



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 23, 2014

Issue 22a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Speaker
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont (PC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Allen, Mike, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (Ind)
Amery, Moe, Calgary-East (PC)
Anderson, Rob, Airdrie (W),
 Official Opposition House Leader
Anglin, Joe, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bhardwaj, Hon. Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)
Bhullar, Hon. Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Bikman, Gary, Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND)
Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (AL),
 Liberal Opposition House Leader
Brown, Dr. Neil, QC, Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (PC)
Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)
Campbell, Hon. Robin, West Yellowhead (PC),
 Government House Leader
Cao, Wayne C.N., Calgary-Fort (PC)
Casey, Ron, Banff-Cochrane (PC)
Cusanelli, Christine, Calgary-Currie (PC)
Dallas, Hon. Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)
Denis, Hon. Jonathan, QC, Calgary-Acadia (PC),
 Deputy Government House Leader
Donovan, Ian, Little Bow (W)
Dorward, David C., Edmonton-Gold Bar (PC),
 Deputy Government Whip
Drysdale, Hon. Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-Calder (ND),
 New Democrat Opposition Whip
Fawcett, Hon. Kyle, Calgary-Klein (PC)
Fenske, Jacquie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC)
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W)
Fox, Rodney M., Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Fraser, Hon. Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Fritz, Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC)
Goudreau, Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (PC)
Griffiths, Hon. Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC)
Hale, Jason W., Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC),
 Premier
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL)
Horne, Hon. Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (PC)
Horner, Hon. Doug, Spruce Grove-St. Albert (PC)
Hughes, Ken, Calgary-West (PC)
Jansen, Hon. Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)
Jeneroux, Matt, Edmonton-South West (PC)
Johnson, Hon. Jeff, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (PC)
Johnson, Linda, Calgary-Glenmore (PC)
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (AL),
 Liberal Opposition Whip
Kennedy-Glans, Donna, QC, Calgary-Varsity (Ind)
Khan, Stephen, St. Albert (PC)
Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC)
Kubinec, Maureen, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (PC)
Lemke, Ken, Stony Plain (PC)
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Luan, Jason, Calgary-Hawkwood (PC)
Lukaszuk, Hon. Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
 Leader of the New Democrat Opposition
McAllister, Bruce, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
McDonald, Everett, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC)
McQueen, Hon. Diana, Drayton Valley-Devon (PC)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
 New Democrat Opposition House Leader
Oberle, Hon. Frank, Peace River (PC),
 Deputy Government House Leader
Olesen, Cathy, Sherwood Park (PC)
Olson, Hon. Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC),
 Deputy Government House Leader
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (PC)
Pedersen, Blake, Medicine Hat (W)
Quadri, Sohail, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)
Quest, Hon. Dave, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (PC)
Redford, Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC)
Rodney, Hon. Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rowe, Bruce, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC)
Saskiw, Shayne, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
 Official Opposition Whip
Scott, Hon. Donald, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (PC)
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (AL),
 Leader of the Liberal Opposition
Smith, Danielle, Highwood (W),
 Leader of the Official Opposition
Starke, Hon. Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Towle, Kerry, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W),
 Official Opposition Deputy Whip
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (PC),
 Government Whip
Weadick, Hon. Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (Ind)
Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (W),
 Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 58 Wildrose: 17 Alberta Liberal: 5 New Democrat: 4 Independent: 3

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

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

Executive Council

Dave Hancock	Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education
Naresh Bhardwaj	Associate Minister – Services for Persons with Disabilities
Manmeet Singh Bhullar	Minister of Human Services
Robin Campbell	Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development
Cal Dallas	Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations
Jonathan Denis	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Wayne Drysdale	Minister of Transportation
Kyle Fawcett	Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for Southwest Alberta
Rick Fraser	Associate Minister – Public Safety Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for High River
Doug Griffiths	Minister of Service Alberta
Fred Horne	Minister of Health
Doug Horner	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Sandra Jansen	Associate Minister – Family and Community Safety
Jeff Johnson	Minister of Education, Ministerial Liaison to the Canadian Forces
Heather Klimchuk	Minister of Culture
Thomas Lukaszuk	Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour
Ric McIver	Minister of Infrastructure
Diana McQueen	Minister of Energy
Frank Oberle	Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Verlyn Olson	Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
Dave Quest	Associate Minister – Seniors
Dave Rodney	Associate Minister – Wellness
Donald Scott	Associate Minister – Accountability, Transparency and Transformation
Richard Starke	Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation
Greg Weadick	Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for Southeast Alberta
Teresa Woo-Paw	Associate Minister – International and Intergovernmental Relations

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Amery

Deputy Chair: Mr. Fox

Dorward	Pastoor
Eggen	Quadri
Hehr	Rogers
Kubinec	Rowe
Lemke	Sarich
Luan	Stier
McDonald	

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Casey

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Jablonski

Amery	Khan
Barnes	Sandhu
Dorward	Sherman
Eggen	

Select Special Ethics Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Rogers

Deputy Chair: Mr. Quadri

Blakeman	Leskiw
Eggen	McDonald
Goudreau	Saskiw
Lemke	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Olesen

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Forsyth

Cusanelli	McAllister
DeLong	Notley
Fenske	Pedersen
Fritz	Sandhu
Jablonski	Swann
Jeneroux	VanderBurg
Leskiw	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Jeneroux

Deputy Chair: Mr. McDonald

Bikman	Leskiw
Blakeman	Quadri
Brown	Wilson
DeLong	Young
Eggen	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Zwozdesky

Deputy Chair: Mr. VanderBurg

Casey	Mason
Forsyth	McDonald
Fritz	Sherman
Johnson, L.	Towle
Kubinec	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Mr. Xiao

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Leskiw

Allen	Notley
Brown	Olesen
Cusanelli	Rowe
DeLong	Stier
Fenske	Strankman
Fritz	Swann
Jablonski	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Kubinec

Deputy Chair: Mr. Rogers

Calahasen	Pastoor
Casey	Pedersen
Kang	Saskiw
Khan	VanderBurg
Luan	Wilson
Notley	Young
Olesen	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Anderson

Deputy Chair: Mr. Dorward

Allen	Khan
Amery	Luan
Barnes	Pastoor
Bilous	Sandhu
Donovan	Sarich
Fenske	Young
Hehr	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Khan

Deputy Chair: Mr. Anglin

Allen	Goudreau
Bikman	Hale
Bilous	Johnson, L.
Blakeman	Webber
Brown	Xiao
Calahasen	Young
Casey	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 23, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. Let us be thankful for the opportunity given to us to meet daily in this Assembly for the service to others, and let us be mindful of the obligations we all have in that regard. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups, starting with Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you members from my constituency of Grande Prairie-Smoky. These members are from the Ridgevalley school. Accompanying these members today is Edi Harden, the schoolteacher. They are seated in the public gallery today. I'll ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly 51 grade 6 students, the brightest and the sharpest kids from Greenview school in my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. They are accompanied by their teachers, Mme Cheri Krywko and Angela Sharun, and parent helpers Heather Pitts, Chrisaline Wiens, Terri Cuthill, Susan McFarlane, Terri White, Cathy Doty, Lisa Headrick, Rosalind Clarke, Patti Fersovitch, and Charlene Greenwood. I will request that you please all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Strathmore-Brooks, I understand your guests are not here yet.

Let's go on to Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I get to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 47 students and parents and teachers from one of my favourite schools, Terrace Ridge, in Lacombe, Alberta. These incredibly bright students are accompanied by their teachers, Pat Jenkins and Mr. Brent Buchanan, and parent helpers Mr. Blair Andrew, Ms Weady Sanders, Mrs. Helga Reiner, Ms Jamie Nichols, Mrs. Verna Bawtenheimer, and Ms Wanda Guske. I would ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other school groups or youth to be introduced?

If not, let us move on with other important guests, starting with the Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure today to introduce 10 guests who are here seated in your gallery. Nine of them are the 2013 Daughters Day award recipients, and they're accompanied by the Daughters Day chairperson. Daughters Day is the initiative of the International Association of Citizens

for a Civil Society, a registered not-for-profit society in Alberta supported by more than 40 diverse community organizations. Daughters Day celebrates the lives and contributions and achievements of daughters. With us today is the cofounder of Daughters Day and its current chairperson, Charan Khehra. Now, I might say with some note that I had the pleasure and privilege of running in an election against Charan several elections ago. As is the case in Edmonton-Whitemud, it's always a friendly affair, and after the affair is over, we get to work together in the best interests of the community.

With him today are the 2013 Daughters Day award recipients: Rebecca Fitzsimmons, who opened a licensed preschool in Savanna and is implementing the food for thought school breakfast nutrition program; April Lam, a gifted young athlete representing Alberta in the 2013 Canada Summer Games and in the 2014 national Special Olympics in swimming; Shawnay McRorie, a recipient of the John Humphrey youth human rights award, committed to working with young children and adults living with disabilities; Christina Nsaliwa, a strong advocate of human services and inspirational mentor for women; Andrea Payne and Corissa Tymafichuk, grade 11 students from Paul Kane high school in St. Albert with a lifetime mission to help survivors of human trafficking and who organized a city-wide community walk, raising \$5,000; Laura Smith, an ESL instructor, motivated and instructed over 600 individuals, improving their level of proficiency in English; Linda Winski, a social justice advocate, opened her home to the community, providing friendship, hospitality, prayer, and a listening ear; and April Wiberg, a proud member of the Mikisew Cree First Nation and a founding member of Edmonton Stolen Sisters Awareness Walk, was not able to join us today.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask all of my Legislature colleagues to honour the presence of these award winners with the usual warm welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you, and welcome.

The Associate Minister – International and Intergovernmental Relations, followed by Edmonton-Decore.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this House a constituent of mine from Calgary-Northern Hills, Lawrence Connell, who has travelled here to visit the Legislature and observe question period. Lawrence has served our province as a registered nurse for 35 years and has worked in corrections as well as for various regional and provincial health authorities since 1985. Lawrence is also on the board of directors for the Calgary Workers' Resource Centre, a nonprofit organization that helps Calgaryans understand and access their rights under various employment legislations. He is seated in the members' gallery, and I ask that he please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour and privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Alberta Legislature representatives from the Edmonton Chinese Bilingual Education Association, here in recognition of their role in over 30 years of promoting and supporting Mandarin language programming through the Edmonton public school system. Also attending are grade 6 Mandarin language students from Kildare elementary school accompanied by their teacher. My guests are seated in the members' gallery, and I would now ask them to please rise as I mention their names.

I would like to welcome from the Edmonton Chinese Bilingual Education Association board of directors Mr. Stephen Tsang, president and parent of an alumni from Edmonton public schools' Chinese bilingual program and has a child enrolled at Parkview school; Ms Angie Loo, vice-president and parent of children enrolled at Kildare elementary school and Londonderry junior high school; Mr. John Yee, past president, involved since 1997, and parent of alumni from the program; Mr. Wei Wong, past president, involved since 1988, and parent of alumni from the program; Mr. Peter Wong, who sends his regrets, past president, involved since 1989, and parent of alumni from the program. The grade 6 Kildare elementary school representatives include teacher Ms Remina Chen and students Henry Chiem, Jessica Fang, Bowei Huang, and with regret Vienna Chen could not join the group today. I would now ask that the Assembly please honour all my guests with the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the Associate Minister – Seniors.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly board members of the Olde Towne Beverly Historical Society. The Olde Towne Beverly Historical Society was formed in 2005 to preserve the history of the town of Beverly, Alberta. The society began when members published their first book on Beverly's early years, *Built on Coal*, in the year 2000. Today the society engages in numerous activities to promote and share Beverly's history. The society runs annual pancake breakfasts, historical carriage rides, a pop-up interpretive centre, and social events. I'd like to highlight their exceptional efforts to offer educational school programs to teach local students about Beverly's coal-mining history. The society is hard at work planning community events for Beverly's 100th anniversary. I will ask my guests to rise as I call their names and remain standing: President Dan Vriend, Amanda Harriman-Gotjan, Edie Boonstra, Alene Carter, Bertha Pisarchuk, Ray Loga, Darlene Schlotter, John Henker, and Zenovia Rockwell. Please join me in giving them the warm traditional welcome.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister – Seniors, followed by Calgary-West.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two guests who join us today to watch the House proceedings. First is Tammy Leach. Tammy is the executive director of the Alberta Continuing Care Association, which is a nonprofit, voluntary organization representing the providers of continuing care services in Alberta. The Alberta Continuing Care Association collaborates with other associations and organizations in Alberta and across Canada to share information, ideas, and resources. Joining Tammy is her nephew Jonathan Moore, who is visiting here from Strathmore and has a keen interest in politics. I know he was very excited to join us today. Tammy and Jonathan are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they both rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Kathleen Hamnett, a constituent of Calgary-West. Kathleen is the

vice-president of local 115 of the United Nurses of Alberta. As you know, there are 26,000 members in the United Nurses of Alberta, who together with the 100,000 Albertans who are part of the health care delivery service in this province do exceptional work day in, day out on behalf of all Albertans. Kathleen is seated in the members' gallery, and I ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, you have two minutes each for these statements. Let's start with the Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Provincial Election Anniversary

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been exactly two years since the last provincial election, and I think it's a great opportunity to reflect and to look ahead. This PC government was re-elected on promises to balance the budget and stay out of debt without a single budget cut to the front lines. Not much more needs to be said about that. Debt levels will soon reach early-1990s levels, and the cuts to the front lines have been swift and harsh and unrelenting.

They were re-elected on a promise to build 50 new schools and renovate 70 more. Well, here we are, two years down the road, without a single shovel in the ground, lots of signs but no shovels. And another one bites the dust.

They were re-elected on a promise of double-funding to municipalities. Instead, they froze funding. Oops. Full-day kindergarten? Nah. Teachers' tax credit to help buy school supplies? Nope. Seniors' activity tax credit? Try again. Tuition refunds for rural physicians? Sorry; no dice on that one either. You name a promise, Mr. Speaker, and it's probably been broken. Such is life in PC Alberta. Promises aren't meant to be kept; they're meant to get you re-elected.

On top of the broken promises, we have seen more scandal and taxpayer abuse than ever before: lavish expenses, luxury travel, penthouse apartments, and more sweetheart insider deals than there are days in a year. It's a major reason why the PC leader that was there in 2012 in the campaign is gone and why once again Albertans will watch as the PC Party tries to pick a new saviour. Best of luck to the poor soul who gets that job, Mr. Speaker. Whoever takes over the leadership of that party across the aisle will step into an impossible task, rebuilding broken trust with Albertans while attempting to shed the baggage that has brought down two Premiers in three years.

Albertans are ready for something entirely new. As we look back on two years' worth of . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Edmonton-Decore.

Beverly Centennial

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to rise today to mark a historic anniversary in my constituency of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I'm proud to call Beverly my home and to represent the community in the Assembly in 2014, Beverly's centennial year.

In 1914 the coal-mining community northeast of Edmonton became the town of Beverly. *Built on Coal* tells the story of the remarkable people, coal mines, organizations, and merchants that

created and shaped Edmonton's working-class town. Beverly has always cherished our rich history. Rundle Heights and Rundle park are named after Reverend Robert Rundle, the first Protestant missionary to serve at Fort Edmonton Park. Abbottsfield and Abbott school are named after Abe Abbott, Beverly school's caretaker from 1922 to 1958. Allan Merrick Jeffers, the architect of the building we stand in today, built Beverly's first town hall. One of the Famous Five, Emily Murphy, worked in the Beverly town hall as the justice of the peace.

Mr. Speaker, after amalgamation with Edmonton in 1961, Beverly still retains its small-town feel. Neighbours know each other by name, look out for one another, and are proud of their community. New families are moving in, and their children are learning about the area's history from my guests today. Our small business community is thriving, with shops and restaurants opening their doors.

Beverly's centennial will be celebrated with activities for the whole community. Markers will be erected at historic mine sites, there will be a giant of Edmonton mural unveiled on May 1, and numerous activities over the summer, including a parade, pancake breakfast, concerts, carriage rides, and more. I encourage all members to visit beverlyhistory.ca. I invite all members to join Beverly centennial celebrations this summer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Chinese Bilingual Education in Edmonton

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans of Chinese ancestry have an extremely proud, valued, and equally long history, heritage, culture, and identity in our province. The Chinese population in Edmonton has grown along with our city, and they have developed strong organizations to assist them to promote and preserve all aspects of their heritage and culture.

One such organization is the Edmonton Chinese Bilingual Education Association, founded over 30 years ago by parent volunteers who were determined to support and help develop an internationally renowned Chinese Mandarin bilingual program offered by Edmonton public schools. Through this organization's effort the first Chinese Mandarin bilingual program was established in 1982, with 20 kindergarten students enrolled at Kildare elementary school, located in the constituency of Edmonton-Decore.

Today the district's Chinese Mandarin enrolment has grown to nearly 2,000 students at 12 school sites and is the largest in North America. The program is considered a model to emulate, and although most students come from Chinese backgrounds, it is attracting interest from others as no prior knowledge of the Chinese Mandarin language is required.

Mr. Speaker, the Edmonton Chinese Bilingual Education Association has garnered many achievements, ranging from district recognition in 2008 to receiving the city of Edmonton salute to excellence award of distinction in 2009. Also, to showcase and share Chinese history and culture, all 12 Chinese bilingual schools along with other community groups have performed at the Chinese New Year carnival at City Centre Mall.

Mr. Speaker, it has been said that culture is the window through which the rest of the world sees our great province. In that spirit, congratulations and heartfelt appreciation to all Edmonton Chinese Bilingual Education Association parent volunteers and Edmonton public schools for their immeasurable contribution to

the teaching and learning experiences which embrace Chinese heritage and culture.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

Cancer Awareness Initiatives in Wanham

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week in this Legislature we all wore daffodils to increase awareness of those who have cancer, and we were encouraged to become involved in a variety of ways. Well, there is a lady who has done a lot to inspire those around her by promoting the importance of cancer research and funding. Teresa Nuthall of Wanham in my constituency of Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley received much attention provincially last summer when she energized her community to become active in breast cancer awareness.

Attention to cancer awareness is what Ms Nuthall desired, and attention is what she received. Joining in the efforts of Wild Pink Yonder's Pinkest Little Town in the West cancer fundraiser, Wanham residents painted their towns – homes, porches, vehicles, and, yes, buildings – pink. Incredibly, the town of only 162 people managed to raise a staggering \$55,000 for breast cancer research during the bid to be named Pinkest Little Town in the West, which, by the way, they did receive. Even after the campaign came to a close, the community has continued to raise funds for breast cancer research. Last year they hosted a fun dance and A Pink Affair Christmas party. These events as well as others added considerably to their fundraising total.

Teresa Nuthall was a strong advocate for breast cancer research after losing her sister to the disease. Now because of her love for her family she's managed to increase breast cancer awareness in her community, in our constituency, and around the province.

Please join me in congratulating Ms Nuthall and the community of Wanham for their efforts to increase awareness and raise funds dedicated to breast cancer research.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

We'll finish off Members' Statements after QP.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: You each have 35 seconds now for a question and 35 seconds for an answer. I'll do my best to enforce it. Let's start.

FOIP Request Process

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, yesterday we released a leaked e-mail that raised concerns about the government undermining the integrity and independence of the freedom of information process by getting political staff to collect information on active FOIP requests. Now, the jobs minister claimed that the memo he wrote on November 23 was approved by the Information Commissioner, and he tabled the letter to try and prove it. Well, that letter does not endorse what the government is doing. In fact, it raises all of the same concerns that we have. To the Premier: why is this government politicizing the freedom of information process?

Mr. Hancock: The short answer, Mr. Speaker, is that it's not. In fact, it is quite prudent for ministers to be aware of information that's being made public out of their departments. Actually, when that information is being made public, by definition it's public

information. It would be ludicrous to suggest that the only people who shouldn't know about it are the people who are responsible for it.

Ms Smith: I think the Premier needs to reread the memo because the Information Commissioner says that giving weekly reports to the Deputy Premier and the Premier goes too far. She says that it increases the potential risk of allegations of interference in the release of information. She also says that press secretaries are political appointees and that using them to develop key messages presents a potential perception that releases could be delayed until mitigating strategies and messages are developed. Why is the government ignoring the Information Commissioner?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, this government would never ignore an officer of the Legislature. The officer of the Legislature was providing good advice: do not interfere politically as you engage in this process, and make sure that you're not doing something untoward with respect to the timing. She doesn't suggest for a moment that ministers should not be aware of the information that's going out and be prepared with appropriate, key messages. That's what the public of Alberta would expect the minister of the Crown to do, and that's what ministers of the Crown do.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the jobs minister told the media that at most a cabinet minister and his staff would get to see a FOIP release only five days before it was sent out. However – breaking news – CBC is reporting that the Health minister's political staff was writing talking points about an embarrassing information request two months before it was scheduled to be released. How is it that a political staffer in the Health minister's office got to see an Alberta Health Services FOIP request two months before it was released?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the other things that's very interesting about the FOIP process is how it results in information, most often from the opposite side, being presented that's either inaccurate or out of context. In this case, as the Premier has clearly stated, ministers of the Crown bear the responsibility for the accurate and timely release of information pertaining to their departments in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. That process is delegated by ministers to their deputy ministers and other officials. As the Premier has said, it is only reasonable that we are aware of what information is being released so that . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second main set of questions, Leader.

Ms Smith: Keep on dancing, Minister. We'll have more questions on it tomorrow.

Health Care Performance Measures

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, over the last two weeks Wildrose has highlighted unprecedented levels of waste in Alberta Health Services. We've shown that they've wasted money on consultants and routinely sole source contracts that should have been open to competitive bids. Today we released a 68-page document about Edmonton and the capital region which shows what happens when AHS wastes money: patients get hurt. The data shows that on 15 tangible health targets AHS is below target and getting worse on 12 of them. Will the Premier admit that AHS is broken?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member has just illustrated is the point I made in my answer to the last question. One of the benefits of the FOIP process is, of course, that it allows us to ensure that information is not presented that's inaccurate or out of context. That is the information the opposition is referring to. The performance measures today and that were published a month later from this release show some tremendous improvements in the health care system, including a reduction of 9 per cent and 15 per cent respectively for hip and knee surgery, significant reductions in waiting times for cardiac surgery. It also illustrates all of this being accomplished while volume increases across the . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, health care workers are doing a great job in a broken system. It's the management and this government that are the problem.

This 68-page presentation shows that in Edmonton and the capital region on the vast majority of their key measures AHS is not only not hitting their targets, they are headed in the wrong direction. It's getting worse. Will the Health minister admit that he and AHS are letting down our front-line workers?

Mr. Horne: No. What I'll admit, Mr. Speaker, is that this hon. member and her colleagues are letting down Albertans and the health care system every time they present information inaccurately and out of context. The truth, which is readily available on the AHS website, is that we've seen a 2.7 per cent increase in the number of patients being discharged from hospital, meaning that we're seeing more patients; almost a week decrease for urgent cardiac bypass treatment; almost a four-week decrease in scheduled cardiac bypass wait times. The list goes on. This is a testament to success in health care in a population that is the fastest growing in Canada, and AHS deserves . . .

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Smith: The list does go on, Mr. Speaker. In 12 of those indicators they are getting worse, and they are not meeting their targets. It took a FOIP request to get this information, which should have been readily available.

If this government does everything in their power to hide the flaws in AHS, nothing is ever going to be fixed. We were promised that AHS would end waste and reduce wait times. Well, waste is up, wait times have never been longer, and this minister refuses to do anything about it. What does the Premier have to say to Albertans who have to wait for health care in a system that is wasting so much money?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we have an incredibly complex health care system that delivers incredibly good service to Albertans on a day-to-day basis. If you talk to anybody who has had an acute situation, they will tell you – and I've talked to many Albertans – about the great service they get in the health system. We have a growing province, we have a growing demand, and we have a growing appetite for new services in the health system. The health system is working very hard and this minister is working very hard to ensure that Albertans get the health services they need when they need them.

The Speaker: Third main set of questions.

Public Service Pensions

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, speaking of our front-line workers, this government is unilaterally pushing through changes to public-sector pensions that have no support from the people who will be impacted. My questions are about the process and not about the legislation. I think that Albertans would hope that the government could sit down with public-sector unions and make improvements to their pensions collaboratively. One would expect that the unions have several good ideas about easy fixes that would improve the viability of the plans. Has this government agreed to all of these easy fixes?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can take the hon. member back in the history of the consultative process, that we started in July of 2012, but I'd also like to remind the hon. members, all members opposite, that on all of the plan boards, the four that we're talking about, that are the public-sector boards, there are union representatives, and there are employer representatives. We've been consulting with those boards all the way through. Those boards then did surveys with all of their membership to talk about the various different things that they could do. In fact, on the websites of those boards they talk about the challenge of sustainability given the current situation in future interest . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, here are a couple of easy fixes that the unions' leadership has put forward. The AUPE has asked the government to end cost-of-living adjustments for deferred pensions for people who have quit as employees. They say that this would save pension money and not harm any of the pensioners or employees. They've also said that the government is using the wrong rate for commuted value. The actuaries say that using the right rate would result in better planning. These are easy fixes, which the unions say will improve the situation. Why won't the government make them?

Mr. Horner: Actually, Mr. Speaker, we are using expert advice on the commuted rates, and we're working with all of the plans to ensure that their unfunded liability is calculated correctly and that the future values are calculated correctly. I would also say that one of the recommendations that was brought forward by the union representation is around joint sponsorship of the plans, and in fact that is exactly where we're going.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, a reasonable government would negotiate with the unions and then bring in implementing legislation to put a deal into effect. Instead, we have the traditional PC "we know best; keep your advice to yourself" approach. This government offended our front-line workers with bills 45 and 46, and now they're upsetting hundreds of thousands of employees and pensioners by unilaterally messing with their retirement plans. How has this government's approach to labour relations gotten so far off track?

2:00

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, last week, when I met with all of the union representation, we talked about moving forward with the contribution rate cap discussion and the joint sponsorship discussion. In fact, I'm looking forward to sitting down with Mr. Smith on the PSPP joint sponsorship because he'd like to get that rolling fairly quickly.

I'd like to quote something, though. It says:

The reason why there are so few defined benefit plans in the private sector [or public sector] is because they are unsustainable with no flexibility to adjust [for volatility] . . . If the issue is not addressed early enough, major corporations and even national governments face financial ruin as more and more people turn 65 and start drawing from their defined benefit [plans].

That's right out of their 2013 . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

You also have two pension bills on the Order Paper this afternoon. Presumably, there will be greater debate.

Let's move on. The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier said something rather curious while defending his government's Republican-style attack on public-sector pensions. He said that there will be "fewer people paying and more people drawing" from the pension plan. Well, Alberta's population is exploding, and young people are moving here in droves. We need more public-sector workers, not fewer. It's illogical for this Premier to say: more work will be done for more people with fewer workers. It doesn't make sense unless the Premier's plan is to provide fewer government services, privatize services, and switch to robots. Premier, which is it? [interjections]

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that, in fact, one of the unions' leadership last week suggested to me that the solution for this is to simply make the government workforce bigger – make it lots bigger – so you've got more contributors, and that will solve the problem. It's kind of like the Liberal logic that we're hearing right now. The truth of the matter, Mr. Speaker, is that in the public-sector plan in 1993 there were 40,000 contributors to the plan. In 2013, 20 years later, there were 40,000 contributors to the plan. That is a testament to the great work that our public sector does. They're doing a lot more for less. But we've had a doubling or tripling of the number of retirees. The math, as the Auditor General says . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, that's a long way of saying: fewer government services, more privatized services, and robots.

Mr. Speaker, this government is changing the rules of the game for 300,000 public-sector workers, who have already stepped up and forgone wage increases to fix the damage done by the Wall Street cowboys to their pension plans. The Premier said that he's switching from a defined cost-of-living adjustment to a targeted one dependent on return on investment. That means that when times are bad, the plans may not pay out enough. Doesn't the Premier understand that it's exactly when times are tough that the pensioners need these wage guarantees?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I think the only robotics that are happening are on the other side, because we get the same question over and over and over again. The answer would be that when times are tough, the cost of living is probably lower, and therefore the return on the investment will probably pay the cost-of-living adjustment. The reality is that you can't pay more than you have, and you can't put a pension plan in peril by paying more benefits than are being contributed for. The cost of living is the one key factor in that piece. Everything else in the pension promise is

being held constant, and that is a very important piece about viability.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the only robotic attack is a constant attack on front-line workers: Bill 45, Bill 46, cutting staff, flatlining their wages, and now their pensions.

The last election was two years ago and at no point during the campaign leading up to election day did the former Premier talk about launching a Republican-style attack on public-sector pensions. The people of Alberta sure the heck didn't give this government a mandate for such an attack. This Premier wasn't elected as a Premier by Albertans. Premier, if you think this is really what the people of Alberta want, why don't you put it aside, call an election, and run on it? [interjections]

Mr. Hancock: Not only is he robotic, Mr. Speaker, but he doesn't understand the parliamentary process. The people of Alberta don't elect a Premier. The people of Alberta elect MLAs, and MLAs form a government. The people of Alberta have entrusted the Progressive Conservative MLAs to form this government. [interjections]

I also know that the people of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, want this government to do what's right each and every day, not just what was talked about two years ago or 10 years ago or, like those guys in that party would want, 15 or 30 years ago. [interjections]

The Speaker: Okay. We've all had our little bit of fun. Let's just settle down and move on.

The hon. leader of the New Democrats.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Lord knows, we wouldn't want to talk about what you promised in the election, Mr. Premier.

FOIP Request Process (continued)

Mr. Mason: Yesterday the jobs minister told the House that his policy of political interference was approved in advance by the Information and Privacy Commissioner, but the memo he released from the commissioner tells a very different story, Mr. Speaker, warning of the risks of ministers and their political staff influencing or interfering with FOIP requests. The commissioner clearly did not approve the policy. My question is to the minister. Why did you tell us that the commissioner had approved your policy in advance when, clearly, she had not?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's set the record straight. Obviously, when a member rises in question period or the media approaches us in a scrum or, frankly, when the public calls on an issue that they know about as a result of a FOIP, they fully expect that a cabinet minister that is in charge of a ministry has a full understanding of what information is being released from his or her ministry. Cabinet ministers are the storekeepers of their ministry. They ought to know what's being released. In order to do that, it is important that a cabinet minister be advised by his department of what is going out and what information is being released.

The Speaker: The hon. member. First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister's memo to the Premier and cabinet, informing them of this policy, which he claims that the commissioner had approved, was dated November 29, 2013. The commissioner's letter to the

minister, in which she warns of the risks of the policy, was dated a week later, December 6, 2013. I want to ask the Premier what he thinks about his minister telling the House that the commissioner had approved this policy when, clearly, she had not. She had warned a week later that it was wrong.

Mr. Lukaszuk: So, Mr. Speaker, what I have done, as the commissioner writes in her letter, further to our telephone conversation of November 27, 2013, is that I have called her, and I said: would it be inappropriate if our ministries were to tell us, the ministers, what it is that they will be releasing, starting Monday to Friday next week, so that we know in advance what it is that we will be dealing with with the public, with constituents, with media, and with the opposition? She said that in principle she has no issue with ministers being advised as long as there is no interference, and there wasn't any.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, that's interesting because the commissioner's concerns have been validated. A memo dated December 13, 2012, shows that a FOIP request to the Minister of Health was vetted by his partisan press secretary two months before it was released. Not only that, but it was clear that the source of the FOIP request was partly revealed to the minister. I want to ask the Premier. Mr. Premier, will you please stop the baffleleg and admit that your government is interfering with the freedom of information process?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the public of Alberta wants to know and can be assured that the FOIP process works appropriately for them without political interference. They also want to know and can be assured that ministers of the Crown will know and understand the information that's being released from their department in order that they can discuss it appropriately in the public context. Those are all appropriate pieces, and that's an appropriate way for it to happen. The ministers of the Crown do not interfere with FOIP co-ordinators' release of information, but they should be informed about the information which is being released.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Please curtail your preambles from this point on.

Let's go to Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Health Care System Information Reporting

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we released approximately 70 pages of detailed health information. It's the Edmonton zone performance dashboard, and it includes key measurements on ER wait times, continuing care, surgeries, children, mental health, and radiation therapy, among others. It's incredibly important information, but none of that is readily available to the public. We went through a costly FOIP process, taking months, just so AHS could release data about the state of public health to the public. To the Minister of Health: why do you refuse to proactively and publicly report this important information about our health care system?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps what the hon. member should explain is why she would want to spend good money to buy outdated information from Alberta Health Services, that doesn't tell the story today about the tremendous performance of our health care system. This hon. member knows that AHS

publishes a performance report, available on their website, which compares the performance of our health system to other provinces and territories using nationally recognized benchmarks. This reflects the everyday experience of citizens in their health care system. It provides them with accurate comparisons. It's the right way to proceed, and it's what we're doing.

2:10

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me just say this to the minister if I may. We'd have more up-to-date information if he had let the FOIP go through and gave it to us immediately.

Given that less than a year ago Alberta Health Services did report comprehensive system performances by zone on a regular basis, why are you now leaving it up to the opposition to dig and publish this information? Minister, it's about accountability.

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, it's about ethics and ethical behaviour. [interjections] If I just heard this hon. member correctly, she suggested to this House that I interfered with the release of information that she had requested under the FOIP Act. I certainly hope that's not the case.

What I will say is that we have developed a performance measurement system that reflects all of the nationally accepted indicators reported by the Canadian Institute for Health Information. It will be broken down by zone, Mr. Speaker, in the next iteration. It's a good snapshot of the very good performance that our health system is delivering and the workers that support it.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Minister, maybe you'd like to answer this. This is from a CBC document. The memo shows that Mr. Johnson and the minister had direct access to the AHS records two months before they were to be released. Under the FOIP Act documents are to be released within 30 days, which means an extension appears to have been taken by Alberta Health Services to facilitate Mr. Johnson's vetting of the records. Maybe you'd like to respond to that. [interjections]

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, this hon. member doesn't seem to know when to stop. I haven't seen the e-mail that she's referred to, but if she is accusing me in this House of interfering with the release of information under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, then she should say so. [interjections] Otherwise, she should educate herself on the provisions of that act and the responsibilities of ministers to ensure their departments comply with that legislation.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a little less noise would be much appreciated, please.

Let's move on to Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by Airdrie.

Keystone XL Pipeline Project

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Premier, on Friday Albertans received the unwelcome news that the U.S. government has decided there will be yet another delay in the review of the Keystone XL pipeline. This despite the fact that the project was nearing its end at the U.S. State Department's . . . [interjections] Are you going to listen, or are you going to talk?

The Speaker: Hon. members, let's remember that someone has the floor. They've been recognized by the Speaker. Let them ask their question. It's not any easier for one side to listen to a question or to an answer than the other, but show some respect for their right to ask it or answer it.

Hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, I couldn't hear what you were saying, so would you start over?

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Premier, on Friday Albertans received the unwelcome news that the U.S. government has decided there will be yet another delay in the review of the Keystone XL pipeline. This despite the fact that the project was nearing the end of the U.S. State Department's national interest determination review. Does the Premier see any rationale for allowing more time for the information to be provided on this project?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the decision on Friday to extend the time frame was extremely disappointing for all Albertans and for Canadians and, I would say, for many Americans because the Keystone pipeline project provides job opportunities both in Canada and the United States, economic opportunities, which are very much needed. It also is the most environmentally sustainable way of shipping oil. It's very important from a safety perspective – there are so many pieces – and it's been studied longer than any pipeline project in history, I think. So it's very untenable that it will take longer for a process to study it, but we do have to await the end of that process, and we will encourage the right decision.

Mr. VanderBurg: To the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. My constituents in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne are suggesting that the government has taken enough action on protecting the environment, and it's time to look at other trading partners. Does the minister believe that this government has taken the necessary actions on the responsible development of our resources?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for the question. I think it's important to know that we were the first jurisdiction in North America to put a price on carbon. Just this week we announced 24 projects at the Zero 2014 forum as part of Alberta's global competition to reduce our carbon footprint. Attendees commented that Alberta is a leader in innovative solutions, and thanked this government for our commitment and foresight. We're also implementing the integrated resource management system. But we have to own the environmental agenda. We have to make sure that Albertans, Canadians, and people in the world know that we're doing a good job with the environment.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy: what are you doing to ensure that Alberta's record as leader in responsible energy development is understood in the United States and with our other existing and potential trading partners?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to share the facts about our strong, responsible energy development with the United States. These facts have been acknowledged through the State Department, acknowledging the work with the land-use framework in the lower Athabasca region, acknowledging our climate change strategy, and the acknowledgement of the fact that the approval of KXL will not impact GHG emissions. In addition to that, I'll be in the United States next week speaking about our responsible energy development. Also, the southern part

of this leg of the pipeline is already delivering oil to the United States.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Provincial Budget Documents

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, this morning's Public Accounts hearing was a real eye-opener. There was discussion regarding the new PC budget accounting methods, which, of course, have been roundly criticized for being misleading. The Auditor General said that the Finance minister's budget and updates are "not in accordance with accounting principles." He then went on to explain several needed changes to bring the budget in line with generally accepted accounting principles. Now, we know you would never ever ignore an officer of this Legislature. Minister, is the Auditor General wrong in his assessment?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has said his opinion on the budget, which is the policy document we table in this House. The financial statements, the Auditor General has actually said, do follow all of the accounting principles. In fact, our Auditor General has made no recommendations to this House on our financial statements, unlike other jurisdictions across Canada, who have many, many comments on their financial statements. The hon. member is trying to suggest that the budget, as the Auditor General has requested, should be constructed at the start of the year versus the end of the year. We're actually doing that for the Auditor General in this budget.

Mr. Anderson: Up is down; black is white. It's fantastic.

Well, given that the AG also said, "The time spent interpreting the Fiscal Management Act budget takes away from time available to understand the province's [actual] financial condition" and then went on to say how the budget is confusing to interpret, Minister, will you instruct your department to implement the AG's recommendations immediately to bring the budget and budget updates in line with generally accepted accounting principles?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want one thing to be perfectly clear. We have already talked to the Auditor General about constructing the budget the way he's requested, and we're going to be doing that in every budget as we move forward. We've done it in this one. But I also want to make one other thing very clear. The consolidated financial surplus of \$1.1 billion will not change regardless of what we do with the Auditor General because it is by the appropriate accounting principles, that the Auditor General is asking us to use. To suggest to Albertans that somewhere that \$1.1 billion is not true is not true information, and the member should be . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: Minister, you've lost the argument. Your party is battling for fourth place in the polls right now. You've lost.

To the Premier: given that your Finance minister has lost every shred of public credibility in his budget presentation, are you going to permit this minister to continue this budget charade, or will you instruct him to immediately accept and implement the Auditor General's recommendations to straighten out his budget and its quarterly updates, as the Wildrose has been asking for month after month after month?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, this Finance minister doesn't do things just to get votes; this Finance minister does things because they're

the right things to do. The opposition opposite wants to confuse Albertans in terms of what the true financial picture is. Let me say this. The credit rating agencies, that actually look at our financial statements and understand what financial statements are all about, different than this Finance critic, believe that our financial statements are the most transparent, the most detailed, and the most accurate, I might add, of all provinces in Canada, including the federal government, who has more recommendations than we do. I think that's a good thing.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

2:20 Sherwood Park Provincial Courthouse

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The current Sherwood Park courthouse is located in a strip mall and was opened in 1981 as a temporary facility. Now almost a hundred thousand people call Sherwood Park and Strathcona county home. This building is not suitable for the needs of my constituents, and I have received numerous letters from constituents who work in the justice system regarding the dismal state of this facility. To the Minister of Justice. My constituents want to know how the money earmarked for exploration of a court facility in Sherwood Park will be used.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to confirm for this member that the budget in 2014 accrued \$1 million for planning, and these funds are being used. I do expect a report in the fall. In addition to that, the budget in 2014 also accrued \$30 million. That's \$30 million for actual courthouse construction over the next couple of years. Of course, that's not enough to construct a courthouse, but it is enough to get the ball rolling.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Olesen: Thank you. To the same minister: given that there is \$30 million of nonallocated capital funding earmarked for addressing the infrastructure needs of the courts in Alberta, can we expect Sherwood Park to see some of this money?

Mr. Denis: I can tell you that the planning is under way. I don't want to handcuff the particular committee, Mr. Speaker, but I can tell this member that Sherwood Park has been identified as a priority for the exact reasons that she has indicated here as well as to me outside of the House.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Olesen: Thank you. To the same minister: given that the judges in my community tell me that our courthouse is the worst in the province – and I will agree with them – will Sherwood Park get a courthouse that will truly meet the needs of my constituents?

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, that is the particular plan. I'm happy that this member knows where the courthouse is, as I do as well. Geotechnical and environmental studies have been completed on the proposed site for the Sherwood Park courthouse, and it has been determined that this site is, in fact, suitable for courthouse development. I'm happy that we're making progress in this area and will continue to work with this member as well as the other member for Sherwood Park.

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

FOIP Request Process (continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The timing of the actions stemming from the November 2013 correspondence between the former Deputy Premier and the Privacy Commissioner isn't adding up. The government memo states that a new process to track the release of FOIP requests is being initiated, but a Liberal FOIP clearly shows that the weekly FOIP status report existed in June 2013. To the Minister of Service Alberta: are these the same weekly reports for which permission was sought from the Privacy Commissioner, oh, six months later, or are they another different, similar but not the same FOIP status report?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, this government is delivering unprecedented transparency. Under the leadership of this Premier we have the gold standard expense disclosure, we have the gold standard salary and severance disclosure, and we are conducting a review of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. That review has been under way for some time. We've been talking to Albertans about ways to improve the act, and we've consulted with media. The opposition parties have participated. We believe that we are going to have an improved act, and that work continues to be under way.

Ms Blakeman: Well, Mr. Speaker, to anyone on the other side that actually knows the FOIP Act, I'll present this question. Given that the Privacy Commissioner memo explicitly warns against any action that would delay the FOIP requests yet an Alberta Liberal FOIP shows the Deputy Minister of Executive Council ordering all the ministries to delay responding to the Liberal request for 30 days, does that not violate the spirit and the letter of the FOIP Act?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, once again the Member for Edmonton-Centre is confused. There are two parallel pieces. As I explained in the House last week, the Deputy Minister of Executive Council has the responsibility for co-ordinating FOIP releases when they cross departments, and someone FOIPed every department for all their ARs. It's very important to have a process because when you FOIP ARs, you may get cabinet documents, and they are not releasable under the FOIP Act, which she would know if she was familiar with it. The other process which the former Deputy Premier initiated with a memo didn't actually commence because there was a cabinet shuffle . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: Right. So that other FOIP status report was just a figment of your official's imagination.

Okay. Back to the Premier, then. Now, since the Privacy Commissioner warns about potential interference by press secretaries, which are political animals, how is having a press secretary working out mitigating strategies for opposition members' FOIPs complying with section 40 of the act?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it is obviously the job of a press secretary to advise their minister with respect to how to handle information that's being released to the public with respect to FOIP or any other public release of information. That is, in fact, their job. In fact, we do not interfere with the release process, but we do need to know the information that's being released so that

we can have mitigating or other strategies relative to the explanation of that information to the public because the public will know that the opposition never puts their information into any context that makes any sense.

Government Policies

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, two years ago today this government came to power selling a much different vision than what they're providing now. Under this PC government we've seen broken-promise budgets and broken-promise policies that they never promised in the first place. To the Premier: why are you attacking the working people, that give so much to this province, our nurses, social workers, tradespeople, emergency response workers, firefighters, park wardens, corrections officers, physiotherapists, sheriffs, agronomists, water experts, librarians . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. First of all, I adhere to the premise that was raised by Premier Lougheed: no one comes to power. We have the responsibility to govern that's been granted to us by Albertans, and we take that responsibility and that privilege very, very seriously. Secondly, we respect the people who work on behalf of the public in this province, whether they're elected to this Legislature, whether they serve in this government, or whether they're the civil servants that provide the services that Albertans need on a daily basis. We respect them. We hope that they will respect them, because they do important work for Albertans.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this government has spent two years breaking promise after promise on everything from health care wait times, advanced education, to full-day kindergarten and now they're asking Albertans to just trust them while their government meddles with their pension security future, why doesn't this Premier start reading the warning labels as we see them here, that a steady diet of broken promises leads to grave health risks for all Albertans?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, he can't even read his notes correctly because I'm sure it doesn't say on his pills: a steady diet of broken promises. I'm not sure that his question is premised on anything other than political rhetoric, and therefore I would respond this way. This government takes the job of governing very seriously. This government likes to focus on the big-picture issues, which focus on what makes Alberta the best place to live, to work, and to raise our families. This government cares about not only our children but our grandchildren and their future in this province, and we will govern in those children's and grandchildren's interests.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, that's very interesting, Mr. Speaker, because given that this government has promised to end child poverty, two years later 10 per cent of Albertan children are still waiting for the help that has never ever come. Making pensions thinner and harder to come by actually increases the poverty. To the Premier: is this government planning to keep any of these promises, or are they willing to just cut them loose 24 months later, just like they did with the last Premier?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would think that every member in this House would want to commit to reducing and ending poverty

for children in this province. This government initiated, in discussion with the public of Alberta, a social policy framework which is on track to do just that. We also initiated the discussion on Together We Raise Tomorrow so that we can do foundational work to ensure that it's not just stopgap measures, not just paying for constant continuance of poverty but actually putting in place policies and programs that will end it. Our social innovation fund, which we put in place, will help us to get the knowledge and the tools we need to do just that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, in 2008 Alberta Education changed the way that math was taught in our schools, and the results have not been good. The same thing happened in Manitoba, but the Manitoba government had the humility to realize they had erred, and they fixed it. They went back to the fundamentals. Their education minister just went on record saying that provinces like ours are utilizing methods and curriculums which have not been found to be successful. To the Education minister. Parents, teachers, math experts, and now other governments all recognize this is a flawed program. Will you do your job and address it?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the province of Manitoba's results are nowhere near the results of the province of Alberta in math. The PISA results have shown that Alberta students are actually very good in the fundamentals in math; it's the problem-solving skills that they need. The Minister of Education has indicated to this hon. member time after time that no one is moving away from the fundamentals of numeracy and literacy as important foundational aspects of education in this province.

2:30

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, the number of math-illiterate kids in this province has doubled since the implementation of this program. That's a problem that you need to address.

Now, given that Manitoba took concrete action, explicitly including the four standard algorithms in the curriculum – vertical addition with a carry, vertical subtraction with a borrow, and they even have their kids memorize times tables by a certain level – will the minister change Alberta's curriculum to require the same thing? If so, give us some specifics about when you are going to do the right thing.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, one of the problems in education, of course, is that everybody is an expert because they went 40 years ago, and that's obviously the case with this hon. member.

The reality is that we have not moved away from fundamentals in math or literacy in our curriculum. The reality is that teaching children is a matter of teaching pedagogy, not a matter of the curriculum. The curriculum sets the outcomes, sets some ways in which you can get to those outcomes, and it's up to the teachers to differentiate the methods of instruction which will work for each individual child. It's not up to that hon. member or anyone else to mandate how a child learns.

Mr. McAllister: The minister and those thumping their desks ought to realize that all of the math experts say that you're failing on this file.

Now, given that the Manitoba education minister also said that they are "revisiting the curriculum to make sure that it meets the needs of our students so that they have those most basic skills" and "so that kids have a better understanding of memorizing math

facts and then bringing back standard algorithms for addition, subtraction, multiplication and division," again to the minister or the Premier: do parents, teachers, math experts, and other governments have it wrong, or do you maybe have it wrong?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is redesigning its curriculum as well, and who would be doing that? It would be teachers. It would be experts in education. It would be the very people that he's talking about who are involved in designing the Alberta curriculum. And as they do it, they are designing it with some fundamental principles. Those fundamental principles are based on foundational learning in literacy and numeracy and the necessary 21st-century skills to be engaged thinkers, ethical citizens, and involved . . .

The Speaker: Thank you. Perhaps we'll hear more a little later.

Let's go on to Edmonton-McClung, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Loyalty Program Prohibition for Prescription Drugs

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta College of Pharmacists has made a decision to prohibit pharmacists from allowing patients to receive reward or loyalty points such as airline miles when purchasing prescriptions. The prohibition will take effect on May 1. Many of my constituents in Edmonton-McClung are not happy with this ban. My question is to the Minister of Health. What is the reasoning behind this decision?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the College of Pharmacists is responsible for setting the standards of practice for pharmacists in Alberta. It is one of many colleges under the Health Professions Act that have a similar responsibility. In this particular case the college has deemed it necessary to change their standards for the protection of the public. As the hon. member said, they have instituted a policy whereby loyalty programs will not be permitted with respect to the purchase of prescription drugs only.

Mr. Xiao: To the same minister: given that reward and loyalty programs encourage patients to visit the same pharmacy and become familiar with their pharmacist, are there other ways to encourage patients to return to the same pharmacy after these reward programs are cancelled?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are, and they actually don't have anything to do with loyalty programs. They have to do with the range of services that pharmacists can now provide in Alberta. This includes things like renewing and modifying a prescription, developing a complex medication plan for clients with multiple chronic diseases, working as members of a multidisciplinary team in a primary care network or a family care clinic. These are the reasons why Albertans continue to choose their pharmacists in increasing numbers, maintain that professional relationship, and improve their health in doing so.

The Speaker: The hon. member. Final supplemental.

Mr. Xiao: Yes. Finally, to the same minister again: given that some patients do not make a lot of money and depend on these reward programs, how can your ministry protect their interests if these benefits are taken away from them?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate that there are many Albertans who are members of the loyalty programs and that they accrue various benefits from them. All I can say is that we put the health of Albertans first, and in this case the college,

within its own purview and under its own authority, made the determination that points should not be awarded in connection with the purchase of prescription drugs. That's a health care decision. That has to do with quality and patient safety in our system. It is the college's decision to make, and I believe they stated the reasons for doing so.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Calgary-East.

FOIP Request Process (continued)

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The four-year court battle between the PC government and the media saw the current Premier dragging his feet to avoid releasing information related to the deaths of children in care. Now we learn that the real gold standard is for the Deputy Premier to intervene in the freedom of information process and the releasing of information. Even the Privacy Commissioner expressed serious concerns regarding this interference. To the Associate Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation: does the gold standard include the associate minister continuing to sit on his hands while the integrity of the FOIP process is completely eroded?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to say that under the leadership of this government we have been conducting a review of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. I was disappointed that there wasn't more participation from the opposition parties in that process, but we're always accepting new information. We spoke to about 600 Albertans throughout the process; we had online participation. We did speak to the media. We spoke to municipalities, school boards, and others. I think that the information is still under way. We're compiling it, and the work is still continuing. I believe that we're delivering good results with the efforts that we put in.

Mrs. Towle: Oh, once again, this minister really doesn't know his portfolio. The opposition asked to be on your all-party committee, and you refused.

Given that the Deputy Premier was writing letters to cabinet, which includes this associate minister, instructing on how to interfere in the FOIP process and given that the Deputy Premier gave direction to cabinet on how to avoid releasing information that had political or other reputational issues for the government, can the associate minister responsible for transparency stop the jibber-jabber and explain why the Deputy Premier was taking responsibility for FOIPs, which are in your ministry, and why you are not protecting the process? That's your job.

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, I heard a comment about my participation in the committee. That's patently untrue. I don't know what she's talking about in that comment.

What I can say about the FOIP process is that it has been effective. In the most recent statistics that I've been given, we responded to more than 4,200 FOIP requests. Ninety per cent of those requests, received by Alberta departments, agencies, boards, and commissions, were processed within 30 days; 96 per cent were completed within 60 days. The work that we've been undertaking to improve the FOIP process – as I've said, we've

been undertaking a review of that – is continuing, and we expect to have that ready shortly.

Mrs. Towle: Hear no evil; see no evil.

Given that this minister, the associate minister, was either aware of the Privacy Commissioner's serious concerns or the associate minister completely ignored them and given that the associate minister, who is a member of cabinet, did not once voice his concern and speak out and oppose this interference in the FOIP process – Minister, it is your job to know your FOIP legislation, to protect the integrity of it, and if you're not going to do that, Albertans want to know: exactly what do you do?

Mr. Lukaszuk: The third creature should speak no evil if she doesn't have a full grasp of the facts.

Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is that there is no interference with the FOIP process. Albertans, as the minister has indicated, are receiving information in record time. A large volume of information is being requested, particularly by this opposition. However, I think this member, who should speak no evil – whatever that critter is that we always use that signage for – would expect the minister to have the answers to her questions, to know what it is that she is asking about, and to know the information that is being released through a FOIP. In order for that to happen, he needs to be briefed like any other cabinet minister. Accept it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

2:40

Health Care Wait Times

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Survey after survey shows that health care is the number one issue on Albertans' minds. My constituents tell me that we do have an excellent health care system, provided that they can get through the emergency department. We had issues with wait times in emergency rooms when our health care budget was \$3 billion, and we are still having the same issues and the same problems with a budget of \$18.2 billion. My question is to the hon. minister. Even with an \$18.2 billion budget wait times are still untenable. What is the minister doing about this?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, wait times are an issue across the country. As I said in answer to an earlier question, we are very proud of the work AHS has done to reduce wait times while coping with growing volumes in the health care system. In the case of emergency departments, as I said earlier, the volume of visits has gone up about 3 and a half per cent in the last year. At the same time we've seen the evolution of new models like family care clinics. There is one located in the hon. member's riding. FCCs have contributed to a 50 per cent reduction in emergency visits for those patients that are attached to them. That's progress.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Primary care networks were supposed to alleviate hospital emergency wait times, yet this doesn't seem to be the case. Is the minister still standing by the claim that PCNs are solving or will be solving the problem?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, for patients who don't need to visit an emergency department, a primary care

network or a family care clinic is a great option. As the hon. member knows, in a number of hospitals across the province we have very high numbers of patients who are classified as CTAS category 4 or 5, who don't need emergency department care, but for lack of primary health care options they end up in the emergency department. The 41 PCNs across Alberta and the FCCs that we have launched, including in the hon. member's own constituency, are combating this problem very well.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that part of the problem is a shortage of doctors, what is the minister doing to accelerate accreditation of foreign-trained medical doctors?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. Of course, physicians are in short supply in some specialties. We see an abundance of specialists in certain areas, but we continue to try to attract more family doctors into our system. The international medical graduate process is difficult for doctors who want to come to Canada. There are national elements to the process. There are provincial elements. We continue to work with the College of Physicians & Surgeons to simplify and to ensure that foreign-trained doctors who are adequate, who are proficient to practise in Alberta have that opportunity.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, the time for Oral Question Period has expired.

Statements by the Speaker

Second Anniversaries of Election

The Speaker: Just before we move on to other business, I want to take a moment to indicate to all of you something that became obvious a little earlier this afternoon, and that is that we have a major anniversary being celebrated today. In particular, I want to salute the 39 new members, who are here among us, that were elected to this Assembly for their very first time two years ago on this day.

I will name them quickly, and then we can applaud them and welcome them to the ranks on their special second anniversary of being elected. The members are from Banff-Cochrane, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Calgary-Currie, Calgary-Glenmore, Calgary-Hawkwood, Calgary-Hays, Calgary-North West, Calgary-Shaw, Calgary-South East, Calgary-Varsity, Calgary-West, Cardston-Taber-Warner, Chestermere-Rocky View, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Drumheller-Stettler, Edmonton-Calder, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, Edmonton-Gold Bar, Edmonton-Mill Woods, Edmonton-Riverview, Edmonton-South West, Fort McMurray-Conklin, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, Grande Prairie-Smoky, Highwood, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, Lacombe-Ponoka, Little Bow, Livingstone-Macleod, Medicine Hat, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Stony Plain, Strathmore-Brooks, and Vermilion-Lloydminster.

I think, Edmonton-Calder, you were actually elected for a second time, but we rolled you in anyway because we welcome you back.

Please, hon. members elected for their first time, would you all rise and let us applaud you and congratulate you on your accomplishment.

Thank you. On that note, I would remind you that today is also St. George's Day. Very briefly, we have a couple of Georges at least here with us. I'm not sure they're all saints, but they're here.

The most recognized symbol associated with St. George, of course, is St. George's cross, which is on the national flag of England, and St. George is the patron saint of England. Today we're celebrating that day.

Oral Question Period Practices

The Speaker: While I have your attention, a couple of other quick notices here. I want to indicate to you that today we had a large number of preambles, not the usual given and on you went, which is allowed and acceptable, but just straight-out preambles. What it tends to do is that it takes up valuable time because technically you're allowed 35 seconds for a question, and a supplemental, and another supplemental, and so on. Mathematically it's just impossible to get beyond the 15th or the 16th speaker if everybody takes the full 35 seconds and goes on with preambles.

We had a number of outbursts on both sides of the House today. There was some conviviality and some joviality that went on today. I sensed the mood to let the laughter go on, and I did. There was considerable heckling and stuff across the bow that took up some time as well. So please bear that in mind for tomorrow. I will be chatting with House leaders about this very soon.

Finally, if you have objections to the conduct of other members, you can always stand and raise a point of order. Opposition members, you're welcome to do that, and so, too, are government members. So know the rules and know how to use them.

Could I have unanimous consent, please, to revert briefly to introduction of visitors? I hear no objection.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Let's go, Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly two members of the Freehold Owners Association that have come to partake in our ceremonies today, Else Pedersen and David Spears. I would ask the House to give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: We'll begin with Lesser Slave Lake, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Murdered and Missing Aboriginal Women

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Shelly Tanis Dene, Marie Antoinette Carlson-Hill, Amber Alyssa Tuccaro, Shirley Ann Waquan, Roxanne Marie Isadore: this roll call is but a small number of the 93 cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls to date in Alberta. Of these cases, 76 per cent of aboriginal missing women and girls disappeared from urban areas, which is higher than the national average. It's sad, Mr. Speaker.

Last year the Native Women's Association of Canada called for a national public inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women because since March 2010 the information this group has gathered is staggering, over 580 cases nationally. Thank you to the Native Women's Association of Canada and the Institute for the

Advancement of Aboriginal Women, who have worked tirelessly to not only look at every case but to bring attention to this issue.

In fact, in 2012 Premiers across this country, including our own, agreed to support this public inquiry that would investigate closed cases involving Canada's aboriginal women. I am saddened by the federal government's decision to reject the inquiry for murdered and missing aboriginal women, and today I call upon all of my colleagues in this Legislature to engage in lobbying the federal government to change its mind and for all of us to support what this government can and will do to work with these organizations.

As representatives of all Albertans it is our responsibility to take prudent action in helping organizations like NWAC and IAAW as they continue to bring attention to this issue. After all, Mr. Speaker, we do it for family. These girls and women are someone's sister, someone's daughter, someone's aunt, someone's mother, someone's wife, someone's grandma, and they do belong to a community. They, too, deserve justice.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Dog Theft in Newell County

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about a very troubling situation which I'm hearing about in my constituency. In the past three weeks I have heard that over 20 dogs have been stolen from family homes, yards, and farms. This has quickly become an important issue in the county of Newell area and has the possibility of affecting the rest of the province. As a dog owner myself this is very troubling. These people are not just stealing animals; they are stealing four-legged members of our families. I have spoken with the Brooks Animal Protection Society, the Animal Care Centre of Strathmore, the SPCA, and RCMP to see what information and updates they have on this file. To date they are saying that this issue is unconfirmed but that it seems to be contained within the county of Newell.

Think about it, Mr. Speaker. We are not talking about one or two dogs going missing; we are talking about more than 20. I heard one story this morning where a dog was taken out of a kennel in the backyard while the people were at home. Imagine getting off the school bus as a kid only to find your prized pal, your buddy, your dog, had been stolen. We do not know for sure what is happening with these dogs when they are taken. There are more than a few unsettling, disturbing theories out there. What we do know is that these people are stealing our pets, and this must be stopped.

It is our responsibility as caring neighbours to look out for each other. I am urging everyone to be aware of strange vehicles and uncommon activities you witness. Please take action by documenting and reporting any suspicious activity to the local authorities. I ask pet owners in my constituency to remain vigilant, and I would like to urge all authorities in Alberta to look into it and work together to stop these egregious acts of theft.

2:50

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, you have a bill to introduce?

Bill Pr. 1

Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2014

Mr. Hale: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I've got to get my ducks in a row. I've got a lot going on here today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2014.

I know members across the aisle and on both sides of the House have had the opportunity to experience the Rosebud Theatre and take advantage of the school of the arts there. It is a gem in my constituency, and I'm very honoured to introduce this bill.

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

Bill Pr. 2

Maskwachees Cultural College Amendment Act, 2014

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Maskwachees Cultural College Amendment Act, 2014.

Mr. Speaker, Bill Pr. 2 is administrative in nature and proposes changes to the college's name so that the spelling is corrected and it properly represents the people, culture, and organization.

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

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister – Services for Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings regarding FASD. FASD is a lifelong condition that has no cure but includes a broad range of disabilities related to the permanent brain damage caused by exposure to alcohol. FASD is one hundred per cent preventable. First, I would like to table five copies of *The Lancet* global health charter for the prevention of FASD. This is known as the Edmonton charter and was published in the prestigious journal *Lancet Global Health* in March of 2014. The Edmonton charter recognizes Alberta's leadership in addressing this important issue and summarizes the latest evidence presented to the conference, calling for urgent global action to address FASD.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is five copies of a consensus statement on the legal issues of FASD. This document was the result of a major consensus conference held September 18 through 20 of last year. This steering committee was chaired by the hon. Marguerite Trussler, QC, retired justice of the Court of Queen's Bench and chairperson of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. The jury chair was the hon. Ian Binnie, CC, QC, former justice of the Supreme Court of Canada.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the leader of the Liberal opposition or someone on behalf of.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview I'd like to present 50 of more than 4,000 postcards that our office received asking the PC government to restore consistent and reliable funding for postsecondary education in Alberta.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of tablings for the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. First, is the George & Bell Consulting study commenting on the financial positions of the local authorities pension plan and the

public service pension plan, which essentially says that the plans are healthy and that the unfunded liability will be paid down in due course within nine years with no substantial changes to the pensions.

Another tabling I have is a final report called Canadian Pensioners' Mortality by the Canadian Institute of Actuaries. One of the government's calls for the need for pension reforms is that people are living longer, but one of the interesting things in this is that in the next generation lifespans are actually going down. So I submit that report as well for our records.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today, five copies, the required amount. The first one is on the early learning and child care diploma program suspension as a result of the government's 7.3 per cent cut to Alberta's postsecondary institutions and the impact it's having.

The second one is the possible effects of the Red Deer College early learning and child care development diploma program suspension, the impacts of that, for discussion, on programs and staff and what it means to everyday Albertans.

The third one is the petition of the local students and those affected by these cuts by this government and the greater impact that will have on young Albertans who receive this kind of care.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I don't have any points of order today unless I missed some. I don't think I did. No? Okay. Thank you.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 8

Appropriation Act, 2014

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to rise today to move third reading of Bill 8, the Appropriation Act, 2014.

The schedule to the act provides amounts that were presented in greater detail in the 2014-15 government and Legislative Assembly estimates tabled on March 6, 2014. These were since debated in Committee of Supply and the legislative policy committees over the past several weeks. During this time we examined and debated the budget and explained how government will continue to make prudent investments in core services such as health, education, human services, and infrastructure.

Budget 2014 is a good budget for this province. It delivers on the values and priorities that Albertans told me about loud and clear as I travelled the province in the fall during budget consultations. Albertans said that they wanted investment in key areas, especially after the tough budget that was Budget 2013. So we delivered \$1 billion in new money for health care, education, and supports for the vulnerable.

Albertans also talked about the need to continue building Alberta. We are the fastest growing province with the strongest economy in the country, and there are many pressing infrastructure needs right now in communities across this province. So we're continuing to build the schools, health care facilities, and roads that

Albertans require today, to the tune of more than \$19 billion over the next three years.

Albertans told us that they wanted to put more of our provincial savings to work for the long term, so we created a new savings plan that earmarks money for new endowments and funds to support Alberta innovation.

Last and certainly not least, Albertans said that they wanted the province to be fiscally responsible, to live within our means and control spending, and to hold the line on taxes, so we are.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2014 is the first balanced budget in six years. Even under the old presentations this would be a \$1.1 billion surplus. We've kept spending growth below population plus inflation for the second year in a row. Alberta has the strongest balance sheet in the country, and Budget 2014 will continue to keep us on top.

There's been a lot of discussion in this House on our fiscal situation and what we are or, as others claim, what we are not doing. With that, let's go over some of the common themes and misconceptions. Let's start with our capital plan and how it's being financed. Certain parties across the floor seem fixated on this issue, so let's talk about it. Two-thirds of the three-year capital plan will be financed by borrowing and using P3s; one-third will be paid by cash. Let me be clear about the ground rules for the borrowing. Unlike almost every other jurisdiction out there, Alberta does not – does not – borrow to pay for the groceries. We don't use our credit card, so to speak, to buy groceries. We don't run an operational deficit. Our borrowing is strictly to build infrastructure. Full stop.

Other rules include a legislated cap on how much we can borrow that is interest-rate and revenue sensitive. We must have a repayment plan in place that sets aside money every year to pay down our bonds as they come due, and we must protect our triple-A credit rating, which allows us to borrow at the lowest possible rates.

3:00

Across the aisle we have an opposition that claims things like: our borrowing is for risky investments. Mr. Speaker, that couldn't be further from the truth. Every dollar we borrow goes into an asset, be it the bricks and mortar of a school or hospital or the asphalt on a highway. These are tangible assets that are on our balance sheet and used by Albertans every day to improve their lives.

The opposition also takes issue with analogies that our borrowing is like a mortgage. I don't want to get into the finer points of distinction between a bond and a mortgage, but let me say this. Albertans know the difference between borrowing for a vacation and borrowing to purchase a home. The government is borrowing to build hard assets like schools, and we're paying interest on the debt and setting aside money every year to pay down the principal. That sounds a lot like a mortgage to me, Mr. Speaker.

That gets me to my next point, about claims that we don't know what the interest rates will be in the future, so we're going to get into trouble down the line. Well, they're right on one count here. I don't know what the interest rates are going to be in the long term, which is exactly why we made our borrowing cap interest-rate sensitive. If I did know what the interest rates were going to be in the future, Mr. Speaker, I probably wouldn't be standing here. I'd have had a very successful career on Wall Street and be retired, probably, by now.

What this claim does show, though, yet again is a disturbing lack of understanding on the other side from the opposition when it comes to the provincial finances. When we borrow at, say, 3 and

a half per cent today, we actually lock that rate in for the term of the entire bond. So if it's a 30-year bond, the interest rate remains the same for the 30 years. So in a sense we do know what the interest rates are for the long term, Mr. Speaker.

While we're on the subject of interest payments, another point they like to make is that we could run whole departments on what we'll be paying in interest down the line. It's as if they truly believe that if we don't borrow, then there would be no impact, no trade-off. While they may get to operate in these mythical scenarios where they can have their cake and eat it too, we have to be accountable to Albertans and we have to operate in reality.

Let's take a moment and talk this myth through, too, Mr. Speaker. Let's say that we don't borrow a penny for capital. Yes, we would theoretically have money available to spend on other priorities, perhaps into savings, but the trade-off is simply this: dozens and dozens of schools and health facilities would not get built, or we wouldn't be able to rehabilitate our thousands of kilometres of highway, let alone build new ones like the Stoney Trail around Calgary. We'd have to drastically scale back the support that we give municipalities for their priority infrastructure although I assume they would continue to borrow for theirs. Albertans would feel these impacts very, very quickly. An infrastructure deficit, Mr. Speaker, is as bad as a dollar deficit.

As government we will not not build. We need to make decisions that balance the needs of Albertans today and the needs of paying for interest today. It would mean telling Albertans that they're not going to get the infrastructure that they need in a timely fashion if we were to not borrow. And what's the bigger priority here for Albertans? Albertans that I've talked to across this province said: build the infrastructure we need today because people are coming and our kids need schools.

That's the point that the opposition doesn't seem to grasp, Mr. Speaker. They have a fake budget, that operates in some mythical world, where they would save a few billion a year by simply stretching out the capital plan by a number of years. Sounds pretty easy. What they don't tell you is that that means delaying the projects that Albertans are looking for today, that we desperately need now, like a new school in Airdrie, flood mitigation in High River, completing the Calgary ring road. They should try having a conversation with Albertans about when they might build those. I can give them a hint as to how those conversations are going to go.

Now, we know what the opposition will say. They will say that it's simple, that you find the money you need by eliminating government waste. Well, that's easy for them to say, having never been in government, having never been in a position to make very difficult and important decisions. But let me remind the hon. members of this. We could eliminate the entire civil service – the entire civil service – for the sum total of \$3 billion. In exchange for the entire government of Alberta proper, we would get less than one year of the opposition's so-called 10-year debt-free capital plan. Then, of course, we would have no civil service to run the government.

Even their 2014 budget recommendations fall woefully short of explaining how they would support their own plan, how they would pay for it. Adding up these numbers, which I'll remind this House are hypothetical at best and often just plain fiction, brings us to under a billion dollars. All of the savings recommendations they have: just under a billion, which is less than one-fifth of one year of their 10-year plan. So I ask the members opposite: where does the rest of the money come from? Or the real question is: what do you cut? Which Albertans' core services do you eliminate? How do you choose which students, which seniors, which young families should have to wait for their health care

facilities, for the schools, or for the critical supports that they need today?

This is a need that we know as a government will only grow as we move forward. And we want to see this need grow, Mr. Speaker, because it reflects the economic growth and the opportunity that positions us as the ongoing economic engine of our country. This growth is good news, and we must both protect it and support it. That is our duty to the 4 million plus Albertans who live here today and the million we expect to welcome within the next decade.

Another myth being perpetuated by our critics is that Alberta has been building infrastructure debt free for the past 15 to 20 years. Mr. Speaker, this is simply not true. We began using P3s in 2005-06 because it made financial sense. The other point they neglect to explain is the different circumstances that existed decades ago. In 1976 we borrowed at over 9 per cent. The interest rate peaked at 16 per cent in 1981 and hovered around 9 per cent to 11 per cent from '86 to '92. Today we are borrowing at less than 3 and a half per cent on 30-year bonds.

While the other side seems stuck in the '90s, the reality is that Alberta has changed. The world has changed. We are growing by a hundred thousand people a year right now. Our economy is much larger. Interest rates are at historic lows. I would say that good governance, good leadership is about making the right choice in order to serve the greatest interests of our constituents. I can say with confidence that the choices we are making today, to borrow at less than 3 and a half per cent when our savings are returning 12 per cent or even higher, is about leveraging available tools to keep pace with that growth.

In the past different choices were made to meet different demands of the time. Ralph Klein's focus on debt elimination was entirely appropriate for his day. The debt he was paying off came from overspending on the operations side. We've now solved that problem. In fact, we've taken it one step further, pursuing some of the forward-thinking ideas Premier Ralph Klein entertained during his time in office, and I quote: I want to look at the whole accounting system and the way that we finance capital projects using P3s, public-private partnerships, and finding imaginative ways to finance these projects rather than the pay-as-you-go; I want to find ways to end the uncertainty of surplus years and bad years. End quote.

So you see, Mr. Speaker, any suggestion by those members across the way that what we're doing today is an insult to Premier Klein's legacy once again stands contrary to the truth. What we're doing as a government is honouring Premier Klein's, Premier Lougheed's, Premier Stelmach's, Premier Redford's service to Alberta by ensuring that we continue to build for the future of our great province; that we continue to provide the supports, services, and infrastructure Albertans need today; and that we ensure that our economy continues to thrive.

On the savings piece, Mr. Speaker, I often hear from the other side that it makes no sense – no sense – for us to save and borrow at the same time. I would ask the hon. members this. Do they not save and borrow at home? Many of us have a mortgage and a car loan while at the same time we put aside money for RRSPs or for a rainy day. If you waited until everything was paid off before you set aside money for savings, you would not have a very enjoyable retirement and you might not have the money you need to send your kids to college or to university or to help them out in their future. Where a province differs from personal finances is that the province will never retire.

It would seem that further lessons are required on the province's savings plan, the budget presentation, and our own balance sheet given that they don't seem to understand that we have no net debt

in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, and our net assets are growing. Alberta is running a consolidated surplus of \$1.1 billion this year. This number is based on current public accounting standards for all Canadian governments, and the Auditor General agrees with that statement. These standards were changed in 2003, so any Finance minister or Premier since this time would end up with the same number. We have received no major reservations, as I said today in question period, from the Auditor General on our budget and have committed to show how the consolidated financial statements, that will come out at the end of the fiscal year, will link back to the budget, the constructed budget that the Auditor General is looking for, which is exactly what I said in question period today.

3:10

So at the end of the day what does Budget 2014 mean to Albertans? It means a lot of things, Mr. Speaker. It means things like 40 new RCMP officers, housing for 2,000 homeless Albertans. It means twinning highway 63 and rehabilitating 2,500 kilometres of our provincial roadways. It means support for our seniors, the handicapped, the mentally ill, and those with addictions. It means more money for new schools, new school spaces, health care, and scholarships, and it means an ongoing commitment to open new markets, ensuring our resources can get the best price possible and creating wealth and opportunity for all Albertans.

Budget 2014 delivers on these commitments and many more with a \$2.6 billion operating surplus and no tax increases. At its core, Mr. Speaker, Budget 2014 helps Albertans who need it most and puts the right mix of programs, services, and infrastructure investments to ensure Alberta's continued success. We're investing in communities and families. We're opening new markets. We're saving for the future, and we're living within our means. This act will provide the government with the financial resources needed to deliver on the operational savings and capital plans set out in Budget 2014. I ask all members of this House to support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, we've heard from the government minister. We'll go to the Wildrose, then we'll go to the Liberals, then we'll go to the ND, and then we'll alternate ping-pong style: government, opposition, government, opposition.

Let's start with Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I wasn't really going to speak to this, but there's so much that the Finance minister has said that is completely erroneous and so much that he has actually said that flies in the face of everyday Albertans.

Let's talk about what he said. He talked about living within their means. The reality of it is that they've had six straight deficits and this government has driven this province back into debt. That's not living within your means by any Albertan standards. Not at all. The reality of it is that when Premier Klein left this government, he left them with a \$17 billion sustainability fund, and today there is none of that money left over. The reality of it is that Premier Lougheed created the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, and it is worth today exactly what it was worth when it was created. This government has shaved off every piece of value they could from that trust fund.

Our government, our province, and our residents could have had a sustainability fund that had grown. They could have had an Alberta heritage trust fund that is worth substantially more – some even propose that it could have been worth hundreds of billions of

dollars – and the revenue off of that fund could have actually replaced the dependency on resource revenue. That's not living within your means, Mr. Speaker. Living within your means means that you don't spend more than you make.

Nobody has a problem with you saving and borrowing at the same time. What they're saying, though, is that you've got to do it when you actually control the spending that you're seeing go out of your government. We are stewards of taxpayer money, and you have to be responsible with that taxpayer money. I understand that there are a lot of people on the other side who like to moan and groan about what the Wildrose says about this, but everyday Albertans don't want to see their dollars going to pay for executive coaching in Alberta Health Services. They don't want to see their dollars paying high severances to the likes of Mr. Allaudin Merali. They don't want to see their taxpayer dollars going to a CEO of Alberta Health Services that for every single month that she is hired, up to a year, is getting the exact same amount in severance pay. That is not responsible use of taxpayer dollars.

For this government to talk about living within your means, that's what that means. Every single Albertan knows what it's like to live within our means. Every day we make choices within our own households. We make choices regarding our children. We make choices with regard to purchases: our mortgages, our cars, our wants, and our needs. We balance that decision every single day. Some make better choices than others. But in a province as rich as ours we should be able to have balanced budgets, we should be able to have a hefty sustainability fund, and we should be able to have a heritage trust fund that has grown by leaps and bounds. The fact of the matter is that we have none of those things, none of them.

There is no question that things need to be built in this province – no question – and the Wildrose doesn't disagree with the party on the other side about that. What we also have proposed is that you could do that through the 10-year capital plan. Now, this government will tell you that we actually end up putting more money into infrastructure over 10 years than this government is putting in over the same period of time. The reality of it is that this government touts and talks about all of this building for infrastructure: 50 new schools, 70 renovations yet not a single shovel in the ground. Not a single one.

How can you sit there and tell Albertans that the reason we went into debt this year is because we're building when you haven't actually built a single thing? [interjection] You can tell me what you have, though. We know what we have. We have Alberta Health Services spending a billion dollars on waste. We have them spending \$460,000 every day in an 18-month period. What did they spend that money on? Executive coaching, snow removal, marriage counselling, yoga mats: that's what we have. We have proof of that.

Just last year we saw the Auditor General come out and talk about how Alberta Health Services spent \$100 million – \$100 million – on credit cards. What were they buying? Tickets to Flames games, actual product. The same things that they were supposed to save money on through the procurement process they actually ended up doing on credit cards, and the Auditor General spoke out against that.

What else do we see? Well, we see severance packages going to Alberta Health Services executives that far exceed what the average Albertan makes. Do you know what you could do with a hundred million dollars? Do you know what you could do for this province with the \$1 billion that was spent in 2012-2013? Do you know what that could have done to reduce the debt of this province?

When this government sits up here and talks about living within your means, why didn't you actually live within your means? Why didn't you go to Alberta Health Services and say: "This kind of behaviour will no longer be tolerated. We're going to take \$1 billion, and we're going to eliminate the pension liability for our front-line workers"? Why didn't you say to Alberta Health Services: "We care so much about how our front-line workers provide services to the needy, the vulnerable, the elderly. We respect you so much"? Why didn't you say to them: "Rather than padding our own pockets and the people who donate to our party, you know what, front-line people? We're going to get right behind you, and we're going to make sure that Budget 2014 actually protects those who provide the most needed care in this province"?

Why didn't this government live up to its campaign promises and balance the budget? Why couldn't they do that? That was a campaign promise. They like to talk all the time about what the Wildrose would do or what the Wildrose wouldn't do. The reality of it is that they went door-knocking, and they told everyday Albertans, "This is what we're going to do for you," and then the minute they got elected, they turned their tails and ran.

Why does this government continue to disrespect the very people who built this province, the very people who right now are having a hard time paying their power bills, have an incredibly hard time getting two baths a week, can't even get home-cooked meals? Are you guys actually really proud of the fact that you spent \$460,000 a day in an 18-month period on executive coaching? Is the PC government proud of Budget 2014, which in previous years allowed executive pensions that are so grossly overrated to go to people that don't even provide front-line service?

When we want to talk about Budget 2014, do you want to make real change? Do you want to actually effect change in this province? You stand up and you say: "I'm going to protect the needy. I'm going to protect the vulnerable. I'm going to side with my front-line services. I'm going to make sure that we actually do have the best health care system in the world, not just a mediocre one. I'm going to actually make sure that every single taxpayer dollar is responsibly spent, and we will end the process of abusing the taxpayer."

That's what Budget 2014 could have done, but it doesn't do that. Instead, what it does is disrespect everyday Albertans by telling them things that aren't accurate, by telling them that this is a balanced budget, by telling them that we live within our means, but we've blown through a \$17 billion sustainability fund. The reason we are back in debt today is not because of anyone else. There's been one government in this province for 43 years, and every single problem that we have today is because of one government. The government actually could have said: "Today we're going to change the way we do business, today we're going to stand up for everyday Albertans, today we're going to live within our means, and we're going to set the example."

3:20

Budget 2014 could have reversed the 50 per cent increase that the PC members on the other side, who have the controlling interest on committees, voted to give MLAs. It could have reversed that. We certainly would have supported that. Budget 2014 could have put stronger caps on sole-sourced contracts. It could have done that. It didn't do that either. Budget 2014 really could have said that we are going to reinvest in Alberta, and it chose not to do that.

Here's the added problem that Budget 2014 has, and this is the problem that the Minister of Finance has. In Budget 2013 he stood

up and said almost exactly the same speech as he gave this year. What happened two months after Budget 2013? Well, I'm pretty sure most of the people in the gallery could tell you what happened two months after Budget 2013. It looked a lot like this, Mr. Speaker. It looked like people with developmental disabilities got a \$42 million cut. That wasn't in Budget 2013. Two months after, what did this government do? They said to the most needy and the most vulnerable in this province: we're going to cut you by \$42 million.

They would have went through with that plan. The only thing that stopped them was massive protests and massive organizing and an effective all-party opposition. It was not the PC Party, it was not the PC government that stood on the steps of the Legislature saying: "We will reverse those cuts immediately. We made a mistake." It wasn't them. They were going to push through the \$42 million in cuts. [interjections] I understand that the members on that side don't like to hear this. It makes them uncomfortable. But that's a fact. Nobody made that up. The department of PDD got a \$42 million budget cut right after the budget was delivered.

Who else got a cut? A 7.3 per cent cut to postsecondaries. But that wasn't in Budget 2013 either. What happened then? Programs were cut, programs that affect every single everyday Albertan. What did they say then? They said: "In Budget 2013 we're living within our means. In Budget 2013 we're standing up for Albertans. In Budget 2013 we are protecting the needs of Albertans." Two months later they cut postsecondary, and they cut disabilities for \$42 million. Now, the Minister of Infrastructure applauds that. That's an interesting take. I'm not so sure his constituents would agree with him, but if he likes to applaud cuts to disabilities, that's his position. That's not what Albertans want. That's not living within your means.

The problem they have with Budget 2014 is that, quite frankly, they just don't trust you. How do we know that two months from now Budget 2014 doesn't talk about all the same things and then turns around and makes the exact same cuts they tried to make last year? Mr. Speaker, we can all sit here and talk about partisan lines. We can do that, and I do it all the time, and every single member in here does. [interjection] Yeah, I absolutely do. You're right, Minister of Finance. You're absolutely right. I'm a Wildrose member, and I'll stand up for Wildrose policies any time.

The difference between me and the Minister of Finance is that I campaigned on balanced budgets, and that's exactly what we'll do. It is not my job to make sure that they fulfill the promises they made in the 2012 election. My job is to hold them accountable to the promises they made in the 2012 election campaign. My job is to stand up for everyday Albertans.

I will remind the hon. members on the other side that 440,000 Albertans, actually a little more than that, didn't vote for your party. Four hundred and forty thousand Albertans. There were actually more Albertans who voted against you than with you.

I would remind all members that when you're talking about living within your means, everyday Albertans know exactly what that means. When their power bills go sky-high and their mom and dad can't get a fresh-cooked meal in their care facility and they can't get a care worker for their disabled person because there are not enough resources, everyday Albertans very clearly know and they remember that Alberta Health Services executives got big buyouts. They know you spent \$460,000 a day for 18 months. They know that you gave perks to Alberta Health Services employees the day after they were reorganized out of their positions. That's something each and every one of you will have to answer for at the doors in your constituency.

But just remember. To everybody in this room: you had a \$17 billion sustainability fund, that you blew through in seven years, in the best years this province has ever had. That is not living within your means by any standard.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as I indicated, in the rotation we will now go to the Liberal opposition on Bill 8, followed by the ND opposition, and then back to government.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I did get an opportunity to speak a little bit in committee about my concerns on how the budget process had gone and about some of the different departments where I felt there could have been either money saved or where it should have been reallocated.

You know, I don't even know where to start with this. It's always the same overriding issues, Mr. Speaker. We are an immensely wealthy province, and that's a good thing and a bad thing. On the bad side it means that we don't have to be as creative as other provinces and even other states in the U.S. have been to solve some of their problems. They haven't investigated or supported sectors to get things happening that ended up working very well for them. So we have too much money to be creative. That's not to say that there's no creativity in what's going on, that there's no innovation or no research. All of that is true, but to the level that we are capable of in this province, we are not even coming close because we can just chuck money at it. We, the government, can just chuck money at it, and they do. That's how they fix lots of stuff. Now, amazingly, they tell us there's no money one day, and then, lo and behold, they've got money to chuck at something the next day because they think they might lose that seat.

On the other side of this we are spending nonrenewable resource revenue every single day, and that is the oil that came out of the oil sands or out of conventional oil and gas yesterday. We're spending it today. We're subsidizing our operating every single day by 30 per cent. For every dollar the government spends today providing programs and services, 30 per cent of that, 30 cents on that dollar, came out of the ground yesterday. We can't get it back. They're nonrenewable resources. They're not trees. It's not agriculture. We can't get it again unless a few of my hon. colleagues would like to lay down and die, and in a few hundred thousand years we would have more of it. That just went right over everybody.

Mr. Eggen: That was kind of weird, actually.

Ms Blakeman: Well, you know, we had a Premier that once said that greenhouse gases were from dinosaur farts.

But what is problematic for me about the spending of that nonrenewable resource revenue is that it's gone. We are increasingly in a situation – we can just start to see it out there on the horizon – where people either cannot or will not want to buy that oil or gas, and then what? We can't subsidize ourselves with that money anymore because it's not there. We're not likely to run out of it – we've got pretty good reserves – although eventually we will. I think we're at somewhere between a 50- and a 75-year horizon. But the likelihood that people will stop buying it from us because it has a bad reputation or we use too much water in production or any number of other reasons: that's much more likely. So then what? You're going to cut 30 per cent of the programs and services here because you don't have that revenue anymore? You shouldn't have to do that.

3:30

I have always looked and the Liberal caucus has always looked for savings plans, that that nonrenewable resource revenue would be put into a savings plan. This year when I heard that there was going to be a social investment fund – I'm sorry. Am I using the right words? Social impact bond? Social endowment fund? I mean, there's a reason why there's such confusion around that. Every time I asked about it in a budget debate, I got: well, we're working on that. I'm sorry. How do you do a budget if what you've actually defined has not been worked out yet? How do you know what the budget figure is? You can't. So that tells me that you're kind of making up figures, which is what I always thought, but it's nice to have the proof.

I was very interested in these social bonds, this social investment fund. Where's the money coming from? Oh, well, let's just take it out of the heritage savings trust fund. That's not making much of a difference. It's taking it out of one trust fund and putting it into another trust fund. That's doing nothing about spending that nonrenewable resource revenue. So no problem solved there.

Then somehow we're going to get private investors involved in public services by investing in it, but if they don't like the outcomes, then they get their money back. You know, to me there's a reason why there is a difference and a separation between public administration and public money and private corporations. Now, private corporations are there to make money for their shareholders. Okey-dokey. Fair enough. Public administration is there to provide a program and a service for the particular user groups, and any surplus they get is reinvested into providing that program or service. So they have different objectives. When you start crossing those objectives, it doesn't work.

I remember that in the arts community some years back it was decided that part of the reason the arts were struggling was not because we weren't getting enough funding but because we weren't running enough like a business. Well, we're not a business. Anyway, we were made to act like businesses, and as a result we lost almost half of our large companies in Alberta. We lost Stage Polaris, we lost the Phoenix, and a number of the other companies were in serious, serious trouble: Theatre Calgary, the Citadel, Alberta Ballet, and a couple of other ones. So this whole thing about, yeah, let's make the not-for-profits and the public administration, which is also government, folks, act more like a business does not work. I still don't understand this great social fund that's supposed to be happening. It sure isn't doing anything to save nonrenewable resource revenue.

Now, you will see that we have a number of pages that assist us in this Assembly. If I were them, I would be right ticked off at the people that sit in here because we're spending their money. They're not even going to get a choice in it. They're not even going to get a chance to say: gee whiz, don't you think you could save some of that so there might be some left when I get to a point where I could really use it? They don't even get that chance because we're spending it already. We spent it yesterday.

What do I think about this appropriation bill? Well, I don't like it. I don't like it because I think that there's a deliberate attempt on behalf of the government to deliver three sets of books. I just think that's inappropriate. Lo and behold, the Auditor General agrees with me. He thinks it's inappropriate, too. It is not done according to generally accepted accounting practices, which is the standard, even, if I may say, the gold standard of how we produce financial statements in this country and across the world. So we've now taken ourselves out of any comparison with any other jurisdiction. That may well be deliberate on the part of the government. They

don't want to be compared. I can't imagine why that would be, but there you are.

I don't like the three sets of books. I don't like the fact that there is no real savings plan in there. I don't like the fact that supposedly a budget is produced and nobody can tell me how because they haven't finalized details on things. I mean, a budget is a plan. If you don't actually know what your plan is, how are you going to be able to implement it day after day? Oh, well, that would be why they're not.

Back to where I started, which was that we have enormous wealth, which should be able to work for all of our constituents, all of our citizens in the province. It really should. I have to admit that this government has absolutely baffled me in the way they can blow so much money and have almost nothing to show for it. I mean, yesterday I was talking about them rolling up and smoking something, and I was kind of teasing them, but honestly it's literally gone up in smoke. How could we possibly be plowing more and more and more money into health care and having less and less and less access? We are doing worse on just about any target or benchmark or comparison or outcome that we've ever used. We're putting more money in and getting less of a result and less of an outcome. This is just not good. I'm being studiously ignored. It tells me that I'm probably right.

You know, we're speaking in third reading, and we're supposed to be speaking about the anticipated effect of the bill. I think the effect of this bill will be another series of stumbling and bumbling, a lack of credibility in what the government is doing, no new ways of actually dealing with problems, just pretending that you're doing something new without really doing it. The people that are really going to pay the price for this are the people that have less tools at their disposal in this province: the vulnerable, the poor, the elderly, the aboriginal, and the new immigrants that can't find a place for themselves.

That just isn't, you know, the society that I wanted to live in, and frankly it's not what the people across from me are capable of. There are a lot of good brains over there. They're just not getting a chance to work, for some reason. I just find this Bill 8, the Appropriation Act, profoundly – I mean, what are the words you can use here? Disappointing? That doesn't seem accurate enough.

Mr. Eggen: Insubstantial.

Ms Blakeman: Insubstantial, yes. It's all of those things.

There's just no good reason. I'm tired of listening to the rhetoric that we get from over there, the pretending that it's all okay. You know, the first thing on the road to recovery is admitting that you have a problem, and this government has to admit they have a problem. You do.

Thanks very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is now available.

Seeing none, let's move on, then, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the associate minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have some brief concluding remarks in regard to the budget bill. I have spoken at length on this Bill 8 already, but I think it's important for us to just make a quick review here of some of the main points that form the foundation of any given budget and what specifically they are in this particular budget in 2014.

Whenever we see a budget come forward, we like to look to see what the government uses as a measurement of inflation and a measurement of population growth. We can debate as to whether those numbers are accurate or not. I found them to be reasonably

so in this particular document. It's very important as a benchmark for how each of the budgets in each of the ministries comes through because, of course, if inflation and population growth are at a certain level, then it doesn't matter if you have a small increase or even a larger increase in a budget. If it doesn't meet that number, then effectively it's still a cut. So it's very important.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I think the numbers for this year in terms of a combination of inflation and population growth globally for our economy here in the province of Alberta were set by the government at about 5 per cent. So this budget overall I believe was at about 3.7 per cent. If you didn't meet that 3 per cent, let's say, in each of the ministries just as a baseline, then it's as good as a cut, really, considering the growth of our economy. Everybody knows that our economy is growing here. Any suggestion about belt tightening and, you know, that we have to make hard decisions and make these cuts here and there is absolute balderdash, right? We know very well that our economy is doing very well. Thank you very much.

The Alberta New Democrats toured around to each corner of this province before the budget came out, and we found no signs of anything but substantial growth in both the economy and the population in our fair province from north to south and east to west. So if you're not meeting that 3 per cent rate for any of the ministries, then in fact you're making a cut. Really, this budget is nothing more than a hold-the-line budget if you put it right across the whole spectrum.

3:40

If you start looking at where the money is actually coming from, then it becomes even more interesting, Mr. Speaker. As I said last night, at this juncture with our economy and the way things are, I think it's a precondition of building a budget, a responsible budget, that it balances. This one sort of does, but once you go through all of the Byzantine layers of how they report this budget, which takes an expert and a team of researchers to finally sort through it, you'll see that, probably, we are balanced or around \$50,000 north or south of balancing the budget, which is quite remarkable, really, when you're thinking of a \$43 billion number. The key to that is that we received a \$1.1 billion increase in our transfer payments for health care from the federal government. If we didn't get that, indeed we would have ended up with another budget deficit here in 2014 in Alberta.

So we need to really give our heads a shake about that. Here we are with, probably, the engine of the Canadian economy, this tremendous growth in population and in our economy, and we're still not really balancing the budget without some transfer payment from Ottawa. That makes you wonder, I think. Everybody's shaking and scratching their heads to various degrees here, and I certainly am, too.

It's very important, Mr. Speaker, to look at this picture in the wider sense, not just where we spend those monies in each ministry but how we get the revenues to actually pay for that. We've talked about this before. We know very well that we have a serious revenue problem in this province. We let billions of dollars slip through our fingers that are rightfully ours as the owners of the natural resources that we have in this province and the generators of the economy which creates the basis by which people make so much money. Some people make a lot of money out of this province. If we're not capturing that money, we're not being responsible as legislators here in the province of Alberta.

I am embarrassed to watch just how much money does slip through our fingers through a very, very antiquated and primitive tax structure that we have here for both personal income tax and

corporate tax. Then, of course, there are the royalties that we fail to collect from our nonrenewable natural resources.

It's interesting. We have to look around. We should always try to learn from best practices in other jurisdictions in Canada and around the world. I was looking at Saskatchewan. I know people like to hold Saskatchewan up because it's also having a period of economic growth and prosperity. Good for them. That's all fine and good. You know, they have a much more reasonable agreed-upon tax structure that is progressive. A progressive tax structure, for people who don't know what it is: the most advanced, industrialized countries in the world use it. It's a way by which you can tax at different levels different levels of your income so that people that are earning \$50,000 or \$40,000 are not being unfairly burdened with the same tax percentage as someone who earns a million dollars or something like that.

With a progressive tax structure similar to the way Saskatchewan collects their taxes and other ways by which they collect their taxes, we could realize an extra \$3.7 billion here in the province of Alberta. That would not just balance the budget very well, thank you very much, but it could actually make the investments for which we are responsible here as the provincial Legislature a real investment in social capital to ensure that no child gets left behind, that we do have a proper K to 12 education program with not overburdened class sizes, that postsecondary education is not unaffordable for people who need and should be able to go there, and that our health care system is looking after people, especially in their senior years.

Just why one simple adjustment that we can learn from the province next to us, only a few hundred kilometres away – I don't see anybody in Saskatchewan suffering from a progressive tax structure. I think that they all think that this is a very fine thing. The net emigration from Saskatchewan to Alberta has been stemmed by their very progressive tax structure and the way by which they organize themselves. You know, we could do something very similar, a very modest proposal. It's not radical. It's something that we ran our province on for the majority of the history of this province, and then suddenly we've slipped into this sort of, as I say, very primitive and regressive tax system of the flat tax, which is to nobody's benefit except the very few people that earn over a million dollars or so.

Those are some of the things that I just wanted to make sure that we got out of the way, that we made very clear here before we finished off with our appropriations debate. Alberta New Democrats believe that we have fundamentally a very strong province. We have a very educated population, and we have a natural resource base that is the envy of many other places in the world. We've created a situation by which we are not using those nonrenewable energy resources to transition into a renewable, sustainable, equitable, and socially just society, and until we do that, we're not doing our jobs as legislators. We will certainly continue to fight, to push in that direction. There are strong forces that push in the other directions, but then, I suppose, through that tension we should really work in the spirit of compromise and look for the things that are best for the people and the majority of the people most of the time.

We look for common-sense, practical solutions. We're not walking around carrying these heavy burdens of ideology that seek to dismantle the public good. We know where we came from as New Democrats, and we know that the vast majority of Albertans actually entertain the same basic principles as we do: the spirit of co-operation, the spirit of looking after each other when we're most in need, the spirit of creating something that's sustainable and not blowing off all of your nonrenewable money

and resources all in one go, all in one generation. You know, it's a matter of time. So these budgets, moments in time once a year, are a chance for us to remind ourselves of what's most important and to remind ourselves of exactly whose money we're debating on in the first place here, right? We look for ways to be more efficient, and we look for ways to be more equitable.

Mr. Speaker, you know, someday I would sure like to vote for a budget. It would be so great, and I'm hoping, based on the very practical suggestions that we've put forward in regard to education, in regard to health care, in regard to finance, energy, and so forth, that we can find some middle ground by which we can work and move forward.

It's sort of ironic because, I mean, some of the things that I was reflecting on over the last 48 hours about this budget are places that this government sought to go to, at least in writing, on paper, when they ran the last election: this idea of full-day kindergarten, this idea of investing in postsecondary education, diversifying our economy, and so forth, right? Obviously, this government knows what is the right thing to do because they put it in black and white in their campaign documents in 2012, so it's not as though they are working from a deck of cards that's ignorance, by any chance, but they are making choices, and the last 24 months have been a bit cathartic, Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, for everyone. You know, I've never seen anything quite like it, quite frankly, how things started to fall apart in terms of the government and the change in direction that they've made, but now is a chance to pull back. It's a fresh beginning. We'll have a new Premier, and I really do expect that this PC government will take a hard, existential look at just where they are right now and start to invest in the things that people really need and want in this province.

We can have lots of empty words about how we want to take care of people and so forth, but we can only judge a government by their actions, so every single individual action that this government seems to take on money, on social policy, and so forth always seems to default to looking after a very small percentage of the population and making those people more able and more well off while the rest of the population, which is more than 4 million people here now, seems to have to get by with less and less. It's perhaps the most bitter irony when you live in a place where there is obvious prosperity, such obvious prosperity, and the cost of living even at full employment is becoming more and more difficult to bear.

So, Mr. Speaker, Alberta New Democrats are here. We are providing some practical alternatives. I think people are starting to listen, and I'm very proud to be having this opportunity to speak here today.

Thank you very much.

3:50

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Associate Minister of Recovery and Reconstruction for Southwest Alberta.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak to Bill 8, the Appropriation Act, 2014. Obviously, this is the bill that sets out the amounts per department that were in the budget and puts them into law for those amounts to then be utilized by the various government departments in delivering public services to Albertans. I do want to provide a number of comments today that focus on a couple of key areas that were discussed already as part of this act by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board as well as some of the

members of the opposition that have spoken already and provide a particular context for myself and on behalf of my constituents of Calgary-Klein.

The first thing that I do want to talk about is that, you know, obviously, we've heard from a couple of opposition parties that the government can never do enough, that there's never enough money for the government to deal with all the challenges that we have, and they are correct, Mr. Speaker. One of the fundamental reasons that we are here as Members of the Legislative Assembly is to allocate what is a finite amount of resources in our society to try to make our province a better place to live for those that live in it, our constituents. So there will never be enough money.

But what is really interesting is that they continue to perpetuate this plan of spending more and taxing more, whether it's raising royalties, income tax, whatever, that, frankly, has been rejected by Albertans over and over and over again for decades in this province. I can tell you that a significant majority of my constituents do not want their taxes to be raised. They do want the government to be more efficient with their taxpayers' money, and that's what we've set out to do through our results-based budgeting process and in a number of steps that we've taken in last year's budget and this year's budget. So, you know, I just can't subscribe to that line of thinking, Mr. Speaker.

I do want to make some comments around what was talked about earlier, actually, in question period by the Member for Airdrie, and I think the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake referred to it as well. It has to do with the budget deficit or surplus that we may or may not have in this province. When the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board tabled his particular budget about a month ago or a month and a half ago, he indicated, as he mentioned earlier today, that we have a consolidated \$1.1 billion budget surplus in this province for the first time in six years. That's something that I think every member of this Assembly can be very, very proud of. I know that I'm certainly proud of it. I know that a majority of the work and effort that I put in with my time as the MLA for Calgary-Klein has been focused on trying to get us back into a surplus position, and this is something that I'm very proud of.

But there have been a number of comments that this is not true. Frankly, I get the sense that a number of members without saying it have actually said that we're not telling the truth, that we're hiding something. Well, I went back and did an analysis and looked at Budget 2005, one of the last budgets tabled under former Premier Klein, who these members always hold up to the highest standards of fiscal conservatism and responsibility, and looked at how they calculated the surplus that was put out there. At that time they were projecting a \$1.5 billion surplus. The way that you calculate it – and this is according to public-sector accounting standards, the exact same standards that the hon. Member for Airdrie was talking about earlier today in question period – is by essentially taking all revenue sources and subtracting the total expenses, and that's how you get your surplus. Total expenses are essentially the sum of your program expenses and debt servicing costs, and what goes under program expenses are your base operating expenses, expenses for capital purpose, and any sort of sustainability fund transfers. That's how you calculate it.

One of things that probably not very many members know about – and I'm sure that the Member for Airdrie for his time on Treasury Board probably understands this, but I would bet dollars to doughnuts that not very many members over there, particularly the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, who wanted to stand up and suggest that the Finance minister didn't know what he was talking about, could tell, from a public-sector accounting practice,

the difference between capital investment and capital grants. Now, they all go into capital projects, and they go into our capital plan, \$6.6 billion of it. But some of it is capital investment, and some of it is capital grants.

Capital grants are grants that we provide to third-party entities like Alberta Health Services, school boards, municipalities, whatever, that end up going on to own that asset. Capital investments are stuff like provincial roads, corrections facilities, any sort of provincial bridges, any sort of assets that are then owned by the provincial government. Those actually are not counted in total program expense according to the public-sector accounting standards. It has been like that forever. That's how Ralph Klein used to calculate his budgets. Frankly, it's how every government in this country calculates whether they have a deficit or a surplus position, including the federal government. When the members over there wanted to stand up and suggest what a great job Jim Flaherty did for this country – and he did – this was the standard that he used to determine the calculation of whether the federal government was in a surplus or a deficit position.

It's funny, I got into this debate on Twitter with the gentleman that purports to represent the taxpayers in Alberta. He's a well-intentioned individual, but he threw out two different deficit numbers: the deficit is actually \$2.3 billion, or it's \$3.9 billion. I said: "What? How can there be two deficit numbers?" How can you have any sort of credibility by saying, "Well, it actually might be two different things?" I said: why don't we just decide to calculate it the way that every other government in Canada decides to calculate it, the way that the Institute of Chartered Accountants wants us to calculate it when they set out the public-sector accounting standards? By doing that, you get a surplus this year of \$1.1 billion, Mr. Speaker. That's something that I think we can all be proud of as Albertans.

The second thing that I want to talk about – and it goes to the crux of what I think is a very significant division in this Legislature – has to do with our capital plan. As I just mentioned, it's actually a \$6.6 billion capital plan. It's certainly a little bit more than we anticipated that we were going to spend last year, but we have some significant challenges. Last year when the budget was tabled, in 2013, we didn't have a deal for the southwest portion of the ring road. Last year when we tabled Budget 2013, we didn't have the 2013 floods. This is a significant difference about the approach around capital and how those capital projects should be financed, Mr. Speaker.

Under the way the opposition is proposing, they would have had to cut schools, cut roads, cut hospitals and all other capital expenditures in order to then fund the southwest Calgary ring road because their 10-year debt-free capital plan provides them with no flexibility to be able to deal with these things that come up on an ongoing basis when you're in government. In order to put in the mitigation that we're putting in in southern Alberta, that we're investing in, they would have had to cut hospitals, roads, and schools. In fact, Mr. Speaker, they would have cut, according to their plan, \$2.6 billion out of this capital plan.

If you go to pages 72 and 73 of your fiscal tables that were tabled with the budget, there's the capital plan, and it lays out all of the money. I challenged them last year, and they couldn't do it, and we were asking them to cut even less money out of the budget. Now they're saying that they're going to cut even more money out of the capital budget this year. I challenge them to do it. They make up this excuse: well, we don't have a priority list. Go to pages 72 and 73 of the fiscal tables, and do it. Put your money where your mouth is because that's what this government is doing. We are talking about building Alberta, and that's what

we're doing. A 36 per cent reduction in the capital plan does not cut it.

4:00

I want to go back to Ralph Klein. Again, I mentioned this last year. You know, I represent the constituency of Calgary-Klein. I've got a great respect for Ralph Klein and what his legacy was. One of his legacies, of course, was to get rid of the provincial debt. I agree with that. Some might think that we're not meeting those needs or not respecting that by doing what we're doing, by capital financing infrastructure projects.

One of the other things that was Ralph Klein's legacy is being an honest guy and suggesting that when we've done something wrong that we should be doing something different and changing courses. He did that very, very well. In 2006 he came out and said: yes, we didn't have a plan; what they're saying is right. I tabled the CBC article last year in the House around this time about when he said: we didn't have a plan, but we're working on it.

What would be a shame for Ralph Klein's policy would be to not heed his advice and to not have a plan to deal with the growth that we're experiencing right now in this province, which is the highest amount of growth that we've experienced in decades and decades and decades. We've increased the population in this province by 25 per cent over the last 13 years, and it's anticipated to increase by another 20 per cent over the next 10 years. That is substantial growth, and these projects cannot be put on hold. It's amazing.

The member from Medicine Hat has stood up over the last couple of months and asked questions about a hospital. I think it was in Consort or something. He stood up and asked questions about a school that has mould and leaking issues. Oh, the hospital was the one in Sherwood Park. Sorry. The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View stood up and asked questions about schools needed in west Calgary. The Member for Livingstone-Macleod stood up and asked questions about the twinning of highway 8 and highway 3. These are all issues that are pressures because of the growth that we're experiencing.

I can tell you this, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we're going to work very hard to make sure that those projects are going to get done. I'll tell you how they're not going to get done, though, or not get done as fast as the people that they're asking these questions on behalf of want them to be done: by cutting \$6.2 billion out of the capital plan. That's how they're not going to get done.

With that, I do want to suggest that this is a government that's trying to find balance. We found balance by balancing the budget this year. But we're trying to find balance by living within our means, making government better, making it more efficient while trying to meet the needs of today, of citizens today, because that's what our constituents want. I know that's what the constituents in Calgary-Klein want. They don't want me to turn a blind eye to the growth that we're experiencing because I'm ideologically bound to not taking on any debt to build capital projects.

Now, yes, our capital plan has grown. I, too, will have the same concerns if our debt levels, you know, continue to rise, rise, rise, and rise to the point where they're not sustainable and it puts us in a very difficult position in the future. But we're a long way away from that, Mr. Speaker. We have the appropriate mechanisms in place, as the Minister of Finance clearly articulated earlier, to make sure that that doesn't happen.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that I'm open to all sorts of debate around whether we're making the right decisions or the wrong decisions. But let's be open and honest and not be blinded by ideology, not be blinded by partisanship. That fact is that we

have a lot of pressures in this province, and we as elected people on behalf of our constituents are put here to meet those pressures while balancing those needs with those of future generations.

I might get into it a little bit later when we start discussing some of the pension legislation that's before the House around the complete hypocrisy of what the Official Opposition is proposing to deal with the unfunded liability and just leaving that for future taxpayers because they're just going to cut off defined benefits and start putting new hires on a defined contribution plan. The liability, the debt, that that would leave for future taxpayers – but then they oppose any sort of debt while putting an asset in the ground. The hypocrisy is amazing, Mr. Speaker, and I think some of those members should be shaking their heads and asking themselves some very serious questions about why they're actually here in this Legislature. Is it to win the next election, or is to serve their constituents and do the right things on behalf of their constituents not just for today but for tomorrow?

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Then I'll recognize the Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I love following the passionate speeches of Calgary-Klein because, I mean, he is very passionate on numbers and stuff like that. It's good to hear. I appreciate that.

Now, the key to value for money – and I appreciate when he brings that up. He talks about the southwest ring road and whatnot. I've had the opportunity to talk to the previous MLA in my riding. He was part of those negotiations way back when. They found that they always had problems getting something signed because it was going to cost too much money at the time. They didn't feel they had good value for money. So if the current Infrastructure minister feels that he did get a good deal on that, I guess, then so be it. We'll let the public decide on that one. I think I understand where everybody has to move forward.

You talk about ideas for where to cut some money. Well, the hillbilly farmer will give you a couple of thoughts and equations here on it, and these are not my fresh ideas. Don't get me wrong. But quite a few of them are to just go back to some standard things for how to save some money on the schools. If at some time somebody plans to build 50 new schools and renovate 70 of them, let's go back to some old cookie-cutter ideas. I'm not going to be the ape of the place. It goes back so many years. You know, back in Vulcan county in the '50s and '60s all the schools there – Mossleigh, Arrowwood, Milo, Brant, Lomond, Vulcan – had the same floor plans. The bigger the school was, you made two levels of it. Those are some places we can save some honest money as far as how to build things.

When I was on the Tri-Services Building Committee in Vulcan, we had an ambulance, RCMP, and fire department built into one. The first person we got, an architect that came onboard, got 8.75 per cent for their job. So they're going to come in and try to sell us a \$10 million building because in their eyes we needed to have lots of two-way glass and rock and everything else, not to mention the fact that behind the building there are two huge concrete silos where the two local elevators are. So aesthetically pleasing? Maybe we didn't need to do that there.

Now, the problem is that you have an architect saying: well, we have to do this. And there are only two architects that the RCMP will hire when they do new buildings because of security, so they come across with that. They almost kind of push you into that corner of: what are you going to do if you don't take us? It's

pretty simple. You fire them, which we did. We said: "Okay. That's fine. We're going to make this project into two, then. We'll do the ambulance and RCMP, which is our side." When we did that and we got that across, we put up an extra concrete wall. We built our side. Then we let the RCMP go back to hiring their architect and doing their part on their half of the building. It saved over half the money by doing it that way.

Those are little things. This goes back to when you don't lose source stuff and you sit there and make people be accountable for the money they use. I'm not saying that we can't move forward with some of these ideas. I get that we can't change the past and that.

You know, we talk about our assets, which the Finance minister talked about before. I've run a farm. When I do my assets sheet, it's what you can sell, what's liquid, stuff like that. Then you look at your whole farm, what your farmland is worth, what your home is worth, what your farm machinery is worth if you were to have an auction sale, and go from there.

The problem in this province is that you can't sell the roads, the bridges, the schools, the hospitals. When we're looking at things to sell and do that, it's going to be a challenge that way, to make that come across.

One of the big things I hear from my constituents is about severance packages. I mean, we have a gallery full of people here that are looking at their pensions and stuff. I'll guarantee you that not one of them up there would argue the point that if they were told that they would get one month's wages for every month they worked, they'd be tickled pink. Nobody else in the real world gets that unless you're a communications staff member or the past Premier, stuff like that. That's what the problem is. We start signing people up for things that are unobtainable. If you wouldn't do that with your own money, you should never do that with public money. It's that simple. There are rules that obviously got danced around a little bit there to make those happen.

When I was on county council, when I was a reeve, if somebody got let go or somebody was retiring, mostly let go, they got one month's wage for every year they worked up to 18 months. So you got a year and a half's wages. That's a pretty standard thing. But when you start getting one month's wage for every month worked, it's unheard of. Nobody does that. That's the problem. These are the things that people get outraged about. So moving forward, I sure hope you guys can get that wrangled that back in. Those are issues, I guess, where people feel that maybe the value for money isn't there. That's where they have concerns on this budget that's going through. Are we truly getting value for the money?

4:10

The Minister of Transportation and I have talked lots, and you've raised it, Calgary-Klein, you know, about what we ask for on this side. Well, we're here to represent our constituents. I think we all do that. I think there are 87 people here that went out and got elected, worked hard. I never argue that we didn't all go out and work hard to get elected here, and you're here to represent your constituents. My constituents have asked for some intersections. They're asking about school upgrades and everything else. So of course I'm going to advocate for them. But I find it slightly ironic that you sit there and throw it back at us that we ask about these things. That's our job. I think we all know that. And it's politics, and it's a part of being in the House, and I get the theatrics side of it.

You know, talking with the Minister of Transportation, I mean, Coalhurst intersection is a key one where I've raised the issue here. I've had the questions. He's been great to answer them. If we want to get back to saving money and what we'd do differently,

do a value for dollar when you're doing projects. They're going to be doing an overlay on that highway there coming up this summer. Transportation has let us know that's going to happen. I get that we're working, that we're paving and making the province better. One of the things when we're doing that is to maybe do the extra lane that needs to go into this community while they're doing that because it saves money. It doesn't have the start-up costs like if I were to bring in a whole crew to do that. You already have the paving crew coming in. It's stuff like that if you want to save some money.

Go back to some of the key people around those tables. They know how to make things happen. They know where to save money if you give them the opportunity. Go back and talk to the people that are making it work.

The Nobleford intersection. We don't have the \$40 million – I talked to the previous Transportation minister about it – to do an overpass there. It's understandable. Then let's live within our means. If you talk with the people there, they're keen on: what can we come up with that's different for that? When you sit and talk with people from around our constituency, they're fine with that. They understand that the money isn't maybe there for that. But what can we do to live within our means and get good value for our dollar? You know, those are the kinds of things, I think, if you're looking for ideas on where to save some money, to sit there and just make some basic, simple cuts. Basic things for how to get the best value for your dollar.

Is it going to work in every scenario? No. Obviously not, and I get that. I'm a realist that way. But I think those are the kinds of things that we need to always keep our eyes on and say: I think that's what we need to do. Those are the challenges, I guess, that we have.

Other colleagues have raised what was brought up in previous budgets and what happened and the flood. Yeah. I mean, that's going to be a challenge. Nobody saw that coming. Remember, also, that we should get a large amount of money back from the federal government on that. But as a taxpayer, you know, I guess I'm paying for it either way, whether it goes through federal taxes or provincial.

We talk about how fast this province is growing. One of the things that's great when people come here, the 100,000 a year that are moving to this province, is that they also do pay taxes here. So they're paying into the system. Is it going to cumulatively come up that fast? Probably not, but at least they're paying taxes. We always have to make sure we know that.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will sit down and let my other colleagues go. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise again to speak on the issue of this budget and why it is that our caucus will not be supporting this budget. I was just looking online here – the joys of having computers in the Assembly these days, and thank you to the Speaker for that – and I note the report on the Public Accounts Committee that occurred today, where the Auditor General was asked about the accounting processes used with respect to this budget and what he thought of them. In fact, the article says that Alberta's Auditor General told an all-party Legislature committee and senior Finance officials on Wednesday that the provincial budget fails to meet general accounting standards. I'm pretty sure that this is something that

people have been telling this government for a long time. The quote, in fact, is as follows:

From my experience and just observing from the sidelines, a lot of time is spent interpreting these different formats . . . time [that] could be . . . spent on actually debating the essence of the budget itself.

Now, there's an interesting thought.

Then, finally, one of the Finance officials, you know, the public servants who are compelled to follow the direction of this government, stated:

The budget is a policy choice of government.

This is the ADM in Finance.

A government of the day could choose to move to a budget that's based on a financial statement basis at some point in the future. That has not been the choice of government.

Then Saher went on to say: I just think there's a better way of presenting information to the public.

Then this raises an interesting question. Why does the government present and report the budget the way they are now? I think the fact of the matter is that they really don't want Albertans to see the state of our finances in a clear fashion. Now, just to be very clear. I'm no Wildroser. I am not going to come riding in on my . . .

Ms Blakeman: Palomino.

Ms Notley: Palomino – thank you, Member for Edmonton-Centre – to demand that we slash and burn services and eliminate this debt tomorrow. But I do think that we cannot deal with the problem if we don't begin by looking at the numbers honestly and identifying the extent of the problem clearly and openly for all Albertans. Now, I appreciate that this government is not terribly interested in having that kind of conversation with Albertans because – you know what? – they've been in charge for 43 years, and the fact of the matter is that they are completely and entirely responsible for the extent of the problem.

The problem is not only a shortcoming in a number of areas that I'm going to talk about in a bit, but the problem is also a profound shortcoming in terms of our infrastructure debt. Now, this is something that our caucus has been talking about for decades – decades, Mr. Speaker – and now it is getting to the point where even this government cannot hide the degree to which they've allowed this province to decay at the expense of giving fabulous tax breaks to their very, very wealthy friends and/or royalty breaks to their very, very wealthy friends. Then they have a problem because we do have our gargantuan debt, and we have to deal with it.

I agree completely with the Wildrose that P3s are, in fact, just another way of hiding debt. You know, we've always been opposed to P3s because they're bad for the public service. They're bad deals. They undermine the employees who are typically involved with those P3s, they undermine the community within which those P3s operate, and on top of that, they're just a mechanism of hiding debt. We've always said that right from the beginning. We actually said it long before those folks were saying it. We've got even more debt hidden by this government as they pursue P3 construction. Here we have a government that uses a number of different tactics to hide their debt.

Well, why do we have debt? Well, we have debt because we have a revenue problem. Our revenue problem can be traced to two fundamental sources. One, we have a flat tax in this province, a strategy that has been adopted by no other province in the country – why? – because it's a really stupid strategy. We also have one of the most forgiving royalty regimes, forgiving, that is, if you are a shareholder for, you know, Suncor or Esso or CNRL

or whoever it is that is currently enjoying the benefits of one of the most forgiving royalty regimes in the developed world. I believe Angola charges less than we do. I'm not sure, but I think that's about where I'd have to stop in terms of describing who has lower royalties than this province.

Ms Blakeman: In a rush to the bottom.

Ms Notley: Oh, we're not rushing to the bottom. We're drowning in the bottom. We've rushed to the bottom, we've fallen into the puddle, and we can't even get out of it. We're at the bottom.

Ms Blakeman: Doing the backstroke.

Ms Notley: Doing the backstroke and coming up with creative ways to hide the financial mess that we have allowed ourselves to sink into.

You know, I've talked about the infrastructure deficit, and there are, of course, so many ways in which we see this hurt Albertans every day in our communities. I mean, we've talked about the travesty at the Misericordia hospital on the west side of Edmonton, we've talked about the horrific conditions at the General hospital, we've talked about the imminent catastrophic failure which exists at the U of A, and of course we're now hearing about the gutting of mature communities through our education system as this government pushes school boards to find the cheapest way possible to deal with the fact that they failed to maintain schools over the course of the last 25 years. We have a lot of consequences to this decision to ignore infrastructure, and they, of course, affect regular Albertans, not the high-flying ones who take employer-sponsored plane trips to the JPL on any given weekend. So that's a problem.

4:20

Now, the other thing, of course, is that this budget contains no vision, Mr. Speaker. It contains no vision for how we can actually take these resources, which we are the owners of, and convert them into a vehicle to actually grow our province, strengthen our communities, and expand upon the opportunities of each and every Albertan, who are themselves the owners of the resources about which I'm speaking. We continue to ignore these opportunities.

What are some of the ideas that we should be looking at? Well, the Member for Edmonton-Calder suggested that, based on what the government ran on in the last provincial election, some of their platform ideas – I think he suggested that they know it's the right thing to do some of these things, yet they still backed off on it. I would suggest, with the greatest of respect to my very positive and friendly colleague, that I have a bit more of a cynical view of this thing.

I think that what actually happened over there was that these folks knew that those policy platforms were what Albertans wanted, but it is not what they believed was the right thing to do. They never wanted to do it. They just knew it was what Albertans wanted to hear because it's what Albertans wanted. They knew that that was the way to get themselves re-elected. In their minds, the right thing to do continues to be what is in the best interests of a very small, select, entitled group of special interests in this province, a group which is getting smaller and smaller and wealthier and wealthier every day. Sooner or later they're not going to be able to buy enough votes for these folks. That's, I think, the direction and the trajectory that this very old and tired government is on, and I think that is reflected in this budget.

That having been said, though, I want to talk about those promises that were broken and a couple of things that I think ought to also be included and considered in the kind of positive,

proactive budget that would actually be an investment in the future of Albertans' opportunities.

We talked about full-day kindergarten. Many people have talked about full-day kindergarten. Indeed, the former Premier talked about full-day kindergarten, and I think it was around December 24 – maybe it was December 28, this Christmas – when there was a tiny, little press release that went out from the Premier's office saying: Oh, yeah; by the way, we don't think this is going to happen. I don't know how many people noticed that. I remember chuckling quite a bit when I saw that press release come out because I thought that, gee, that looks like a FOIP management strategy: let's dump that one in between Christmas and New Year's, where we acknowledge that that particular promise is not going to be met.

What else did they promise to Albertans and not follow through on? Well, we've talked about it a lot in the last few days, the commitment to end child poverty in five years and eliminate poverty for all Albertans in 10. Not only have we done absolutely nothing on that project; we have actually taken a number of steps backwards in a number of different settings.

For me, personally, I just find that to be one of the most cynical moves that a government can make, to actually make child poverty and the future hopes of children who are at risk an election issue that you will run on when you know you're not going to do anything about it. We're all politicians, and I think we probably all have a higher tolerance level for cynicism than the average voter, unfortunately. It comes with the job. But that one went well beyond mine. I've seen cynical, manipulative politics, but that went beyond what I think should be acceptable for anybody on either side of this House who wants to feel good about the job that they do when they go to work every morning.

What else did we not get? Well, we were told that we were going to get funds to actually promote and expand access to our postsecondary institutions for Alberta students, rural students, aboriginal students, those people who find it the most difficult to get into postsecondary education. What have we done? Well, we didn't follow through on the promised funds, and indeed we made additional cuts which are going to ensure that the number of spaces are reduced and that access to our postsecondary institutions will be limited even more than they were when this promise was first made. So not only did we not go forward; we went backwards.

What are some of the other things that I would have liked to have seen? Well, I'm just going to talk really briefly about two. I've talked about them before, but I just can never say it enough. Child care is one of those public policy issues that is so clearly proven to bring about profound improvements in the quality of life on a broadly equitable basis in a way that you can see decades and decades later. It's like medicare in terms of its public policy value and its merits to the best interests of the greatest number of citizens in our province. The research is out there. You can look at any jurisdiction on the other side of the ocean there and see what that does for health outcomes, education outcomes, employment outcomes. All those things go up when you have a fully accessible, affordable, quality child care system, and that is something that we continue to ignore in this province.

It's particularly frustrating because we attract people to come here to jump on our little – what are those wheels called? – treadmill, you know, and run as fast as you can to generate activity in our economy. We invite everyone to come here and work more hours in a day, in a week, in a year than they do in any other province, but we are absolutely opposed to providing the kind of child care that would ensure that people who are contributing to the economy like that will also have the ability to

have a balanced family life in a way that builds and grows our communities above and beyond simply how much money someone is putting in their pocket at the end of a given shift.

We're not doing that, and we happen to have the youngest population in the country, I believe, and probably the greatest demand, and we have the greatest number of resources at our disposal if we would just use them that way, but we just have no vision. You know, the leadership on this issue is stuck back in 1952, and it's all about: well, you know, mom can stay home, and dad can go to work. I don't know who lives that life anymore, almost nobody, certainly not the public-sector employees that this government is so fond of attacking. We could do so much if we did that, but we're not, and it's a lost opportunity.

The only other thing that I'm going to talk about briefly, Mr. Speaker, is the whole issue of how we support those Albertans who are particularly vulnerable, those Albertans with special needs, with developmental disabilities. We know that last year we saw this government take a very punishing approach to that particular community in a really callous way that surprised, you know, onlookers from all sides of the political spectrum. We were quite surprised that anyone would pick that particular fight with that particular group of people, but they did, and they restored some of the funding but not all of it.

The problem with that, Mr. Speaker, is that these folks have so many opportunities before them, but they really need to be supported for that to work, and in the course of justifying these cuts, the minister at the time suggested: "Well, here's the problem. There's a whole schvack of other vulnerable Albertans who don't qualify for support because of our criteria right now. We need to change the criteria so that we can deal with more people." Well, they changed the criteria. They reduced the number of people that were receiving services, but they haven't invited anybody else in, and the number of people receiving services has not gone up. It's gone down. In fact, that was an incredibly disingenuous approach to things, and I think that we have the option to do better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was quite fascinated with the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's proposal on what she would like to see in the budget and what the Alberta NDP would propose. I'd very much like for her to finish her thought and to hear the rest of it.

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

Ms Notley: Well, thank you so much. I'm glad someone was listening. That was great. He's great to work with. He's a really great guy.

4:30

Anyway, what I was going to say about supporting people with special needs is that it goes beyond simply PDD. It also goes into the area of mental health and mental health services. It goes into the area of long-term care. It goes into home care. It goes into the kind of services that you provide to people who need support. Rather than picking away at it and cutting it, whether it's the Health minister arbitrarily restructuring home care in Edmonton in a way that created vast chaos and disruption in the families and the lives of many vulnerable Edmontonians, not just seniors but also people with lifelong disability, or whether it's closing Michener Centre, you know, breaking a promise that had been

made to families for decades that this would not happen and taking our most fragile, vulnerable citizens and forcing them to change the home that they've had for 25 or 30 years at the very end of their life – incredibly short sighted and also cruel, Mr. Speaker.

It's about ensuring that our kids who are both in care or are not in care but are at risk can get access to the supports they need in our schools to not only deal with whatever special needs they have but also to ensure that they have access to the kind of education that will allow them to meet their full potential. Mr. Speaker, you can have a child who gets that help in their early years in the school setting and you can have a child who does not get that help in their early years in the school setting. The difference in that child's life will be profound 15 years later. It's not just a difference in that child's life, although for me that's all I really need to talk about; it's also a difference in the draw on taxpayer resources in the justice system, in our health care system, and all the other things that become more expensive as we allow poverty and inequality to grow unchecked.

Those are the kinds of things that we could do better, Mr. Speaker, but none of those issues are addressed in this budget. Instead, it's a hold-the-line or below-inflation budget. We know that the population is growing dramatically every year. We know the demands are increasing. We know that that's what's going on, but we are not meeting those demands because it is so important to these guys to continue their practice of giving preferred taxation benefits to their pals who earn a million dollars a year or more and to their pals who run very, very large oil and gas corporations, that aren't paying their fair share of royalty revenues. That's what these guys are interested in, and unfortunately it's regular working Albertans, regular families, vulnerable Albertans who pay the price. It's short sighted, and in the long run it's more costly.

So 43 years later we have a budget like the one we are dealing with today. Those are the kinds of decisions, not an exhaustive list but some of the decisions, that have resulted in a budget that is like the one that we have before us today, that myself and my colleagues in the NDP caucus absolutely cannot support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my hon. colleagues for hearing me today. It's a pleasure to stand up and speak to the budget bill, Bill 8, on behalf of my constituents in Calgary-Shaw and our team here in the Official Opposition. You know, I always find it interesting listening to the Minister of Finance talk about his budget. I understand that it's easy to be passionate about it. I appreciate the passion that the Member for Calgary-Klein often brings into this House. I would caution him not to generate more indignation than he can conveniently contain at times, but I do appreciate the way in which he delivers his words in this House, Mr. Speaker.

I will talk about a couple of good things about this budget. First off, it's got the governing party focusing a lot on us. I think that between the Minister of Finance and the associate minister the majority of their comments were about the Official Opposition, so I thank them for paying so much attention to what it is that we're doing here.

I will say that it is refreshing to see a focus on savings in the budget, though. Irrespective of the argument about saving and taking out debt for savings, what we like to see is money being put into that heritage savings trust fund. We recognize that there is a

place in time where Alberta will either have its reliance on the oil and gas sector – the world will have moved on, and we're going to have to find another revenue source to replace the \$8 billion, \$9 billion, \$10 billion per year that we get in resource revenues, that goes into the general revenue fund. We believe that the best way to do that is to build up the heritage savings trust fund and to use the interest off that fund to replace that revenue source. So it is a positive sign to see that the government is refocusing some of its attention on savings. It is unfortunate that they are doing it in a way that is also forcing us to incur debt, and I'll get back to that a little bit later.

Talking about keeping promises and, you know, that this is a government that stands by what it says and says what it's going to do just doesn't hold weight. Unfortunately, this government has lost complete credibility with the Alberta public around some of the things that it has promised and committed to Albertans. The building of the 50/70 schools. Two years ago today, as we talked about earlier, this government was elected. The democratic process in this province worked. They promised the world to do it. The 50/70 program. We'll talk about the number that was committed in this budget: \$1.2 billion for that. The reality is that there's no possible way that they can complete 50 new schools for which not a single shovel is in the ground right now. There are a lot of signs that have been put up around the province talking about it but not a single shovel in the ground, and we are also looking at the 70 renovations or modernizations. It's \$1.2 billion. It's not going to fly. Their original promise in the 2012 campaign was to have those schools open by the next election, so it is quite simply just a broken promise and one of many.

You know, we talk about P3s and the benefit of P3s, but let's be honest. The majority of people out there believe that P3s can be a useful tool, but this government is using them in order to hide debt. If there are scenarios where P3s do make sense, I think that at times we may be supportive of that. For example, the 19 schools that can only attract one bidder for a P3 deal: I just don't think that that is enough of a competitive process to convince Albertans that it's working.

We talk about municipal funding. There were promises made that this government was going to start funding the MSI program at a rate of \$1.4 billion by next year. Well, it's nowhere close to that. They also talk about how there are a hundred thousand people moving to Alberta every single year. Well, as my colleague from Little Bow alluded to earlier, those hundred thousand people that move here, Mr. Speaker, bring with them tax revenue, to the tune of \$872 million last year. That's a pretty sizable chunk of change. Unfortunately, the municipalities in this province that are responsible for building around the growth of this province aren't receiving the funding from the province to do it. The additional tax revenue flows in, again, to the general revenue fund of the government, but it doesn't flow through.

We talk about the minister not making decisions to buy votes. I think he mentioned that today in question period, and that was one of those laugh out loud moments for me. I'm sure every Albertan who's driven around this province over the last number of months and has seen a nice Building Alberta sign with the former Premier's name on it is assuming that they did that not as a way of buying votes but just simply as a way of advertising the infrastructure that they were planning to build because that's what Albertans needed to know. You know, the unfortunate part of putting someone's name on those signs is that when they're no longer in that office, it makes it a little awkward. So now we're spending more money on what was a vanity exercise for the former Premier to take all those signs down because it's a little bit embarrassing to see that PC orange and blue all over the province.

We talk about some of the areas where we can save money, and just in this past couple of weeks, Mr. Speaker, we've talked about \$1 billion that AHS has spent on sole-source contracts, no competitive bid whatsoever. That is not the best way to be a steward of taxpayer dollars. Two hundred and fifty million dollars on outside consultants. You have one of the largest organizations in the province in AHS, and they're spending a quarter billion dollars looking outside of their own organization for consulting and executive coaching, all of these other things. The reality is that it adds up. It just adds up. Just like a \$45,000 flight, it all adds up.

Let's get back to the crux of the conversation because we do have some disagreements fundamentally on the idea of debt, and there was a point in time when this government shared some of those problems with debt. You know, I'll give you a couple of quotes from the former Premier from when she ran in the last election. She said: "It's entirely possible for us to continue to provide the quality of life that we as Albertans have without going into debt." Agreed. "Debt is the trap that has caught so many struggling governments." Agreed. "Debt has proven the death of countless dreams." Can't argue that one. And finally, "Alberta does not have debt, and we will not incur debt."

4:40

So when this government stands up and the Minister of Finance says that when they say something and they make a promise and they make a commitment and they live within their means yet they stand up and defend going into debt to the tune of \$21 billion, it just doesn't add up. They often ask us what schools we wouldn't build, what roads we wouldn't pave. Well, I think that they owe it to Albertans to start talking about that in a little bit of the longer term sense because come 2016, we're going to be spending \$820 million a year on debt-financing and debt-servicing costs. You think of some of the turmoil that was created over last year's budget when they cut \$42 million out of the PDD program. How are they going to find \$820 million? They talk about the \$140 million that was taken out of the postsecondary. Where are they going to find that?

Well, I'll tell you, because I've got a list here, based on this budget, that will add up to the \$820 million that will be spent on debt servicing come 2016. So I think it's time for some honesty from the other side. I'll just go through the list: wildlife management, \$24 million a year cut; fisheries management, \$8 million a year cut; the child health benefit . . .

An Hon. Member: What?

Mr. Wilson: If you're looking for clarification there on the other side, this is \$820 million in programs that you currently fund. You will have to find money to fund these because this will now be spent on servicing your \$21 billion of debt.

Child health benefit, \$28 million cut. That's the optical, drug, and dental benefits for low-income children. The insulin pump therapy program, \$8 million. Can't do it anymore. Child intervention supports for permanency, \$54 million. That's got to go. Protection of sexually exploited children, \$7 million. Can't afford that anymore; we're paying off our debt. Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder initiatives, \$24 million. Sorry. Shelters for women, \$33 million; emergency transitional shelter support, \$38 million; provincial disability supports initiative, \$21 million; modular classrooms for high-growth areas, \$154 million a year. We're not going to be able to afford that anymore, Mr. Speaker.

Academic health centres for postsecondary institutions, \$21 million; addictions and mental health, \$48 million a year. Well,

we're not going to be able to afford that either. Special-needs assistance and project grants for seniors, \$31 million; cancer research and prevention, \$25 million; labour attraction and retention, \$40 million; labour qualifications and mobility, \$7 million; police assistance to municipalities, \$83 million; First Nations policing, \$12 million; organized and serious crime, \$30 million; municipal water and waste-water programs, \$75 million; Alberta Emergency Management Agency, \$10 million; PDD employment supports, \$31 million; immunization support, \$8 million.

If you add all of that up, you get to that nice round number of \$820 million, Mr. Speaker. Now, that's a lot of stuff. That is a lot of programming that Albertans rely on. So to sit there, stand up, and suggest that you are taking this province into debt because you're building Alberta without telling them what you're going to do to pay off that debt on the back end: shame on you.

Mr. Speaker, that is the fundamental difference between their party and ours. We believe that we can do some of the things that Ms Redford suggested when she was running in that election campaign two years ago. It is entirely possible for us to continue to provide the quality of life we have as Albertans without going into debt.

Thank you. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 11 Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister – Family and Community Safety.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise on behalf of the hon. Minister of Human Services and move second reading of Bill 11, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014.

At the centre of all the programs available through Human Services are the children and the families that we work to support. Our priority is keeping children healthy and safe. These are often the children who are most vulnerable because of challenges they have in their families that put them at risk, challenges like poverty, family violence, and addiction. Many Albertans point to the child intervention system as being responsible for assisting families to address their concerns and for keeping children safe when their parents are unwilling or unable to.

But everyone has a role, Mr. Speaker, in supporting children and families. The problems that they have are rooted in issues that are far greater than any one system, and they need a multisystem approach to solve. For those children and families who must receive support from the child intervention system, we are committed to ensuring that they have the best system possible to meet their needs. For this to happen, we need real change, with an emphasis on being accountable to all Albertans, most especially to the children and families who receive our services.

It also means building a culture of transparency, quality care, and continuous improvement in Alberta's child intervention system. That's why we believe that the amendments to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act will help improve accountability, transparency, and quality assurance. This will also improve our overall focus on continuing improvement and providing services aimed at keeping children healthy and safe.

These amendments to the legislation will also put in elements of the five-point plan, that was announced in January, that will, if fully realized, have a tremendously positive impact on Albertans. The five-point plan focuses on enhancing information sharing, addressing the root causes that bring children into care, and supporting collaborative research to improve services to children and families. Once fully implemented, Alberta will have a quality child intervention system that is robust in its assurance mechanisms and one that is based on a culture of continuous improvement.

Human Services has already completed the first two actions identified in the five-point plan. In January we hosted a roundtable to discuss investigations and reporting into the deaths of children in our province. We were fortunate to have 13 experts, 91 in-room participants, and more than 475 online participants sharing their viewpoints and their ideas about improvements.

Also in January we established the implementation oversight committee to accelerate activity on our five-point plan and prioritize responses to previous recommendations for improving the child intervention system. This committee is already very active in defining their role, and they have already provided their first report. They have also been working with the Child and Family Services Council for Quality Assurance and the Child and Youth Advocate on how they can co-ordinate their respective mandates and their work.

The child intervention system has been criticized by family advocates, members of the opposition, media, and others for lacking in transparency and therefore, by extension, accountability. We heard loudly and clearly that the publication ban provisions of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act need to be changed, and we plan on doing just that, specifically amending that the ban no longer applies to deceased children. There are a number of families who have long asked for the ability to talk publicly about their deceased child. This change will give them that right. The current ban prohibits the publication of the name and/or photograph of a child and their family or guardian who are involved in the child intervention system. This remains unchanged.

In speaking with the families and the media about their concerns about the existing ban, they feel it is overly restrictive, especially compared with other jurisdictions. The amendment would enable the name and photograph of a deceased child and their parents or guardians to be published. It will also empower families to speak publicly about their children and to share their stories and viewpoints about their involvement with the child intervention system.

But there are times when it may be more appropriate for the name and photograph of a deceased child to remain private. That's why we've included a provision that allows for those closest to the child who has passed away to decide if they want information about that child or their family to be made public. In these circumstances family members or an interested party can apply to have the court impose a publication ban.

4:50

We are intent on making sure that Albertans are confident that our province has a leading system in place to support at-risk children and their families. Confidence is built upon the knowledge of and access to information about how the system works. It's also built on the understanding that there needs to be an intentional and comprehensive activity when it comes to quality assurance, continuous improvement, and learning from external reviews. The proposed amendments embed quality assurance requirements in the legislation and encompass the activities of the council for quality assurance, expert panels, and the committees and councils appointed by the council and the

director of child, youth, and family enhancement. This includes new provisions that will help with information sharing about child intervention services and provide statutory protection for internal quality assurance activities and reviews.

The Child and Family Services Council for Quality Assurance was established in late 2012 to help increase public understanding of and confidence in the child intervention system. A clarified and enhanced mandate for the council will provide additional means for ensuring that our system is continuously improving. While the council already has the ability to call an expert panel to review the death of a child, we propose that they also have the ability to appoint a committee to support quality assurance activities and that this committee would be protected by a statutory shield, the same as the expert panel's. In addition, embedding in legislation that matters must be included in the council's annual report, that is tabled in the Legislature, will provide additional accountability. This public report will also serve as a means of demonstrating progress in implementing recommendations and improvements related to quality assurance.

Another aspect of quality assurance lies with the director of child, youth, and family enhancement. Expanding the requirements of the director to release information to the public is a significant opportunity for increasing transparency and accountability in the system as a whole and when investigating and reporting on the deaths of children receiving child intervention services. With this new provision the director will also be required to publicly release information about the findings and about the recommendations resulting from internal quality assurance activities, including those reviews of death, serious injury, and serious incident.

The director will also be mandated to share statistical data about children and youth who are currently in the system or who have received intervention services in the past. With this provision the plan is to establish a gold standard for data sharing about child intervention services, the most comprehensive and integrated data set on a provincial child intervention system. This will not only be transparent, but it is important for research and informing the child intervention system in its future work.

Since the Child and Youth Advocate was established as an independent officer of the Legislature in 2012, he has been one of our highest levels of external quality assurance by identifying where improvements to the child intervention system can be made. We propose to amend the Child and Youth Advocate Act to expand the advocate's investigation powers to include the death of a child or youth that occurred up to two years following the child's involvement in the child intervention system. Through the recent release by Human Services of data related to deaths of children and youth known to the child intervention system, we became aware that a number of deaths happened postinvolvement.

We have spoken about the need to have a better sense of the bigger picture with respect to the challenges facing children and youth after they are no longer in the system. We agreed that changes to the legislation were needed to ensure that an expanded mandate for the advocate was supported by the Legislature. Enabling the advocate to conduct investigations for this subgroup of children and youth may bring to light changes and enhancements we need to make to our services.

As we mentioned earlier, we are committed to making real change that will help improve outcomes for Albertans and increase accountability and transparency. We have garnered support from Gordon Phaneuf of the Child Welfare League of Canada; Robyn Blackadar of the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research; and Tim Richter, chair of the implementation oversight committee and president and CEO of the Canadian Alliance to

End Homelessness. Your support in moving these changes forward is much appreciated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now move to adjourn debate on Bill 11.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 9

Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014

[Adjourned debate April 22: Mrs. Towle]

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

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to be able to rise, for the first time actually, on this bill to offer up commentary with respect to its merits in second reading. There's already been a fair amount of conversation about this bill. Of course, it is one which is the outcome of the government's – well, failed negotiations would imply that there had been negotiations – failed consultations and their nonexistent negotiations with their employees and other public-sector employees about the future of their pension plan. The outcome, ultimately, is a series of changes which, in our view, jeopardize a number of different components of the pension plan and will reduce the security and the adequacy of pensions enjoyed by roughly 300,000 Albertans.

You know, I have to say that I am perplexed by this government and the way in which they choose issues to pursue. There's a notion of leading with your chin. It seems to me like this government has put on a blindfold and stuck their chin out, and it's just been sort of staggering through the last six months at every turn. This, of course, is a continuation of that pattern, and it's one that I suspect is not going to help them in the long run.

Nonetheless, we're dealing today with this particular bill, which is a problem. The minister has tried to suggest that this bill is good because it moves public-sector pension plans into a model of joint sponsorship. He says: "Well, look at us. We're doing what the unions actually told us they wanted when we consulted with them" – not. The fact of the matter is this, Mr. Speaker. You know what? This bill only does that after the government has completely loaded the dice and written all the rules and established all the legislation about what the joint sponsorship can consist of such that there is no such thing as joint sponsorship. They don't have any independence. The critical and important rules that unions and workers and other plan sponsors would have wanted to see in place are those that give them the flexibility to make decisions jointly in the best interests of all members of the plan. Instead, what happened is that we've got the government deciding to just write a whole bunch of rules and then hand over responsibility for the plan. Of course, that's not joint sponsorship.

Every time the minister says, "Hey, look, there's something good in this," I think people need to remember that it's not even that. Even the good things that they're trying to sell are not really what they are saying they are. That is sort of a continuation of a theme with this government. They're becoming increasingly distant from the facts in terms of the way they communicate about things. You know, we've seen a lot of it over the last few weeks, but this is just another example of them forgetting to mention the fine print, which has, you know, profound implications and consequences. That's the first thing.

The second thing, of course, is that the minister suggested: "Oh, no. We listened to the boards. We consulted with the boards, and we listened to what they had to say." Well, I don't know. I wasn't in the room. It's possible that they actually listened, but either way they then took what they heard, wrote it down on a piece of paper

and crumpled up the piece of paper and threw it into the garbage can and continued on their way. They consulted in much the way they consult with anybody that they claim they're consulting with. You know, they did an information session and then said: by the way, we're out of here.

5:00

So most of the original components of the changes that the government first put out to union members many months ago or maybe even a year ago remain in place. There have been minor tweaks, but quite frankly I think those minor tweaks mostly exist in the form of the clarity of the bill. In many cases what the government has done is that instead of overtly making the changes that many people asked them not to make, they've just given themselves oblique permission to make those changes by way of regulation at some point down the road.

As I was saying last night, when we were talking about Bill 10, any structure of legislation that leads to giving this government more authority to make decisions that impact working people behind closed doors is absolutely not on because this government not only has not earned the trust of working people in this province; they probably, worse than any other government in the country these days, have betrayed the trust of working people in this province and, in so doing, can't expect anyone to be anything but alarmed and deeply, deeply suspicious of all of the authority that this government is giving itself within this piece of legislation.

Now, the minister also suggests: you know, all we've done is that we've moved from a fixed COLA to a targeted COLA, and it may well be that someday there will actually be no difference in what people receive. Well, that again is simply not an accurate description of what this legislation includes. This legislation allows for the government to move from an 85 factor to a 90 factor and, in so doing, reduce the pensions that people were expecting to receive.

I was talking to a neighbour two or three weeks ago who went online and used the government's actual calculator to figure out what these changes meant to him. He is somebody that is about halfway through his career; he's about 44, 45 years old. What he realized was that these changes were going to mean about \$350 a month to how much he receives when he finally retires. That's based on the calculator that the government itself has put on their website. So it really surprises me, Mr. Speaker, when the minister gets up and says, "Oh, there's no change; nothing is going to happen," that we're all scaremongering because their own documents, their own resources contradict that.

The other and probably the most important thing that concerns me the greatest about this piece of legislation is the plan to impose a contribution cap on these pension plans. We know that what that means in the long run is that should the plan get into trouble, the only way we can deal with that trouble is by reducing benefits and not just by reducing the COLA. It's not just about reducing the COLA. It's about reducing benefits and reducing benefits that are paid out. So we know that that's what's contemplated through this legislation, and although it doesn't say it overtly, it absolutely gives authority to the plan to do that.

You know, it was interesting because the minister tried to say: well, it's not a target plan; we're just putting a cap on contributions. But, interestingly, when I was being briefed about this plan and briefed about the legislation, we were talking about Bill 10, and I was told, "Well, you know, many of the plans under Bill 10," which is not this one but the other one, "are for all intents and purposes already a target benefit plan because we have the opportunity for contribution caps in place for all of those plans already; so all we're doing is that we're making it more overt by

putting in this provision for a target benefit, which is to be contrasted with the defined benefit." Fair enough. That's probably true.

Then it's quite interesting that when the minister is up talking about Bill 9, he says: oh, well, we're not moving to a target benefit. The fact of the matter is that his own official sort of said: well, you start talking about caps and contributions, and that's kind of where you're going. We all know. We might not call it that, but that's what it is. Again, less than clear communication from this government. I really think that when you're doing something as substantive as what these folks are doing, you need to communicate clearly.

The other thing that's included in the bill which is very concerning to me, of course, is this notion of a moratorium on all benefit improvements till 2021. I mean, we don't know that that necessarily needs to be in place, but absolutely the government has decided that, if nothing else, we need to ensure that for the next seven years there are no improvements made to the benefit. Yet we can't predict that. Presumably, if we were in a target benefit plan, we could potentially do that. But, no, we're going to make sure that under no circumstances do we improve benefits until 2021, and at the same time we maintain the freeze on contributions. Again, you know, clearly, they are stacking the deck.

Now, there are so many problems with this bill that, of course, it is our view that we should not be proceeding any further with it. As a result of that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce an amendment to Bill 9. I will hand that over to a page.

The Deputy Speaker: We'll just pause, hon. member, and have the amendment distributed.

I think we're good, hon. member. This is a referral amendment.

Ms Notley: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For those who are unaware, this amendment moves that Bill 9, Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 9, Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014, be not now read a second time but that it be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future." That is the amendment.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this amendment, of course, is to begin by allowing for that actual consultation and negotiation and consideration of this issue that Albertans need to have. I know that a select group there in cabinet have convinced themselves that this is all okely-dokely, but I would suspect that a vast number of the Conservative caucus itself are not fully briefed on what this means. Either way, the fact of the matter is that most of the people who are impacted by this piece of legislation have not had an opportunity to really fully consider the implications of the changes, nor have they been given the opportunity to really fully communicate to this government, which is accountable to them by way of that trite, old, little institution we call democracy, to listen to what they have to say about this.

Because this has such an incredibly far-reaching set of consequences to the lives of so many Albertans, I would suggest that this not be a bill that we ram through at, you know, 4 o'clock in the morning as this government is scrambling to get out of the Legislature so they can run off and slap a whole bunch of ineffective bandages over their broken political vehicle.

5:10

The fact of the matter is that what we should be doing is actually putting on our good-governance hat and putting out a very clear, open, transparent process for everyone to participate in discussing what the consequences of this bill are, what the objectives of the bill are, the competing expert assumptions, the competing characterizations of what different components of the bill mean to pensions in the future for these Albertans. All that information should be fully canvassed and fully discussed by having this matter referred to the standing committee. Then, hopefully, that committee would move to have public hearings on it and to secure independent expert evidence. By doing that, we could ensure that we actually acted in the interests of those people who voted for us and got the best deal for those people, all people, not just those people but also the taxpayers that the Finance minister claims to be standing up for – frankly, I think that's a bit disingenuous – and let everybody in on the conversation. That is what we could do by accepting this amendment.

Of course, the reason for it is because there are just so many things that are wrong with this bill, Mr. Speaker. There are just too many ways in which the retirement future, the modest pensions, secured by 300,000 hard-working Albertans would be put in jeopardy if we continue down the path which is laid out within the terms of this bill. For that reason, we need to take a step back and do some due diligence and a much broader range of expert input into this.

When I realized that it was really, like, about 300,000 people whose retirement we were looking at impacting, we did a bit of research. You know, in the last election that party over there received a total of roughly 600,000 votes. This impacts 300,000 Albertans. You've got to think that a lot of the folks that voted for you actually are included in this group. I am quite sure that never once was the issue of fundamentally threatening the security of their long hard-fought-for, worked-for, earned pension something that was talked about in the election. I am pretty sure that that was not a platform piece.

So that's why I urge members to support this amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to ask the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona if there's anything salvageable in this bill or if the motion or the notice to refer this is just because, really, once you go through it, there's nothing left that's of use. I'm hoping you can comment on that.

Ms Notley: Well, you know, I actually think that people in unions are actually very practical folks, and the folks who are receiving these pensions are very practical folks. I talked about it last night. Unlike the people over there, the people that are receiving these pensions plan 20 years ahead. They have modest incomes, and they figure out how to provide for their own security, to have their houses paid off if possible, to have a little bit of savings tucked away, to have enough money to put food on the plate and buy Christmas presents for the grandkids, all that kind of stuff. They don't need their private jet. They don't need taxpayer-funded trips to the JPL. They don't need any of that kind of stuff. They're just planning to live a good life and contribute to their community and be part of their community when they retire, all that good stuff.

So they're more than prepared to talk about whether or not these pension plans are in true jeopardy. The fact of the matter is that to talk about it, you need to have a truly meaningful consultation process. You have to have a range of experts providing

information about what is necessary and what is not necessary and what's at risk and what's not at risk. You need to talk about what really, truly needs to be done based on the consensus of those experts in terms of where we end up going. What's happened here is that the minister has taken a relatively small problem and bootstrapped it into an excuse for fundamentally converting the nature of these pension plans. That's not the way we go about finding solutions.

To the extent that this bill actually allowed for joint sponsorship and genuine negotiation, then that part of the bill is good. There might be tweaks, ultimately, that would be something that everyone would agree to and think are reasonable in the circumstances, but we don't even have, as I said before, a true joint sponsorship. What we have is the minister writing all the rules and doing all the planning and then handing over responsibility for the pension once he's broken it. That's not joint sponsorship. Joint sponsorship at the front end of the changes is actually not a bad idea at all.

In answer to your question, that component of it is quite reasonable, but the problem is that the joint sponsorship is planned at the other end of the process, long after all the changes have been made, when it's no longer relevant. That's why we need to refer this to committee and restructure the components of it, do better research, expand the nature of the consultation, improve the quality of the consultation, establish negotiation processes and protocols, come up with fair and objective assessments that everybody can have faith in and have good trust in, and then move forward from there.

The minister suggested that he did consult with the boards of the plans, and you do need to know, Mr. Speaker, that this is not something that the plan boards are recommending. They are absolutely not recommending this set of changes. Just to be clear, this is something that is coming from that cabinet, that PC government, over the objections of the plan administrators and the boards, to whom they should be listening.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: There is more time left under 29(2)(a). Are there any others?

Seeing none, we will go, then, to speaking on the amendment. This is, for the record, RA1. On RA1 I'll recognize the hon. Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for Southwest Alberta.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Where to start? I guess what we see in this House on an ongoing basis is that when you fail the logic and the common-sense test, you go, you know, to the we-haven't-done-enough-consultation test. That's essentially what this amendment does.

I do need to highlight all of the work that the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board has done since July 2012. I know, as the associate minister of Finance back when that started, that the minister had all of the intentions and followed through on all of those intentions to do the consultation work with the plan boards and with Albertans. The truth of the matter is that the member wants to talk about the 300,000 stakeholders or people that are interested. Last time I checked, there are 4 million people in this province now, and they actually all have an interest in the sustainability of these pensions.

What the minister did back in July 2012 is that he asked the pension boards to go back and look at the challenges that they have with their particular pension funds and to provide him with some options moving forward about how we can as Albertans address this issue, not just for those that are members of these

pensions but for all Albertans, who potentially are on the hook for any future liabilities.

Mr. Speaker, the pension boards came back, some with some recommendations, some with no recommendations. In fact, the LAPP, which has had an unfunded liability for a good portion of the last 22 years, came back with no recommendations. The minister then had to sit down and work with his department people and take a look at what potential options are on the table.

5:20

The Minister of Finance has already stated – I'm of the same opinion, and I think it's probably the opinion of many in this House – that actually his original position was the thought that, you know, we might have to look at going towards a defined contribution pension plan. On how you implement that, whether you go with the Wildrose approach or what, you would have to ask some questions about that, but he thought that was the direction he wanted to go. But through consultation and through discussions with his department he has come to the conclusion that that's actually not the case.

To suggest that the Minister of Finance hasn't done this consultation and the proper due diligence on this is just not true, Mr. Speaker. In fact, his actions have suggested the complete opposite. After engaging the boards and asking them what to do and then engaging the Department of Finance on what to do and what options might be available, they put some of those options out there in the public. From September 16 of last year to December 31 Albertans were asked what their opinions were, and again many of the ideas that were put out there, based on the feedback that was received, were taken off the table, not all of them but a portion of them, the ones that didn't make sense, the ones where there were some rational or logical reasons as to why you shouldn't actually be doing that. As a result, the minister took that feedback, has come back, and has brought forward this legislation.

To suggest that there hasn't been any consultation or that there needs to be more consultation is, I think, frankly, just a way to try to avoid the issue and bury your head in the sand around the issue, that there needs to be some adjustments with our public-sector pension plans moving forward. These adjustments are well thought out, have sought the opinions of all Albertans. I think it's time to try to move forward with the legislation, have a healthy debate in this Legislature, have a healthy debate in Committee of the Whole, bring forward any amendments at that particular time, and move forward with the changes in the spirit of the legislation that the Minister of Finance has intended.

The Deputy Speaker: For the record, hon. members, amendment RA1. The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the Member for Edmonton-Centre as well for allowing me to speak before her.

I rise to speak in favour of this amendment, and I'm going to list the reasons. Now, I do want to address some of the concerns that the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein, I believe it is, raised, especially around consultation. That word has different meanings for different people, and I'll go through and give some examples of how I've had claims that the government has consulted. The best examples are really when it comes to consulting with our indigenous communities, or alleging to consult with our indigenous communities.

You know, again, the example that I brought up last night was the legislation that the government brought forward called the Aboriginal Consultation Levy Act, which has the word “consultation” in it, so one would hope that there was some consultation actually done with different aboriginal communities. What we learned and, in fact, what all opposition parties learned from having dialogues with representatives from all three treaties was that there wasn’t consultation. So the government making a reference to bringing forward sometime down the road a piece of legislation to deal with levies to help enable aboriginal communities to consult was really the extent of it, yet the minister at the time would talk about how they’d consulted. Quite frankly, if you asked the aboriginal communities and representatives from treaties 6, 7, and 8, they’d have a much different response.

Now, jumping back to this amendment and to the bill, I just want to very briefly touch on the reason and the history of why we have pensions. I think it is something that shouldn’t be overlooked. When we want to attract quality workers to the public sector, as was even discussed this morning in Public Accounts, there are three different ways to remunerate workers, which is through their salary, through their benefits, and through pensions. Again, by stripping public-sector workers, 300,000 Alberta front-line workers, of their pensions, of their defined benefits, what they supposedly were to rely on, to count on for retirement security, knowing that it would be there – many of them have contributed their whole working life toward this plan, expecting it to be there. Suddenly, with the introduction of some legislation and the stroke of a pen, the Minister of Finance can completely change what these folks are going to be getting and expecting to get.

You know, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, our offices have received hundreds and hundreds of letters from irate Alberta workers who, if I can put it into two words – well, maybe it would be three, then.

Ms Blakeman: Go on. I dare you.

Mr. Bilous: Well, that’s exactly it. “How dare you” is the theme of the letters. That was very creative thinking from the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Again, it’s folks who are irate, and they’re irate for a number of reasons. First and foremost, these plans have been looked at and audited by numerous groups who have said over and over again that the plans are back on track to paying off the unfunded liability portion of these plans. There are tools within the existing pensions to accommodate a downturn in the market, which is what happened in 2008, and these pension plans are working toward paying it off. It has to do with contribution rates and the fact that employees stepped up and agreed to pay more in order to cover the loss that occurred in 2008. The fact is that these pension plans, prior to this bill being introduced, were a shared responsibility between employer and employee. With some of the sweeping changes that this bill is proposing, it is really putting all of the onus onto the workers, onto the employees, and removing responsibility from the government and from, well, the chief employer.

You know, an issue that I have with the bill is that it removes from the board their already limited role in making fundamental decisions about plans and, again, gives broad, sweeping powers to the minister or the Lieutenant Governor in Council. The decisions about the terms of the plans, the terms that actually affect how the plans operate for hundreds of thousands of Albertans who rely on these, will now be made behind closed doors, behind cabinet doors, which takes away oversight that members have had into how decisions have been made. Again, members are losing even more of a voice with some of the changes. The very folks who are,

I guess, wearing the changes or are going to be affected by the changes are the ones with the least amount of voice in the decision-making of what’s happening with their retirement.

You know, I’ve met with numerous constituency members who have come to me, having worked for 25-plus years for the government, dismayed at how this government is returning their loyalty and years of service by taking away something that was negotiated and was part of their contractual agreement when they decided to work for the government.

5:30

I mean, there are numerous other areas that I’m going to go through. The next is looking at COLA, which is obviously looking at cost-of-living adjustments, which was part of the defined benefit to ensure that the dollars that were put in as far as purchasing power and real spending will be the same on the other end. Now that that’s been removed or has been changed to a target, we could quite easily see that the value of the dollars that workers are getting are continuing to slide backwards, so they’re getting less and less year in and year out. When we look at the fact that the minister has claimed that these changes will not affect the defined benefit . . . [interjection] I agree that is quite a funny joke if it were actually funny.

Moving decisions as far as COLA, as far as contribution caps, which I’ll go through in a second, basically means that decisions are moving out of legislation into regulation, which, again, the minister can make with cabinet, Lieutenant Governor in Council, behind closed doors. When you look at setting contribution caps, which is one of the ways that pensions have been able to adapt to, say, years where the market is poorer or returns are not as good, that was one of the methods of dealing with that.

Again, looking at plans over a long term, when you remove the flexibility of these plans, whether it’s the cost-of-living contribution, you’re handcuffing the boards and the plans on what they can do to adapt to these problems or these challenges. So, basically, this is forcing the pensioners to accept less, because if you take away the contribution caps, if you take away the ability for the plan to adapt to poorer years, then the only other way to keep it sustainable is essentially to cut back on benefits, which is what this piece of legislation is going to do, what it is driving forward to do.

When you look at Alberta – and I mentioned this last night – we have the highest rate of inflation out of any province in the country. Again, in March alone the inflation rate in Alberta went up to 3.9 per cent, which is almost double what the Canadian average is throughout the country. When you remove COLA or change it from guaranteed to targeted, you are essentially reducing the benefits that workers have been promised, and you are reducing them year in and year out.

The other thing with this bill – I mean, there’s a long list of issues that I have with it – is when we look at the limitation of liability. The fact that Bill 9 adds a complete limitation of liability for benefit reductions or contribution increases . . .

The Deputy Speaker: You’re speaking to the amendment, hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Oh, absolutely. These are all reasons, Mr. Speaker, why this bill should not now be read a second time.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Notley: And go to a committee.

Mr. Bilous: And go to committee, and it's what the committee needs to explore.

When we're looking at – I threw myself off – the limitation of liability, it basically means there's no recourse for the losses that are suffered by any of our Alberta workers who are our pensioners as a result of the reduced benefits.

Now, as I said earlier, currently employees retain about half of that risk even though, again, ironically, they don't have necessarily a proportional role when it comes to the plan governance. This bill is moving all of the risk onto the employees. So it gives the minister all powers, all decision-making authority regarding the plans that are affecting 300,000 workers except the minister bears none of the risk or liability. That's put solely onto the folks who have contributed to these plans from day one.

Another thing that's interesting is that part of this bill is looking at rolling the MEPP into the PSPP and talking about intergenerational equity. The minister claims that one of the aims is for more fair and equitable plans, but by making these changes, the government is actually increasing the burden on certain groups. Younger plan members are paying higher contribution rates to bring the plans back up to fully funded status, but they're doing that because they're under the impression or they're being told that their benefits are defined. So they pay higher now, and that will come back to them when they retire.

Ms Blakeman: And that's not the truth.

Mr. Bilous: No. That's quite far from the truth.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, if you could have the conversation through the chair, I'd appreciate that. Thank you.

Mr. Bilous: Sure, Mr. Speaker. I know this corner of the House is very excited to talk about this awful bill.

By creating conditions for reduced benefits, the younger workers are paying now for benefits that likely they're never going to see, not if this bill passes. As well, by rolling the MEPP into the PSPP, government is placing an unfair burden on front-line workers, so managers, with their higher salaries and higher benefits, necessitate higher contributions of active members to be able to fund those benefits. With both levels of employees being rolled into the same plan and making the same set of contributions, the lower paid front-line workers will essentially be subsidizing the higher benefits paid to management employees, which is quite the opposite of being fair.

I don't know if it's been brought up yet, Mr. Speaker. You know, we talk about the 300,000 Albertans that this is going to affect, but I think it's worth taking a look more specifically at who those 300,000 workers are. I do want to mention it, and I had some statistics here. Again, to clarify for members of the House, LAPP and PSPP payouts are between \$12,000 to \$15,000 a year. We're not talking generous like, for example, the severance packages that communications staff out of the Premier's office get. We're talking about something that's very, very modest. Again, when we look at the average salary . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much. I'm just very interested in what the member has to say about the extent of the benefits that are currently being received by pensioners and/or that will be received from working members of the province, public-sector workers, currently as well as potentially in the future and some

observations that the member was about to share with us in terms of those amounts. I'm wondering if he could share that.

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

Mr. Bilous: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for asking that. Where I'm going with this, Mr. Speaker, is that, again, when we look at the salaries of the folks who are being affected, they average around \$60,000 to \$70,000 a year. These aren't, you know, AHS executive salaries that we're talking about here. These are modest salaries. But, again, folks who are earning \$60,000 to \$70,000 stand to lose nearly 15 per cent of their pension benefits with this current legislation.

5:40

What I wanted to draw attention to, Mr. Speaker, is that over 90 per cent of UNA members and over 75 per cent of HSAA members are women. This legislation is a direct attack on not only working Albertans but on women. We all know that in this province and in this country it is completely unfair – that's not even the right word. It's outrageous that women working in a position similar to men do not receive the same amount of remuneration. Women actually are paid less for jobs equal to men, which is something that is shameful and shouldn't be happening. When we look at this bill and its attack not just on Alberta workers, again, especially, this is an attack and unfair predominantly toward women and women in the workplace. This is something that the government, if it wasn't aware of, should have been aware of.

For that reason along with every other reason that I've outlined, the Alberta NDP and myself will continue to be vehemently opposed to this bill. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I strongly encourage all members to vote in favour of this amendment to not now read this bill a second time and send it back to committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

There's still time left under 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, hon. members, I have quite a long list of speakers, and I'll tell you who they are in order: Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Edmonton-Centre, followed by Calgary-Varsity. And might I remind you that we are now dealing with amendment RA1, please.

Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm looking at this bill and kind of wondering to myself what's going on with it. Where's the human element in it? It seems that our government has lost a bit of credibility on this one. The PC government has once again failed to lead by example. In the midst of the publicity surrounding the obscene severance packages their political staff have been getting, they're ramming through a pension plan change, and they expect that public-sector employees are supposed to take one for the team while they continue to spend lavishly. I just don't get it. I don't understand it.

You know, I went back and I talked to a few people that would be affected in my riding, and specifically I talked to some nurses. I've talked to them on several occasions. This isn't the first time I've talked to them. Really, they are the front-line services in our province, and specifically they're the people that are working hard to make sure that those who are sick get better. They are the ones that provide the service, and they are a group that are affected by this particular piece of legislation.

Now, they work very hard. They put a lot of blood, sweat, and tears into the work that they do. They tend to work in situations

where they're understaffed and overburdened. They work very hard, they do wonderful things, they put their patients ahead of themselves, and they do that in situations that aren't always ideal. They put in extra hours, they worry, they care, and to be honest, right now they feel abandoned. That's what I'm hearing from the members that I'm talking to in my constituency.

They've requested help, they've asked for resources from their managers, they've asked for resources from the government, they've gone to AHS, and it's all fallen on deaf ears. It's funny to me that this government is willing to burn out this workforce that gives of themselves so very often. They're the workforce that we need to keep healthy because they keep us healthy, and they bring Albertans back into good health when they're not. The understaffing that they go through creates a lot of problems for them. They go through mental breakdowns. They take a lot of stress leave. It's unfortunate that we treat such wonderful people in such a horrible manner.

You know, I spent a good part of my youth watching what nurses do in our health care system. My mother was sick for a very long time. I watched nurses care for her day in and day out. Not only did they care for her as she was sick, but while I was there in the hospital, when I was visiting, the hours that I spent there with my mother, they actually cared for me, too. They made sure that my mental health was where it needed to be. They talked to me on many occasions about what was happening, what was going to happen, and what I needed to do to try and keep myself healthy. They would even cook for our family. We would get meals that would be given to us in the hospital from these nurses. Now, this wasn't part of their job description. This was just something that they did. They cared for their community. They cared for the people that were in their care and for their families. It's this compassion that I think sets them apart, but they are the front-line services, and they are affected by this piece of legislation.

Not only are they worried about their work conditions, the resources that they get, the supports that they get, the hours that they have to put in, and the toll that it takes on their families and on their own health; now they have worry about what their pension is going to look like. They've got to worry about their retirement. It's just not right, and it's not fair to go to these people, that are already overtaxed, overworked and give them one more thing to worry about because you're not negotiating with them. You haven't negotiated or bargained in good faith with these people, with these hard-workers. You haven't done it with all of the front-line services workers in this province, and it really is a travesty that you're not listening to the very people that do the work of this government, that provide the services to Albertans.

The changes proposed in Bill 9 could even allow the minister to alter pension plans without regulation, without recommendation from the pension boards. You're taking away their very ability to have a say in what happens in their pension. We could just have it with a stroke of a pen from this minister or a future minister changing the very nature of their retirement. That's not right. It really is not right. You can't do this to people. You have to support the contracts that you've signed. You need to honour the contracts that you've signed, and if decisions have to be made, you need to bargain and negotiate in good faith. This is a basic tenet of our society. You don't just pull the rug out from underneath a hard-working group of people because all of sudden you seem to think that the actuarial numbers don't work.

It's interesting that we hear that the actuarial numbers don't work from this government because we hear from other sources that there is a plan in place, that these unfunded liabilities were slowly being chipped away. I wonder why we're doing this right

now, why this government has put this forward in this manner. There really does need to be more consulting on this. There needs to be the ability for these people to stand up, negotiate, and find the solution to the problem rather than to have one dictated and imposed upon them.

This is the way our government works. We're not supposed to dictate and impose from this Chamber. We're supposed to go out, converse, listen, come back, and negotiate in good faith.

Now, I worry about the nurses in my riding, I worry about all of the nurses in this province, I worry about our public-sector employees, I worry about their future, and I worry about our future as a province when we fail to negotiate with those who do our work.

I'm not in support of this particular piece of legislation. I will be voting against it in second reading. I do not believe that our nurses, and specifically the one who carried a message to me on my graduation day from my deceased mother, who had carried it for five years – I do not believe that this is fair to her or that it is fair to any of those that she works with. I really to believe that they need to be consulted and they need to be negotiated with and that a solution can be found, but it's not this one.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

5:50

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I am in support of this particular amendment for a couple of reasons. I think, you know, we want to go way back and sort of ask ourselves how we got into all this and why.

But as the previous member mentioned, you know, there is a deal. There is a written and unwritten contract that everyone understands. I think the part of that that hasn't been considered by the government in all of this is the nonmonetary aspect of it. There was an expectation that workers came, that they worked for a particular employer, in this case the public sector, for an extended period of time. There was an expectation from the employer that there was loyalty, that they would be loyal to the company, that they would work in the best interests of the particular government department or agency, Crown agency, whatever, and in return for their service and for taking lower wages as they went, there would be a defined retirement benefit that they could count on over the long term and budget for over the long term.

I just want to remind everybody about the institutional memory that we gain with long-term workers in any sector. Just to put a little bug in your ear, some of the people during this debate have talked about, "Well, you know, what if people that are close to retirement just go pfft; nothing more for me here; I might as well go," and they take their retirement now, and off they go? Just imagine the municipal workers that we have that are in that kind of 55 to 64 range; in other words, early retirement; they could go now. What if they went? Imagine the institutional memory that's going to walk out the door.

Now, imagine if you take the number of workers in the city of Edmonton or the city of Calgary, Bonnyville, Lloydminster, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Ponoka, Lacombe, a lot of those places that have municipal workers that are in that age range, and they go: "Pfft. I'm out of here. You know, why should I have loyalty to my employer here when they don't have loyalty to me?" Just think about how much of what we now take for granted in the smooth running of municipalities would disappear overnight because

those workers and that institutional memory will have walked out the door. It's just a little bug to put in your ear.

Remember that we had a hiring freeze in the '90s, so there is no cohort that comes behind them. That cohort that's sort of 45 to 55 or 40 to 55 is not there. The next cohort is in their 30s. So you're going to have the 55-year-olds, that know how to do stuff, walk out the door. Who's left? The thirtysomethings. Not that there isn't great potential there and not that some of them don't know what they're doing – I'm sure they do – but overall imagine the havoc in our towns, in our villages, and in our cities. Who is it that remembers: don't buy that particular kind of rock because it doesn't lay down as well as gravel when you're salting or sanding the roads and the highways? Where is that actually written down? It probably isn't. It's probably in somebody's head.

So, you know, that deal that was struck, that loyalty, that long-term relationship, that recognition of service and the provision of service: that's what's being pulled apart here. The weave of that is being pulled apart in what's being contemplated by the government in this particular bill.

There's a lot more to be considered here than what we've seen actually considered, so it should go to a committee to think about other things. I think it's a very valid point that's been made by others that there is a consultation gap here. The government seems to have talked to the board members of the plan, and then they put it out to the public. Who did we miss? Anybody? Anybody? The workers, the beneficiaries of the plan: that's who didn't get talked to here. So if you're looking for another reason why a committee could do some work, they could talk to the actual beneficiaries of the plan. The government very clearly talked to the board members. I just heard that they talked to the public, put it out to public, but didn't actually talk to the beneficiaries of the plan. That might be a bit of a problem here.

There's also a real hustle up in the timeline. I noticed that in some of the sections there's a – I mean, the government understands it in other places. There are sections in there that go:

“Oh. We've got to have a moratorium on this stuff while we allow the plan to get into place. You're not allowed to do anything to it until 2020.” You know, there's a six-year timeline to establish the plans and get them onboard. Yet what's the timeline we're working with here? Eighteen months. Whoa. What's the hurry? If you understand that it takes six years to get this plan moving, why do you expect us to do all the rest of this stuff on the front end in 18 months? I think there's a gap with that.

We've also had a number of: I'll put my stats up against your stats. That will probably continue through the rest of this debate. I think the stats I'm looking at are better than your stats. I think they come from a wider number of places. Today the Leader of the Official Opposition tabled something from the Canadian Institute of Actuaries. You know, I'm going to trust that a bit more than the government telling me that they've consulted with some people. Frankly, I don't find any government consultation now credible because you've not done what you've said before, and I'm holding that against you.

Now, I notice the clock is ticking by for us here, so I think what I'm going to do is adjourn debate on this amendment and look to be able to pick it up again this evening. With that, I would ask that we adjourn debate on amendment RA1, which is amending Bill 9.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I was looking at the time. I move that we call it 6 and that we reconvene tonight at 7:30.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:57 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	597
Introduction of Guests	597, 608
Members' Statements	
Provincial Election Anniversary	598
Beverly Centennial	598
Chinese Bilingual Education in Edmonton	599
Cancer Awareness Initiatives in Wanham	599
Murdered and Missing Aboriginal Women	608
Dog Theft in Newell County	609
Oral Question Period	
FOIP Request Process	599, 602, 605, 607
Health Care Performance Measures	600
Public Service Pensions	601
Health Care System Information Reporting	602
Keystone XL Pipeline Project	603
Provincial Budget Documents	604
Sherwood Park Provincial Courthouse	604
Government Policies	605
Educational Curriculum Redesign	606
Loyalty Program Prohibition for Prescription Drugs	606
Health Care Wait Times	607
Statement by the Speaker	
Second Anniversaries of Election	608
Oral Question Period Practices	608
Introduction of Bills	
Bill Pr. 1 Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2014	609
Bill Pr. 2 Maskwachees Cultural College Amendment Act, 2014	609
Tabling Returns and Reports	609
Orders of the Day	610
Government Bills and Orders	
Third Reading	
Bill 8 Appropriation Act, 2014	610
Second Reading	
Bill 11 Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2014	623
Bill 9 Public Sector Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2014	625

If your address is incorrect, please clip on the dotted line, make any changes, and return to the address listed below. To facilitate the update, please attach the last mailing label along with your account number.

Subscriptions
Legislative Assembly Office
1001 Legislature Annex
9718 – 107 Street
EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E4

Last mailing label:

Account # _____

New information:

Name:

Address:

Subscription information:

Annual subscriptions to the paper copy of *Alberta Hansard* (including annual index) are \$127.50 including GST if mailed once a week or \$94.92 including GST if picked up at the subscription address below or if mailed through the provincial government interdepartmental mail system. Bound volumes are \$121.70 including GST if mailed. Cheques should be made payable to the Minister of Finance.

Price per issue is \$0.75 including GST.

Online access to *Alberta Hansard* is available through the Internet at www.assembly.ab.ca

Subscription inquiries:

Subscriptions
Legislative Assembly Office
1001 Legislature Annex
9718 – 107 St.
EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E4
Telephone: 780.427.1302

Other inquiries:

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