations? The Auditor General is perfectly free and, I would also say, very willing to put recommendations as to how our format may have crossed the line of the legislation. I would add that when the previous letter went to the Auditor General saying that we had violated the act in some sense in terms of our quarterly reporting, he came back and said: "No, you hadn't. You didn't." There are no recommendations that we have violated anything in this report from the Auditor General.

I would also say to the hon. members opposite that if the Auditor General gave us a recommendation as to format, timing, content, or that ministry reports should incorporate any changes – he's the Auditor – then we're going to have our government response in the response to the report of the Auditor General. You wouldn't put it in the legislation and have it as a one-off item, Mr. Chairman. Therefore, we cannot accept this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Again, very briefly, I need to rise in support of this amendment. Again, just trying to use examples, I think of recommendations by the Auditor General on the effectiveness of and the process around climate change management, climate change emissions, and the climate change program. I think he made some very specific recommendations, and I do not believe that the annual reports of that ministry refer to them consistently or, in many cases, at all. The response of the government that's included in the Auditor General's report often just amounts to simply: working on it. Then it doesn't come back until the Auditor General actually takes the time and uses his very limited resources to specifically highlight it again.

What should be happening is that where the Auditor General outlines that there is a significant departmental problem with implementing a task that the government has committed to, then there should be an obligation for that to remain a feature of the annual report, not just the one time the Auditor General brings it out but every year. Certainly, that's not the practice right now, and this would ensure that it was the practice, so I support the amendment.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Horner: Well, actually, hon. member, you might want to read the amendment. It would not ensure that. It would only ensure that if it was a change to format, timing, and content of the report, not whether or not the recommendation was made.

I would also point you to the report, the Auditor General's recommendations and the responses, page 153, Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, the Auditor General's recommendation that

the Department of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development improve the reliability, comparability and relevance of its public reporting on Alberta's results and costs incurred in meeting climate change targets.

It's already there, and it's been there every year, hon. member. This amendment would not do what you're asking for.

The Chair: Are there others?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A8 lost]

The Chair: Back to the bill. The hon. Member for Airdrie.

4:40

Mr. Anderson: Thank you very much. All right. I have another amendment, so we'll distribute it.

The Chair: If you'll have the pages circulate that, hon. member. Give us half a minute.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This amendment, A9 I believe it is, amends section 12(2). In this it's talking about the government annual report and what must be in here.

- (2) The annual report must include for a fiscal year
 - (a) a fiscal plan analysis that includes a statement of
 - (i) the actual operational revenue and actual operational expense,
 - (ii) the debt-servicing costs . . .
 - (iii) the amount of non-renewable resource revenue,
 - (iv) the amount allocated to or from the Contingency Account . . .
 - (v) the prescribed savings,

- (b) a comparison of the actual performance results to the desired results included in the business plan . . . [and] variances,
- (c) the consolidated financial statements of the Province of Alberta.

What (c.1) would do is that it would go under that, “the consolidated financial statements of the Province of Alberta,” and say:

- (c.1) a historical fiscal summary commencing with the 1993-94 fiscal year and for all subsequent fiscal years that includes
 - (i) a breakdown of revenue by source,
 - (ii) a breakdown of operating and capital expense by function, and
 - (iii) a balance sheet including financial assets, capital assets, pension liabilities, and accumulated debt.

I know this Finance minister wants to always follow generally accepted accounting principles. Well, generally accepted accounting principles: if you talk to some accountants, obviously not every accountant, they would say that when you change the way that you report your numbers as a company, you have to alter your historical fiscal summary to report it as it would be if you had always done it that way so that there can be a specific comparison made, so you can compare apples to apples, essentially. If you don't do it that way, then you're comparing apples to oranges because you're doing the books differently one year as opposed to the 20 years before that. So it becomes difficult for people, members of the public in this case and government members and members of the opposition, to compare apples to apples to see whether we're making progress or whether we're going in the wrong direction or whatever.

What this amendment would do is make sure that this document, that is in the fiscal plan this year, the historical fiscal summary that is in the fiscal plan this year – what it would make sure would happen is that we would be able to have another table that would show that historical fiscal summary but would do so using the same methodology that's being used now under the new act for all those years previous to this one. In that way, we could compare apples to apples. When we're debating in this House, we'll be able to figure out exactly what has changed, the size of the operational deficit, a surplus, the size of the capital program, the size of the savings, whatever. It would be, I think, a very good financial practice to be able to do that and give that type of fiscal summary for people to peruse and look over and be able to compare.

That is the amendment in this case.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do recognize where the hon. member is coming from on this one. The change to how we broke down the capital expense by function in actual fact would be a fairly significant exercise by a lot of people, to go back into records to figure out what the capital that was hidden in that operating expense that we didn't pull out before was. It would be a significant undertaking to do that.

I think what we're going to be seeing in the years to come is the benefit of having actual results compared to budgeted and actual operating expense results compared to what we said that we were going to spend on a program or service, not blended with what I've been saying all along was an opportunity to move capital in and out of the expense accounts to change the numbers. I think

that change has been a significant component of where we're going for transparency, similar to what municipalities use.

So I would not support putting this into the act. There will be many, I'm sure, in the future that will look at breaking those things down and coming up with the comparators on their own. I would not be averse to that. I wouldn't be averse to going through the exercise, but I would be averse to putting it into the act.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Well, I think you've got some very smart people working in that department. I don't think it would be that hard to do it, and it sounds like you're not opposed to it. So if you're not going to put it in the act, would you at least put it under advisement so that if your department is able to supply that in future summaries, we can compare apples to apples?

Mr. Horner: You know, there may be an opportunity for us to look at utilizing some. I don't know whether we do it as a research project or something like that. I'm not opposed to it, hon. member, but I am opposed to putting it into the act.

The Chair: Are there others?

I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A9 lost]

The Chair: Are there others to speak? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: I have another amendment.

The Chair: We'll call that one A10, hon. member.

Proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is another amendment. This is in the definitions section under 1(1). What we do here is that we strike out clauses (a) and (b). Now, (a) and (b) under the new act say:

- (a) “actual operational expense” means, with respect to a fiscal year, the actual operational expense of the Government and prescribed Provincial agencies as reported in the fiscal plan analysis for that year, but does not include changes in liabilities respecting pensions;
- (b) “actual operational revenue” means, with respect to a fiscal year, actual revenue of the Government and prescribed Provincial agencies, less . . .

And it goes through and says what things are not going to be included in the revenue.

Now, what this amendment does is that it strikes those and replaces them with:

- (a) “actual expense” means, with respect to a fiscal year, actual expense of the Crown for all purposes as reported in the Government annual report for that year but does not include increases or decreases in liabilities respecting pensions;
- (b) “actual revenue” means, with respect to a fiscal year, actual revenue of the Crown from all sources as reported in the Government annual report for that year.

It then also strikes out “actual operational expenses” wherever it occurs in the act and puts in “actual expense” and strikes out “actual operational revenue” wherever it occurs in the act and substitutes “actual revenue” just to make it consistent with the definitions throughout the act.

The purpose of this. The language being used in this amendment is the exact language of the previous act. It's just going back to the way we reported it last year. Again, this goes back to the fact that it was truly amazing on budget day how many different numbers were out there with regard to the actual size of the deficit, the cash adjustment, the size of the sustainability fund, everything under the sun. Certainly, for the deficit number there were literally a dozen different numbers floating around, including from your own government. I heard with my own ears – unless I was hearing things – that when media asked the government what the actual deficit was, the Finance minister gave a different answer than the associate Finance minister.

4:50

Then, of course, the NDs had a number. The Liberals had a number. The Wildrose had a number. They were similar, but they were different. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation came out with a totally different number. CFIB came out with a different number. Then Don Braid had a different number. I mean, it was just all over the map.

That can't be healthy, and I think that that goes back a little bit to what I was saying about how we're now changing the way we report things so that we're not comparing apples to apples anymore, which is why we need that historical summary to be able to do that. I talked about that in the last amendment. But we wouldn't need that at all if we passed this amendment, if we just continued to go on with the way we've reported it.

I can't see the Finance minister saying – he says that there's such harm in doing it that way. I don't see it. We've had some of the best, the most balanced budgets we've ever had using this definition from last year. It gives people an understanding, a better understanding anyway, of what the consolidated deficit or the consolidated surplus is.

I don't think we have any problem with the Finance minister separating out operational, capital, and savings as another document in his budget in the fiscal plan. If he wants to do that in order to put that out there so he can message it how he wants to message his budget and make it even more clear for people, in his view, that's fine. But why change the way that we have done this reporting for decades now? It doesn't make any sense to make that change.

You know, it makes people concerned, frankly, when government starts changing the way that they account for things, the way that they present the budget, the way that they present, particularly, the deficit number. When they start changing the rules around that, that makes people nervous. It makes it look like they're hiding something. Indeed, if you look at the number that the Finance minister and the associate Finance minister gave, they were on the low end. They said: the deficit is this much. Then everybody else was more in the \$5 billion to \$6 billion range: no, it's this much if you consolidate capital into it.

We can't have that kind of craziness again on budget day. It's uncertain. It's amateurish. We've got to make sure that we have consistency. There may be some investors out there that like the new format, and I'm sure the minister will quote that. But the public, which is who the budget is for mostly, just the general public, were happy with the way it was being done. This definition complied with generally accepted accounting principles. People were happy with it. It worked. People understood it. We would have some disagreements about, you know, that we would try to merge in some expenses that still weren't counted as expenses like capital for provincial infrastructure, but that was just one number. We had back and forth about that, but the general deficit number

gave everybody a consistent gauge by which to judge the size of the deficit or the surplus and the finances of the province.

I think that Albertans want us to continue to be consistent, to use that same definition, and not to change the definition in order to frankly hide the size of the deficit. Well, not to hide the size but – what's the word? – to make it more difficult to determine what the true cash adjustment is and what the size of the deficit is. That's very difficult, and it caused a lot of uncertainty. I hope that perhaps – I have a small hope. It's probably a little tiny hope. Okay. Maybe it's not there at all, but I will say that I am hoping this amendment will be accepted.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Chairman, I'm having a déjà vu moment here because last night we had an amendment – in fact, it was amendment A1, I believe – that the hon. member presented that said that we would have to present “a consolidated expense and revenue balance sheet which includes all capital spending as an expense.” Today we have an amendment which, basically, would do the same thing, which means that he's doing the same thing amendment that this House has already defeated. You know, I'm sure there are some rules around that. You know, I'm not as educated in House rules as the hon. Opposition House Leader, but my guess is that perhaps there's something we might want to check there

The other thing that I did want to say, too – and I know there's another hon. member that wants to comment on this – is that the way that we reported it before included capital in the expense side, which is why there was confusion, which is why, hon. member, you used to bring it up almost all the time. Now you won't have that issue because it's all in – you know, I was kind of doing this for you. When you think about it, we are now showing a more transparent view of the operating expenditures of this government. I could have risen on a point of order, Mr. Chairman, when he was suggesting that I was trying to hide what the deficit was. Totally untrue.

In fact, I pointed out not only to the journalists and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation the calculation that we used to do, which is still there. It's simply the difference between the change of our net financial assets. That's all it was. It's still there. You can still figure it out. So there was no, I guess, confusion on our side. But it was because of all of those other numbers where people are trying to turn it into a cash-required deficit, which includes money that you would have put into savings, versus what is an accounting deficit of operating revenue over operating expenditures, which is what we have today.

So, no, I can't accept an amendment, which we defeated in this House yesterday, presented in a different format today, which I believe is against the rules. The Clerk might want to comment on that. I'm also going to say no to this amendment for the same reasons that I said no to it yesterday.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There's no question that these are complex matters, and there's no question that a \$40 billion budget is a complex thing. However, Bill 12, this document, over time will be better understood, quite frankly, than the financial statements that have been released by the government in the past. There is a bit of a transition period. There's no question.

I would like to just say – and I support everything the minister just said. Of course, that's a puffball statement. [interjection] It's not a puffball question; it's a puffball statement. Mr. Chair, deficit

is to operating as funded is to capital. Simply, what's happening here is that the operational expenses are really what is associated with deficit, and capital is the word "funded." To use the word "deficit" with respect to capital is nonsensical in the accounting world. Therefore, this is going to make things much clearer.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on amendment A10.

[Motion on amendment A10 lost]

The Chair: I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo I've got an amendment, which I will circulate.

The Chair: We'll refer to that one as A11, hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you.

The Chair: Proceed, hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The purpose of the amendment is somewhat similar to the previous amendment. It's to establish clear taxpayer information rights in relation to the act. We're proposing that every citizen has the right to:

- (a) know how their tax dollars are spent;
- (b) expect the Government to conform to generally accepted accounting principles in preparing any documents under this Act;
- (c) expect the Government to report on the province's finances in a clear, straightforward and unambiguous manner.

The motivation is that Bill 12 fundamentally changes the way government administers and reports on the province's finances. One of the key features of the new legislation is that the government will now be required to have a distinct operational plan, a distinct savings plan, and a distinct capital plan as part of its overall annual fiscal plan.

In creating these new, quote, fiscal management structures, end quote, as the Premier calls them, the government is reversing the Klein-era restrictions on debt and deficit, relaxing financial reporting requirements, and ultimately demanding less accountability and transparency from the Minister of Finance.

5:00

The new process also makes direct comparisons to previous budget estimates much more challenging and, as we saw with Budget 2013, leads to multiple and contradictory ways for the province's actual deficit and debt numbers to be calculated.

I appreciate that I wasn't here last evening, and the minister has already said that there was some repetition, so I'll put it to the minister to comment on whether there is sufficient difference between this and the most recent amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. minister, I take it you've got a copy of the amendment?

Mr. Horner: I do. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I note that in the amendment it says that the act would "expect the Government to conform to generally accepted accounting principles in preparing any documents." I would not accept the amendment because we also have to adhere to the public-sector accounting principles,

which in some cases are actually different than GAAP. In some cases, as we'll see in the near future, our Auditor General is actually on the committee of the public-sector accounting groups.

There are different ways that we deal with depreciation, different ways that we deal with capital and capital amortization. There are different ways that revenue is actually recorded in the public sector versus generally accepted accounting, but because we are a public entity, we must adhere, in my view, to what our Auditor General is going to tell us, which could actually violate this, which would be unfortunate. I would not want to do that. Therefore, I'm not going to. In addition to the fact that it is a given that by the nature of the general business plans that we're doing – the savings plan, the capital plan – the whole intent of this new framework, as I think I heard the hon. member say, is to be transparent and to provide that, this would be redundant in terms of putting it into the act.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there others?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on amendment A11.

[Motion on amendment A11 lost]

The Chair: Again, I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo an amendment.

The Chair: This will be amendment A12, hon. member.

Proceed, hon. member.

Dr. Swann: The purpose of this amendment, an addition to section 16.1, is to commit the Legislative Assembly to a review of Alberta's tax revenues within one year of the act coming into force. The three items to be included in the review are all from the Alberta Liberal fiscal platform, including (a) the feasibility and benefits of moving to a continuously progressive income tax system, (b) the feasibility and appropriateness of increasing the Alberta corporate income tax rate by 2 per cent, and (c) examining whether Alberta's overall tax system, tax mix, and tax revenues are sufficient to pay for the level of government services that Albertans need and expect.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Horner: I'm not sure that I even need to speak to this one, Mr. Chairman. Obviously, this is not something that we're going to accept putting into the act. How we come up with our policy around tax – corporate, personal, and other – is a matter of government policy, and you wouldn't put it in a piece of legislation, so we will not be accepting A12.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there others to speak to amendment A12?

Ms Notley: I will speak very briefly to this. I just want to outline my wholehearted support for this amendment. Probably the singularly most difficult component of this bill, Bill 12, is the fact that it absolutely fails to deal with the structural revenue problems in this province and that, in fact, through a number of different mechanisms it simply gives the government a whole bunch of discretion to put off fixing structural revenue problems in this province. This amendment is one small mechanism that would hold the government at least partially publicly accountable for a process of answering to Albertans for why we're not looking at other sources of revenue. Of course, we also have some fairly

huge issues with respect to what we're collecting from our nonrenewable resource revenue.

However, the issue of the flat tax in Alberta is a significantly difficult one and one that, clearly, Albertans no longer support. The majority of Albertans do not support this. We need to allow for an opportunity for there to be some broader discussion with it, and this is one mechanism that might allow for that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A12 lost]

The Chair: On the bill are there other speakers?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 12 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The committee will now rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 12. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? That's carried. So ordered.

Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests prior to Committee of the Whole?

[Unanimous consent granted]

5:10

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

Mr. Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to have found many of my friends outside the Legislature taking pictures. They will be travelling to Fort McMurray tomorrow. They will be moving into crucial decision-making positions in ONGC, which is the national oil company in India. This group of 23 ONGC senior general managers are to take over strategic positions in the Indian national oil company. The group has come to the University of Alberta through IIM Bangalore. IIM Bangalore is a leading management institute in the country and has organized this visit as part of the leadership development program in collaboration with the University of Alberta. Professor V. Anand Ram is one of the program directors accompanying the group. I will ask all my new friends to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

Bill 20 Appropriation Act, 2013

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm glad to be able to rise, finally, to speak to Bill 20, the Appropriation Act, 2013, having not had an opportunity to do that in second reading and, of course, as we've mentioned before, having had the opportunity to do that in estimates significantly limited through an unprecedented change in process introduced by the House leader and his committee chairs. That being said, I am pleased to be able to take this brief period of time in Committee of the Whole to offer up some comments about Bill 20, the Appropriation Act.

As we have stated in a couple of other forums, probably the most fundamental difficulty around this piece of legislation rests with, first of all, the countless broken promises which it reflects on the part of the Premier, and the second difficulty relates to the failure of this government to come to grips with its revenue problems. That's probably a good summary of how this budget reflects a very disappointing first year on the part of this government and this Premier.

When it comes to the issue of revenues, Mr. Chair, we've argued on a number of occasions that the 10 per cent flat tax has not been a success in Alberta. The very fact that not a single other province has adopted the flat tax is an indication that it's not actually burning up the phone lines in a "Hey, this a great idea; let's do this here" sort of way. In fact, it is one of the many policies that this government has introduced over its ridiculously long and antidemocratic tenure – antidemocratic in length, shall I say – that works towards increasing the gap between rich and poor. Nowhere is that greater than in this province, and that happens, of course, as a result of this flat tax.

As is typical with many right-wing governments – in case anybody hasn't been watching over the last few months, it's very clear that that's exactly what we have; people might have thought they were voting against the Wildrose, but really in many respects that's kind of what they got, the Wildrose with different personalities but, beyond that, very similar agendas – what you find in situations where you've got right-wing governments is that they often have a tendency to want to cut services, but even more significantly they really want to do great things for their friends in business.

They do that in two ways. First of all, they slowly chip away at their base of revenue. Thankfully, you know, at least the average guy or girl gets their taxes reduced a little bit although typically they end up paying on the other end with lost services and increased fees. But in theory everybody's taxes go down, and certainly the taxes of the wealthy go down even more. That's the first thing that happens.

The other thing that we do is that we then start finding ways to give millions and hundreds of millions and, indeed, billions of dollars to big corporations and – wait for it – wealthy Albertans. So we actually do it on both sides. What happens is that you'll find that if you analyze the management history of right-wing governments, they often contribute to spiralling debt faster than other parties. Of course, as I always like to remind this Assembly, in Canada the party with the best record in terms of balancing the budget is, in fact, the NDP.

I do believe that a balanced budget is very important. But the way you do that is that you make it very clear that we are all part of this great province. We ask those who can afford to to pay their fair share. We're all part of this province, and we all want to see it grow forward in a way that is fair and equitable. Indeed, Mr. Chair, it's becoming more and more apparent that the more equitable a community is, the better everybody does, even those at the very, very top. Their quality of life actually goes up by way of living in a more equitable community.

That being said, we're also conscious of the competitive advantage. It's never been our idea that we would, you know, price ourselves out of the market. It's quite the opposite. It's our view that we can retain the lowest taxes in the country yet make them fairer amongst Albertans and increase them enough to also bring a lot more money into our treasury while retaining that competitive advantage. We can do that.

We also have the lowest natural resource revenue system in pretty much the developed world. I did hear one person point out that Angola had a lower royalty rate than us, but I'm just not convinced that we should be comparing ourselves to Angola in that regard. Were we to simply follow the guidance that was given by former Premier Lougheed, we could easily double the amount of money that comes into our coffers right now through non-renewable resource revenues.

That being said, the other thing that our party has been very keen on seeing more work on is the idea of investing to upgrade our resources here in the province of Alberta. Rather than shipping them out as fast as possible, as cheaply as possible, ensuring the greatest amount of profit possible to organizations and corporations which have no loyalty to our province as a community, what we would do is we'd say that we need to be putting more work into creating long-term, sustainable, mortgage-paying jobs for Albertans here, and in so doing, we increase our tax base, we bring more revenue into our coffers, and we also increase the quality of life for regular Albertans. Rather than being the source of cheap and easy dollars for multinational corporations, we ought to be actually developing our resources in the best interests of all Albertans.

That being said, on the expense side of this budget we also have a number of significant broken promises. It's hard to go through the list because I think I only have at this point about three minutes left, and the list is so long. I have to say that I am personally almost offended by the Premier's decision to make the elimination of child poverty a critical plank in her election platform and to watch what she has done since then. I find it to be the quintessential cynical move of a politician, and it's the kind of move that will ensure that the respect for and trust in politicians takes an unprecedented plummet. I don't know who promises to end child poverty and then turns around and cuts program after program after program that currently maintains the level of child poverty where it is and tries to stop it from increasing. I just don't know who does that kind of thing. It's just so cynical.

5:20

Certainly, what this budget did was not only cut a number of different programs that would have helped not eliminate child poverty but certainly worked against it increasing, but on top of that this budget includes nothing, no money, for increasing efforts to reduce child poverty. In fact, instead what it does is it has a lot of gobbledygook and message box language about how we're going to collaborate more with the private sector and nonprofit organizations and move away from our role as being a resource provider to families and communities and children who are in need. It is a monumental communications feat that someone

managed to write that plan and still have any sense of dignity when they publicly read it out and suggested that it was actually going to make life better for vulnerable children in our province. It's a broken promise, and it's one that I think the Premier should be really quite ashamed of.

The other one, of course, is full-day kindergarten. Now, of course, she says: oh, we've got kindergarten all over the place. Well, actually, we've got lots of full-day private kindergartens and a smaller number of full-day kindergartens where school boards have been creative in order to make that work for high-needs kids, but overall full-day kindergarten does not exist for the majority of children in Alberta. We are, I believe, the only province left in the country that doesn't do that. Just to be clear, that is a fundamental piece to ending cyclical intergenerational poverty over the long term.

Once again, the Premier cynically broke her promise on it and then refuses to take responsibility for it. I have to tell you, Mr. Chair, I have just never seen a political leader who is so shameless in not at least taking responsibility for the decisions she's made. To simply choose not to fund full-day kindergarten and then to not acknowledge it is – really, you wonder why people have such a low trust relationship and such a low trust rating of the Premier.

That's really a concern for me, Mr. Chair. I think that all Albertans want to see everybody have a shared and equal opportunity for success in the future. They don't want to see Alberta become the home of intergenerational, structural, unfixable poverty. We should not have children who are in government care going to the food bank, and we do. That is ridiculous. We are a province that is far too wealthy for that. There are so many components to child poverty which I think every member of this House who chooses to vote in favour of this budget should really consider. Quite frankly, we are doing nothing, and the government actually had the gall to run on doing something. You should be pushing your Finance minister to add some honesty to the positions that were publicly taken by the party which is now in government.

Obviously, we've heard a tremendous outcry about the cuts to advanced education. Again, you talk about the investments that we make in our province that actually would bring about diversification. You know, everybody involved in politics loves to talk about economic diversification. We talk about it all the time. It's just one of those words. It's like motherhood and apple pie. Economic diversification: we're all in favour of it. Yet here we have a government that is taking away significant resources, 8 per cent, from our ministry of advanced education after several years where that area was frozen.

We have a Premier who once again refuses to take responsibility for the outcome of her decisions, who actually will sit in a press conference and say to people, "Oh, no; we can cut this by 8 per cent," and then people will magically have an improved education through finding efficiencies. I mean, I'm pretty sure she doesn't actually believe that because nobody who knows anything about organizational management would believe that to be true. So why is she saying things which no reasonable person would actually believe to be true? It's frustrating, Mr. Chair. It's frustrating not having a Premier who would engage in an honest debate about the implications of her decisions.

Ultimately, here's what happened, Mr. Chair. The Premier had to decide: do I have the political courage to go to Albertans to come up with ways to restructure our revenue, or am I going to break a whole bunch of promises? If she believes that Albertans would rather see those promises broken, then she should go honestly to Albertans and say: "You know what? I know I promised you the moon and several unicorns in addition to the

moon, but it can't happen because I don't have the political will and/or courage. I believe you folks are not at all interested in getting rid of the flat tax. You're not at all interested in seeing the oil and gas sector contribute more to our coffers. You're not interested in these things, so I believe this is something that you want me to do."

Instead, she has the temerity to come into here, well, certainly in public, to say: "Oh, no, no, no. I cut a hundred and fifty million dollars, but I did that because I was trying to improve things." Really? Really, Mr. Chair? I mean, there's got to be a point at which these things come back to haunt you.

So that's with advanced education. Of course, it's the same kind of thing with the cuts to PDD: a \$45 million cut from a community access support grant, roughly a 45 per cent cut to Albertans with developmental disabilities. And, yes, I understand that that overall budget went up a little bit because the government made a decision to partially fund a promise. They didn't keep their promise. They halfway kept their promise to put more money into salaries for those hard-working people who do brilliant work every day in the PDD sector, so that's great.

But nobody believed that when the Premier said, "I'm going to give more money to these hard-working Albertans," she meant that what she was going to do was take it away from the very developmentally disabled Albertans who those people serve. I don't believe that's what people thought. Again, it's a profoundly misleading way to approach talking to Albertans and governing the province. Those cuts are going to hurt some of our most vulnerable Albertans.

Again, it frustrates me that the Premier is not at least prepared to admit that that's a choice she made and that she thinks that in the long run that's what Albertans would choose. That's what political courage is, Mr. Chair. You make tough choices, and then you take responsibility for them. You don't simply start wishing on a star and talking about unicorns and then, you know, striding out of a press conference saying: "Yeah. Truly, unicorns are real, and the sun rises in the west. That's me. Thank you very much. I'm going to collaborate. I'm going to move forward. Tough decisions. Bye-bye." I mean, it's just a profoundly disrespectful way to govern the province. That's what this whole budget includes. That's what this whole budget encapsulates.

Another issue, Mr. Chair, relates to seniors. Seniors probably are taking the biggest hit in this budget out of anybody. It hasn't been fully discussed yet. I don't think they're fully aware yet of what this means because there's perhaps a different means of communication in certain subsets or communities in our province. We're taking tax relief away from seniors, we're taking income support funds away from seniors, and we are taking pharmacare away from seniors. It adds up to about \$250 million that seniors in the next two years are going to lose out of this budget. It is the single biggest area of cuts. That's on top of the government's continued refusal to build new long-term care beds and their decision to contract out the fake long-term care beds to private developers, the majority of whom will charge seniors a ridiculous amount of money for the care that they need.

When it all comes together, this is a tremendous betrayal to seniors. What that means is that it's not just about seniors, of course. We know what that will really mean is that the families of those seniors will be the ones who shoulder the burden that this government is creating and building and handing back to Albertans. Why? It's really important that the wealthiest Albertans pay the least amount of tax in the country, to the tune of \$10 billion a year. That's really important to this government, and that's the choice that they've made, Mr. Chair.

I think that it's really a disappointing budget because there were some tremendous opportunities for this government to truly move forward, to truly make gains, to truly become progressive, to truly reflect the values of Albertans. Instead, what we got was the same old same old combined with an unprecedented unwillingness to acknowledge and admit to the same old same old. So, yeah, I guess there was something new introduced into this budget, and that was a whole new relationship with reality on the part of this government's leader. That's the new part, the relationship between the facts and what we talk about. That's a real problem in terms of the cuts to Health.

5:30

Then, obviously, with the stable, predictable funding that was promised for health, that was promised for advanced education, that was promised for K to 12, all of that, just the elimination of the predictability of it is a hit. That was something that this government argued over and over and over again that these institutions needed in order to be able to plan, in order to be able to improve their services and make better decisions. All of that rested on stable, predictable funding. I remember seeing different ministers across the way a year ago saying that as a chant, as a mantra: stable, predictable funding. In every area this government has broken its promise on stable, predictable funding. The only stability in the funding is that you cannot count from year to year on what it is you will receive. That is something that these folks on the other side actually acknowledged in a pre-election period was bad for good governance. Now, of course, we've decided to go to stable, unpredictable funding. So that's a problem.

I'm also, of course, concerned about what this province is doing with respect to the effective management of our resources and the protection of our environment. When I talk about that, I mean making sure that our air is clean, that people aren't getting sick because of development that's going on too close to their community, ensuring that our water is clean, ensuring the health of our wildlife and that our biodiversity is clean. All of that is not included in this budget.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm honoured to rise and speak in committee on what I would have to call an indescribable failure of government to really address the 21st century in terms of our finances, our responsibilities, our future. The Minister of Finance earlier dismissed the Liberal-proposed amendment to actually commit to a serious and legislated examination and transformation of our revenue and our budget, instead opting with his government to transform the reporting of our revenue and our budget plans. Albertans deserve better. The financial management of the last two decades reflects a shameful lack of courage and foresight and a failure to provide the fundamental role of government, which is to act to protect the most vulnerable in our society and future generations.

Mr. Chairman, the term "power corrupts" is well known. Perhaps what is less well known is that weakness corrupts. What has resulted over the last decade, in particular, is a profound loss of hope and confidence in our population such that we have lost all but a small proportion of our public to the democratic process.

It's been fostered, may I say, by the continuing concentration of power, concentration of media messaging, and intimidation from a

government that has resorted to using power to silence and dismiss dissent and alternate perspectives on where this province could be and should be; by the staggering lack of leadership despite repeated financial advice from within this country and beyond this country; by recommendations that we get off the resource roller coaster totally unheeded by this government, now compromising not only future generations but the current resources we have for services and a new economy, not to mention the abdication of environmental standards in terms of proper monitoring, objective monitoring, objective science, and proper enforcement of those standards, again compromising present and future generations.

The failure to recognize the need for stable revenue for basic services such as education, poverty reduction, persons with developmental disabilities, and environmental monitoring as well as health care in the broadest sense of health care, not simply sickness treatment but real investment in primary care and prevention, is going to haunt us for decades. The lack of humility and willingness to examine the evidence, the failure to invest in early childhood, in lifelong learning, and in health means at least three serious compromises to our future.

We will see more social violence, addictions, mental health problems, and long-term physical health costs. We will see a profound loss of human potential, which, for a government that touts its commitment to a knowledge economy and a future in postsecondary innovation and research, is a profound failure. Thirdly, it will mean, ultimately, the failure of a sustainable economy if we do not invest in early childhood; in people with compromised surroundings; environmental, social, and intellectual opportunity. We will fail to get the kind of economy that we would see with vibrant education leading to thoughtful, engaged citizens in research, in developing alternative entrepreneurial options to the resource addiction that has plagued this province for decades.

The Alberta Liberals have consistently called for an honest review of our tax system for fairness, for stability, and for social development based on evidence. Mr. Chairman, the evidence from around the world is quite persuasive. It seems this government has never been interested beyond its own borders in learning about state-of-the-art or best practices in terms of governance and financial management and planning for the future.

In short, this government has no foresight, no courage to deal with the evidence that's on the table, and no willingness to learn from experts like Richard Wilkinson, who over the span of 35 years has put together a tremendous accounting for what happens when you invest in people, in social equity, in people in disadvantaged positions and reduce the income inequality that spurs all kinds of social, health, and environmental problems.

Norway has also been a quiet leader in terms of governance, in thinking about both the short-term needs of people and the longer term investment for the future. They were the first country to have a carbon tax, in 1991, and they have shown in half the time a savings account of close to \$600 billion as a result of saving their nonrenewable resource wealth and being able now, if they chose, to fund all their programs through the interest on this tremendous savings account that they have built up primarily through their nonrenewable resource sector. That, Mr. Chairman, is leadership.

Somehow, despite several visits to Norway and several visits from Norway to this government, there has been no inclination to make the kind of changes, the kind of tough decisions in some ways that that government has made: first of all, to examine the revenue stream, look at what we're getting for our natural resources, examine the tax system and see where there is fairness

and unfairness in terms of the corporate sector and individual income.

We have repeatedly recommended that we move away from this egregious flat tax, that has left us between \$6 billion and \$8 billion less in tax revenue than the nearest province, where we would clearly be able to invest in the kinds of preventative and long-term social and economic development priorities that these countries have and have demonstrated great returns. In Norway, for example, there are extremely few homeless. They are well taken care of. The children from disadvantaged families do not go hungry. There are seniors' care centres that are models in the world. Yes, they have a higher tax system, but they have also put the priorities of government on what human and environmental priorities must demand if we're going to have a sustainable society and a sustainable planet.

It's once again distressing to have to stand up and rail about a government that seems unwilling or unable to learn from the past and learn from the best that's going on in the present around the world in terms of both managing our revenue stream and budgeting for the needs of the people today as well as saving for the long-term future of tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

5:40

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm disappointed with the appropriations and in the budget in general. I just want to raise a few points because we've debated a number of topics dealing with the amendments that came forward on Bill 12 or even the bill itself. Now we have the Appropriations Act. But I want to talk about a couple of things, particularly with regard to debt and the rhetoric that's been transpiring throughout the entire debate.

Borrowing money responsibly throughout all of our society works extremely well in business. I pay off my credit card once a month. That's my goal, and lots of people like to do that. The way this government was able to call itself debt-free was that it actually had a debt retirement account, and the law was very specific about that. It basically said in section 5(2) of the Fiscal Responsibility Act that the debt retirement account must be equal to or greater than the total accumulated debt, a very good provision of the act that now is basically removed as a result of rescinding the Government Accountability Act and the Fiscal Responsibility Act. That to me is the primary difference. The government, to borrow responsibly and have those funds available so it actually had that zero net debt, was allowed to manage its finances and call itself debt-free.

Mr. Horner: Which we will after this.

Mr. Anglin: Well, that's where we're going to have to disagree. That's where we're going to have to disagree.

The hon. House leader from the government side put an end to the nonsense of: we're going to borrow money to save money, and we're going to lend that borrowed money out. When that was brought up quite awhile back, he stood up and said: that's nonsense. I was glad to hear it. I'm glad to hear that the government is not saying that anymore, which was, in the House leader's words, nonsense.

The fact is that I've never seen anybody borrow money to save money, and I've never seen any institution borrow money to save money. It's a unique concept. I don't think it works. If you can make it work, please show us how. But we'll judge that a few years down the road. More and more investors have gotten them-

selves into trouble thinking they were going to borrow money, invest the money, get rich off it, and pay that money back. That generally has never happened, and I don't see that happening here.

There are a couple of issues that were brought up recently in these debates, and one of them I did not get a chance to address. That was the one about setting the goals and assessing the performances and setting those performance targets so that we can measure in the business plan of the government, when it proposes a budget, how we're going to do these things.

I'm going to give you a particular example. The issue of greenhouse gases is a significant issue. Nobody that I know of argues that point. We need to deal with it. [interjection] I do know it very well, hon. member from Edmonton—whatever, Gold Bar.

An Hon. Member: Goldfinger.

Mr. Anglin: Goldfinger.

I'll tell you that while the member over here may insult us, calling us the Tea Party, the reality is that we would be better described as the Green Tea Party. That still would be an insult, but I wear it well. I wear it well, being the environment critic. That's one of the reasons I'm the environment critic.

Let's talk about that because that is in your budget.

An Hon. Member: Born again.

Mr. Anglin: No, sir. I was born that way, not again. Just born that way.

I want to get done in 10 minutes here, so let me get done. Otherwise, you'll get me off topic, and I will keep on going.

I do want to say this. The greenhouse gas strategy, if it complied with some of the things that were brought forward in the way it's presented in this budget, if there was accountability, if there was verifiability, then we would be able to actually measure whether or not we're achieving those targets. That's not just important for this budget. That's important for our economy, and that's important for our industry. What has been made public in the estimates, what has been made public recently is that there's a real lack of verifiability in that sector, and we're suffering that criticism internationally. To change that criticism, all we have to do is be more transparent and verify those carbon offsets to make sure we are achieving exactly what we said we are, and anyone who's an accountant knows that. You want to be able, when you measure this stuff, to verify that it's accurate. That's what audits do. That's the whole purpose of the carbon offset system.

In this budget, in this act itself everything would have flowed better had we accepted some of the amendments that were offered earlier, and I think that's extremely important.

I do want to make a point. Under our other system, soon to be our old system, we had a debt retirement account that allowed us to use money more efficiently, to borrow money but to actually be able to state to the public – and that's why our former Premier did this and hung that big sign that says: we're debt free. That was his justification. That was his legitimacy. What we're going to do on the passage of multiple acts here is remove that legitimacy.

Now, what you're saying in many ways, hon. minister of Treasury Board and Finance, is pretty much: trust me. You're not saying that? Well, I think you're saying that, but that's okay. If you're not saying it, I'm not trusting you anyways on the issue of the budget.

Mr. Horner: The feeling is mutual.

Mr. Anglin: But I don't have the billions of dollars you have.

I will tell you this. The measurement is: have you always done what you said you would do? You may say that, yes, you have.

But you stood up here in this Legislature and said that we would have a balanced budget at one time. I can go back and find that. You said that our operational budget would be balanced, and what we did is that we came in with a deficit. We don't have a balanced budget, and we're running a deficit.

We can go back – and we've done this. We've tabled the evidence where our Premier has talked very negatively about debt, the way you're hearing the opposition talk about it. She did that during the leadership campaign. We have stayed on message with that, the very same words she used when she ran for leadership about how negative debt is. I took that as that whole concept of the net debt, gross debt, and what's often referred to as the total accumulated debt. What we have here now is a system in place where it looks like there could be checks and balances – you can change that as we move forward – but we're going to still accumulate debt going forward. That is my belief.

Now, I don't have the evidence to say that this is what it's exactly going to be in four years or three years or five years. Nobody can say that precisely. But the track record is that we haven't done what we said we were going to do, and that's what's disturbing. There needs to be accountability or something in the act that really would hold the government accountable to its spending.

As I stated earlier once in this House, it's a legitimate debate that the Liberals and the NDP have brought forward, which is that they would balance the budget by raising revenues. They would do it differently. Both those parties have said so. We said that we would balance the budget by reprioritizing, and that's a legitimate debate.

5:50

What I think went wrong is that nobody on the other side, nobody that I know of, stood up and said that when they went door-knocking, they told their constituents that when they got elected they were going to repeal the Government Accountability Act and they were going to repeal the Fiscal Responsibility Act. I don't believe it. Maybe some member will stand up and say that they did – please do – but I don't believe they did that.

To me, that's the legacy that I think gave Alberta its reputation, that gave Alberta its credibility. It's what gave Alberta that acronym of the Alberta advantage, and it meant a lot. It meant a lot to the people who did it. It meant a lot to the citizens who supported it.

I don't believe they were told that during the election. And when they found out, I think that's what we're hearing the rumblings about from the public.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will finish. Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others? The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Yes. Mr. Chairman, I'd ask that we rise and report progress on Bill 20.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on Bill 20.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? That's carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, being that the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre was so diligent in his comments and was very nice to finish before 6 o'clock, I'll suggest that we adjourn the House until 7:30 tonight.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:52 p.m.]

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Managing Editor
Alberta Hansard
1001 Legislature Annex
9718 – 107 St.
EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E4
Telephone: 780.427.1875