



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

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Issue 7a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 60

Wildrose: 17

Alberta Liberal: 5

New Democrat: 4

Independent: 1

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Lemke	Sarich
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Amery	Khan
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Chair: Mr. Rogers

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Amery	Luan
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Bikman	Hale
Bilous	Johnson, L.
Blakeman	Webber
Brown	Xiao
Calahasen	Young
Casey	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 12, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us pray. Gracious Lord and Holy Creator, fill our hearts and minds with wisdom and with determination to always do what is right for our constituents, for our province, and for our country. And bless those brave men and women who served in peacekeeping missions, perhaps still are, those who returned, and those who gave their lives in place. Amen.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

13th Anniversary of Elected Members

The Speaker: Hon. members, just before we begin the rest of the Routine, I am reminded that we have five members today who are celebrating their 13th election anniversary as Members of this Legislative Assembly. Let me read their names, and then we can applaud them all: the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, and the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. Congratulations to all of you.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As many of you know, today marked the end of Canada's 12-year mission in Afghanistan, and as the ministerial liaison to the Canadian armed forces and the MLA for Edmonton Garrison it was truly a privilege to attend the flag-raising ceremony this morning at Guthrie school, where I was joined by several colleagues, the Premier, the Lieutenant Governor, troops, families, education stakeholders, students, and staff there. There will be a member's statement on this commemoration a little later today by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, but I wanted to introduce a few special guests that we have here with us this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly four troops from the Canadian armed forces who have served in Afghanistan during these 12 years as well as the family of one – I see she's not here; we may have to revert later – who never made it home. All of these individuals demonstrate the strength and courage that it takes to serve this country, and I know that we are all eternally grateful for their sacrifice. I would ask these folks to please rise and remain standing as I say their names so that we can properly thank them: Major Stephane Pellerin, who has served six tours overseas, two in Afghanistan; Master Warrant Officer Robin Crane, seven tours overseas, three in Afghanistan; Sergeant Paul Rachynski, three tours overseas, all of which were in Afghanistan; and Master Corporal Caroline Brooks, who has one tour overseas in Afghanistan. Like I said, we have one family that's not here yet. I would ask your indulgence to revert later.

These folks are representative of the tens of thousands of Canadians that have served on this mission and made us very proud. I'd like to invite the Assembly to show our gratitude. [Standing ovation]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups, hon. members, starting with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I would like to introduce to you and through you 115 students from A. Blair McPherson school, located in your constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek. They're accompanied here today by their teachers, Tom Henderson, Barb Hennig, Rachel Day, and Jeff Neilson. They're seated in both galleries. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome, students.
Edmonton-Centre, please.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your indulgence, I'll do both of my introductions at the same time. The first group that I would like to introduce is always a group that I'm very proud of, and that is the Careers in Transition section from NorQuest College, I believe. Today we're being joined by 10 students, and that includes their instructor, Allan Carlson. If I could get that group to rise, please, and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly. There they are. Thank you very much.

My second introduction today, Mr. Speaker, is a group that have come together and called themselves the blue university project. They are a group of students and community members who are taking action on water rights. They've organized a week of events for Edmonton Water Week at the University of Alberta from March 17 to 22. Their leader today, Nichole Batienco, has worked with me on my Motion 515 to have water declared as a public good. I would ask them, please, to rise as I say their names: Nichole Batienco, Tigest Mulugeta, Sheena Lukacs, Jennifer Novak, David Wolsey, and Caitlin Pettifor. If you would join me, please, in thanking them for their wonderful work on the environment.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

If not, then let us move on with the Associate Minister of Public Safety and Recovery and Reconstruction for High River.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, it's with humility and honour that I rise to introduce to you and through you Mr. Tom Sampson, executive officer with the Calgary fire department. Tom Sampson joined the Calgary fire department in 2009 to oversee the Emergency Management Agency and facilitate the building of the new emergency operations centre. During his tenure with CEMA he acted as the emergency operations centre manager addressing the devastating Slave Lake fires and subsequently received the Slave Lake medal of honour for his efforts. Tom was the acting director of the Calgary Emergency Management Agency during the unprecedented floods that we saw this last June.

Prior to working for CFD Tom was the chief of Calgary's emergency medical services, my boss. He worked to establish the Calgary regional EMS partnership, the chiefs of Alberta, and nationally the EMS Chiefs of Canada. He received the Alberta College of Paramedics award for excellence for his advocacy in paramedicine. Tom is a lifetime member of the board of EMS Chiefs of Canada and continues to maintain his registration as an advanced care paramedic. But, Mr. Speaker, the one accolade that is maybe not mentioned in his biography is his dedication to his family. I've always admired that. He is a friend and a mentor, and I'd ask him to rise today and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. member in the seat occupied normally by Edmonton-Gold Bar, or is that Edmonton-Gold Bar himself? Yes, it is, indeed. Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, it's a bit breezy in here today. I'm pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two wonderful individuals that I'm honoured to introduce on this very special day. A little bit of poetry. Mrs. Christine McIver, the wife of the Minister of Infrastructure and chief executive officer of Kids Cancer Care Foundation, and Mr. Stu Reid, chief development officer of Kids Cancer Care Foundation of Alberta, the foundation which I chose to raise money for during these last 11 months. Christine and Stuart are doing exceptional work for cancer research and care in this province, particularly with youth and children. It is great to see such dedicated and passionate people doing such important work for kids who suffer from this terrible, life-altering disease. Christine and Stu were present today as I shaved my lid for kids with cancer at Gabrielle-Roy school. It has been my privilege for 13 months to do my small part in growing my hair and raising awareness and money for wonderful organizations across our province. The government can't do it all. We all have to help in our little ways.

Thank you.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition, the Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood MLA.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I must say to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar that I'm not sure which look I like best. But I know there's a pink wig out there somewhere.

It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you a group of hard-working nurses from the Grey Nuns hospital emergency department. My guests are here today because they believe that two of the most important facets to a strong society are health care and education. I would now like my guests to rise as I call their names: Rob Kroetsch; Sarah Fitzgerald; Christine Maxwell; Tara MacNeil; Pat Mercer-Deadman, RN, who's the president of the emergency nurses of Alberta; Cassandra Garneau; and Alan Vandenbroek. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly an amazing young couple. This young couple from Cypress-Medicine Hat have been early organizers, great strategists, and very hard workers for the Wildrose Party in the last few years. These two were and are critical to the Wildrose success in the south, and it's nice to see such young, principled, hard-working, and smart conservative values put into practice. I would invite Colin and Cheryl Phaff to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Ron and Jeff Deeprise. I've known Ron and Jeff for most of my life. Ron is an engineer, and Jeff is a teacher. They came here today to see if the rumours are true and perhaps taste the winds of change blowing through these hallowed halls in these past days. If they could rise, please – and I will introduce them – and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? Minister of Education, your guests have now arrived?

Mr. J. Johnson: They have, Mr. Speaker, yes. Thank you for indulging me. We have the final group that we want to honour here. This is a tougher one to introduce. Lisa Schamehorn-Eades is here with her two daughters. I know Lisa well. She's been in this House before. She's an Albertan. She's the spouse of Sergeant Shawn Eades, who was killed in action in August 2008, from the Combat Engineer Regiment out of Edmonton here. She's here with her daughters, Breanna and Niya. I just saw them at the Guthrie school, where we had the ceremony. Lisa wears a medal that nobody wants to wear. It's the Memorial Silver Cross, which was established in 1919 for widows and mothers of fallen soldiers. We owe them a debt that we cannot repay, but these young ladies that are here with their mother can take comfort and pride in the fact that now, because of their father, there are 3 million girls in school in Afghanistan that were not there before he went. [Standing ovation]

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Government Culture

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think today is a good day to talk about the culture of this government. The Premier is currently under heavy fire for her sense of entitlement and not without good reason. But let's dig a little deeper into how government works.

A government is a team. It's not one individual. Government is made up of MLAs, the caucus, and the cabinet. The Premier hand-picks her cabinet from her team of MLAs to run departments and to set the strategic objectives of the government. One of the key functions of caucus and, specifically, cabinet is to provide good advice to the Premier. Now, what kind of advice do you think you're going to get from a group that would use a taxpayer-funded aircraft to get to and from a PC Party fundraiser? You would think that as good advisers these cabinet ministers would have advised the Premier to not use the government plane and would have not used it themselves.

The bad advice and the bad conduct of this cabinet don't stop there, Mr. Speaker. Under their watch there has been a litany of expense scandals, from the Health ministry all the way down to the Tourism ministry, from jet-setting on a \$45,000 trip to South Africa to the \$100 million in executive expenses paid out by the Health minister.

Now, the rumours abound that the cabinet is unhappy with the Premier. They aren't pleased that she did the very things they taught her with their advice and their actions. They are looking to toss her under the bus for doing the very things and subscribing to the very same culture they are responsible for establishing. Apparently, they are concerned that if they don't do something, they might cease to be entitled to their entitlements. But let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. A change in the occupant of the Premier's chair won't cut the rot out of this tired, out-of-touch government.

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

Public Service Pensions

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This PC government is attacking pensions for employees without justification and without

warning. Alberta's public-sector pension plans are among the most stable in North America, and independent analysis shows that they are well on their way to being fully funded. Yet the PCs are continuing to jeopardize the retirement security of more than 300,000 Albertans, who work hard every day to keep our seniors healthy, to keep our roads safe, and to protect vulnerable Albertans.

On January 1, 2016, public employees will start losing value from their pensions, that they've spent years paying into. A letter to the editor in the *Edmonton Journal* compared these changes to "a marathon runner reaching Mile 25 only to learn the finish line has been extended [by] several miles." Mr. Speaker, it isn't fair, it is not necessary, and it will make it much harder for our public sector to attract and to retain employees.

Two changes are particularly concerning. Imposing a contribution cap means that pensioners will always be at risk of losing their retirement income. Second, eliminating the guaranteed cost-of-living adjustments means imposing growing rates of poverty on seniors over the length of their retirements.

Mr. Speaker, this government should be working to make things better for Albertans, not worse. They should be looking to make retirement more secure, not less. Unfortunately, standing up for middle-class Albertans is not what this government does. That's why we need Alberta New Democrats, and in force.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I beg your indulgence for one more member's statement.

Calgary-Currie, please.

Canadian Mission in Afghanistan

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly a privilege to rise today and an honour to note a significant milestone that took place today, at the end of Canada's 12-year mission in Afghanistan. During this time Canadian armed forces' troops performed beyond all expectations in an environment that was dangerous and fragile. Our troops have been trainers, coaches, teachers, and fighters, and through their entire mission they've displayed incredible character.

To honour this commitment and sacrifice, the province started the day by lowering all the flags in the province to half-mast. This act is one we took to remember those who did not come back from this mission, those who gave their lives to protect our country and improve the well-being of a nation on the other side of the world. Forty-six Albertans died while serving in Afghanistan, and many more were wounded or hurt. They were our neighbours, our fathers, our brothers and sisters, and they were all taken too soon. We lowered our flags to commemorate their sacrifice and let those who did return know that they're not alone.

Today is not just an opportunity to remember the sacrifices made by our soldiers; it is a chance for all of us to take a broad look at the world and see Canada's unique place in it. Our hon. Minister of Education encouraged schools around the province to follow the government's lead and lower their Canadian and Albertan flags to half-mast to begin the day and then raise them at noon. This was a unique opportunity for students to learn about history while it's happening, providing them with an opportunity to engage, reflect, and ask questions. Over the lunch hour today the hon. minister was joined by several colleagues at Guthrie school, and along with students, staff, stakeholders, troops and their families, they raised the flags to full height from half-mast.

I would like to close by saying how very grateful we are to all the men and women and parents who served for Canada and those

who made the ultimate sacrifice. May they rest in eternal peace and be always remembered.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought that was well said by the MLA for Calgary-Currie. I'm delighted to see the men and women in uniform here today and their families. We're honoured by your presence.

Government Airplane Usage

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that the Premier and two cabinet ministers boarded a government plane on October 25, 2012, to attend a PC fundraiser in Grande Prairie. The Health minister said that the use of the plane was legitimate because "we made an announcement" on the Grande Prairie hospital. Now, we've done some checking, and there was no government of Alberta press conference that day in Grande Prairie, just the Premier's \$250-per-ticket fundraiser, which the minister attended. To the minister: is he sure that the use of the plane that day was for legitimate government business?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I answered this question yesterday, and the answer that I provided yesterday stands. We did speak to the Grande Prairie hospital construction, which is very exciting for both the constituents of my colleague the Minister of Transportation and all citizens of the Grande Prairie area. There was a government-issued news release that day. There were a number of other announcements in the same week. In fact, this government announced six hospital expansions during the week of October 18.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the paper of record in Grande Prairie, the *Daily Herald-Tribune*, confirms that there was no government press conference, and the only announcement was a press release sent out at 4:02 p.m., while the Premier and her ministers were still in the air. Again to the Health minister: if there was no government of Alberta event or press conference or meeting in Grande Prairie that day, why did he take the government of Alberta plane?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, first, I'd like to start by saying to all members of our Canadian Forces: thank you; duty well done.

Mr. Speaker, as the hon. minister mentioned, during that week there were a number of announcements – Edson and Medicine Hat, I believe – around hospitals. This was one of those announcements around the hospitals, that was done in Grande Prairie. On that particular day, as the hon. members opposite would remember, there was a tragedy in St. Paul. There were a number of planes that were used to move people to and from that tragedy. This plane was delayed, unfortunately. However, there was also a PC Party charter plane that went up for all members who were not on government business.

The Speaker: The hon. leader, second supplemental. [interjections]
Hon. members, the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition actually has the floor.

Please take it.

Ms Smith: Notwithstanding what the Finance minister said, it's pretty obvious that the only reason why the Premier and her ministers boarded the government plane that day was to attend the PC Party fundraiser. In addition to using taxpayer-funded aircraft to pick her up from holidays, the Premier and now her cabinet appear to believe that it's perfectly okay to use the government planes to travel to and from PC Party fundraisers. The Premier should stop the gross use of government aircraft and order the PC Party to reimburse taxpayers. Will she do it?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that a number of things happen in this world. A lot of them are government business; some of them are party business. We keep government business and party business separate. We charter planes to go to party business. We use government planes to go to government business. In that week, as the Minister of Health said, there was a rollout of six hospital announcements, including a very important one in Grande Prairie, very important to the residents of Grande Prairie, very important to northern Alberta, a very important piece of government business.

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

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, there was no press conference, no announcement, no event. Let's see if the other members of the cabinet feel as brazen about this abuse of taxpayer dollars as the Premier and the Health minister do. I'd like to ask the Transportation minister, formerly the Infrastructure minister, who was on the plane out. Is it okay for taxpayers to subsidize the fundraising activities of the PC Party by providing free air transportation to and from PC Party fundraising events?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, this is almost ridiculous in this House, that they would use this kind of line of questioning to challenge our integrity or my judgment. I would put my integrity with anybody's over there.

I flew with the Health minister on that Saturday to Edson and High Prairie to make a similar announcement. Maybe they would rather we made the announcement at the PC fundraising dinner. That would have been wrong. We went up ahead of time to do a press release. You might have checked Twitter to find out that there was no press release. I was there in the press release. I can bring all kinds of citizens from Grande Prairie. I can . . .

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, they don't need to fly a government airplane to Grande Prairie if all they're going to do is put out a press release.

Let's now ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs, formerly the Minister of Energy, how he feels about the situation, because he was on the plane back. If he were the Premier, would he think that it's okay for taxpayers to subsidize the PC Party this way, or would he recognize that this is wrong and pay the money back?

The Speaker: Hon. member, just be careful with questions that call for opinion. If someone wishes to respond from the bench on fact, that would be welcome, but no opinions, please. That's not in order.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the question has been asked and answered. There was government business that week announcing hospital projects right across the province, using the plane to go to a local area so local citizens can be part of the excitement of announcements that happen in their community. When we go to party business, we charter planes, and we take government members to that party business on chartered planes that are chartered

by the PC Party. It's been asked. It's been answered. It's clearly government business, and there is no reason for these hon. members . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Smith: The only way Grande Prairie residents would have been able to take part is if they went to the PC Party fundraiser that night, which means it was PC Party business, and they shouldn't have been using a government plane for it.

My question is to the associate minister of electricity, who was on the plane back from that fundraiser, too. She's the most junior minister in cabinet, but in a prior life she was an important oil company executive and a self-described expert on ethics. Does she have any reservations about the ethics of using taxpayer resources to help raise money for her political party, or has she, too, already been captured by the PC culture of entitlement?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, this question has been asked and answered. The hon. member can say all she wants about PC business, but PC business isn't the business of the House. We keep that separate. They should keep that separate as well. The ministers went for government business, and they flew there on government business. The plane was delayed for very, very legitimate reasons. That's been asked and answered. It's not in those people's hands to determine what our ethics are. This group of people has a very high standard of ethics on behalf of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. Third main set of questions.

Ms Smith: If there's no government announcement, they should not be using government planes. End of story.

Disaster Recovery Program Claims

Ms Smith: Yesterday I asked the Minister of Municipal Affairs if he would deal with the mess of the disaster recovery program by firing LandLink and creating a program that actually works. He answered by saying that when LandLink's contract comes to an end at the end of March, they will not be part of any future disaster recovery program. That's not as clear as I would like, so I'm going to ask the minister to clarify. Is LandLink completely done on March 31, or is he going to allow them to continue to revictimize flood victims for years by keeping these open files that drag on and on and on?

2:00

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, my answer stands from yesterday, and that answer is that LandLink will not be involved in any new DRP files going forward. The question that the member is asking: is LandLink involved in resolving outstanding files? The answer is that, yes, they are, and they're doing so with clear guidance from me to resolve them as quickly as possible, with the goal of having all residential DRP files resolved by the end of March – that's in three weeks; write it down – and it'll be there.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. First sup.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. LandLink has been a man-made disaster for those who've had the bad luck to be struck by a natural disaster. Consider Sue Arlidge of Exshaw. Her home was severely flooded with silt by three different surges of creeks around Exshaw last June. Three different engineers' reports said that her house was structurally unfit. The MD of Bighorn issued her a demolition permit. Then the supposed experts at LandLink showed up and said that her house was fine, that it just needed

repairs. Now that LandLink is gone, how can Sue Arlidge and all the others like her get their cases reviewed?

Mr. Hughes: Well, as this hon. member knows well, we're working very hard. Many good public servants and others are working very hard to ensure that the 10,500 applications to the disaster recovery program are addressed in a manner that is fair and that is as speedy as possible. I have in fact cleared away many of the administrative hurdles to ensure that these cases are dealt with in a timely fashion. We all have a great deal of empathy and sympathy, and I want to ensure that we are able to deliver to people at the earliest possible date a resolution to their files so they can move on with life.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, please.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has called it a \$6 billion flood, but so far LandLink has flowed through only about \$22 million to the hardest hit homeowners in High River. Nine months after the flood more than half of the disaster relief claimants in High River have not had their files dealt with. Only 1 in 5 applicants has received their final payments and had their files closed. Now the minister tells us that he's going to have everything resolved in three weeks, which LandLink couldn't do in nine months. Now that LandLink is gone, what is the minister's plan to clear this backlog?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, some would have us completely throw out the whole process and create chaos, but actually LandLink has an important administrative role in ensuring that these files are dealt with appropriately over time and closed. Some 2,200 payments as of last Friday have been made to individuals in High River. There has been substantial movement in the last hundred days, and I think people understand that this is a very difficult time for a lot of people, and we're here to try and help ensure that their cases get resolved. I am open to hearing from people who are concerned about their particular files, and I welcome, if the hon. member has any files, her bringing them forward.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberals thank the men and women of the armed forces and all their families for their sacrifices to humanity and to this country.

Government Airplane Usage

(continued)

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, we first had Donationgate. Then we had Travelgate. Now we have two in one, Donation-Travelgate. Yesterday we learned the Premier gave two of her ministers a free ride to Grande Prairie on Redforce One. Supposedly by sheer coincidence, there was some sort of drive-by hospital announcement outside the doors of the PC fundraiser. Okay. Let's pretend that's true. I still have a question. Why did you give five additional PC MLAs, who clearly were in town for the PC fundraiser, a free ride back home at taxpayers' expense on Redforce One?

Speaker's Ruling

Questions about Political Party Activity

The Speaker: Hon. members, let's try to address the answer from the standpoint of government policy because, as you know, ques-

tions pertaining to political party fundraising are not on. So, please, I invite you to address this from that standpoint, and I'll ask future questioners to make sure that their question doesn't run into the foul territory.

The hon. minister.

Government Airplane Usage

(continued)

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that clarity. As the Deputy Premier has been saying, we do separate out the party business from the government business, and this is a clear case of that, actually. There was party transportation put on, paid for by the party, for any members who were not on government business. The members who were on the plane going up to Grande Prairie were on government business.

As to the policy, if you will, for the authorized use of the planes, that is at the discretion of the minister who authorized the plane. They can invite guests. They can invite family members. They can invite those people who are relevant to the duties that they're doing, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, this is policy. The Finance minister alleges that they're on government business, supposing it's true. But then yesterday he talked about deadhead flights. Truer words were never spoken when he talked about deadheads.

Mr. Speaker, three things are clear. The five PC hitchhiker MLAs clearly got a free ride home from the PC Party fundraiser, these hitchhikers clearly had no business being on Redforce One, and finally Alberta taxpayers deserve to get their money back. To the Premier or Finance minister: when will the PC Party pay Albertans back for these free rides?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to honour the comment that the hon. member made about flights that are used to reposition aircraft when they've been used to travel from one place to another and they need to come back to base. If the flight is empty coming back to base, that's what the industry calls it. Airlines have the same issue. We try to limit those.

Out of the nearly 4,000 flights that are logged over the last two years, which is the time period that the hon. members have been talking about, we do try to minimize the number of deadhead flights. We try to minimize the number of times that the schedule conflicts. However, Mr. Speaker, the policy that we have for the flights is that the minister who charters the plane says who's on it.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister should really listen. The question was: will his party pay the taxpayers their money back or not for the five hitchhikers?

Mr. Speaker, Don Braid wrote a very interesting article in the *Calgary Herald* on March 10. In it he reported that the Premier at a caucus meeting prior to the budget had "already said she won't repay \$45,000 [back] for her South Africa trip . . . because if she did, Wildrose would demand that the PCs repay everything." To the Premier: is what Mr. Braid wrote true? Are you refusing to pay back the \$45,000 you wasted out of fear that other members of your caucus will be . . .

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is getting to the absurdity now where he starts to read the newspaper to find out what supposedly went on at a Conservative caucus meeting and then asks questions in the House as though that was relevant to government policy and policy for governing this province. It shouldn't even be dignified with an answer.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition. First main set of questions.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For years this PC government has been accused of using taxpayers' money to subsidize their partisan activities, going back to the days of Premier Klein. Recently a number of PC MLAs and cabinet ministers took a flight to attend a partisan event. They include the Minister of Infrastructure, now Transportation; the Health minister; intergovernmental affairs; Energy, now Municipal Affairs; and the associate minister of electricity. My question is to the Finance minister. Given that this was a fundraising party for the PC Party, what makes you think that you can use a government aircraft as your designated driver?

The Speaker: Hon. member, from the standpoint of government policy, please.

I'm going to remind members of what's allowed and what's not allowed shortly, but go ahead.

Mr. Horner: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. In fact, for the party event, as I said, the party did put transportation on for government members who were not on government duty. The flight in question was for members who were on government duty. As I said before, the policy of the government – we do have a policy for the use of the air transportation service and the charter aircraft, which I have in my hands and which is readily available to many, many folks.

The authorization for category 1, 2, 3, 4 flights: I would actually say, Mr. Speaker, that one of the flights that was taken on that day was a category flight that is actually for emergencies, which was, as I said, to the incident in St. Paul, where we actually carried one of the hon. members of the opposition.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it doesn't matter what new face you may want to put on the PCs' packaging. It's too far past the best-before date. The government issued a media advisory for just 45 minutes after the plane landed in Grande Prairie, and it's wheels up, back to Edmonton before 10 the next day. It arrived at 16:32 – that's close to 4:30 – and left again at approximately 10 o'clock at night. Can the Finance minister explain what crucial government business was done on this trip to the partisan Tory fundraiser?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, there were a number of items that were scheduled to happen that day in Grande Prairie, and the flights were to leave earlier than they did. The cause for the delay was that the Minister of Infrastructure at the time was asked to attend at a tragedy of a car accident at a school. The flight that he was on was the one that delayed the flight coming back. Obviously, these are the scheduling challenges that we have with transportation services on an ongoing basis. As I said, close to 2,000 flights a year, and we try to limit the number of times that we have these kinds of delays and these kinds of issues.

2:10

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the answer is that no government business was undertaken by any of the participants on that flight.

The entirety of this governing party deserves a share of the blame for this kind of behaviour. There were five cabinet minis-

ters and three backbenchers on that flight. It's not just the Premier. It's the whole caucus. It's the whole cabinet. To the Finance minister: why is the sense of entitlement of this government and this PC caucus so strong that they believe that Albertans should pick up . . .

The Speaker: Time has elapsed. We need an answer. The Minister of Finance, please.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, today, as you most aptly pointed out, is the 13th anniversary of my entering this Chamber. I'm very proud of that service. I'm very proud of the fact that I have done and will continue to do service for the people, a passion for service, not a passion for politics, not a passion for ideology. We have a passion to serve Albertans. The things that are being brought up here today are trying to take Albertans' minds away from the very positive things that this government has done like a hospital in Grande Prairie, like a hospital in Edson, like building Alberta for the future. That's what Albertans want us to do.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, we have a point of order that was raised sometime between 2:06 and 2:07 by the Government House Leader – I think it was during the time that the Liberal opposition leader was speaking – and we have a second point of order that was raised by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills at approximately 2:10 p.m. during the question being asked by the member from the New Democrat opposition, but it may go back to something just before that.

Speaker's Ruling Questions about Political Party Activity

The Speaker: While I'm on my feet, could I just take a moment to please remind all of you of a convention that I've reminded you of several times before, and I've just spotted it now. It's in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition. It starts on page 502, and then it goes on to page 504. It says, "In summary, when recognized in Question Period, a Member should [not ask questions that] concern internal party matters, or party or election expenses." There's a reason why we don't allow questions like that in parliament – whether it's expenses or fundraising, it's all to do with party matters – and it's because it tends to create disorder. If you want to pursue those kinds of questions, write them or create them in terms of government policy. There's a clever way that you could all do that. Just be careful. I didn't rule anybody out of order. I let them all go. I'm just giving you a warning, okay?

Let us move on, then. No more preambles now, please, to supplementaries, and let's see how that's demonstrated with Calgary-Shaw.

Disaster Recovery Program Claims (continued)

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thousands of flood-affected residents all over Alberta have yet to receive a single dollar in assistance from the DRP to address the devastation they suffered to their homes and businesses. For the last nine months it would appear the government has been held hostage by LandLink, the company they hired to manage the millions of taxpayer dollars used for disaster relief. Now, today the minister has suggested that all cases will be closed, all 10,500, by the end of March. How is the minister planning on dealing with appeals?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, allow me to clarify my comments earlier because the hon. member and his hon. leader have actually misled the House in terms of what I actually said. What I said was . . . [interjections] I perhaps have misstated my intention, and I apologize. I didn't mean to allege misleading. However, let me say that what I have said is that we expect 90 per cent of all the residential files to be resolved by or close to the end of March. Now, there are other files. There are files related to agricultural operations. There are files related to businesses. Those are going to take time to resolve as well.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alan and Joyce Hird of High River recently learned that the disaster relief program is prepared to assist them with only \$10,000, which is \$25,000 less than what they needed to cover the cost to remediate and repair their basement. Given that there are countless other cases where LandLink is failing Albertans, how is your ministry, Minister, going to resolve these failures in the next two and a half weeks?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a helpful question. Actually, what's going to happen is that everybody who receives a settlement as of the last few weeks will also receive with that a letter which spells out exactly why they received the settlement.

There is an appeal process, and that's spelled out in the letter as well. I would encourage Albertans who feel that they have not been dealt with in an appropriate manner to pursue that appeal process and deal with that and also provide the evidence that they are worthy of greater support than what they will have received if they're not . . .

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Endorsing and allowing a company that was never going to be able to capably manage a DRP program of this size, scale, and scope was a massive oversight. Minister, will you commit right here and right now not only to ensure that everyone who feels that they were wronged by LandLink will have a review process in place but also enlighten the House as to what we're doing moving forward from this point?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is, actually, a helpful take on the circumstance. Clearly, this was a model that was developed probably 20 years ago with the independent company providing this service. It's clearly not up to the needs of a disaster of this size. I have taken steps to ensure that the way in which a disaster recovery program is addressed in the future is much different. I welcome input from members on all sides of this House with respect to changes that might be taken into account in that DRP of the future.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Airdrie rose on a point of order at approximately 2:15 p.m. I believe it was with regard to the word "misled." I think we heard the minister apologize, but we'll see where that might or might not go later.

Let's move on to Calgary-Currie, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Public Transit Funding

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given yesterday's funding announcement by the government for public transit in Edmonton, my constituents are curious as to what that means for the city of Calgary. Calgarians need to know that our provincial government is not playing favourites between Alberta's two largest cities. My question is to the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board. Will Calgary be offered the same provincial public transit funding deal that was announced for Edmonton yesterday?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was a good day for Edmonton's LRT yesterday and for Edmontonians, some government business. We're pleased in the throne speech and in the budget to extend our commitment to GreenTRIP as well as to talk about our commitments with the building Canada fund. The city of Edmonton had an allocation under GreenTRIP which was applied towards the LRT. The city of Calgary has an allocation under GreenTRIP. All municipalities in the province are eligible for the second round. We look forward to working with all of our municipalities on their number one priorities.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Cusanelli: To the same minister: are these sorts of provincial public transit funding deals an anomaly, or is this a new way of doing business?

Mr. Horner: Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? We're looking for ways to do business with our municipalities that work for them and work for us and work for taxpayers. Yesterday's announcement was exactly one of those things. We look forward to doing that not only with the city of Calgary but with all of the municipalities in the province, the rural MDs, the urban and rural municipalities that are looking to do things that will help move citizens to and from their place of work using GreenTRIP funding, using building Canada funding. That's what building Alberta is all about.

Ms Cusanelli: We'd like to see other efforts currently being undertaken by the government that are going to provide long-term, stable public transit funding. Or is this just a one-off?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Budget 2014 saw a commitment of some \$2 billion to municipalities. In fact, one of the augmentations was another \$20 million through the Alberta community partnership, which is a fund for regional collaboration, which is what we all want to see. We want to see municipalities work together. We want to see that they build their communities together with their neighbours and that they serve the interests of their constituents.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Leduc-Beaumont.

Premier's Former Staff Member's Employment

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ryan Barberio is the Premier's former executive assistant. After working in her office of Justice minister, he worked on her PC leadership campaign and then followed her into the Premier's office. He is now listed on the

Alberta sunshine list as a senior manager in International and Intergovernmental Relations with a total compensation package of over \$160,000 per year. Can the associate IIR minister assure Albertans that Mr. Barberio was awarded the senior position through an open job competition?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are many people who work for this government who have talent and are good public servants. The purpose of the sunshine list isn't to open every one of our public servants to attack and question as to whether or not they went through an appropriate hiring process. [interjections] We go through appropriate hiring processes, we find and select good talent, we utilize people in appropriate places, and we move them to where they can do the most good for the people of Alberta.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not the employee's fault. I'm actually asking the minister.

Mr. Speaker, given the very senior nature of Mr. Barberio's position and given the magnitude of the files and issues IIR is currently dealing with, it's of utmost importance that we hire the most talented, experienced, and qualified individuals that we can for these jobs. Again to the associate minister of IIR: was Mr. Barberio hired to this senior managerial position through an open and fair job competition with other qualified applicants? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. Deputy Premier, before you speak.

Calgary-Buffalo, could I get you to just tone it down a bit. You might be on the list. I'll recognize you later but not now, please.

The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is committed to hiring people who have talent, using those talents well, using those people in the most appropriate places. Again, the purpose of a sunshine list is not to expose each individual member of the public service to this type of critique. The assurance that this government can give is that when we hire people to do a job, we hire the best people we can find to do those jobs.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not about the individual. It's about the protocol. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, given that Mr. Barberio wouldn't be the Premier's first former office staffer to land on his feet with a senior high-paying government job, can the associate IIR minister immediately put to rest the notion that this \$160,000 per year job was a post created specifically for Mr. Barberio after he left the Premier's office? [interjections] Table the job posting, please, Minister.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Before you respond, could I get Calgary-Fish Creek and the Minister of Finance and whoever else is on the front bench giving the bait or taking the bait to please stop. You can hardly hear the question being asked, but we can sure hear your conversation. Please, let's stop this across-the-bow stuff. Look up

here if you have to, look somewhere else, find something to read, but don't take the bait, and whoever is giving it, don't give it.

Let's carry on. Who's answering? Deputy Premier, please.

Premier's Former Staff Member's Employment (continued)

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would much prefer to look at you when I answer the questions, and I will take your advice on that because it's very important that in this House we do focus on the important issues.

I can say to this hon. member and to all hon. members of the House that this government takes very, very seriously how we deploy personnel, whom we deploy in offices across the country and across the world on behalf of Albertans. Opening up new markets requires talent. We use that talent well, and we get the best talent we can.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Highway 19 Twinning

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The twinning of highway 19 between Nisku and the town of Devon has been an ongoing issue in my constituency for far too long. While my constituents wait for a definite decision on this project, the industrial traffic continues to increase, and the safety of my constituents continues to be a major concern. My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Can the minister provide an update on his ministry's plans to twin highway 19?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. He is always advocating hard for his constituency. Highway 19 is an important route here in the capital region and for the province as a whole. We are committed to ensuring the safety of motorists and improving accessibility to this industrial hub. The twinning project is currently in the design stages.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how is the minister working with stakeholders such as the Edmonton International Airport authority and affected residents to develop this finalized plan?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, my department is working very closely with all interested stakeholders in finalizing this twinning design. In addition, Alberta Transportation and EIA have held a number of public open houses to keep residents apprised of the developments. We have also had direct contact with potentially affected landowners in the region.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister. The minister mentioned some public open houses. Could he possibly elaborate on when and whether we'll see some more, if there'll be any more any time soon to update the public on this very, very important issue?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, it's too early to begin planning another public open house at this stage. We are committed to keeping local residents informed of new developments, and we will look at maybe organizing another public open house when we have more information to share.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Edmonton-Centre in place of Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Legal Services for Low-income Albertans

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Access to justice is a critical component of our Constitution and of Canadian culture, but in Alberta the government's funding for access to justice for low-income people has been steadily decreasing. As a result, our courts are faced to deal with an increasing number of unrepresented people because they simply can't afford a lawyer. My question to the Minister of Justice is: what was the reasoning for setting the cut-off level for legal aid so that people on assured income for the severely handicapped or even someone working full-time minimum wage would not qualify?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The cut-off for legal aid, as the member mentions, is actually set solely and completely by Legal Aid itself. It is an autonomous society. I do want to mention to this member that the province is proud to fund 83 per cent of the legal aid costs. The federal government only picks up about \$10 million. I raised this issue in Whitehorse last year at our federal-provincial-territorial justice ministers' meeting, and we will continue to raise this issue.

Ms Blakeman: Nonetheless, the government does fund for this. You can't put it off on the feds.

Could the minister explain why a 19 per cent cut was made to the very services that provide civil mediation and law libraries, which is what these unrepresented people are supposed to use and where our AISH recipients and minimum-wage earners are supposed to be getting help. Why would you cut that?

Mr. Denis: The member is quite correct. We did privatize law library resources last year. We found that it was not a good use of taxpayers' dollars to continue funding that in the current model. I also would like to let this member know that we are very proud that as part of our 2012 operations, at the end of the year we had a \$7 million surplus, and we gave it all to Legal Aid.

Ms Blakeman: Well, that's an encouraging sign. Maybe I can keep them doing it.

Back to the same minister: given that denying legal aid to people is making them go to court without representation and that's clogging up the courts and given that legal aid isn't even free – sometimes it has to be paid back and sometimes even up front – why is it that the minister is so keen to make it hard for low-income and sick Albertans to get good legal advice?

Mr. Denis: Again, as I mentioned to this member, Mr. Speaker, we fund 83 per cent of the costs of legal aid. The federal government over the last 10 years, under two different administrations, has been gradually decreasing their share of this amount. The previous Minister of Justice and I have had this discussion, and we will continue to encourage the federal government to

match where we are at with respect to the strong commitment to legal aid and access to justice that this government has.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, curriculum sets out the basic learning objectives for children in our province. In the past the curriculum for Alberta's students has been designed by teachers, parents, school boards, and experts. This time oil and gas companies have been awarded the title of stakeholders and key education partners, allowing them to shape what is taught in our schools. Alberta's NDP are in favour of children learning about Alberta and its natural resources, but allowing corporations to decide what kids learn in grade school is dead wrong. To the Minister of Education: why do you insist on opening the classroom door to corporate propaganda?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. Our curriculum is constantly upgraded in this province. The member has that right. What's different about this process is that we actually want to take it out to the community and let everyone who has a stake in education be a part of that dialogue. It's still going to be led by teachers. It's still going to be led by educators and those school boards. But we do want to hear from parents, we do want to hear from students, and we do want the First Nations and the Métis to have some input in this as well. We want to hear from the economy. We want to hear from the employers. Some of those are oil and gas companies. There's nothing wrong with oil and gas companies. They drive this province. I see that member over there doesn't mind cashing their cheques either.

Mr. Bilous: Deciding what they learn in kindergarten.

Mr. Speaker, given that oil and gas companies are partners across the board in every curriculum project, all four, from kindergarten all the way up to grade 12, while teachers are partners in only one, to the minister: will you tell Albertans why the oil and gas sector gets four times the influence of teachers?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, that's not true. Teachers are involved in every one of these, and teachers are leading these. As a matter of fact, I've got educators and teachers and former teachers in my department that have thought up this process, and the ATA has been at the table for two years as part of developing this process, and so have Alberta school boards. Unfortunately, this hon. member left that little piece of it out.

There's no reason that we shouldn't hear from the economy and that we shouldn't hear from entrepreneurs if we want to develop entrepreneurs. That doesn't mean they're building the curriculum; that means they get some input, and our kids will have a more relevant education at the end of the day. These companies also have a really good perspective on how maybe we can interest kids in science and technology and engineering, some of the key areas that we need skilled people for.

2:30

Mr. Bilous: Read your own document, Minister. Teachers are not listed.

Mr. Speaker, given that this minister believes that he knows best – better than teachers, better than Albertans – and given the minister can't see the difference between teaching students about the oil and gas sector versus allowing the oil and gas sector to decide what students learn in our schools, to the minister: this is offensive to Albertans. What are you going to do to fix it?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think the member completely misses the point. Once again, teachers are leading this. This isn't about oil and gas. This is about being relevant. It's about the economy. It's about entrepreneurialism. It's about making sure that our kids have the skills coming out of it to be employable. There's nothing wrong with working, I mean, or working for oil and gas. We can't all work for Greenpeace.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to listen to these folks, and it's important for them to bring ideas to the table, like I said, that might help our kids get interested in the sciences and get interested in engineering and technology. We're not going to apologize for trying to listen to the business community when we're trying . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Calgary-East.

School Construction

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to remind the House of two stories that we often tell our children. The first is about the boy who cried wolf. Remember that this boy ran around everywhere saying something was happening when it actually wasn't. It seems the government does the same thing with building Alberta. The second story is of Pinocchio. This young boy would mislead everyone he spoke to, and eventually his nose began to grow.

Mr. Denis: Point of order.

Mrs. Towle: To the Minister of Infrastructure. The other day this House was told that even though the government has announced 50 schools, the government has no idea how much the schools will cost, how they'll be built, or how they'll be paid for. Which story can Albertans believe about this government, the boy who cried wolf or Pinocchio?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, the question reminds me of the story of the opposition, that always says: you should put the infrastructure that you're going to build on your website. They haven't got a single school listed on their website. We have several under construction now. We'll be building 50 new ones and 70 rehabilitated schools by 2016. We're actually building Alberta. We're putting in place the things that Albertans have asked us for, and we listened. The building Alberta plan under this Premier will provide the infrastructure that Albertans actually want.

Mrs. Towle: It looks like we're going with Pinocchio.

Given that the minister has announced the K to 8 school in Sylvan Lake and it takes three years to build a school and given that this community will actually have no idea when this government will keep its promise to Albertans, does this government honestly believe that it's responsible for them to announce schools they cannot build and cry wolf to communities who desperately need these schools?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I think what's important is what we do in this government. We listen to Albertans, we find out what they want in all communities, including Sylvan Lake, and that's what we're doing. We are working hard to get those schools delivered by 2016. The budget showed that what we have is a plan to get started during 2014-2015. As the contracts are done, more exact numbers will be in. Those folks would have us go to the contractors and say, "We've got this much money. How much do

you want?" So they'd take it all. We are actually trying to get Albertans a good deal. They can't seem to get that through their heads.

Mrs. Towle: Doo-doo: finally some language I can agree with the minister on.

Given that a full year after announcing a new school in Blackfolds, there are still no shovels in the ground, and given that the K to 8 school in Sylvan Lake was just announced, Minister, can you give a date when Sylvan Lake can expect more than a shovel in the ground, or will you be making this promise as part of your election campaign for Premier? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. minister, we're anxious for your answer.

Mr. McIver: You know what? Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member may be jealous of the Member for Airdrie, whom we've seen a picture of posing with a shovel in the ground for the schools there, and I recognize that the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake wants to be there, too. You know why? Because she's excited also about the building Alberta plan. We're all excited about it. She should just watch and see us put it in place because under this Premier and this government we're going to make it happen.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Justice, your point of order was noted at approximately 2:33 p.m. during the first question from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Let us move on. Calgary-East, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Postsecondary Education Affordability

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. During a recent meeting with the Council of Alberta University Students they expressed concerns regarding costs to the postsecondary students. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Calgary-East actually has the floor.

Mr. Amery: Thank you. Many students would like to attend postsecondary schools, Mr. Speaker, but the cost is increasingly becoming a burden. Alberta currently has the lowest postsecondary participation rate in the country, a rate of 17 per cent. My question is to the hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. What is the minister doing to ensure that all qualified and interested students have an equal opportunity to attend an Alberta postsecondary institution?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ensuring access to education is one of the pillars of Campus Alberta. We want to make sure that every Albertan has an opportunity to advance their education, and we want to ensure that cost is not a barrier to any student's getting an education. It's one of the reasons we've created 2,000 new student spaces in the 2014 budget. We're very proud of the education system we have. Our trades system, for example, educates 22 per cent of the trades graduates in this country every year. We have one of the most generous scholarship and financial support programs in the entire country. In this year's budget: \$490 million for student loans, \$74 million for scholarships, \$69 million in grants.

The Speaker: Thank you. The time has elapsed.

Let us hear the first supplemental.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is the minister doing to regulate noninstructional fees, which are becoming a burden on the students?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Noninstructional fees are fees that have been charged by some of the postsecondaries across the province in the last few years. What we've undertaken with students and with the postsecondary institutions is to do a complete review of the funding model and a review of the tuition and other fees charged. That will be pursued this year. Students will have a voice at the table in those reviews, and we will come out with a funding model which works to ensure that Albertans have access to education and a tuition and fees policy which works to ensure, with our student loans and finance process, that finances are not a barrier to education.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister and his department consider adopting an open textbook policy to allow students to use textbooks through an open-source framework similar to what's being done in B.C.?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very excited about digital access to online resources. When I held this portfolio before, we started, you might recall, the Lois Hole Campus Alberta digital library. Adding more resources to that library and adding more access for Albertans to that library are extremely important objectives.

Open textbooks is a great concept. It's been pioneered in other jurisdictions. We're looking to what B.C. is doing. We're working very hard on that. I'd ask the hon. member and others in this House to keep their ears open very soon for progress in this area.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Travel Alberta Executive Expenses

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] We all remember David Dingwall and his famous quote: I'm entitled to my entitlements. We get the feeling that it could be the next election theme for the PC Party and this minister of the tourism. Presumably, before every disclosure period the minister would review disclosures of their senior bureaucrats. So why did the minister accept a \$99 claim, \$150 tuxedo rental, amongst other dubious claims? Or did he just not do his job?

Dr. Starke: Nice tux.

Mr. Speaker, as tourism minister – not “minister of the tourism” but Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation – I'm very proud of our tourism industry in this province. I'm proud to be able to promote this province around the world, nationally, and around our province. Travel Alberta has an integral part to play in that, but that being said, they have to play by the rules. That's why I've instructed a full review of Travel Alberta's expenses. That review will be undertaken, and those results will be in my hands very quickly.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's 130 bucks. I paid for it myself. [interjections]

Given that my constituency of Drumheller-Stettler receives large numbers of tourists every year and that we therefore expect nothing but the best from Travel Alberta, is it any wonder that we are upset that the PC government allows \$1,800 dinners with \$300 alcohol tabs for internal strategy meetings? Or is that just the way this PC government does business?

2:40

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will have to confess that I had a difficult time hearing most of that question. Perhaps the tux is a little tight, and he is not able to project well today.

But I will say, Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, that Travel Alberta will be conducting a full, thorough, independent, third-party review of all expenses. I expect that when the results of that come to light, we will determine whether there, in fact, are any inappropriate expenses, and those expenses will be fully reconciled.

Mr. Strankman: A \$99 steak kind of makes it fit a little tight. [interjections]

Does the minister think it is economical for Travel Alberta to have a \$1,000 dinner at a Canmore resort, including the driver, the \$99 steak, for a board meeting, or is that just another part of the PC government's entitlements?

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite really proves that if you're going to try to be impo'tant, you dress impo'tant. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to promote Alberta as a tourism destination.

The Speaker: You know, it's Wednesday, not Thursday, so could we please restore some civility and decorum here and listen to the final answer?

You have a couple of seconds left, hon. minister.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we're going to conduct a full, independent review. I'm very proud of the work that Travel Alberta does. It's an award-winning organization, and I think everybody should know that Travel Alberta promotes Alberta as a world-class tourism destination, and that's what it will always be.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I believe I heard the bell amongst all the din, and that means that the time for question period has expired.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

MacEwan University

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to call attention to the continued success of one of our postsecondary institutions located just down the street from the Legislature. MacEwan University is named after a great Albertan, former Lieutenant Governor Grant MacEwan. Founded in 1971, MacEwan has gone from a local community college to an impressive university with more than 13,000 students.

Mr. Speaker, our government places a high value on a postsecondary education, and today this government announced

that it's helping MacEwan University to take the next step in its continued growth. Through the building Alberta plan we will invest \$30 million over the next three years to help build the centre for arts and culture, a new academic building that is the missing link in the university's dream for a single, sustainable downtown campus. Construction will begin this summer. The five-storey academic and performing arts centre opens in the fall of 2017.

Mr. Speaker, this project puts students first by helping MacEwan University consolidate its operation at one downtown campus. All students will have improved access to recreation facilities, MacEwan sports teams, libraries, counsellors, faculty, and improved amenities. In the future MacEwan University expects more than 17,000 students, and this single, sustainable campus will help make this a reality.

After yesterday's exciting LRT announcement I am very thrilled that students from my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods will take the LRT to go to this amazing addition to MacEwan University.

MacEwan University has an important role in Campus Alberta, and our government is acting to ensure that this institution can continue to grow and serve Albertans today and into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Medicine Hat.

Education System

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sadly, I'm about to end my 23-year experience with public education in Alberta. No, it's not that I haven't been able to master my basic math skills. This June my third child will graduate grade 12.

Education matters, and the education system that is available for all Albertans is among the best in the world. Educators from many countries come here to learn from and copy the practices outlined in Inspiring Education. Alberta high school graduates are Rhodes Scholars. They are inventors. They are entrepreneurs. They are creative thinkers. They are the ones providing services, goods, and innovation so that this province can continue to grow and prosper.

Mr. Speaker, the content, delivery, and format of education is constantly evolving. The work being done with curriculum redesign will improve content to ensure that superior numeracy and literacy become the central focus of classroom activity in new and more intuitive ways.

At the age of 25 one of my children had a bachelor of science and a master's in public policy, another at 22 had obtained a mechanical engineering degree, and the youngest has received early acceptance to the two universities of his choice. All three children were educated in the public system here in Alberta. It is a credit that they and their classmates and their friends are equipped for success to move forward.

Education in Alberta is delivered by passionate, caring teachers and principals as well as by supportive parents and community partners. It is an evolving service that we can be proud of, but evolution requires change. I don't know about you guys; I never did master the slide rule, and I'm glad I didn't have to help my kids learn how to use that one.

We can't let changing times outpace us, and this is why re-design is both necessary and healthy. We will continue to ensure that we hold ourselves to a high standard.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This PC government is quick to brag about making promises, but all too often we see them break them and then tell us they never made them in the first place.

Last year the Premier promised to increase postsecondary funding. Instead, she cut funding without warning and without remorse. We should always be working to find efficiencies, but you don't find a better system by placing students and institutions in a chokehold.

The government is now touting an increase in funding for more spaces for Alberta students in classrooms in response to the needs of the economy and our communities. I've heard from students that this is a good step forward. However, I would ask this PC government to bring in sustainable and predictable funding for students and institutions and eliminate politics when it comes to funding postsecondary education in our province.

One thing I'm sure the minister has learned by now – and if he hasn't, he will soon – is that when Alberta students are frustrated with the system, they don't torch cars, destroy stores, and shut down cities like we see elsewhere. They get together, have a discussion about ideas and solutions, and then provide these recommendations to the government. We saw this with the Ignite Report, which brought together students from nearly every postsecondary institution in the province. Students share that they are concerned about the cost and quality of education they are receiving, ensuring increased access for students to the institutions, and how unstable and unpredictable funding is hurting the foundations of advanced education.

As the minister is surely aware, mandatory noninstructional fees are also a huge concern for students, and they are an increased cost to their education. Students have shared with me that they have significant concerns with how these fees are determined and collected. The minister could address these concerns and consult with students and institutions to find a solution that works.

It's time for a sustainable and predictable funding model for Alberta's postsecondary students and institutions. We owe all Albertans at least that much.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: I have notification here of notices of motions. Hon. Member for Highlands-Norwood, you gave notice yesterday.

Mr. Mason: Yes, I did, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: We have one from Calgary-Shaw as well.

Mr. Wilson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 15(2) I would like to raise a question of privilege based on a response yesterday by the Minister of Health.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, do you have a report you wish to table?

Mr. Mason: Yes, in fact, I do. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail to the Premier sent by Robert

Kroetsch, a registered nurse in the emergency department of the Grey Nuns hospital. In his e-mail he expresses his frustration with the Premier as well as that of many of his co-workers, asking, "Why is it when times get tough you want to cut my pension, cut my benefits and bully my right to fair and unobstructed bargaining?"

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I have Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in a moment. Let's go on to Cardston-Taber-Warner first.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today and the requisite number of copies. The first is from an associate of mine from Raymond, Alberta, in my riding. He has written to me and expressed his concern to my assistant that he helped build classrooms during the flood situation in High River and that he and many other workers have not been paid. His attempts to get paid have been unsuccessful, unfortunately. He points out that "the government contracted the job to Wind River Developments, but it was sold to OZO who went bankrupt shortly thereafter." He feels "this all comes back to the government because they should be sure to hire companies that are credible." I have that to table.

Also, a hard-working farmer in my riding, Brian Hildebrand, shares some rambling thoughts, as he called them, indicating that seeing all of the things that he's been seeing on Facebook and social media and in the newspapers about the concerns with Premier, he just thought that he ought to point out the failings of this government, of which he feels the Premier's own behaviour is only "the tip of the iceberg." That's the second tabling that I have.

The third one is from Dale Stuart, who was watching the proceedings here in this Assembly. He's concerned about why power companies are allowed to gouge their customers and the inability of the opposition to get straight answers about it. That's the third tabling.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your indulgence I have two tablings today. For the first I'd like to table 50 of over 4,000 postcards our office has received asking this PC government to restore consistent and reliable funding to postsecondary education in Alberta. The postcards, collected by the Non-Academic Staff Association at the U of A, are clear evidence the government is not listening to the demands of Albertans for a well-funded postsecondary system that is affordable and accessible to all.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Calder, and it's in regard to the *Edmonton Journal* article that he referenced in his member's statement talking about pension plans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? None? Thank you.

We can now proceed to points of privilege and points of order. We have two points of privilege to hear today. Let's start with the first one from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who served notice of this yesterday.

Privilege Intimidation

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated in the House yesterday, I'm rising on a point of privilege in response

to an answer given yesterday in question period by the Associate Minister of Electricity and Renewable Energy. Now, I am given to understand by the Deputy Government House Leader that there may be a clarification coming from the associate minister with respect to this matter. If that is still the case, then I would be prepared to significantly abbreviate my point of privilege, but I do feel it's important to get the main points on the record, in any event. If that is still the understanding from the government side, then I will do so and with your permission.

The Speaker: Hon. member, it's your point of privilege. Proceed as you wish. I'm prepared to hear it. If you want to get something on the record, now is your opportunity. I'm not aware of any deals or any discussions between caucuses.

Mr. Mason: No. It's not a deal, Mr. Speaker. A remedy has been suggested, so I'm going to shorten it.

I'm rising pursuant to Standing Order 15(2) to address comments made yesterday in the Assembly by the Associate Minister of Electricity and Renewable Energy. In *Alberta Hansard*, page 168, she said that "for us to offer opinions at this point in time actually compromises consumers, and I would remind this member, including all members of the opposition, that they can be called before the regulator to clarify their comments." Mr. Speaker, the concern is that that could be interpreted as a threat and was certainly intended to inhibit questions on this matter from the opposition. As such, I think it's a serious breach of the rights of the members of the Assembly.

Beauchesne's section 75 says, "The privilege of freedom of speech is both the least questioned and the most fundamental right of the Member." *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 89, also states that freedom of speech is the first right of members. "By far, the most important right accorded to Members of the House is the exercise of freedom of speech in parliamentary proceedings." Further, the comments yesterday amount to a suggestion that a member or all members of the opposition should restrict their statements and questions in the House.

Beauchesne's section 69 confirms that it is not the inflammatory or offensive nature of comments that gives rise to a breach of privilege but, rather, whether they impinge on the ability of members to do their jobs properly. It is, I think, worthy of note.

The other citation I'd like to make is from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, which states on page 93 that immunity from prosecution or civil liability for comments made is essential because it allows members "to make statements or allegations about outside bodies or persons, which that they may hesitate to make without the [question] of privilege." It goes on to say that "the freedom to make allegations which the Member genuinely believes at the time to be true, or at least worthy of investigation, is fundamental."

More to the point, it is very important to remember that *Beauchesne's* says at 89 that "no Member may be compelled to appear in court as a witness." So the associate minister in making the suggestion that we could be called before the regulator to explain our comments was perhaps not aware of the fact that we are protected by our privilege from having to testify before any regulatory body or any court.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, on the point of making threats to members, *Beauchesne's* 93 says, "It is generally accepted that any threat, or attempt to influence the vote of, or actions of a Member, is a breach of privilege." The privilege to be free of obstruction, interference, intimidation, and molestation also flows from the same fundamental right to freedom of speech. A member cannot be impeded from doing the job of representing their constituents.

The ability of a member to speak freely is particularly important for opposition members, who have an additional duty above and beyond the duty to speak on behalf of their constituents. I am referring to the opposition's function of holding the government to account. This function requires that members have the ability to question the government about its business on behalf of Albertans. Question period is, therefore, one of the most important parts of parliamentary procedure. We think that the statements yesterday were threats to those important principles.

Erskine May uses a similar case as an example of a breach of privilege at page 262, where a member in the British House of Commons was threatened "with the possibility of a trial at some future time for a question [they] asked in the House."

There was a similar case in 1993, in *Alberta Hansard* at page 907, where the Speaker found no breach of privilege only because the member in question was challenged to repeat the questions in another form to see what would happen. Anyway, I don't think that's that important.

3:00

In my view, Mr. Speaker, the minister's comments do indicate an attempt to threaten, intimidate, or suggest to opposition members that they may not ask questions about a certain matter under pain of being called before a regulatory hearing to explain their actions. It represents, in my view, a real attempt to limit the ability of opposition members to do their job in this place. As a result, unless there is some action on the part of the associate minister, then I would ask that you find a prima facie case of contempt of the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I'm going to recognize the hon. associate minister responsible for electricity and renewable energy at this point. Maybe we can save some time. I'm just anticipating, based on your words, hon. leader of the ND opposition, what might occur. I don't know. But let's hear from her now.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have read and reread the *Hansard* records from yesterday and my response in particular to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. It was in response to allegations about an issue before the Alberta Utilities Commission, and I won't reread the comments. They've already been presented here. When I made the comments, I was thinking about the electricity regulator legislation, in particular the Alberta utilities act in section 19, which states that "the Commission may, when in its opinion the attendance of any person before the Commission is desirable, serve on the witness a notice requiring the witness's attendance before the Commission."

Mr. Speaker, it was not my intention to act in any way that is not respectful of this Legislature or of fellow members. It was my intention to indicate that comments by members may trigger the AUC to call that member to a hearing in question. But, of course, you are correct that, based on legal jurisprudence, the AUC may well not be able to compel an MLA to a hearing.

I apologize for any offence. It was not intended, and I withdraw my comments to this member.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, that automatically concludes the issue. A withdrawal and apology ends the matter.

We will now go on to the second point of privilege, from Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Anglin: Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: Please have a seat, hon. member. We're going to the second point of privilege because that first one . . .

Mr. Anglin: Well, there's a problem with . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, that concludes that matter. If you have something else to ask, it might be in order, but that concludes that matter. If you have anything else that you want to pursue, we have question period, and we have debate. We have a number of other avenues. You can send me a nice letter if you like.

Let's go on to Calgary-Shaw now and have the second point of privilege raised. Calgary-Shaw, please.

Mr. Anglin: Mr. Speaker, can I please seek clarification?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I've indicated already that that concludes the matter, and that's the only clarification that is required. So we will conclude that matter and move on now.

A third time I'm calling for the second point of privilege, or are you withdrawing it, Calgary-Shaw?

Privilege Misleading the House

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am rising in accordance with Standing Order 15(2) to raise a point of privilege; namely, that yesterday, March 11, 2014, the Minister of Health interfered with the ability of members of this House to fulfill their duties when he stated that a trip to Grande Prairie on October 25, 2012, was for the purpose of making an announcement related to the expansion of the Grande Prairie hospital.

I would like to refer you to the *Hansard* from yesterday in question period, where the minister, in answering a question posed by the Leader of the Official Opposition, said:

Well, Mr. Speaker, I was one of the cabinet ministers that was present with the Premier in Grande Prairie at that time. We made an announcement, as the hon. members should know, with respect to the expansion of the Grande Prairie hospital. The announcement specifically talked about the progress on the construction of the hospital, an update on the total cost for that facility. This is one example of the important government business that we do using the aircraft that are funded by the taxpayers of this province.

Circumstances indicate that several government ministers did use a government plane to travel to Grande Prairie, and there was a press release the same day. But the government ministers did not take part in the announcement. Therefore, this was not only an example of the misuse of taxpayer resources, but the Minister of Health intentionally misled the House by referring to the hospital announcement, knowing that neither he nor the other ministers present attended any such announcement. Because of this, I believe that the minister has interfered in the ability of members to fulfill their duties.

First, I would like to mention that notice of this point of privilege was raised at the earliest opportunity since the response of the minister was made in the House yesterday. Notice of the point was delivered to the Speaker's office this morning according to the rules laid out in Standing Order 15(2).

To establish there has been an intentional and grave point of privilege, Mr. Speaker, there is a test required. Looking at *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, page 86, it explains there are three elements to be established when it is alleged that a member is in contempt by reason of a statement that the member has made. First, the statement must in fact have been misleading; secondly, it must be established that the member

making the statement knew at the time that the statement the member was making was incorrect; and third, in making it, the member must have intended to mislead the House.

Now, here are the facts as we understand them, Mr. Speaker. We have not found a government media advisory for October 25, 2012, related to this announcement. A reporter who is on the distribution list to receive media advisories and who was in Grande Prairie at the time has stated that he did not receive a media advisory that day. Neither the Premier nor the Minister of Health was listed on the Order Paper as a ministerial absence. This means they had no prior intention of leaving Edmonton until after question period, around 3 p.m., that day. This is not consistent with a cancelled government hospital announcement.

The government plane left Edmonton at 3:40 p.m. on October 25. The news release related to the Grande Prairie hospital expansion was sent out at 4:02 p.m., while the plane was in the air. The plane carrying the Premier and the Minister of Health landed at 4:32 p.m. The PC Party scheduled a press conference for 5:20 p.m. later that day. A party media availability does not constitute government business. The formal program followed at 7 p.m.

The Minister of Health, reading from a piece of paper that looked prepared as if in anticipation of this very question, stated in the House yesterday, March 11, 2014, that an announcement in Grande Prairie was “important government business” and required the use of the government plane. Well, a report emerged from the Canadian Press reporter later yesterday that the government acknowledged the event did not take place but was cancelled because of the St. Paul tragedy earlier in the day. Now, this claim does not hold up in the fact that no media notices were sent out.

It seems clear, Mr. Speaker, that this is a prima facie case of privilege. First, we must establish whether or not the statement was misleading. In this case, the circumstances indicate there was no government announcement even planned for the expansion of the Grande Prairie hospital. The minister’s statement that the announcement was an example of government business is misleading because no such announcement actually took place, nor is there evidence that one was ever scheduled. A press release does not constitute a press conference, and a media release does not constitute a government announcement.

Second, the minister had to have known that the statement he was making was misleading. It’s clear that the minister knew that he was making a misleading statement. In his answer yesterday, recorded in *Hansard*, the minister answered the initial question asked by the Leader of the Official Opposition without hesitation and reading out of his binder. Obviously, the minister had already been briefed on the events of October 25, 2012, but he himself should know that he would have not been at any such announcement. It isn’t conceivable that he recalled the events of this day one and a half years ago without being reminded recently of the chronology. So given that the minister had been briefed on the events of October 25, 2012, and had answered the question with no hesitation, he knew that the statement he was making was misleading. He was trying to pass off a PC Party press conference as government business.

Third, the member must have intended to mislead the House. Knowing that the announcement made that evening was part of a party event and knowing that the government plane was used to fly him and the Premier to this event and other ministers home to Calgary and Edmonton from the event, the minister answered the question in a way that was meant to imply that his use of the plane was strictly for government business and that the timing of the flight just fortunately aligned with a planned party fundraiser.

3:10

We understand that exactness in every answer is not a requirement in this House, and for that reason a member can speak and later correct his or her statement if it later turns out to be false. But this case is different, Mr. Speaker, and shows a clear intent to mislead the members of the Assembly and subsequently to obstruct other members as they try to clearly understand the actions of this government. Further, the minister again today defended such decisions, such language, and I would argue that perhaps he should reconsider that as well.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, I ask you to find this minister in breach of privilege in this case.

Thank you.

The Speaker: No one else?

Let’s go, then, to the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member had politely stated what exactly the test is out of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* – and I thank him for that – and the government also takes no issue with respect to the time which he’d taken here. It was quick. But as far as the test, with no disrespect to the Member for Calgary-Shaw, he’s failed in all three instances.

Mr. Speaker, on the morning of October 25, 2012, the government got word that a serious accident had happened in a school in St. Paul. The Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti was scheduled to be in Grande Prairie in the mid-afternoon to make the official announcement of the new Grande Prairie hospital with the Minister of Health. This event was part of the five big hospital announcements that had been planned for weeks. After speaking to school board officials in St. Paul, it was determined that the Minister of Education and the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti would go to the school. In fact, they even brought the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills on the government plane to St. Paul that day since the tragic accident happened in his constituency, and that member later praised both ministers publicly for their support during that time, and we thank him for the same.

As a result of these events, plans had to change. The minister had to leave Edmonton with the Premier and with the Minister of Health around 1:30, but the flight was pushed back so that they could wait for the Minister of Education and the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti to return to Edmonton. Because the incident was at the school, Mr. Speaker, the event up north had to be pushed back and realigned, and thus the announcement happened very close to the time frame of the partisan dinner that was mentioned earlier. The Minister of Finance mentioned earlier as well that there, in fact, was a party plane that went up for people there that did not have any party business.

So my first statement to you, Mr. Speaker, is that this fails the test. In fact, it was not a misleading statement. Second, on top of that, there has been no evidence tendered to indicate that the Minister of Health had some sort of positive intention, that he knew it was false, or, again, evidence that the Minister of Health planned to mislead.

I do wish to mention to you that the member’s statement that there was no media release is, unfortunately, incorrect, Mr. Speaker. I’m holding in my hand a media release, which I can table for you tomorrow, from October 25, 2012, indicating – this is the title – *New Grande Prairie Regional Hospital Means Improved Access to Emergency Services, Surgery and Cancer Care*. The next day there was a story about this by Keith Gerein of the *Edmonton Journal*, Friday, October 26, and there was also

another story from the *Daily Herald-Tribune*, by a gentleman named Graeme Bruce, saying: New Hospital Gets Name Change, Budget Increase. To me, this is very, very rank-and-file government business, and as we all know, this business that we're involved in, opposition or government, can change on a dime. It's very difficult to actually go and plan on a day-to-day basis.

I wanted also to mention a couple of items in *Beauchesne's* that I have found. First off, I refer you, sir, to *Beauchesne's* 117(2), which indicates that "the Speaker's function in ruling on a claim of breach of privilege is limited to deciding the formal question . . ." – and I go ahead – "and does not extend to deciding the question of substance." So that limit is what the precedent had to say.

But, more interestingly, Mr. Speaker, I refer you also to *Beauchesne's* 31(1), which deals with points of privilege. It states, "A dispute . . . between two Members, as to allegations of facts, does not fulfill the conditions of parliamentary privilege." So to state that there is a point of privilege here is simply a misconception, and I hope that I can get this member over to my way of thinking.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Strathcona, you indicated a request to speak.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief. The authorities have been reviewed very clearly. The question becomes, essentially: was the statement made by the member misleading, did the member know it was misleading, and did he intend to make it in a context that would as a result be misleading the House?

What is clear to me is that, in fact, there is not actually a dispute over the facts. I think it's very clear that there is consensus on the facts. There was not an in-person announcement in Grande Prairie that can be characterized as government business in Grande Prairie. There was a press release, that I suspect went out from Edmonton, that coincided with the plane being in mid-air, but that is not a government announcement in Grande Prairie. Both the member from the Official Opposition as well as the Minister of Justice have essentially just recounted the same facts, that there was, in fact, no government business, no announcement that took place in Grande Prairie.

Unfortunately, yesterday the Minister of Health clearly stated that the plane went up to Grande Prairie because there was government business in Grande Prairie. So on the face of it we have evidence of a statement that was clearly misleading. One has to assume that the minister understands his schedule and was briefed, so he understood that it was misleading. In saying it in the House, we have to assume that he intended to mislead the House. If he had said it outside of the House, then perhaps he wasn't intending to mislead the House. But in answer to a direct question by the Official Opposition leader we have to assume that it was intended to mislead.

Obviously, in the absence of that government business in Grande Prairie, what we did have was an outcome that taxpayer-funded dollars were spent to get a bunch of people up to Grande Prairie at a time when there was no government business but there did happen to be other business that had no business being funded by taxpayer dollars. That is completely and appropriately within the correct confines of the questioning that should occur in this House: whether or not we are responsibly dispensing taxpayer dollars.

So the question was correct. The answer was unfortunately not accurate, and we have to assume that the minister was aware of

that at the time. Then it appropriately raises the question of whether those dollars were appropriately expended and whether or not they ought to have been paid back. But that's another issue.

Thank you for allowing me, Mr. Speaker, to contribute to this debate.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Are there others?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, just briefly, as I don't want to drag this out. I'm not a lawyer, and I feel like I'm on trial here. You can say what you want, you can call me a liar, but I was at the news conference with a whole roomful of media people. I can probably name some, but going back two years they may not remember. I can guarantee you there was a media announcement there that day with the Premier and with the minister, and I can stand up in here as an eyewitness and confirm that. You can call me a liar if you like. I was there.

Mr. Anderson: I think that, clearly, what was stated in the back and forth was that there was a government announcement – a government announcement – for the new hospital. What this member was just referring to was the pre PC Party fundraising scrum that they do, that took place at the PC event. That is not a government announcement. You need to try to understand that because it really is – the mix between government and party here is very, very clear. There is a terrible mix here. You cannot say that you were at a government announcement when it was the PC Party event, so please take that into consideration.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I'll hear one final comment and hear from the minister who is at the heart of this matter, and that is the Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, will be as brief as possible, and I appreciate your indulgence. I'm quite frankly shocked at the allegation that's been levelled at me by the member that brought forward this point of privilege. It's obviously his right to do so, and it will be your judgment that prevails in the end.

You know, a number of facts have been presented around the circumstances of that particular day, and I think those have been well explained. I think what I find the most disturbing and perhaps the most offensive here is the allegation by two members that I intentionally misled this House. Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that I certainly did not mean to mislead the House in any way. We have provided and we can table documents that substantiate both a government news release that was issued that day as well as some of the local media coverage that was provided.

3:20

I think that, as my hon. colleague the Minister of Justice has commented, there was a planned series of announcements that week across the province, beginning in Medicine Hat and Lethbridge on October 18, moving to Grande Prairie, and then concluding in the communities of Hinton and High Prairie and Edson on the following Saturday. Over the course of that week, Mr. Speaker, as you may recall, this government announced literally hundreds of millions of dollars of investment in expansion and renovation in some very key hospitals across the province.

The comments that were made in Grande Prairie were part of that communication strategy around hospital infrastructure. I certainly stand by the statement I made in the House yesterday. While I certainly acknowledge that other members in the House, members opposite, may wish to raise a dispute with respect to use

of government aircraft – and that’s certainly their right to do so – I do not think, Mr. Speaker, that they have either proven nor should they have the right to question my intent and my integrity and to suggest that I have misled the House in order to further that cause, which is an entirely different matter.

So I’ll repeat, Mr. Speaker, that I certainly did in no way intend to mislead the House in the answer that I gave yesterday afternoon. It was an honest answer to the question. The facts and the circumstances that have been explained here I think provide further context to that, and I would certainly respectfully ask you to take these facts into consideration in your ruling.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

The deputy House leader for the Official Opposition, the Member for Calgary-Shaw, has made a very serious statement and comment; in his words, a point of privilege against the Minister of Health regarding some comments that the minister made yesterday. It pertains to an exchange in this House yesterday dealing with an announcement or not, dealing with a government airplane, dealing with matters related to that particular event that occurred sometime in October. I think October 25 was the date referenced by several members.

We’ve heard now from six different people on this matter, and I listened very carefully. Just so you know, I took my notes as always. I want to begin by saying that the Member for Calgary-Shaw did provide notice in accordance with our rules, and at 10:33 this morning he met the requirements of Standing Order 15(2) with respect to giving at least two hours’ notice before the start of the afternoon proceedings.

I hope not to take up too much time on this matter, but when an allegation is made that someone has misled the House and in particular intentionally misled the House, which I believe is what the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw has said on at least one if not two or three different occasions, that really catches my attention. The reason it does, hon. members, is because frequently we’ll find that one member sees an event or an activity or a statement one way, hears it one way, and another members hears it and interprets it in a different way. So you could argue: well, somebody misled. But it couldn’t be argued that you deliberately misled or that you intentionally misled, could it? You’ve all been on the receiving end of that or on the giving end of it in your own private lives, and it’s no different in here.

Nonetheless, I want to remind you of a couple of things before I rule on this. One is that I have reminded members many times about allegations that you make in this House about this fact, or not a fact, of misleading the Assembly: quite often it’s really a disagreement on facts or a matter of interpretation, as I’ve said. Please be reminded what the Speaker’s role is in the House in general and particularly during question period. It’s set out in the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, and it states the following: “The Speaker ensures that replies adhere to the dictates of order, decorum and parliamentary language. The Speaker, however, is not responsible for the quality or content of replies to questions.”

Of course, someone else referred to it, and I want to refer to it again. In *Beauchesne*, second edition, paragraph 494 – and I’ve referred to this many times before – it states that the chair often has to accept “two contradictory accounts of the same incident.”

Now, if the member who raised the point of privilege is alleging that the minister deliberately misled the Assembly, then that indeed is a very, very high bar and is almost never made out according to the many rulings that you will have researched as part of your preparation for this point of privilege. In order to

constitute a contempt and to conclude that a member deliberately misled the Assembly, three elements must be met, and members have referred to this in their own words. First, the statement must in fact have been misleading; secondly, it must be established that the member making the statement knew at the time the statement was made that it was incorrect; and three, in making such a statement, the member must have intended to mislead the House. I think the Member for Calgary-Shaw tried very hard to do that. He tried to prove his case, as it were. Of course, the case was then argued by three members from the Executive Council to the contrary. Again, we have this contradiction of what people perceive to have been the facts.

Nonetheless, the authorities for this particular test were outlined by me in this House before; in particular, I outlined them on December 3, 2012, when I made a ruling, that you can find at pages 1206 and 1207 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day. I’m not going to take the time of the House to repeat them. But I think it is clear that the wording of this particular purported point of privilege isn’t so much a point of privilege even if it was worded somehow else. It could certainly meet the test of having been a point of order, in which case we would have had a clarification not unlike what we just heard, but I cannot see where this, at the moment at least, constitutes a question of privilege.

I did listen very carefully and attentively to everyone who spoke. I have my notes to back this up. I know that there were explanations given about a tragedy that occurred on that day and that that tragedy then led to certain other circumstances having to unfold, certain changes in schedules. I listened carefully when Airdrie mentioned the issue about the location of where a purported or de facto press conference or media conference or whatever you want to call it may or may not have occurred. Other than the fact that there was a tragedy that day, I think it is still, nonetheless, a fair point to remind government about the choice of locations for some of the announcements. It’s clear from what I’ve heard that there may not have been a choice in this one if, in fact, what Airdrie said is true, and I don’t know that. It may come up again later in this session. I’m not sure. But let’s be reminded that there are circumstances that occur in our lives that are, generally speaking, beyond our control. As such, we must accept that the members who spoke, spoke, I hope, with honour and with their own conviction and their own belief.

In this case I do not find there to be a prima facie case that would constitute a point of privilege. So that will conclude this matter today.

Let us move on to points of order, please. We have, I think, four points of order to be heard. The first one, actually, was raised by the hon. Government House Leader, who rose on a point of order against the leader of the Liberal opposition. He has since sent me a note saying that he will withdraw his point of order. So point of order 1 is officially withdrawn by the issuer, and that concludes that matter.

Point of order 2 was raised, I believe, by the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. It was raised in response to something that the Minister of Finance had said. That was during a comment that was being delivered at that moment by the leader of the ND opposition, but I don’t think it was in reference to what the ND leader was saying.

I think I’ll allow some people an opportunity to clarify their positions in here. Whoever it was that raised the second point of order – I believe it was the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills – I’ll recognize you in just a moment so that you can state your citation and move on with it at this time.

The hon. member.

3:30

Point of Order Clarification

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise according to Standing Order 23(h), (i), (j), and it is in regard to a comment made by the Minister of Finance and then previously, I believe, by the Minister of Education. This year there was an absolute tragedy that occurred in St. Paul. There was a vehicle that drove into a school, with horrific consequences. It was an absolute living nightmare. I was invited as an MLA to go with the Minister of Education along with the Minister of Infrastructure at the time, because it was important business, of course, but also an emergency. It was an emergency situation where we needed to determine the facts on the ground. The families in that incident suffered enough.

Now, during the debate the Minister of Finance used that tragedy as an excuse for using a government plane to go to a PC fundraiser, and I find it, frankly, appalling, disgusting, and reprehensible. Mr. Speaker, these families have suffered enough. For them to drag this issue into the papers is deplorable, and he should withdraw those comments. If there was any incident in terms of timing and so forth, they should have cancelled the flight to Grande Prairie if there was no announcement to be made. They shouldn't be using a tragedy. They shouldn't be bringing it up in here anymore. Withdraw the comment, sir, and let's just go on. Stop playing politics.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance to clarify from the government's position, please.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member just did what he is accusing me of doing, and I find that reprehensible. I would suggest that if the Blues were to be reviewed, it would be discovered by this hon. member, if he'd pay attention in this House, that I was referencing the flights, the delay for the Grande Prairie flights, for the government business that was being done in Grande Prairie. I did not bring up the tragedy in a way that would have directed it to the parents, to the children, or to the school. It is – I'm not even going to go there. What is pitiful is that he actually stood on a point of order so that he could stand up and say that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have the Blues here from today. In the Blues the Minister of Finance actually stood and said, among other things, in response to the first main question, I think, from the hon. leader of the ND, "I would actually say . . . that one of the flights that was taken on that day was a category flight that is actually for emergencies, which was, as I said, to the incident in St. Paul, where we actually carried one of the hon. members of the opposition."

My own view on this is that a courtesy was extended to you, hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, you accepted that courtesy, and I think it would behoove all of us to leave that matter as having been clarified and not pursue it any further. I don't see this as a point of order. I do see it as a point of clarification, although perhaps others here might have different versions of it. It seems like a sincere gesture, actually, on both parts. [interjections]

I don't like some of the language that was just used, and I don't like the bantering that's going across the bow right now either. There's just too much of that going on, gentlemen, ladies. Perhaps we could restrict ourselves more to the business of the House

rather than any personal attacks or innuendos or whatever have you.

As such, that concludes that matter, and we'll move to point of order 3. I believe this was raised by Airdrie. Did he withdraw?

Mr. Wilson: On behalf of Airdrie I believe the minister clarified his comments, and ours was withdrawn.

The Speaker: That was my take on it as well. Point of order 3 is officially withdrawn. The statement has been clarified, apologized for, or withdrawn, as the case may be.

We can move on to point of order 4, which was the Minister of Justice on comments during the question by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The third point of order dealt with the use of the term "mislead." I refer you to *Beauchesne* 489, page 146. It indicates that "mislead" is a prohibited term. With respect, it does not matter at all whether this is used towards someone; this is a prohibited term. So I would just simply ask – of course, we just ask to be treated the same as any other party, and since that's been dealt with on our end, I just would ask the member to please withdraw that word.

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

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe there is no point of order here. The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake was simply referring to the story of Pinocchio, and it's pretty difficult to outline the story of Pinocchio without using words something along those lines. She did admittedly use the word "mislead," but I would ask the Speaker in his ruling to look at *Beauchesne* 486(1), for example. "It is impossible to lay down any specific rules in regard to injurious reflections uttered in debate against particular Members." Well, this was not a comment directed to any member. When the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake was talking about the story of Pinocchio, she was not referring in any way, shape, or form to anyone on the government benches.

It also suggests that "much depends upon the tone and manner, and intention, of the person speaking." Again, this was not directed at any individual member in this Assembly. It was used in a story. I would ask you to consider the Blues when you look at that if the Justice minister does not agree.

I would also ask you to consider *Beauchesne* 486(2), that says, "An expression which is deemed to be unparliamentary today does not necessarily have to be deemed unparliamentary next week." So it's pretty clear that this is no point of order, Mr. Speaker.

You know, I don't believe the hon. Justice minister even gave a citation in our standing orders on which he was rising, but I would ask that you just leave this matter as a point of clarification.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, let me say a couple of things here very briefly. I have the Blues here, and according to the Blues from today the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake stood at approximately 2:32 and in her question referred to two stories that we often tell our children. The first story was something to do with the boy who cried wolf, and the second story was to do with the young boy called Pinocchio. Then she said, "This young boy would mislead everyone he spoke to, and eventually his nose began to grow." At that point a point of order was raised. The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake went on and then directed her question to a specific person. In fact, she directed her question to

the Minister of Infrastructure and concluded by saying, “Which story can Albertans believe about this government, the boy who cried wolf or Pinocchio?”

So I would caution you of this convention as a reminder, which I’ve given you before. I won’t take the time to read the whole thing, but please be reminded that you should not attempt to do or infer indirectly what you are specifically disallowed to do directly. We all know the story of Pinocchio. It’s about the young boy who lied, and every time he lied his nose got longer and longer, and by reference to that story you’re implying that someone else might be lying. That is not on in this House; it shouldn’t be on in this House whatsoever.

I will simply say that there is perhaps a dispute about the facts or whatever you might have surrounding the question about building Alberta or whatever it was that was talked about. There is certainly no point of order deep enough for me to call anyone to order on, but I would call you to a reminder, and I would give you a caution about not trying to imply, directly or indirectly, things that otherwise would be out of order.

As such, that concludes this matter, and I think that concludes points of order, and we can move on.

3:40

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 1

Savings Management Act

The Speaker: I believe the hon. President of Treasury Board has the floor now.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s nice to get to the business of the government. I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the hon. Premier to move third reading of Bill 1, the Savings Management Act.

Bill 1, as has been described, articulates a vision and a purpose for our savings, allowing them to grow while leveraging a portion of them to support Alberta’s long-term social and economic development. The proposed Savings Management Act will support innovation in the social services and cultural sectors, will help address Alberta’s demand for skilled labour by supporting apprentices, and will position Alberta to take advantage of future, once-in-a-generation strategic opportunities. Together the enhanced Alberta heritage scholarship fund, the social innovation endowments, the agriculture and food innovation endowments, and the Alberta future fund will help secure a brighter future for our province.

Rather than providing a rehashed summary of each fund, I would like to address three areas of concern that came up in debate: the social innovation endowment and its potential connection to social impact bonds, the Alberta future fund, and the heritage fund. In a broad sense the social innovation endowment will increase the capacity of the social services and cultural sectors to innovate, supporting new ideas, risk sharing, and creative collaboration within the nonprofit sector. The social innovation endowment will support new knowledge, prototyping, and the design and testing of new funding models and service delivery approaches that will improve outcomes for Albertans. In short, it’s about finding better ways of doing things, not just throwing more money at existing approaches.

Social impact bonds are just one of the many possible alternatives to traditional financing that may be considered. No decisions have been made regarding the use of social impact

bonds or any other alternative funding model. Several funding models will be reviewed, with the focus on assessing the potential of each to improve social outcomes for Albertans. Countries like the U.S., U.K., and Australia have developed programs involving social financing as a way to achieve social outcomes. As part of Alberta’s own review of alternative funding models, the experiences of other jurisdictions are being carefully studied to see what lessons can be drawn from them.

With respect to the Alberta future fund there has been some concern expressed about its broad spending parameters. At this time the government does not have any specific uses in mind. The intent of the Alberta future fund is to support investments that are transformative in nature and provide long-term, ongoing benefits to Albertans and the Alberta economy. Because these kinds of opportunities may arise unexpectedly, it is important that the government have some flexible funds in place for this purpose. You can’t budget for these kinds of opportunities, but you can set aside money for them so you’re ready to act when the time comes. The Alberta future fund will be established as an account within the heritage fund, and that money will stay there and grow until the right opportunity comes along. If one doesn’t come along, the fund will keep growing. A resolution of the Legislature is needed before any money can be transferred from this fund, so there will be an opportunity to debate the merits of proposed disbursements from the fund.

The other thing that came up in debate that I would like to address is the concern about leveraging a portion of our savings in the heritage fund to establish these endowments and funds. The vision proposed by the Savings Management Act in many ways reflects the Lougheed government’s original vision for the Alberta heritage fund. When the heritage fund was established in 1976, the fund’s stated objectives were to save for the future, strengthen or diversify the economy, and improve the quality of life for Albertans.

Over the years the heritage fund has been used for a variety of purposes, including capital projects like parks and museums and hospitals. To this day it supports medical and scientific research and scholarships, and in more recent years net income from the fund has supported general government operations.

I think a lot of that anxiety around leveraging the heritage fund is rooted in the fear that our savings will not grow. They will. Apart from the legislative-authorized disbursements from the new accounts, the net income of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund will remain subject to the provisions of the Fiscal Management Act. The provisions require that by 2017-18 and in all subsequent years, 100 per cent of the heritage fund’s net income will be retained within the fund, and as set out in our legislated savings plan, we will set aside a portion of our nonrenewable resource revenue for savings right off the top, so the heritage fund and our total savings will continue to grow.

As I conclude my remarks, I go back to what I heard from Albertans. They want us to save, but they want to know what we’re saving for. In public forums like budget consultations and the economic summit last year many Albertans expressed support for using a portion of our savings for strategic, future-oriented investments. Bill 1 reflects this desire by defining and implementing a renewed vision and purpose for a portion of our savings. The targeted endowments and funds it creates will encourage innovation in agriculture and social services, support trades-focused education to address the demand for skilled labour, and position Alberta to capitalize on future strategic opportunities. I encourage members of

this Assembly to join me in supporting this important future-oriented bill to create an even brighter future for Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now move to adjourn debate on Bill 1.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 2
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2014

The Speaker: Is it Bill 2 or Bill 3 that you're going for?

Mr. Horner: You said 2?

The Speaker: Bill 2 was indicated. Do you wish to go there, hon. minister?

Mr. Horner: I'm ready to do whatever you wish, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you. It is my privilege to rise today and move third reading of Bill 2, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2014.

I now move to adjourn the debate on Bill 2.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 3
Securities Amendment Act, 2014

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems to be my day.

I am pleased to rise today to move third reading of Bill 3, the Securities Amendment Act, 2014.

Bill 3 supports Canada's international commitments to reduce systemic risk and strengthen the regulation and oversight of over-the-counter derivatives. We've learned some important lessons from the 2008 financial crisis, and jurisdictions across Canada continue to make reform of securities regulation a priority.

The Member for Calgary-Buffalo was quite correct in his assessment of the severity of the 2008 financial crisis and that a lack of regulation was a major factor in that event. That's why, following that crisis, the International Organization of Securities Commissions introduced several new principles relating to the reduction of systemic risk, and in tandem with that, the G20 made recommendations to improve the regulation of over-the-counter derivatives markets. Canada along with the rest of the G20 countries committed to strengthen the regulation of this type of investment, and provincial governments and regulators are putting harmonized rules into place for this type of instrument.

The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre expressed a lot of concerns about the derivatives market and stressed the importance of an international agreement on how we're going to deal with these instruments given the global nature of the market and the size of the companies involved. That's why new regulatory environments for over-the-counter derivatives are being implemented across the world with three core requirements: trading through a derivatives exchange or trading platform, clearing trades through central counterparties, and reporting of all derivatives transactions to a trade repository.

This will ensure a high level of co-operation and collaboration and information sharing between the regulators, which should result in better identification, management, and reduction of systemic risk. Better oversight and regulation is a plus, Mr. Speaker, and will lead to better markets for all. Alberta is the second-largest capital market in Canada, and for the last three years the World

Bank has ranked Canada as one of the top five countries for protecting investors, ahead of the United States and the United Kingdom.

We want to build on that success, and that's why the government of Alberta and the Alberta Securities Commission are committed to continuous improvement of our highly regarded securities regulatory system. Bill 3 reflects that co-operative spirit and commitment. As the Member for Airdrie put it, this is a good example of how the Canadian system of provincial jurisdiction over securities regulation can work in the international marketplace.

I therefore move third reading and ask that all Members of the Legislative Assembly would support Bill 3 so the Alberta Securities Commission and securities regulators from other provinces can get on with their work of developing and implementing harmonized rules for the regulation of over-the-counter derivatives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I now move to adjourn debate on Bill 3.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:50 **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

Bill 5
Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014

The Chair: Are there any questions or comments to be offered? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today to speak to Bill 5 just in general. I haven't had the opportunity to respond to the overall budget, and I'd like to just provide a few of those general comments before speaking directly to Bill 5.

Of course, prior to the election, Mr. Chair, the Premier stated: debt is the death of countless dreams; we can have all the infrastructure we need without going into debt. That was then; this is now. The new slogan that the Premier and her handlers are pushing is: debt is hope. Debt is hope.

Mr. Chair, I just find it quite alarming, the stark difference between an election period and then after an election period. We don't need to go into debt. We'll never go into debt. Now debt is hope. It must be coming from some of her well-paid staffers who came from Ontario. They're pushing this type of thing. I don't think it's a good signal to send to future generations.

Mr. Chair, the expectation now is that this PC government will go \$21 billion into debt. Twenty-one billion dollars. That's \$14 million a day. I don't think anyone who watched the Premier in the last election came to any conclusion that she along with her cabinet and her MLAs were going to plunge the province into that much debt.

I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that when I go to constituents and I go to the coffee shops and I do my town halls and I ask them, you know, "There is record revenue in this province, the highest revenues that we've ever had; should we have to go into debt?" they state singlehandedly or almost all the time, "No."

Mr. Chair, what is interesting is that combined with the debt that they're going into, they're also under Bill 1 creating a system of endowments, and what's quite interesting is that that promise to go to endowments actually came from the 2004 Liberal campaign, the provincial one, with Kevin Taft, and it was subsequently the Liberal campaign promise in 2008. So we know where the brain trust is with this current government. They're cherry-picking election promises right from the Liberal Party of Alberta platform.

Mr. Chair, this is the seventh consecutive deficit despite record revenues. I just cannot support plunging this province right into debt.

An Hon. Member: Is it a deficit?

Mr. Saskiw: You know, the question of whether or not it's a deficit is an interesting one. Because they have three separate books, because they're, you know, doing things with all these books, putting numbers here, there, and everywhere, a lot of Albertans – the Auditor General, in fact, has stated that it's very difficult to figure out whether it's a deficit or a surplus. But what we see if you look at the money coming in versus the money coming out: it's a massive, massive deficit.

Mr. Chair, going to Bill 5 itself, of course, because of this government's spending, there are appropriations and so forth that must take place. Again, I cannot stand by while this government states: debt is hope. I won't support the budget on this particular bill. I look forward to the debate and any possible amendments that go forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: No other comments or questions to be offered?

Okay. In that case, then, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Am I to be adjourning this when I'm finished? Yes? Okay. I will do that.

Bill 5 is essentially the government's request to get some money before the budget passes, so it is, in essence, I guess, a pro rata allocation of the budget that we will be discussing over the course of the next month. Obviously, by voting in favour of this, we are essentially endorsing the budget that was introduced just a few days ago.

I know the leader of my party will soon be talking about what he thinks about that budget, but I felt that this was an opportunity as well for me to outline a few of the primary failings of this budget and to suggest why, then, we have some difficulty in supporting Bill 5, the effective allocation of funds into the future on the basis of this particular configuration. Of course, we want dollars to continue to flow, and we're always going to support dollars continuing to flow. However, we do need to note that the underlying assumptions on these dollars continuing to flow are problematic for us.

Now, I'm obviously not going to do a line-by-line discussion about that – we will have opportunity to do that later on in this session, when we have more discussion about the budget – but I did want to talk about a few things that I was concerned about based on what I've heard from people in my constituency as well as what I have heard about from stakeholders who are participating in the areas that I'm the critic for.

One of the things, of course, is the failure to completely restore the funding to postsecondary education that is part of this budget. We know that certain bits and pieces have been pulled together through sort of the reopening of the access to the future fund, and we know that there was an ever so slight increase, less than the cost of living in Alberta but an ever so slight increase. But when you put that together with the massive cuts last year, even notwithstanding the partial restoration partway through the year, we're still left in a situation where our postsecondary sector is struggling and where many critical components of our post-secondary sector have been rendered inaccessible to Alberta students. At a time when, you know, the government would argue that the economy is healthy and our budget is healthy, one questions why it is that we would be so miserly with the

postsecondary system given that it is such an important vehicle for growing and expanding opportunity and prosperity for all Albertans, not just a select few but for all. So the failure to fully restore funding, to maintain the level of funding that was actually promised in the last election, is disappointing to me.

The other thing that is truly disappointing to me in this budget, of course, is the abject failure to address the issue of child poverty and the fact that it is combined with significant cuts to programs that would otherwise help to at least reduce or limit child poverty. We're cutting those programs at the same time that the government is claiming that they're concerned about child poverty, which is problematic for me and for many, many Albertans. It seems very hypocritical. Again, at a time when the government claims that the province is wealthy and prosperous and we have all these great opportunities and we're building Alberta, it seems that we're just building Alberta for people who can afford the entrance requirements and the entrance fee to the various and sundry buildings, but we're not really building Alberta for all Albertans, just a select few. So the failure to address the child poverty issue in this budget makes me concerned about endorsing the budget through supporting this bill, Bill 5.

The other thing that we didn't do in this budget was give adequate funding to our K to 12 education system. We know that our class sizes are growing, and we have a Minister of Education who claims: "Ah, well, class sizes. That's last year's concern. Class sizes have no impact on the quality of education." Well, you know, Mr. Chair, they do. By failing to keep up with population growth and with cost of living and inflation and by also failing to look at the change in the makeup of our student population, the increased pressures that come from our growing new Canadian population and the increased needs that they have to ensure that they have the same opportunities that our parents and grandparents did – those costs are also not reflected in the changes to the Education budget.

4:00

I'm also concerned about the fact that this government has contemplated significant increases in economic activity, particularly in the oil and gas sector, but we do not see an equivalent increase in the investments into protecting our air and our land and our water. If you assume for the moment that our efforts to protect our air and our land and our water for future generations are adequate – I would argue they are not – as business grows, as the applications grow, as the amount of industrial activity grows, so too should the investment in protecting the environment, yet it is staying static. That is, I think, a profound failure and a recipe for continuing the bad record and the ultimately economically negative outcomes that arise from our haphazard and negligent environmental policy. That is concerning.

Another thing that is concerning to me about this budget is the fact that, notwithstanding that everybody has talked about how they've made this offer and that offer at whatever table, what we do have is a piece of legislation that calls for wage freezes, and we also have a budget that presumes wage freezes for public-sector employees. We also have a budget that appears to support what we believe is coming with respect to pension reform, and we know that that is going to be extremely damaging to public-sector employees and to their families and ultimately to seniors in Alberta. Those are some of the main areas that I'm concerned about and that I hear about a lot in my community.

We are also concerned about the failure to fully restore funding to PDD, persons with developmental disabilities, as a result of the cuts that were made last year. You know, some of that funding was restored, but not all of it was restored. Once again, that

assumes that everything was working just tickety-boo before the cuts were made, which, to be clear, Mr. Chair, was certainly not the case.

What needs to happen in order to ensure that we do invest in the prosperity of all Albertans, not just a select few, is that we need a budget that amends our revenue side, that looks at fair taxation instead of flat taxation, which simply benefits the very elite few. We need to review that. We need to review the fact that we have a royalty regime that collects less money than any other royalty regime in the world. We need to look at that side of the budget. We are structurally broken in terms of our revenue stream, and the consequence of that is the slow depreciation of the public services that Albertans rely on in order to provide growth, prosperity, and opportunity equally to all Albertans across the board.

With those comments in place, I just feel that I can't vote in favour of Bill 5 because it would appear to endorse a fundamentally broken monetary plan.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak on this.

Mr. Chair, I move to adjourn debate on Bill 5 in Committee of the Whole.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: Hon. Government House Leader, you wish to move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 5?

Mr. Campbell: Yeah. We move to rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, if you'll take your seats, please.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 5.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Having heard the report by the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, does the House concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Motions

Provincial Fiscal Policies

11. Mr. Horner moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate March 11: Mr. Denis]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond to the speech of the Finance minister and President of Treasury Board on the budget.

Mr. Speaker, I expected more, and I think Albertans expected more. We all know that we live in an incredibly prosperous province. Not only do we have resource wealth, but we also have

vibrant, diverse, and growing communities. The opportunities in Alberta are not limited. In fact, they are rich with possibility. In spite of all of this it's disturbing that these doors of possibility are not open to us all. For too many Albertans these doors are shut completely.

We are truly living in a tale of two Albertas. In one Alberta the opportunities are endless and the PC government works hard to open doors for their friends and supporters. It's the best of times to be a Conservative insider. In the other Alberta, where the majority of us live, it is the worst of times to be a middle-class family or to be in need of support and services this government exists to provide. At every turn this PC government has chosen to do what is in their own best interests instead of doing what it could to make the lives of ordinary Albertans just a little easier.

Budget 2014 is no different, so I say again: I expected more. Albertans deserve more. The latest budget is a prime example of how out of touch the government is. This government has continued its attack on everyday Alberta families while making sure the richest Albertans and corporations are well looked after. The budget abandons middle-class and vulnerable citizens. In this PC government the rich get richer. Budget 2014 includes \$150 million of in-kind royalties, which should be paying us for our natural resources, not the other way around. The University of Alberta has specifically asked the minister to reinvest in their infrastructure maintenance program in order to avoid the catastrophic failure of some of their building systems. Instead, the budget allocates \$8.6 million of postsecondary education to corporate subsidies to industry instead of to the institutions themselves.

While mired in expense controversy, the Premier's office's budget sees a \$1-million increase. There's money in the budget to open three new international offices in Brazil, California, and China, which can only mean the creation of more plum and pricey patronage appointments for the PC government's friends. I might just point out, Mr. Speaker, that the capital of Brazil is Brasilia, the main business centre is Sao Paolo, and the main tourist mecca is Rio de Janeiro, and that's where the government is putting its business office. In California the state capital is Sacramento, and the main business centre, of course, is Los Angeles, but they're putting it in scenic San Francisco.

Meanwhile in this PC government's Alberta the middle class gets squeezed. There's no funding for full-day kindergarten, so parents are forced to pay more in child care costs. After threatening for a third time to change the seniors' drug benefit program and having his office occupied as a result, the Minister of Health promised to once again scrap the changes. But this year the program's budget was cut by \$120 million. Despite a \$147-million cut to postsecondary last year, this budget does not provide a sufficient reinvestment in postsecondary education. Our colleges and universities will remain inaccessible to too many students and will remain unnecessarily costly to everyone else. Of the more than a billion dollars the federal government just gave the province specifically for health care, only \$600 million went directly to the health budget. The balance remains unaccounted for.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, this government simply can't be trusted. On February 26 the Minister of Finance gleefully announced that all the fearmongering around the bitumen bubble and the passing of Budget 2013, with a significant operational deficit, was for naught. Resource revenues were up, he said. An operational surplus was guaranteed, he said. So Albertans like myself dared hope that with the extra revenue coming in, Budget 2014 was finally the

time when the PC government would help families and vulnerable citizens. Instead, they've been left behind yet again and will see tough times ahead.

Mr. Speaker, 400,000 Albertans live in poverty. They rely on government services and programs to survive and get the hand up that will take them out of the cycle of poverty. This government was elected on promises to support these vulnerable Albertans, but now, three budgets later, the PC government appears committed to the exact opposite. The government has clearly given up on their promise to eliminate child poverty by 2017 since there's still no strategy, no plan, and no money. Last year Albertans rallied at the Legislature week after week in opposition to enormous cuts to services for persons with developmental disabilities. Instead of learning their lesson, the government cut \$20 million from the program in this budget.

Albertans believe in fairness and hard work. They also believe in accountability, transparency, and responsible spending. Poverty costs \$7 billion a year in increased demands for public services. The most responsible and effective investment in poverty reduction that this government can make is in programs to help low-income families get out of poverty by developing job skills and furthering their education. But what has the government done instead, Mr. Speaker? They've cut up to 50 per cent from the budgets of these proven poverty reduction strategies. It's a shame.

In a fit of spin the government boastfully announced the creation of two new endowment funds in this budget. Now, it may be of some value, but it will also provide cover for the government repeating another conservative government's mistake. The U.K.-tested social impact bonds are a way of encouraging corporations to invest in social programming. Programs that met specific targets were deemed successful, and their investors were paid dividends. The PC government seized the idea of these bonds as the Holy Grail of divesting themselves of their responsibility to fund and provide effective social services. Funding will come from the incentivized private sector, and services will be provided by the eager not-for-profit sector. All the government has to do is sit back and watch.

Mr. Speaker, we can do much better, and we have to. After all, we know that the U.K. experiment has already failed. Putting a price tag on poverty alleviation and promising investors big returns guarantees that only the safe programs – that is, good investments – will be funded. Poverty and the people living in it thereby become a new stock to be traded, bought, and sold. It's disturbing on many levels. Albertans living in poverty do not have the time for the government to reinvent the wheel and try out hare-brained schemes that have failed elsewhere.

The government seems, Mr. Speaker, terribly proud of themselves for keeping their social services budget from expanding to meet the needs of inflation and population growth. How underfunding the needs of a growing province is worth bragging about I do not pretend to understand. It becomes clearer by the day and some days by the hour that this government does not understand the priorities of Albertans. Spending the equivalent of an average public servant's yearly salary on a weekend trip, spending a quarter of that yearly salary on a minister's office redecoration, spending an exorbitant amount of money on severances: that's not what Albertans want. That's not what they voted for. I don't think that Albertans will tolerate it much longer.

Albertans see rising debt and decreasing levels of service, and they are at best confused and at worse very angry. We are not concerned about borrowing funds to finance capital projects. It's the norm in municipal governments and in other provinces in this country. It stretches the financial responsibility to future generations who will benefit from the project. What we need to make

sure we have, Mr. Speaker, is an adequate plan to repay that debt, funds set aside to make sure that that happens, and a cap on the total amount of capital debt that can be incurred. We have not seen any of those things so far.

It's fine to have more schools and modernizations, but school boards have pointed out that those are the schools that we needed yesterday. By the time these schools are built, we'll need another 50. What we're really concerned about is the lack of consultation in deciding infrastructure priorities. The Lethbridge public school board has had Galbraith elementary school at the top of their renovation list for nearly a decade, yet it remains untouched and unsupported by this government.

What we're concerned about is that the building Alberta plan seems to be a no-limit, all-you-can-eat buffet. There's no ceiling for the borrowing needed to complete the plan, and there's no plan to pay down the growing debt. But this government isn't really known as wise stewards of our collective resources. Day after day this government issues press releases claiming to have been elected to, quote, live within our means, yet their entitlement seems to know no bounds.

The 2014 budget lays the groundwork for more wage freezes for public-sector workers. Despite ongoing bargaining with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, and the United Nurses of Alberta, the government has not budgeted for moderate and reasonable changes to the contracts of public-sector workers. It's hard to bargain in good faith when the government has declared their position in the budget. Of course, given their track record, expecting this government to bargain in good faith with their own employees is just expecting too much.

Labour relations in this province are in serious trouble. Not only has the government's non-existent commitment to fair bargaining been called out by the courts, but this PC government also plans to undercut the retirement security of hundreds and thousands of Albertans. The public-sector pension plans are the foundation of nearly 300,000 Albertans' retirement savings. Without offering any clear evidence, this PC government is breaking the promise they made to generations of public employees in claiming a looming crisis for the pension funds, yet financial experts agree that Alberta's public pension funds are among the most stable in North America.

Too many Albertans are worried about retirement security. What is needed more than anything is a major increase in the Canada pension plan. Yet alone among the provinces it's been the government of Alberta that has blocked negotiations at the national level for a major reform of the Canada pension plan. This government is committed not to retirement security for all Albertans and Canadians but exactly the opposite.

It was interesting to read the consultation document that the government prepared based on their consultations ahead of this budget. The government heard the same things that the NDP caucus did when they were touring the province and talking to citizens. We found that Albertans prioritize funding for core services like health care and education and that more than half want to see funding increases for these sectors. So did the government. We found that almost half of Albertans want to see an increase in funding to protect our air, water, and land for future generations, and so did the government. We found that increasing support for seniors, students, and the vulnerable are priorities for Albertans. So, Mr. Speaker, did the government. I would be remiss if I did not point out that these are precisely the priorities of Alberta's New Democrat opposition, yet they are not the priorities of this government as evidenced by Budget 2014.

We think there's a way to make it happen. We just need to get off the revenue roller coaster. With more than 30 per cent of our program funding dependent on fluctuating royalty revenue that is unpredictable and tied to the whims of the global resource market, it's impossible to create and sustain the world-class health care, education, and social services that Albertans expect and deserve. Minor changes to Alberta's corporate tax and royalty system would ensure that our province remains the most competitive place to do business yet would bring in significantly higher revenues that would not be subject to the fluctuations of our royalty resource revenue. Minor changes to Alberta's personal tax system would see everybody pay their fair share, would give a tax break to the middle class, and would make sure that we had significantly more revenue to pay for ongoing program expenditures. All of this can be done and still retain the most competitive tax structure in the entire country.

4:20

But this government isn't interested in doing the job they were elected to do. Instead, they're grasping at any opportunity to download their responsibilities so that they can focus on what they're actually good at, taking care of their friends. Budget 2014 moves the province closer to privatized land titles, privatized lab services, and privatized social services. Mr. Speaker, none of these things are necessary. None of these things are in the public interest. All of them are in the interests of the friends and insiders associated with this long-in-the-tooth PC government.

Mr. Speaker, the entire billion dollars that was provided in additional transfer funding from the federal government should have been allocated to the front line of our health services. Instead, only \$600 million of that billion was allocated to the health system at all. It could have been invested in quality, public long-term care beds for our seniors. It could have been invested in home care. It could have reduced the cost of prescription drugs borne by seniors and low-income Albertans. It could have supported mental health care. It could have been used to address the shortage of health care professionals working in our province. It could have kept lab services public.

That billion dollars could have renovated the Misericordia hospital, which is in dire need of asbestos removal and repairs to elevators, floors, roofs, and plumbing. The minister claims that the money has been spent, but it's totally inadequate.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Yes. The member was about to start talking about how current funding, I believe for the Misericordia, was deeply inadequate, and I would like to hear more about the foundation for that assertion from the member.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Health minister claimed the other day that there is money in the budget allocated for this, but it is a fraction of what is required. There's so much more to be done. I suggest that one of our capital city's hospitals has become the icon of PC neglect. It could have been fixed in the budget, but it wasn't.

Mr. Speaker, while we're living in the tale of two Albertas, Albertans also have the choice of two Albertas before them. Our prosperous province can continue down this road, paved by the conservative choices and priorities of the government and its

disgruntled cousins in the Official Opposition, or our province can choose a new progressive path marked out by hard-working and trustworthy representatives with Alberta values, momentum, and leadership.

The Alberta New Democrats will continue to fight for middle-class families who are squeezed by PC policies and to stand up for vulnerable Albertans who were attacked in this year's budget. We will continue to put forward common-sense solutions to correct the missteps of this PC government. We will remain the champions of everyday Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Are there other speakers to Motion 11? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege to be able to respond to the budget speech that was delivered last week by this long-running PC government. I've been here since 2008 now, and I get the sense that regardless of what the budget is, you tend to hear a speech that trumpets the fiscal competence of this government regardless of the situation, regardless of what the budget says, regardless of what the outside world may comment about our fiscal prudence. A couple of examples of that. We can go back to 2008. Largely, for my course of time here there have been deficit budgets. We've seen year after year the government go through deficits, largely snowing through a contingency account that was at one time \$26 billion, I think.

In this budget we finally get here, and through some new voodoo accounting or changing of the Fiscal Management Act, we come up with – I think even the numbers are fairly clear when it's all said and done – a \$3.9 billion debt or deficit, actually, for this year despite the government's best efforts in saying that, you know, we're in a surplus. I, frankly, question that. We also acknowledge in this budget that by the end of 2017 we will be approximately 21 and a half billion dollars in debt. Is that all?

I guess, you know, despite the evidence of what I've seen in front of me for the last seven years, like I said, we still get these budget speeches that say that things are great here, that we're prudent financial managers, despite all contrary, objective evidence. And that's starting to appear. The rest of the world knows that when the government says it, it reminds them of the story about Pinocchio, to reference what we were discussing earlier.

An Hon. Member: The story.

Mr. Hehr: Yes, the story.

You see it in *The Economist* magazine, where they write that Alberta is a clear example of how not to run an oil and gas economy in terms of saving royalties for future generations and taking a fiscally responsible approach to things, paying for what you use out of taxes that you raise. If the government wants to provide a program, well, my goodness, you'd better tax for it. If you want to keep low taxes, well, then you don't provide the service. It's pretty simple, and it's pretty clear that we have not done that kind of budgeting or accounting. You know, I think people here know full well that there is a difference here in the amount of services we provide and the amount of services that we actually collect taxes for. There's a large spread between those, depending on what the year is, of around \$12 billion. That spread is not changing despite what we see before us in this budget.

What has that led to here? Well, it has not only led to what I see as a compounding debt number, but it has also led to a real inability for us to do what we need to do today to ensure that we

are getting the education system we need for our children, the postsecondary system we need for our young adults, the long-term care system we need for our elderly, and the poverty relief we need for those 400,000 Albertans who are living in that state of existence who we were led to believe in the last election this government was going to start caring about. It's not just all debt. It's got a human cost to it, this budget.

Let's go through the numbers in terms of our education system. Since the time I got here, especially since about 2009-2010, we have started cutting our Education budgets. You can see and the evidence is clear that we have roughly, by some estimates, 51,000 more students in our system, with relatively few teachers added to the system. Any way you cut it, though, the children of today have been shortchanged by this government compared to what other elementary kids and children have gotten before in their education system in dollars allocated to them.

Let's be clear. What else is troubling as a result of our current budgeting? Well, we were promised 50 schools in the last election. I know that the hon. Minister of Infrastructure tries to put on a brave face and says that these schools will be built by 2016, but we all know – at least I know, and maybe the hon. Premier is going to tell me differently – that we will not have one of these 50 new schools that was promised built by the next election.

4:30

I also look at some other things going on in this province that are really having a human capacity issue. We promised to get a handle on child poverty, a real issue. That, I felt, was an excellent promise that was made by this government in the last election. We have not begun to follow through on doing some things that would actually start allowing people to move from that symptom. You know, look at the bill we have today, the social infrastructure bonds. I guess we could say: that's doing something. I'm not so sold on whether it actually is. I think it's a distraction for the government, to allow them to say that they're doing things about child poverty or the like without actually putting government muscle into it.

There are things we could actually be doing here in Alberta. We have the lowest Alberta Works payments of any of the provinces by a country mile. You can go google the statistics. You know, if you're a single mother with a child, you're receiving heart-wrenchingly low income support. That just drives me insane. Look, if we really want to do something about it, let's revamp our Alberta Works system and actually look at what the poor are getting and factor in that Alberta is a high-rent place and that you're simply not able to make it. That would be an actual, tangible issue where you could say: yes, our poor are doing better. Okay? You don't need a social infrastructure bond or something like that to do that. You need to get people a cheque in their hand and say: they're going to live better. That is one mechanism we could do on that front pretty easily.

If we wanted to move young families out of poverty, well, look no farther than developing our daycare spaces, okay? Right now there's a shortage of daycare spaces, and they're costing \$1,700 a month per daycare space for one child in the city of Calgary. If we're looking at it, is that really affordable for most people in the city of Calgary who are wanting to get out and work, to build their lives, to build their families, to get out of poverty? Probably not.

You know, if we really look at systems that may actually move society forward, there are opportunities to do that out in the world. Quebec has moved to a learn-through-play daycare system that, if you do the math, after some government seed money, inside of five to six years is largely revenue neutral. It allows young mothers and families to get out and work and have their children

looked after in a learn-through-play environment that allows them to flourish. In my view, one of the reasons why Quebec seems to be rising in the PISA rankings and Alberta may be going the other way – and there are lots of different reasons for this – is that Quebec is now 15 years into a learn-through-play program, that has given their children an opportunity to learn. I think that piece has really set their society on a course and a trajectory forward on the educational front.

I look at investments like that. That would be substantial if you want to move child poverty, that initiative, forward. That would be real government muscle, going ahead and doing something, not saying that you're going to do something but actually doing something. That's the failure.

We can go down the list. Postsecondary education: you know, we can say that, well, we had to do it, but we cut postsecondary dramatically in the 2013 budget. Was it really flourishing before that? We already, before that cut, had the lowest university participation rate of any province on a per capita basis. So, really, it's not like we were doing exceptionally well there before we whacked that budget by 7 and a half per cent, whatever it was, and whatever we kick back into it simply doesn't even catch up to where it was. It was already underperforming in giving Alberta citizens an opportunity to develop their postsecondary skills.

These are the real, day-to-day opportunities that we've missed out on over the last 10 years. Why did we miss out on them? It's because we simply refused to – yes, you get it – tax people here in this province, guys, and it's not just me saying it. It's your former Finance ministers, from Jim Dinning to Ron Liepert to Ted Morton to Shirley McClellan, who all say: we have a revenue problem. Well, come on, guys. The jig is up. You know what I'm saying. You know, we could have actually done this at some point in time, and that would have allowed us to not only do better today but allowed us to do better tomorrow, okay? Those are two things I cannot countenance us sacrificing on.

The government of the day chose, I think, instead to make a calculation. Instead of solving the elephant in the room, the problem that no one likes to talk about, our revenue streams, they kicked that down the curb. My greatest worry is that we are just going to move into a cycle again where, possibly four, five years down the road here, we in this Legislature – some of us will move on; some of us may be here – will think we're wealthy again. We'll think: "Oh, my goodness, we have all these revenues here. We'll do that project, that project, this project." It'll be like the good old days in 2001 – I think some of you guys were here – when we thought that this would never end, but if we haven't learned by now that this is going to end, I don't know when we will.

My greatest sadness is that because we didn't rectify it here, I don't think we'll get another opportunity. I think that by the time we've figured out, next time, that we're not creating permanent wealth in this province but merely running from problem to problem, false success to false success or the like – that is my true worry. We really could have had an opportunity to fix things. I hear the Wildrose say: we want predictable, sustainable funding. Well, when you guys say that, too, you guys know you can't have it without . . . [Mr. Hehr's speaking time expired] Whatever.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't resist. I would just like to hear what you were about to say about how we can't have sustainable funding because . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Through the chair, hon. member.

Mr. Wilson: When we talk about sustainable funding, Mr. Speaker, just so the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo is clear, what we're referring to is from tax revenue.

Thank you.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I'll make this pretty simple. Right now we have a difference between our tax code and Saskatchewan's. Saskatchewan is the second-lowest tax jurisdiction. If we adopted theirs lock, stock, and barrel, we'd bring in about \$11 billion more in taxes. That says to me that we are roughly \$11 billion undertaxed here, okay? Call me crazy for suggesting that. So we have that gap. We provide roughly the same services to our citizens as the government of Saskatchewan does. We just spend all of it on royalties.

Although the Wildrose has plans on how they're going to limit spending to population growth for now and forever and a day and all that stuff and never do anything besides their 10-year plan to build infrastructure and the like, what you're going to find if – and I stress: if – you get into government is that, simply put, the pressures of the electorate are far too great to limit it to that for very long.

4:40

I'd look at a Premier who thought he probably could do that, the Klein government between '94 and about '97. After that, the pressures of governing became too great. You either have to do some things to – you'll find out that government programs, some of them, actually work, okay? They actually make people's lives better. They actually make things more efficient. Investing in schools and hospitals and policing is what your citizens want. It actually leads to better results in the long term. I think that's what you're going to find out if – and I stress: if – you're going to get to government. And then what happens? Well, because five or six years from now we may be in a position where there is more money available from nonrenewable resource revenue, then that temptation is there.

I realize this tale I'm saying is all about what they've done over the course of the last 42 years. But unless you deal with that predictable, sustainable funding and that gap – you know, you can never get predictable, sustainable funding if your budget consists largely of oil and gas revenues. If we go down to \$75 oil this year, which doesn't look like it's going to happen but if it does, where does the predictable, sustainable funding go next year? It goes out the door for these guys. It goes out the door for you guys. There are just no ifs, ands, or buts about it. So we're kidding ourselves if we want predictable, sustainable funding without actually talking about taxes. You're kidding yourself.

You know, I'm 44 years old. I'm getting too old to kid myself. I'm surprised that many people in this room continue to do so. It's really beyond me. Instead of going out and leading for something better and trying to do something, this government chose not to do that. I'm very disappointed in that because – guess what? – I was hoping they would. I hoped they would solve some problems that they saw out there. They chose not to. I don't know if the next government is going to be afforded a unique opportunity like this to fix the problem. Sometimes governments can only solve problems when a crisis emerges. If the crisis goes away, well, no one will think it's a problem anymore.

Anyway, that's why I don't think it's possible. I think there are actually pressures to governing that are out there. I have a sense

that if we didn't get a handle on it here, we might just be destined to spend it all on one generation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a pleasure, as always.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

There's still some time left if there are others under 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Allen: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this Chamber today to respond to the government's Budget 2014 with, like many Albertans, mixed feelings. In its throne speech a week ago this government affirmed its pledge to work with Albertans, new and old, who desire to build a stronger, modern, better province together. There are funding commitments identified in Budget 2014 that are consistent with the government's theme of building Alberta that will be well received by my constituents and, therefore, merit recognition in my remarks. But there is also a great deal that is missing in this budget that is important not only to the residents of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo but to all Albertans, especially when we acknowledge that as much as 30 per cent of government revenues originate in northeastern Alberta, which is home to no more than 3 per cent of the population.

As I said just two days ago in my response to the throne speech in a phrase that becomes less meaningful only because it's too familiar, the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo is the economic engine of Alberta. I would like to preface my remarks this afternoon with a few statistics that help to illustrate what that actually means rather than being obscured behind the foggy thinking that is encouraged by clichés.

We in Alberta, our ambitions to economic diversification notwithstanding, are for the present tied to the petroleum industry as by far the single largest contributor to our envied prosperity. Oil sands production a decade ago was barely 1 million barrels per day. Production will top 2 million barrels per day for the first time this spring. In another decade projects that have already received regulatory approval will drive production up to more than 3 million barrels of oil per day. Some analysts suggest that Alberta oil sands account for almost 10 per cent of Canada's GDP. Round it up because of the discontinued penny, and 10 cents of every dollar in your pocket is derived from oil sands activity.

The Canadian Energy Research Institute estimates capital investment in Alberta's oil sands over the next 25 years to exceed \$200 billion, equivalent to running the entire province of Alberta for five years under Budget 2014. That investment is estimated by CERI to generate \$350 billion in royalties and \$122 billion in municipal tax revenues across Alberta. This mind-boggling economic activity helps to explain why the region's permanent population has tripled in just over a decade and why there are as many as 60,000 people, many of them flying in and out of Alberta and paying personal income tax in different jurisdictions, who may be living in camp accommodations throughout our region, which is not even mentioned that the total camp accommodations capacity in Wood Buffalo as of this past Christmas reached 90,000.

The province's heavy reliance on oil sands revenues, indeed Canada's reliance on the oil sands is why our governments have become so focused on issues like market access and the bitumen bubble, impediments to our prosperity that must be solved beyond our borders. Oil sands growth is also why, I think, the Premier announced two years ago that the province's focus on capital investment was going to shift to include strategic economic investment to lay the foundations to grow our economy. In many ways the spending in Wood Buffalo announced by the government since

2008 to address accumulated infrastructure deficit of colossal proportion – Fort McMurray had become, after all, the nexus of a global tempest to develop oil sands resources – has enabled my community and, by extension, the expectations of all Albertans only to catch up to 2010, perhaps 2011, and we have just turned the page on the calendar for 2014.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge again this government's commitment to twinning the portion of highway 63 from Grassland to Fort McMurray by 2016. The government first committed to twinning highway 63 nearly a decade ago. This highway is, of course, the singular corridor for the safe movement of goods, services, and people in and out of Wood Buffalo. It's also the primary route for the arrival in Wood Buffalo of almost 5,000 modules, not tractor-trailer units or trucks carrying large loads or dangerous goods but 5,000 modules, required to construct new oil sands facilities over the next five years.

The improvements to highway 63 are essential to improve public safety on one of our province's most busy, most dangerous highways. However, when this government first announced its commitment to fast-track highway 63 in October 2012, it also announced \$350 million for improvements to highway 881 and to study requirements to extend that corridor into the oil sands region across the Clearwater River. That commitment appears to have evaporated as government has grappled with declining revenues and flood recovery.

I want to remind the government, however, that capital investment in Wood Buffalo generates outsized economic return that is distributed among all Albertans in tax and royalty revenues. The public return on private investment in public resources, owned by all Albertans, is 2.5 to 1, and that private investment will be better targeted in partnership with the public sector.

This government is correct when it says that not building is not an option, even as it makes difficult choices about where to spend scarce capital, so it would be childish of me to stamp my feet and say, "You promised" without recognizing that my fellow citizens in southern Alberta suffered through a disaster unprecedented in Canadian history this past summer. Still, the municipal sustainability initiative and GreenTRIP funding are not adequate to deliver transportation infrastructure in Wood Buffalo that will help to grow provincial revenues for all Albertans.

So I repeat my statement from Monday. I strongly encourage this government to embrace the innovation it champions and to explore with stakeholders the alternative delivery and finance instruments being proposed within Wood Buffalo to support the design, construction, and maintenance of new transportation infrastructure essential to our continued prosperity, the very same infrastructure identified in government's unfunded Athabasca CRISP document.

One among the new approaches that has been adopted by the province has been the recent land exchange agreement with the RMWB, that essentially makes the municipality the province's banker. The municipality will provide bridge financing to deliver highway improvements within the city of Fort McMurray that will be repaid through the sale of Crown land to private developers. These improvements are essential in a community of 75,000 residents that had only 40 new home lots for sale last year and two neighbourhoods intended to welcome 40,000 new residents, neither of which can proceed until transportation bottlenecks are removed. This land-for-roads agreement indicates the government is willing to explore its options and the exchange or sharing of assets when required to deliver new infrastructure.

It may well be that the government should not pay for every new road that supports resource extraction, but government must be the enabler of a new way of doing business so that the oil sands

producers, railroads, and other private-sector parties can make meaningful contributions to transportation infrastructure.

4:50

I'm confident that the transportation co-ordinating committee will make recommendations to this government about how to best advance essential transportation projects in Wood Buffalo through new governance and financing instruments. I am hopeful that the province will examine these recommendations carefully and determine how it is possible to ensure that oil sands companies meet their socioeconomic obligations in a way that ensures increased revenues, manageable population growth, and appropriate quality-of-life improvements for Wood Buffalo residents.

I'm also pleased to have seen in Budget 2014 that the province has reaffirmed its commitment to completing the Parsons Creek interchange, which will enable residential development in the second of Fort McMurray's two stalled neighbourhoods to resume. It's absurd to think that the fastest growing community in Alberta has been prohibited from welcoming any more than a hundred net new residents for nearly two years because there were no lots available in the entire city on which to build new houses. That impasse has been broken by a willingness to do different, and I hope that the province will bring the same courage, for which the residents of Wood Buffalo have waited, to bear on other issues that will require courage to resolve.

The next phase of the Parsons Creek interchange is to build another crossing across the Athabasca, link that road to the crossing of the Clearwater to the east, and extend that road as the beginning of a link to Peace River to the west. That project, again, will be best completed by bringing creativity and innovation to the table to find solutions to the regional transportation network with all the players in the region.

Fort McMurray has also been well served by commitments from this government to build new schools and to renovate existing schools to accommodate new students arising from a 7 per cent annual population growth. Students speak up to 120 different first languages in Fort McMurray schools, making this northern city one of the most diverse urban areas in Canada. Parents, schoolchildren, and the public and separate school boards are grateful for the commitment of the province in providing suitable school facilities.

My constituents will also appreciate the commitment of funding to address flood impacts and mitigation efforts for our downtown schools, which are the flood plain at the confluence of the Clearwater, Athabasca, Horse, and Hangingstone rivers.

But, speaking of schools, not all is rosy on the education front in Wood Buffalo. When the province removed the mitigation measures in place for the education property tax, it failed to understand something unique about Fort McMurray. The average three-bedroom, single-family home in Fort McMurray is roughly half again as much as the same home would cost in Calgary and twice what it would cost in Edmonton. An ordinary new three-bedroom home lists for just over \$1 million. When the government went to strict market assessment for education property taxes, it imposed a 40 per cent tax hike and again this year on my constituents, hard-working families who already pay more for their housing than anyone else in Canada.

My constituents do not object to paying their fair share, but they do object to the effective doubling of their education property taxes in just over two years, especially those long-term residents on fixed incomes or those who work in the service sector or who otherwise do not work in high-paying, oil sands related jobs.

I've asked in the past that the full market value assessments be phased in over five years, and I ask the government again to

respect the hardship borne by people who already pay more for their housing than anyone else in the country. Two years is too quick; five years would enable folks to manage the transition more favourably.

I said just last Monday that Fort McMurray was one of the two communities identified in August as deserving special consideration to maintain its downtown development in a potential floodway. The throne speech said that the government would make firm the commitment to build community mitigation projects in flood-affected communities. The Wood Buffalo regional council has already introduced measures to protect Fort McMurray that will cost approximately \$160 million in order to comply with the government's 1-in-100-year flood requirements.

Budget 2014 says nothing about flood mitigation for Fort McMurray, and I'm simply putting this government on notice that it should anticipate a firm position from the regional municipality, which is committed to meeting provincially imposed requirements without provincially provided assistance. I am certain that was merely an oversight as the government concentrated its attention on communities that were more drastically affected by June's floods. But given that Fort McMurray and Drumheller alone among provincial towns and cities were recognized as deserving special consideration, it is my expectation that the province will help to defray flood mitigation expenses and not expect the municipality to foot the bill alone.

Government also committed to investing in better seniors' care, focusing on aging-in-place developments. As members of this Assembly are well aware, Fort McMurray has long been advocating, for more than a decade, for its first long-term care facility, the only such facility in a community of 75,000 people, which, if it were available, would free an entire floor of our critical care hospital. I know that Alberta Health, Alberta Infrastructure, and Alberta Municipal Affairs are all in discussion with the regional municipality to bring this vision to fruition using money committed from last year's budget, and this includes not just long-term care but the full spectrum of aging-in-place accommodations for those Albertans who helped to convert the oil sands from Canada's largest research and development project to the engine of its economy and who are now entering the sunset of their lives. I urge this government to bring these negotiations with both the local and federal governments to a rapid close and to break ground on this long-overdue facility in the current calendar year.

Back in 2010 the province took 20 townships from Wood Buffalo and gave them to Lac La Biche as compensation for oil revenues from the Cold Lake air weapons range being captured in the new improvement district that would be awarded primarily to the city of Cold Lake. An \$80 million net solution to a \$10 million problem has been a boon to Cold Lake and Lac La Biche but has left Wood Buffalo with substantial lost revenues. When the proposal was first floated by the province, it was supposed to involve sharing those revenues among all the affected parties. Instead, Wood Buffalo was stripped of up to \$60 million in annual tax revenues, more than \$1 billion over the life of the oil sands projects, in the lands transferred to Lac La Biche, without compensation. The order in council is up for renewal in 2014. At the very least, the government of Alberta needs to re-examine this arrangement and restructure growing revenues so that Wood Buffalo, too, is a beneficiary.

This province has weathered more than one storm since the global economic downturn in 2008. Alberta remains the best place to live, work, learn, and play. That is due in part to our rich natural resources but also to the wisdom of past leaders who built this province. I look forward to working with this government over the

next year to help it understand where it has missed opportunities and how to best correct its oversights so that the wise choices we make today will be recognized by future generations in 20, 30, or a hundred years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and with that, I would like to move to adjourn debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 1 Savings Management Act (continued)

[Adjourned debate March 12: Mr. Horner]

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

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to finally be able to get up to speak to this bill, having had a bit of confusion around stuff and not being able to speak to it prior to now. I will as part of it talk a little bit about the amendments that we had hoped to bring to this bill in an effort to make it slightly more palatable.

Bill 1, you know, appears to be what the government thinks is a flagship bill to begin this latest session, and to that extent I think it's really a rather disappointing outing and represents a disappointing foray into defining the future direction of the government. It represents a transfer of money from the heritage trust fund into a number of different accounts that may or may not be spent. We can't really tell because there's very, very little direction about what is going to come from this bill.

There are a couple of critical areas that I'm very concerned about. The first one – I'll just touch on it briefly – is the plan to create this Alberta future fund, so \$200 million just this year and then another \$200 million every year till 2024. Now, I realize that these guys have been in government for a long time, and when you look at the cost of their expenses and the fact that they've been here for 45 years, I suppose it makes sense at a certain point that they stop getting how much this money is actually worth. But this idea of putting aside \$200 million a year for a fund so we can, quote, maybe do something cool, end quote, in the future – and that was a direct quote from the Deputy Premier – is really a little outrageous, Mr. Speaker.

5:00

The Finance minister said previously, in introducing this bill in third reading, that Albertans want to know what we're saving for, but you know, I just really think that \$200 million a year for the next 10 years for, quote, something really cool, end quote, doesn't actually meet that standard, Mr. Speaker, and I don't think that it's going to give Albertans great comfort. Moreover, given the inability of members of this government to distinguish between their public duty and obligations and their political duties and obligations and, in particular, the ongoing mixture of their political expenses with their governance expenses, I am deeply concerned that what this fund really is is an election slush fund. It's an election slush fund that's being used with a historic and iconic savings account that almost all Albertans have grown to respect.

You know, I don't want to spend a lot of time on it, but another resource-driven country in the world, that's been producing oil

and gas for about half the time that we have, has something like 25 times the amount of money in their savings fund as a result of their much more intentional management of their natural resources, understanding that that management is to be done for the best interests of their citizens rather than for the best interests of those developing the oil and gas resources. So it's always been the case that you look at the heritage trust fund and it's quite disappointing in terms of how small it is relative to how big it could be, but now we see that we're going to skim money off it to create cute little election slush funds, and that is worrisome.

The other item that I want to spend a little bit more time talking about, though, of course, is the social endowment fund. Now, I will say that the idea of setting aside the fund to the extent that parts of it can be used to support research into best practices and to support research into design and implementation of innovative interventions is good stuff, Mr. Speaker. I don't have a problem with that, and I know that many people within the postsecondary sector have advocated for this as a means to increase the quality and the research opportunities for people in the arts sector as a whole in our postsecondary institutions. To the extent that this money ends up going to that, that's a good thing. I, of course, am tremendously skeptical that the money will go to that because, you know, I don't know that these guys feel anything is worthwhile unless there is some oil company at the end of the financial trail receiving a cheque. I would really want to see that part of it overseen with much more caution and rigour.

The other piece of it that I am deeply concerned about is this notion of social impact bonds, and as the critic for Human Services I really, really believe that we need to have a much more intelligent conversation about this ridiculous strategy. Now, the Finance minister at one point said: oh, well, don't worry about it; it's not like these social impact bonds will be instead of our current funding; we're going to maintain our current funding. But I think the starting point, Mr. Speaker, is that our current funding is grossly, grossly inadequate. Let's just start there. We don't have enough funding. The problem now is that as advocates, people who want to build this province and build opportunity in this province and reduce inequality in this province and expand the quality of life for all Albertans, push for more investment into the kinds of programs that will achieve that object, this government is going to say: "Oh, no. Well, we have our social impact bonds, and we're paying business a premium of 10 to 20 per cent for them to invest in so-called innovative practices."

You know, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that this is just an incredibly unproven strategy with almost no record of success anywhere. What we do know is that it transfers money from the public sector to the private sector and that it rewards the private sector for investing in social problems that this government has failed to invest in adequately to eliminate. That is what we do know.

There is almost no successful example of a social impact bond anywhere else in the world, and there are a number of different reasons for this, Mr. Speaker. Partly, what we're doing is that we are increasing the administrative costs, and we are increasing the complexity, and we are increasing the administrative burden on the very nonprofit organizations that are theoretically trying to achieve these objects. That's the first thing we're doing. We are injecting inefficiency into the provision of social services and social development strategies within our province. So that's the first thing that we're going to do. We're injecting cost into it because we are going to fracture it and have an increasingly patchwork system, and in so doing, of course, we're going to once again reduce efficiency and increase cost.

We are also undermining the quality of the work that will be achieved by ensuring that the object is not actually the best interests of the people receiving the benefits of these programs. The object will be the best interests of the investors. In doing that, we also ensure that we've injected another criterion, another standard, another process which will reduce the effectiveness and the efficiency and the outcome in this overall sector, and let me tell you that this is a sector that desperately needs attention because inequality is growing daily in this province. These guys like to think: oh, yeah, it's growing daily because our rich friends are getting richer. You know what? That's not exactly it. The purchasing power and the actual economic quality of life of regular Albertans is decreasing as well as time marches on.

For the social impact bonds we've got some really kind of scary examples. We've got the New York City Rikers Island social impact bond, where Goldman Sachs invested in a project. As it turned out, the nonprofit itself had to guarantee \$7.2 million of that \$9.6 million, and then if the project actually works, the government is going to give them a 20 per cent return. Why are we paying a 20 per cent premium, or why would we even consider that that was a good idea? It just makes no sense across the board.

I'm overwhelmed by the absurdity of this particular policy choice that these guys are embarking upon, and it really reveals that, you know, it's all about giving money to friends and insiders. It's just: let's find another way to give money to friends and insiders. Let's make sure that there's an opportunity to maximize profiteering on the backs of Alberta's most vulnerable citizens.

Now, there is this notion that: "Oh, well, you know, if we bring the private sector in there, they're the really super innovative ones. Woo-hoo. They're innovative and the government is not innovative." Well, you know what? If you look at the history of social development programs over the years, the innovation actually comes from publicly funded universities, it comes from the public sector, and it comes from nonprofits. There's no history of innovation from the private sector in this area, none at all. Again, it's not evidence based. Those folks over there are constantly accusing us of being ideological. This is one of the most ideologically driven, idiotic initiatives that I have seen come from that side in a long, long time, and it's not going to make things better for the very Albertans that need it most.

Now, will it generate innovation? Well, here's the other thing. Investors are not stupid. They're not going to invest in high-risk stuff. No. They're going to cream the easy stuff off the top. You know what? It doesn't take Goldman Sachs to tell us that if you provide counselling and mentoring and job search assistance to somebody coming out of prison, they're less likely to reoffend. Okay? You don't need Goldman Sachs to tell you that that's going to happen, because the research is out there. What you need to do is just as efficiently as possible provide that service. Why would you then ask Goldman Sachs to do it and give them a 20 per cent return on it? It's just the most silly thing that I've ever heard of.

5:10

Then what's going to end up happening is that you're going to fracture things. You're going to carve off the easy stuff that we all know is easy to do – and the only reason it's not happening more is because these guys have slashed funding – and then you're going to leave the really tough stuff in the public system. Then the public system itself is going to be fractured away from these other services, and they're not going to have flexibility to devote the resources that are necessary, so the really challenging groups of people are going to grow and grow and develop and become a bigger cost.

Anyone who has ever done any work on this topic concludes that it is not a good idea. Interestingly, I think it was Hawaii that actually passed legislation to prohibit social impact bonds. They said: “You know what? We’ve done the research, and this is just too uncertain. It’s not a good deal for anybody, and we’re just not going to go there.” Apparently, these folks haven’t done that.

We planned to bring in two different amendments, Mr. Speaker. One of them would have replaced one of the recitals in the beginning of the act. What we would have done is that we would have replaced one of the recitals with a different one that says: whereas Albertans recognize that innovative social services originate from government initiatives, nonprofit organizations, and publicly funded research rather than a motivation for private profit.

Mr. Wilson: It’s the Savings Management Act.

Ms Notley: I know it’s the Savings Management Act. I’m just looking for the actual copy of the act so that I can identify the recital that we would have replaced.

What it currently says is, “Whereas these opportunities should build on the existing innovation system to support new ideas, risk-sharing and creative collaboration across sectors.” We were going to replace that with what I just recited. We were going to do that in order to make it clear that that’s where our limited resources should be going in order to get the greatest outcome.

The other thing that we were going to do was that we were going to strike out section 2(1)(a)(iii). That section of the act outlines that one of the purposes of this particular endowment was to develop new funding models and partnerships. That was one of the purposes of the social innovation endowment. You know what? We were just going to strike that out because we don’t need to waste time finding ways to give McDonald’s or Walmart, of all people, an opportunity to invest in and make money off poverty. It just makes no sense. We thought that that was something we should just ensure couldn’t possibly happen.

If we could have gotten members of this Legislature to agree to that, then we might have been able to provide a great deal more support to the objects of this social endowment fund, but as long as we’re looking at taking heritage trust fund money, which, as I said before, is an iconic savings plan, which Albertans over the years have contributed to through their tax dollars and through forgoing other public services and all those other things, as long as we’re planning on taking that money and using it to find ways to invite Walmart and McDonald’s and anyone else to the table so they can make money off high-risk youth and poor families and those kinds of people, then we can’t support it, so it needs to be removed. Those were the two amendments that we were planning on bringing forward yesterday had the matter carried on into the evening as we had expected it would.

Meanwhile, just sort of going back into a little bit more detail, one of the few examples of a social impact bond that’s actually been implemented, which had sort of limited success, was the Peterborough, U.K., prison project. One of the reviews of that project afterwards concluded that the process was “time-consuming and analytically complex.”

In addition, what has also been identified, as I said before, is that these nonprofits end up having to hire people to act as fundraisers and salespeople. So they can start running around to all these businesses saying: “Hey, we’ve got a quick way for you to make 10 or 15 per cent on your investment. We’ve found some really keen kids who just happened to get in trouble with the law, but they’ve all agreed to volunteer in this program, and we’re pretty sure they’re not going to reoffend. So, hey, why don’t you give us money for that, and once you do, eventually the govern-

ment is going to give you back that money plus 10 or 20 per cent out of the heritage trust fund.” What a great plan.

But how much money have we actually saved? Well, probably none. What we’ve done is that we’ve just lost that money, and we’ve given McDonald’s or Walmart the opportunity to make money. Meanwhile, instead of actually working on the programs that would bring about the reduction in poverty or high-risk behaviour or whatever it is that you’re working on, the nonprofit organization has hired somebody who does that job, who does the pitching, who’s the salesman, who’s the used car dealer running out there trying to pitch these programs to funders. That’s what they’re spending their time doing. Then they have to go out and hire legal counsel and financial advisers to assist them with the management of their bonds. Then after that the government itself has to regulate these organizations that are making these offers to investors because if they don’t, they’ll probably be found liable for any loss of investment dollars. So it really makes no sense.

I think, ultimately, though, what is probably the most compelling piece of this is the position taken by the Alberta College of Social Workers, which is simply that it is immoral for people to be making money off human suffering. Human suffering should not be turned into a commodity, and that’s what social impact bonds do. We don’t think anyone should be allowed to profit from the misery of others, and we certainly don’t think that anyone should be allowed to profit by skimming the somewhat easy problems to solve off the process and then subsequently leaving the challenging problems with fewer resources and less capacity to fix the problem. Just like this government wants Syncrude in our classrooms – because we all know our five-year-olds are there looking for a job right now – this is a continuation of the same approach.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: I move to adjourn debate on Bill 1.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

5:20 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

Bill 5 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014 (continued)

The Chair: Hon. members, are there any comments or questions to be offered? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: I’m just pulling my thoughts together here, Mr. Chair, but thank you for the opportunity. I’ll keep this fairly brief. This is the interim supply, right?

My comments really, again, speak to the fund allocations and how this budget is continuing on the narrative of the tale of two Albertas, where there are rules and dollars for some Albertans, which, ironically, turn out to be mostly the supporters of the current government. Then, you know, there’s reality for those that aren’t, the rest of Albertans, including and especially those that are squeezed, I would argue, in the middle and even in the lower socioeconomic bracket.

I think what’s important to point out for myself, Mr. Chairman, and on behalf of, I think, many Albertans is that this current government is out of touch with the priorities of Albertans. One

need look no further than the fact that our Education budget barely accounts for the increase in student enrolment, yet still, you know, school boards, classrooms, teachers, and principals around the province are calling out for more dollars to be able to lower class sizes, to bring in necessary resources, whether it's staff training to be able to accommodate today's classroom and its makeup.

You know, from that to postsecondary, still reeling from the cuts from last year's budget, to the fact that we've got an increasing number of seniors that are waiting for long-term care facilities, for beds – that backlogs our health system because there is a shortage. They're tying up beds that are much needed in our hospitals. You know, Mr. Chair, that's really just the tip of the iceberg as far as where we're at.

I think, you know, that the message really comes back to the fact that this PC government refuses to look at the other side of the coin when we're talking budgets, and that, of course, is looking at revenue. I can appreciate Alberta being a very competitive jurisdiction, whether we're talking about royalties or taxes, but what I do find frustrating – and most Albertans understand – is that there's quite a bit of room between where we currently are and where we could go and still remain the most competitive jurisdiction but bring in billions of dollars into our revenue, additionally, to ensure that our classrooms are supported, our health care is supported, supported above and beyond just the capital or the facilities. Of course, as I pointed out numerous times, this government loves to open up shiny new buildings and then walk away when it comes to the operational side or ensuring that there are staff to operate it or, in the example of schools, ensuring that there are enough staff in our schools to deliver the high-quality education that Albertans have come to expect. I would argue that our front-line staff are doing a phenomenal job, but there's no wonder why many of them are overworked, are being, you know, pushed out of the system. It's simply becoming unbearable.

I would like to have seen, again, this government address the revenue side of the budget coin. There are some real, concrete solutions that would ensure that we have dollars not just for today but for tomorrow, that we'd be able to grow our heritage savings fund at a much greater pace as compared to many other jurisdictions and, obviously, invest in infrastructure, which is sorely overdue for maintenance. You know, we need look no further than the fact that – four decades of the same government in power, and they've starved our infrastructure to the point where much of it is crumbling. We don't even know the integrity of some of our buildings province-wide. It would have been much wiser to invest over the last 20 years in our infrastructure as opposed to the predicament we're now in. Look no further than the condition of the Misericordia hospital in Edmonton or other hospitals province-wide that need a complete overhaul.

You know, Mr. Chair, there are lots of solutions, available solutions, again, of addressing moving our personal income tax to a progressive system, which would generate more dollars. Again, it needs to be reiterated that it would save our middle-income earners, our middle-income households dollars. I know the leader of the Alberta NDP, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, has repeatedly given figures on household incomes that are around \$100,000, \$120,000 and how much more taxes that household pays in Alberta under the flat tax versus living in provinces like B.C. or Ontario, where there are progressive income tax systems but where they would actually pay less in taxes and save more money.

Looking at, again, our corporate income tax rate, where corporations are taxed on their profits, not if they're, you know, a

fledging business that is at a loss, unnecessarily dropping – years ago this government dropped it from 15 to 10. This is ideology, Mr. Chair. If, in fact, Alberta was tied for the lowest corporate tax rate in Canada, which we are, if that was the sole driver of where companies set up shop, then, really, the rest of the provinces minus one other province shouldn't have any industry or corporations operating inside of their boundaries. But the reality is that they do, and they pay higher taxes than other provinces. They're still there. They're not running for the hills. Again, it adds more dollars to the revenue.

Really, at the end of the day, Mr. Chair, we're talking about ensuring that there is stable, predictable funding for infrastructure, for the priorities that Albertans have expressed. I can tell you that as long as we continue to heavily rely on our revenue from oil and gas, because it fluctuates so much in the market, it seems absurd to bet on a roller coaster – one year you're doing well, and the next year you're not – and really break that down into month by month as opposed to stable, predictable funding. School boards have been asking for it in schools. Our health care system is looking for it. Municipalities are dying to have stable, predictable funding to be able to manage their plans and their growth. Again, I think that this is another example of an opportunity missed.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to express my views.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others?

An Hon. Member: Question.

The Chair: Seeing none, the question has been called.

[The clauses of Bill 5 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 4 Estate Administration Act

The Chair: Are there questions or comments to be offered?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: Seeing none, the question has been called.

[The clauses of Bill 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Chair, I'd like to rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

5:30

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 5 and Bill 4.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Having heard the report from the hon. Member for Calgary-East, does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Due to the agreement between the House leaders I'd like to request unanimous consent of the House to waive Standing Order 64(2) to proceed to third reading of Bill 5.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 5

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it is certainly my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 5, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance has moved third reading of Bill 5, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2014.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a third time]

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn the House till 7:30.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:32 p.m.]

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