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The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

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Issue 21e

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Vacant, Spruce Grove-St. Albert

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 70 Wildrose: 5 Alberta Liberal: 5 New Democrat: 4 Independent: 1 Vacant: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, March 16, 2015

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

Transmittal of Estimates

Mr. Oberle: Madam Speaker, I have received a certain message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

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

Please be seated.

Mr. Oberle: Madam Speaker, I now wish to table the 2015-2016 interim supply estimates. When Budget 2015 is tabled on March 26, the fiscal plan for the entire fiscal year will be presented. However, these interim supply estimates will provide spending authority to the Legislative Assembly and to the government as of April 1, 2015. When passed, these interim supply estimates will authorize the approximate spending of \$61.5 million for the Legislative Assembly and \$10.6 billion in operational funding, \$1.3 billion in capital funding, \$256.8 million in financial transactions funding for the government, and \$386.9 million for the transfer from the lottery fund to the general revenue fund.

Madam Speaker, interim supply amounts are based on the department's need to fund government programs and services.

Government Motions

21. Mr. Oberle on behalf of Mr. Campbell moved:
Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2015-16 interim supply estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

The Acting Speaker: This is a debatable motion under Standing Order 18(1)(i). Are there any members who wish to speak to the motion?

Seeing none, we will ask the question.

Would you like to close debate, hon. minister?

Mr. Oberle: No. I'll call the question, Madam Speaker.

[Government Motion 21 carried]

22. Mr. Oberle on behalf of Mr. Campbell moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(2) the Committee of Supply shall be called to consider the 2015-16 interim supply estimates for six hours on Tuesday, March 17, 2015.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, this motion is not debatable under Standing Order 61(2).

[Government Motion 22 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

We have had a request to revert to introductions. Are there any opposed to reverting to introductions at this time?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a friend of mine, Brian Willoughby, in the government gallery. Brian is a long-time friend and a member of the Camrose council. I just wanted to welcome him and introduce him to the House.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise this evening to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly several students we have from the Alberta Students Executive Council. We have Kristen George from Grande Prairie, Shannon Peacocke from CSA, Cody Weger from CSA, Joshua Bettle from SAIT, Bailey Daines from Red Deer College, Alex Willkie from Medicine Hat College, and Thomas Ridgeway from the ASEC association. I ask all hon. members to welcome our visitors to the gallery.

Bill 17

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Chair: Chair.

Mr. Strankman: Madam Chair. I'll get it right yet, possibly, if I keep going around the bases there.

I would like to reiterate some of the comments made the other evening regarding the supplementary supply estimates. There are several interesting line items in there that are onerous, I guess, to say the least, with the financial situation of the province. One of them is the potential of an injection of cash funding into carbon capture and storage, some \$2 billion to date, and there is potential for further allocation. It's my understanding that this is not necessarily a complete science, and I think it should be made known to the Chamber and to others across the way that this is questionable. There's an ongoing question that's being debated, and I think possibly during the election cycle that will become a situation if the government does decide to go ahead.

One of the other things that I'd like to bring forward is the expenditure of some \$400 million on the federal building. To me, Madam Chair, that's exorbitant, extraneous, and extremely wasteful in this day and age, in what we might consider to be a frugal government. Certainly, it's not necessarily, as the members opposite call it, a government of new management because that was brought forward previous to that. It's certainly, again, an example of an overextension of the government.

7:40

The final thing I would like to bring forward is, I think, probably the most significant comment here and something that was specifically mentioned as a line item. It relates to the refurbishment, I guess, of what you might call in some people's minds an extravagance, the Kananaskis golf course. The Kananaskis golf course competes against private industry, and it's not necessarily the government's place in this case to compete against private industry much the same as the government took a position on government aircraft that government aircraft is also not necessarily required nor should compete in private industry. It's not government's place to compete with private industry; it's government's place to create regulation or reduce regulation to allow private industry or private enterprise to go forward.

Madam Chair, those are my main points. I think there may be further discussion in this regard as we go forward. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd just like to respond to a couple of the comments and to clarify the situation on carbon capture and storage for the House. You'll recall some years ago now that the government of Alberta set up a \$2 billion fund to invest in carbon capture and storage technology. This was not a go-alone thing. We're in fact co-operating with a number of other nations in the world: the United Kingdom, Norway, and others that have science institutions. We had planned to incent a number of projects up to \$2 billion.

What eventually happened was that two projects came forward, funded to the tune of \$1.3 billion. We've only paid out about \$300 million of that right now as both of those projects are under construction and they don't get paid until they meet construction timelines. Since assuming the helm of the Department of Energy, I committed that we would suspend our spending at \$1.3 billion. We will not go beyond that, yet the funds flow from the current \$300 million until we reach \$1.3 billion. The two projects in question: the quest project will be finished at the end of this current year, so most of that will be in payout this year; and the Alberta trunk line will be in full production next year. So over the next two years the rest of the \$1 billion will be paid out for those two projects.

Madam Chair, the carbon capture and storage fund that the member says is incomplete science: generally incomplete science requires that you complete the science. We're participating with other organizations in the world. But we've frozen our spending at \$1.3 billion. There are no cost overrun provisions in either of those contracts, so the spending will not go beyond \$1.3 billion, but it does require some time to get there until they meet the timelines.

Most recently the Department of Energy in the United States is examining our projects. They want to be involved from a science point of view in the validation and monitoring research that's going to go on. They've proposed that we establish a centre of excellence on the data. We fully intend to do that. It's going to be housed in Alberta, though, not in the United States. We've decided to suspend any further spending, additional projects, until some of our international partners (a) have a chance to review the data that's happening here and elsewhere and (b) we think we've made our contribution.

The member talked about the federal building. I think everybody heard the Infrastructure minister say that all things being equal, if that project were proposed today in our current fiscal climate, most likely we would not have proceeded with it. Nonetheless, we did proceed with it some years ago. We've got contracts in place, and we're not going to break contracts. In addition, Madam Chair, that's

a heritage building. The cornerstone was laid by none other than John Diefenbaker, I believe. It was sold to the province for a dollar some 20 years ago and sat languishing, roof leaking and everything else. The hon. member will get to see the inside of it in detail. His office is going to be in there as are many other members of the Legislature. It's a beautiful building, and it's an Alberta heritage building, so it was important.

The Kananaskis golf course, that he mentioned. We're not competing with private industry there. In fact, we've got private industry that was lobbying to have us complete that golf course because it's a major economic driver in the region, and lots of spinoff businesses are sitting there with no business because people can't use the Kananaskis golf course.

Kananaskis is also an asset of the government of Alberta, in fact of the people of Alberta, and we're going to maintain our assets as prudent property owners do, Madam Chair, so that's what that's about.

Finally, the planes. Of course, the member knows that we sold the planes. The Premier, under new management, decided that we would sell the aircraft. We were not competing with private business there. We had our own aircraft; many governments do. The Premier, we think rightfully, decided, "enough of that" and we sold the airplanes. Not much more to say than that, Madam Chair. We don't have any planes anymore.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any others? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's always good to enjoy hearing the minister, but I will tell you this. To hear that a government-funded golf course is not somehow competing with private enterprise: I would have to disagree with that.

Madam Chair, I have an amendment to this bill, and I have the 95 copies here.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we'll pause for a moment while we distribute the amendment.

Hon. members, this amendment to Bill 17 will be known as amendment A1.

Hon. member, if you'd like to, go ahead.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 17, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015, be amended as follows:

- A Section 2 is amended by striking out "\$459 250 000" and substituting "\$451 250 000."
- B Section 3 is amended by striking out "\$704 609 000" and substituting "\$703 439 000."
- C The Schedule is amended
 - (a) on page 3 following "Environment and Sustainable Resource Development"
 - (i) by striking out "200 014 000" and substituting "192 014 000", and
 - (ii) by striking out "48 085 000" and substituting "46 915 000"
 - and
 - (b) on page 4
 - (i) following "Operational amounts to be voted under section 2" by striking out "459 250 000" and substituting "451 250 000", and
 - (ii) following "Capital amounts to be voted on under section 3" by striking out "704 609 000" and substituting "703 439 000".

Now, Madam Chair, what this amendment is proposing to do is to take that money slated for a golf course and remove it from this

authorization. It's quite simple. We are hearing from government members that this is a unique time in budgeting. In other words, everyone has got to pull up their bootstraps. Everyone has got to be willing to cut. We made a proposal to cut the Auditor General after the committee, an independent committee, authorized about a half million dollar increase. We cut the Child and Youth Advocate's office. We're looking at roughly 9 per cent across the board in total cuts – right across the board, universally speaking – in every department. We've had the Premier tell the public-sector workers they have to be prepared to renegotiate, to give up something.

7:50

All this may be well and good – that's a debate for another day – but the debate today is simply this. A golf course got damaged, and that is sad. It really is sad, particularly if you're a golfer. But the fact is: should we be spending \$2 million to build a golf course – we have \$1.1 million, \$1.2 million in this budget – and \$8 million to keep it open just while we're fixing it? That doesn't even make sense. You can't ask the public to accept that when you're asking them for cuts. This is about priorities, and this golf course, well intentioned – and it may be a five-star golf course in the sense of pride and joy of this government – does not warrant this kind of expenditure at this time.

A prudent, reasonable businessperson who had suffered this same damage, in spending \$2 million to fix their golf course, would not spend \$8 million to keep it open. They would at least just spend \$2 million to fix it while they remained closed. This is something that the public will not buy into, and it's imperative that this government take a look at this in terms of looking at priorities. What should be funded as: this is what we need? What should not be funded because we want something? That's critical to this.

I mean, there are lots of options for this golf course. We could lease it out if it's a money-maker. One of the things we can't even find out from this government is: what is the revenue source from this golf course? How much revenue do we actually make in a year? We don't get that information; that's quite interesting. Now we're going to be throwing this kind of money at it. What is the bottom line here? What is the bottom line?

This amendment requires that we just take this money out and tell the public: we're going to cut back here. You know what? If the government members want to hold a golf tournament, they can go to a public golf course versus Kananaskis. We don't need to be funding that today. That's simply what this amendment does.

I would know from the government members: are you willing to actually go out on the campaign trail and say that we spent \$9 million to almost \$10 million to fix a golf course while we're going to cut teachers, while we're going to cut front-line workers? I know you say that you're not going to, but they're feeling the pinch today, and we don't have room to squeeze. You're looking at cutting various departments like the Auditor General, who could actually help us, who could actually show us where we can cut efficiently, because where we're spending money, there's no proof that it's actually producing anything.

I would hope that the government members would actually support this amendment. Let's withdraw that money from this bill, and let's be prudent and reasonable and spend money wisely. These are taxpayers' dollars.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Speaking to amendment A1 on Bill 17, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015, the hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Fawcett: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's an honour to stand up and speak against this amendment. I have to give the member some credit in the sense that he certainly knows how to generate some talking points or a sound bite in the time of fiscal austerity that we're going through. Certainly, you know, I don't imagine that if you went out and asked Albertans at this time, they would say that a golf course is a priority.

However, the member is clearly leaving out some of the facts around this particular item in the supplementary estimates. The facts are that he alluded to what a business would do. I can tell you that if a business had an asset – the golf course is about a \$50 million plus asset which was destroyed significantly during the floods – and had an insurance policy on that asset and if the insurance company was going to step forward and pay for that company to rebuild that asset, particularly a big portion of that, but you did have a small deductible, let's say about \$2 million on that asset to rebuild that asset for the company, and if the insurance company was willing to do that, it would make sense for that company to take the insurance company, that they've been paying all along, up on that agreement to rebuild that asset, to pay the deductible.

Now, to rebuild that asset takes time. That asset wasn't completely destroyed. There was approximately \$18 million of that asset that was still intact. It does not make sense to allow that portion of that asset to go into disrepair while the rest of the asset is being rebuilt, funded in the majority by the insurance company. This is strictly asset management, which on this side of the House we understand needs to be done prudently on behalf of taxpayers. In fact, there actually would be more additional expenses to the taxpayers through the remediation of the site there – those would include cleaning up all of the debris and doing something with the current assets that are still available – that would be over and above what is actually being paid by the government right now to rebuild that asset.

Now, if that hon. member wants to have a debate around whether this government should own a golf course or not, that's fair. That's a fair debate. But that's not what this is about. This is about asset management. We currently own an asset which suffered significant damage. We had an insurance policy on that in the form of provincial assets being covered by the disaster recovery program in the arrangement between the provincial government and the federal government. What we're doing is capitalizing on that to make sure that Albertans have the same asset afterwards that they had before the flood.

I could go into a whole bunch – I believe the hon. Minister of Energy talked about it before – about the economic spinoffs around that. You can be assured that the hon. member was right when he said that the other businesses were supportive of this. This is a place where tourists go, where Albertans go, yes, to recreate. It is the job of government to provide opportunities for Albertans to recreate. Many people that go and visit this golf course do a weekend trip and go visit another golf course in the area, that is owned by a private business. They understand that, and that's why they wanted this provincial asset rebuilt. Again, there is well over a million and a half dollars created in taxes every year from this golf course. It employs 150 people on an annual basis. That's directly. Indirectly there's other employment.

So while the hon. member sounds really good – and I'm sure he's going to try to take all the credit he wants in front of the camera about this being a misspent priority in a time of frugality – he's missing a whole bunch of facts and not explaining those to Albertans. This is sound asset management, and in fact it would cost Albertans more in the remediation of the site and with some of the contracts that are in place and getting out of those contracts than it actually would do what we're doing, which is to then rebuild a provincial asset that was there before the flood, that will now be in

place years afterwards, that will create a whole bunch of economic benefits for Albertans, particularly in the tourism industry and particularly in the Bow Valley area, that was impacted significantly by the floods in 2013.

Mr. Anglin: A great argument. I'm just not buying it, Madam Chair. I'm not buying it. It's a great asset, yes. What makes you think that you have to reclaim it this year if you don't fix it this year? That's the part that doesn't make sense to me. It did get damaged. Now, you mentioned the debris, the removal of the debris alone. Well, if you're going to fix the golf course, you've got to remove the debris anyway. If this is a natural preserve – I mean, I'm not buying the argument that it's got to be fixed this year. I will buy the argument that it's a valuable asset. I don't have a problem with that. What I have a problem with is that we're looking at expenditures this year. It got damaged 18 months ago. I understand that. Maybe it needs to be repaired over a longer period of time, when we're in a better position budgetwise.

8:00

But when you're going into a position with an austerity budget where there are county bridges that are impassable right now because there's absolutely no funding for those bridges and we're going to fix a golf course, that doesn't make sense to me. There's a bridge in James River Bridge, which is a community. They need a quarter of a million dollars to fix the bridge, and they're being told there's no money coming to fix the bridge. But we're going to spend \$8 million for a golf course just to keep it open while we spend another \$1.1 million to finish it and fix it. That doesn't make sense to me. The operational money makes no sense to me. We don't need it open for one more year.

The other thing that the member says is: we're not presenting all the facts. The answer is true. You're not presenting all the facts. What is the generating revenue from your so-called \$50 million asset? Has it ever paid for itself? Does it even make money? I mean, we can go on and on about this, but you're not giving us the figures. You're not being transparent, and we need that to make sure that the money is being spent wisely. This business of saying... [interjections] Could I ask you to be quiet, please? Thanks. It's just loud in my ear.

Okay. What we're looking at is priorities. That's it. I'm not saying that you get rid of the asset. I'm not saying that you don't fix the asset. But the Health minister will even tell you that when he looks at a hospital and he's going to look at building hospitals versus fixing hospitals, one thing he will absolutely stand up and defend me on is that he'll prioritize what's best for us. Building that golf course is not in the best interest of the public right now. If you say that it is, then I ask you to prove it. Show the revenue that it's going to generate, that if we spend this kind of money now, we will get a return of X amount that shows that it's worth it. You can't do that because it's not happening. That's the problem.

My argument is simply this. I'm not saying don't do it. I'm saying: in this supplemental budget pull it out; do it when you have the money. We have senior citizens who need certain medications that are life-saving, certain medications that make for a better quality of life going into their final days, that are not covered by the province because we don't have the money. We have all sorts of priorities that are in line that are not funded.

All I'm saying in this amendment is that this is not a priority here and now. If you say that it's a worthwhile endeavour and it's a worthwhile asset, I'm okay with that. I'm just not okay saying that we've got to spend that money right now while we're asking everyone else to cut, because – you know what? – golfing is nice, but you know as well as I do that the golfers in this province are

heading to Palm Springs in the wintertime, and when these golf courses open, they're all over the province. There are lots of golf courses. Having one golf course not operational while it's under repair or while it's waiting to go under repair because we just don't have the money now is not the end of the world for this province. It is not a high priority, in my view, and that's where I'm going with this. So I'm not saying that we have to reclaim it. I'm not saying that we have to abandon it. I'm just saying that it's not a priority this spring, in 2015. Maybe it needs to be moved out.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Energy on amendment A1.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Madam Chair. I always look forward to the comments of the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, who, as the Minister of Environment points out, does occasionally omit the facts, occasionally makes up a few while he's talking, and that's always an entertaining conversation. For example, he started his motion for amendment by talking about 9 per cent cuts across the board, even across every ministry. There is nothing whatsoever in the record of this Assembly or any motion or budget or anything before us that would suggest any such thing. It's just simply not true, Madam Chair, but that doesn't matter. We'll make up facts as we go along.

He talked about that we'll be breaking contracts left and right.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Deputy Chair: A point of order has been called. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on the point of order.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I think that the hon. member, by suggesting that the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre is omitting the facts, is violating the rules of the Assembly. Furthermore, I would like to point out that the Minister of Finance of this province is on the record in public making the assertion that not only will there not be any increases included in this budget for inflation and population growth, but there will be an across-the-board reduction of 5 per cent. Now, the government may have changed its mind, and it's well that they might because I would suggest that the firestorm of public opinion would consume them. But I think the fact of the matter is – and I want to put it on the record – that those statements have been made in public by the Finance minister, and for the minister to assert otherwise is simply not true.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, can you give us the citation for your point of order, please?

Mr. Mason: Yeah; 23(h), (i), and (j).

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Oberle: Madam Chair, those citations would suggest that I had somehow impugned the hon. member or made some incorrect statement when the actual fact of the matter is that this hon. member can go on what he may have heard or hadn't or what CBC had quoted or hadn't. What I said was that there's no such suggestion before this House that's being considered at this time. We'll have to wait for the budget, to see what that brings about. That's a statement of fact, and I believe that automatically means there's no point of order.

May I continue, Madam Chair?

The Deputy Chair: I will just rule on that point of order. Just give me one minute, please. Half a minute.

Thank you, hon. members. We know that in this Assembly members will certainly disagree from time and time, and there may be a dispute as to facts. Clarifications have been made, so let's move on.

Debate Continued

Mr. Oberle: Madam Chair, in his introduction he also talked about the necessity of breaking contracts when, again, no such facts are in evidence before the House here. In fact, if the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood wants to bandy quotes about, the actual quote given is that we won't be breaking contracts. So let's just straighten that out. None of those things ever stopped the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Let's just put this in simpler terms. About the golf course: the federal government under the disaster recovery program will fund up to 90 per cent of the flood damage cost of this facility. He mentioned in his discussion about prudent businessmen what a prudent businessman would do. Well, perhaps he could describe to me one prudent businessman in the world who would pass up 90 per cent cost recovery to repair his asset that was damaged in a flood. If indeed we accept his amendment to stop the payment on the flood-damaged golf course, the citizens of Alberta will be liable for the cost. Even if we don't lay it out, we lose the value in the asset, which, I might point out, becomes an item in the budget, and we lose a writedown of \$10 million instead of getting up to 90 per cent back from the federal government. No prudent businessman in his right mind would consider any such thing. Again, the member omits facts where it's convenient for him to do so.

Now, Madam Chair, I want to point out something else about the member, and sometimes his facts don't line up. When, some time ago . . . [interjection] oh, pain, pain. No hon. member attempted to make greater hay than this hon. member in discussing the transmission system of Alberta. We were wrong to build transmission, we were wrong to use DC conversion, and all of that hocus-pocus. So what does he say today in his debate? He argues in the first half that we need distributed transmission because we have a huge transmission overbuild: if we would just distribute generation out around the province. Then in the second half of his speech this afternoon he argues that we should build transmission across to Manitoba to pick up hydroelectric power. Who is going to pay for that one? And it requires DC conversion because you can't get across the Saskatchewan border without DC conversion. So the hon. member uses the facts quite loosely.

He's always got the sound bite ready, as the hon. minister of Environment says, but the fact of the matter is that none of his arguments hold water. It is a prudent investment for the government of Alberta to repair this golf course and recover their money and maintain their assets. We don't pay for it; it's an insurance policy. If the member really wants to argue that we should forgo an insurance policy and pay for it ourselves: knock yourself out. I'm sure he'll figure out a way to do it.

8:10

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

On Bill 17, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015, A1, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I'm pleased to rise to speak to this amendment, which I am going to support. This amendment follows some questions that I raised when we first debated the supplementary supply estimates last week. You know,

the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre has stated that he's not in favour of this particular golf course because it competes with the private sector. I take a somewhat different view with regard to that. I believe that this is an amenity of the park that the private hotels and resorts that operate in that park want to see operating because it brings them customers. So I would flip it around the other way and say that this particular golf course is actually a hidden subsidy for private companies. Nevertheless, it's an asset that we have.

I am not opposed to having a publicly operated golf course. The city of Edmonton has a couple of them and is able to offer golfing at reasonable prices for ordinary people. I'm not saying that the Kananaskis is anything like that. The question, really, for me, Madam Chair, is a question of priorities: what are the priorities of the government at a time when revenues are tight? We've never said that you don't have to make changes or adjustments when your revenue is less than you expect. It's just a question of which changes you make and which programs you support and which programs you don't support.

Now, I was struck that when the committee that directs the officers of the Assembly – help me out here, Madam Chair.

Some Hon. Members: Legislative Offices.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, all you helpful hon. members.

The Legislative Offices Committee tried to provide an increase in funding for the Auditor General's budget, and they voted in favour of that. We supported that. They also voted down a motion to increase the funding for the children's advocate. We didn't support that decision; we thought that that funding should be there. But then the Premier thundered from on high that there was absolutely no money, and he directed the committee members to go back and reverse their decision, which, like the dutiful caucus members that they are, they did.

Now, my question is this, Madam Chairman. If we don't have a few thousand dollars for the Auditor General and for the children's advocate to look after children who are in care – and we dealt with that issue quite extensively just today in the House, and the need for that is so clear. If those children aren't a priority and the golf course is, then there's something wrong. If the Auditor General, who does a wonderful job most of the time in keeping track of government waste and making sure that the government is on track with its own policies, is not a good investment, I don't know what is.

To me, it's not that they're going to pay \$8 million in operating costs for this golf course, and it's not that there's another, oh, almost \$2 million, 1 and a half million dollars, something like that, in capital that is being spent. When children who are potentially in danger are told that the cupboard is bare, then I think that the government should be ashamed of itself because it clearly has the wrong priorities.

Now, the ministers have said: well, we're going to get back 80 cents or 90 cents on the dollar for this investment. They haven't offered a shred of proof of that, Madam Chairman, and there's no guarantee, in my view, that this money will be returned to us. If they have some, I'm happy to see that, but in the meantime I'm going to take that suggestion with a grain of salt.

I think, in the end, that this really reveals a callousness on the part of the government in how they establish the priorities for the government and for the various programs. You know, when it comes to making sure that we protect tourism and the tourist industry in this province, they are willing to spend a lot of money. When it comes to protecting vulnerable children, they're not. And nothing could be more telling of what's wrong with this government, Madam Chair, than that.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Oh, thank you so much, Madam Chair. I should offer some proof, I suppose. If the hon. member has ever visited the federal government's website and reviewed the disaster recovery program, which was approved for Alberta and in which we need to spend money in order to get the money back, that, I think, would be fairly rock-solid proof unless the member doesn't believe the written policy of the federal government and the payments that have been made to this point. That's entirely possible. I'm not sure what bats circle his belfry.

Madam Chair, you know, you talk about callous. What does the spending on the Auditor General or the child advocate have to do whatsoever with a golf course? We make a decision on spending based on what's the right thing to do. In the case of the golf course it's the right thing to access an insurance policy. We actually believe – the hon. member won't agree with this or believe it – that the child advocate and the Auditor General should be funded properly. They are, as a matter of fact, amongst the highest in the country, which is why we don't support additional spending. This government is prudent with the taxpayers' money. The investment that we're talking about this evening is cashing in on an insurance policy, and anybody that wouldn't do that, I'm afraid, is not managing their assets very well. It's just simple. I'll drop my argument right there.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

On Bill 17, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015, the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler. Amendment A1.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Chair. I certainly am coming to enjoy the discussions in this Chamber. We're going from bats to energy to corporations. I happen to live beside a corporation – if I should follow the argument of the Member for Calgary-Klein – and the corporation is called Saskatchewan. In that corporate jurisdiction they believe that the government should also operate buses and run it on a profit and loss. You know, in other jurisdictions across the country that private enterprise – not relating to bats, but relating to dogs – is called Greyhound, and they operate that private enterprise, so there's a jurisdictional difference there.

In this case I take would some umbrage at the Energy minister's comments saying that we have to spend the money so that we can get the money from the federal government. I think that's possibly certainly true, but the perceptions in his mind and the perceptions being presented are onerous at best. In my riding I have health needs, and many members will be reminiscent of my fighting for the simple reallocation of some small amount of funds to the Consort acute-care beds. There are people who need those facilities, and they forego luxury.

There's a difference between a need and a want, and that operates in many corporate jurisdictions and should operate in government jurisdictions. The funding that's being brought forward here in the case of the Kananaskis golf course, I believe, is simply more of a want than a need. It's illustrious, and it's extravagant, and it flies in the face, if you will – no pun intended about the flies – of frugality. In a government that's reaching a new level of indebtedness, why not set an example of leadership? And this would be only one way that you could exhibit that leadership.

8:20

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre on A1.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, I think we were discussing A1 all this time if I'm not mistaken, but we ended up into electricity. That's just shocking. I don't know how that happened.

Mr. Mason: It's revolting.

Mr. Anglin: Revolting is what it is.

And it's interesting because the member talks about stretching the facts. I don't know where we separate on this. But one is that Manitoba would be willing to build 2,000 kilometres of transmission line to the States versus 400 kilometres to the Saskatchewan border. That's a no-brainer for Manitoba, to try to access the market. The key is to try to get Saskatchewan involved, but that's another negotiation. But the other side of the province with site C, that's a piece of cake for Alberta because we get generation trapped in Grande Prairie.

Now, getting back to the subject matter at hand. I just wanted to clear up that the member, you know, is a little bit low on voltage on the understanding of what's going on in the transmission system. But I am not low on voltage when it comes to understanding the spending. Now, if I hear the minister correctly, they are in charge. This government is in charge of tabling all the proof necessary to prove what it is saying, but it has not done so. In other words, if you have a \$50 million asset, what is it producing on an annual basis for revenue, and is it actually making money? Because you were talking about the businessman mentality here. I want to know, the opposition wants to know: is this really producing for our province? I mean, that's what you'd base this on.

The insurance money that the member's talking about. I have a lot of questions about that, but without proof of the insurance being tabled here, the policy itself, I can't ask those questions. But this one question does beg an answer. Sure, fix it for \$1.1 million. Why \$8 million to keep it open? That's a valid question. That's a valid question. If you think it needs to be operational during this short period of time for \$8 million, that doesn't make sense to me. That doesn't make sense to me. Now, if you want to be prudent – I presume it's an 18-hole golf course. Nobody ever said anything different. But if that presumption is correct, why don't you fix it into a 9-hole golf course, tell them to play two rounds for 18 holes, and save yourself a little bit of money? And then when the times are good, go back and rebuild if you want to do something like that if the investment is worth it. I don't know.

What I do know: on a level of priorities, you have a golf course that – I presume part of it is functional by the way you're talking. Part of it is functional now. Part of it is not functional; it needs to be fixed. That's what I'm taking from your conversation. If that's the case, what I'm saying here is simply this: there are times that we need to be reasonable and prudent, and if you're telling me that this is a \$50 million asset that must be fixed now, before this next budget is tabled and out there, I'm asking you to show proof and table it in this House so we can question that. And you have never done that. But what you have here is a luxury. And it is a nice luxury. The fact is: I'm not buying the argument without proof that it's got to be done and it's got to be done now.

I'm going to tell you what needs to be done and be done now. We need some rural bridges fixed, we have some communities that have senior facilities that need to be built, we need schools to be funded, and we don't have that. We have teachers that you say you value, but you're going to squeeze them, and you're going to squeeze them even more. That's a valuable asset. When we look at other areas of services this government provides that are good services like our road system – we need to fix our roads – some of that is going to wait. And those are valuable assets. This is about priorities, and I

can't see how this golf course is a priority, and I've seen no evidence that it has to be fixed now and cannot be fixed after our next budget comes in or even next year. That has not been stated.

The other thing about insurance policies – and it's been done before. You have the ability to negotiate, even with the federal government, based on our own fiscal situation. Presumably the government understands the situation we're in because Canada's in it. They understand that. I see no reason why you can't go back and say, "Hey, we have this situation here. Can we extend this one or two years?" Because it's just not reasonable to spend that money now, given all the cuts that we're going to bring forward.

Just in closing, Madam Chair, it was the Minister of Finance who basically used that 9 per cent across the board, and he publicly stated so. I believe it had to do with the cost of inflation plus that 5 per cent cut that the member from Edmonton here recently mentioned. We were listening to that. We're waiting for every little evidence of what the budget will be when you table it on the 26th, but right now we're dealing with this issue and why we have to spend this kind of money when Albertans are going and getting pink slips, one after another. We're talking about raising revenue. We're talking about cutting spending, but we're going to spend money on a golf course. It makes no sense to Albertans. You can't sell this during the election. We're going to campaign on it. When I say we, that's anyone in the opposition. It's a bad priority.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

On amendment A1, Bill 17, the hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Fawcett: Madam Chair, it's amazing. The more that that member speaks, the more that he actually makes the argument for why we need to actually make this investment today. So I'm going to start off just real quickly educating the hon. member. It's very obvious that he doesn't golf very much, and that's fine. He's busy. He's got a big constituency. He probably doesn't get out to golf too much, and that's fine.

A golf course is typically 18 holes. This golf course, I believe, was a 36-hole golf course, and there were all but a handful of holes that were damaged, meaning that if you really wanted to play golf on the course right now, you could probably play on four or five holes. For me personally that would be okay because I would actually have a chance to break a hundred, Madam Chair, but, you know, most people actually want to play on a golf course that actually has a regulation 18 holes. Okay. So what happens with those four holes that don't need to be rebuilt? They need to be maintained, right?

On a golf course there's this stuff called grass, and it's usually one of the biggest parts of a golf course. The grass has to be nice, has to be taken care of. You don't want weeds on it. You want it to be nicely watered in order for it to be maintained, or else you end up having to replace it in the future. So on those holes that currently exist that you could play on, we need to maintain them up to a standard where you could play on them, or else they would go into disrepair and need additional work some time on in the future before that becomes playable again.

What this hon. member just argued was that we should postpone the rebuilding of the golf course because we don't have enough money. He was saying: I'm not going to argue that you shouldn't rebuild it and take up that insurance policy. He said: you should postpone it. And what, continue to pay on an ongoing basis the maintenance on the asset that is currently of value? That doesn't make any financial sense, hon. member. You know it doesn't, and we all know it doesn't.

Hey, this is a very unfortunate circumstance that happened to tie into a very unfortunate financial position that we are in as a government, and I'd be the first one to admit the optics aren't great, but when you're on this side of the House, you're asked to make decisions that go beyond just optics and asked to make decisions around what makes the most rational, thoughtful decision. I can't conceive of anything that is any more irrational than saying, "Let's put this off and do it two, three years down the road," while continuing to pay and maintain the operating costs for the assets that weren't damaged. That doesn't make sense whatsoever. What makes sense is to try to build this and get the construction done as soon as we possibly can to take advantage of the insurance policy that is in place so that we can eventually get it up and operational and start collecting the revenue that it generates when it's in operation. That's what makes the most financial sense, Madam Chair, and I would ask all members for that reason to turn down this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

8:30

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Well, I just want to address one thing because I know that it's been part of the government's speaking notes with respect to the decisions around the children's advocate and the Auditor General's requests for funding that were turned down and the 2 per cent reductions that were made across the board to the officers of the Legislature.

I know that the Minister of Energy has just repeated that these two offices are the best funded of their kind in Canada, more than adequately funded and that they don't need any increases and they can sustain the 2 per cent reduction. I just want to point out a few things, Madam Chair. With respect to the request from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate this was to pay for three investigators and two analysts.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, can you bring that back to A1? We're on the amendment.

Mr. Mason: Yes. What I'm trying to do here, Madam Chair, is to respond to some claims that were made in debate on this by the minister. I had started the debate by trying to contrast the government's priorities for golf courses with their refusal to fund these two important offices, so I think it's very important to clarify exactly what these requests were that were turned down, and I'm going to turn my attention as well back to the golf course.

Five staff had been previously approved by the same committee to handle increases in investigations after the mandate of the office was broadened to include investigations into the deaths of children and youth within two years of them receiving government services. So those positions are no longer funded, apparently. I don't know what adjustments the office is going to make, but they have increased responsibility for investigating the deaths of children in care or who are receiving services, and this is what the government unfunded. So that's one indication of the priority of this government.

The second claim that's been made about the Auditor General is that he's the most lavishly funded Auditor General in Canada. What they fail to point out is that the Auditor General in Alberta, in addition to making operational audits of government departments, is also the auditor of record for the various agencies of this government that spend money or handle a great deal of money. So AIMCo, Treasury Branches, and a number of other organizations are additional responsibilities of the office that Auditors General in other parts of the country simply don't have. To claim that because our Auditor General's office budget is larger and, therefore, he can sustain the cuts doesn't make sense.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, could you bring it back to amendment A1, please. You made your point.

Mr. Mason: Yes. I would like it if the Auditor General had the resources to look into this decision to fund this golf course, Madam Chair, because I think that he could shed a great deal of light on what the government is actually trying to pull here.

Again, Madam Chair, I just want to clarify those particular points, and I want to say very clearly that I think this government has the wrong priorities. We should be putting children and finding real savings in government expenditures ahead of lavish luxury golf courses at fancy resorts.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre on amendment A1.

Mr. Anglin: Absolutely. Still on the amendment and the rationale for spending the money. We're talking about the reasonableness, whether or not this is a prudent expenditure or whether it's a waste of money. If I hear the government correctly, they've got to spend this money now or they lose a \$50 million asset.

To the hon. Minister of ESRD. Could you, then, answer me: why are we rebuilding a 36-hole golf course in a flood plain that is at risk of being flooded out in the next flood? It's a very reasonable question. We've done this with homes where we're not allowing them to rebuild, and we're actually paying for properties in some cases. There are flood victims out there that have yet to see a finalization of their monies that are required, and that's just for basic living, but we're talking about a 36-hole golf course here and the luxury of it. The minister himself said that he would prefer to play on a regulation 18-hole golf course.

By the way, we do play golf in the west country. It's a little bit rougher than the luxury some of these ministers might be used to. We're a little bit tougher golfers out there, I guess. We break more clubs. I don't know. The fact of the matter is simply this: the priority of spending this money. The big question is if it's such a valuable asset, why are we rebuilding it in a flood zone, in a flood plain that is at risk of being washed out again in the very next flood? Are we throwing more money away, again, when this should not be rebuilt there? That's why maybe this money needs to be pulled out now.

I will say this. What has not been given, and maybe it should be, is how much of the golf course is operational. I don't know. Maybe the minister can answer that question. I'm trying to understand why the public should fund this with taxpayers' dollars now, why this can't wait. Why can't we do so much? You can't tell me that we can't go back to the federal government and negotiate here if it was so important that you fix it. The fact that that money now has priority over so much else is just not sellable. It's not sellable to the public. They're not buying it. It is a lost ball, as far as I'm concerned, on the golf course.

So if the minister could explain that, I really would like to hear that.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members who wish to speak on amendment A1 for Bill 17?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Chair: The question has been called.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:37 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

For the motion:

Anglin	Sherman	Strankman
Mason	Stier	

Against the motion:

Bikman	Johnson, L.	Olesen
Brown	Kennedy-Glans	Pastoor
Cao	Khan	Quadri
DeLong	Klimchuk	Quest
Donovan	Leskiw	Rodney
Ellis	Luan	Sarich
Fawcett	Lukaszuk	Smith
Fenske	Mandel	VanderBurg
Fraser	McIver	Woo-Paw
Horne	McQueen	Young
Jeneroux	Oberle	

Totals:	For – 5	Against – 32
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We will now go back to Bill 17. Are there any comments, questions, or further amendments to be offered for Bill 17?

Seeing none, the question has been called. Are you ready for the question on Bill 17?

8:50

Hon. Members: Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 17 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Mr. Oberle: Madam Chair, I would move that we rise and report at this juncture.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports Bill 17. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 16 Statutes Amendment Act, 2015

[Adjourned debate March 12: Mr. Donovan]

Mr. Donovan: I guess I did my speech yesterday, so I'll move it from there. Call the question.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 16, Statutes Amendment Act, 2015?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a second time]

Bill 15 Securities Amendment Act, 2015

[Adjourned debate March 12: Mr. Campbell]

Mr. Oberle: I believe the minister had completed his remarks, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other members who wish to speak in second reading on Bill 15, Securities Amendment Act, 2015? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise and speak to Bill 15, the Securities Amendment Act, 2015. This bill is a continuation of the old Bill 42 from 2013 and Bill 3 from 2014, so it's been around for a long time and somehow just never really managed to make it through the Assembly. We have some interest in this bill in that it ensures the proper enforcement relating to securities and point-of-sale-related amendments and amendments that support continued harmonization of derivatives regulation. As well, it has some housekeeping amendments.

Under this Constitution, the Constitution of the country that was really created in its original form in 1867, a very, very long time ago, regulation of securities was given to the provinces. Now, Madam Speaker, it's my view that that is no longer the appropriate way to regulate securities, which are largely in these days very international. To have a system where each province separately regulates its securities in the absence of national regulation is a parochial and antiquated system. Now, having given the power to the provinces, they are unprepared, of course, to relinquish the power.

The question, then, really is where we ought to go. There's a recognition of this, a recognition, I think, even on the part of the provinces as they try to move towards some more harmonization of the regulation, but they won't admit that it is really not appropriate any longer in today's world for the provinces to hold this particular jurisdiction, so securities do continue to be regulated by a patchwork system involving provincial-made statutes governing the basic framework that varies from coast to coast as well as instruments set out by the Canadian Securities Administrators, which act as binding rules, and CSA national policies, which act as interpretive guidelines. Most of the actual rules and regulations are contained in the national or multilateral instruments as determined by the CSA in consultation with each province and industry experts. Each exchange also has its own set of rules and standards for listing.

Now, derivatives are not as well regulated as other securities and are mostly traded over the counter, meaning they're not subject to many of the exchange requirements or the investor protection that those other exchange rules create. Derivatives played a very large role, Madam Speaker, in the 2008 global financial crisis precisely because they were not adequately regulated. Bad debts were bundled into securities, which were bought by investors without the ability to know what was underlying those securities. It was difficult for investors to have access to enough information to know in what they were actually investing, and no one was providing

adequate oversight because of the enormous regulatory gaps. Because most derivatives were traded over the counter, meaning not traded through exchanges, there was even less oversight. We think that this bill in that sense is a positive step towards increasing transparency and investor protection in the ever-growing derivatives market.

However, the same deficiencies that exist in securities regulation as a whole will continue until they are addressed. For example, Madam Speaker, derivatives will now be regulated similar to most other securities but are still subject to some exemptions which are outdated or not working properly. When were the thresholds for the accredited investor exemption last updated? A net income of \$200,000 is no longer particularly rare or exceedingly high. That's a lot of money to most people but among the investing class perhaps not considered to be a very, very large number.

We need to have a national regulator, in our view, though, Madam Speaker. Of those countries which regulate securities, Bosnia and Herzegovina is the only other country in the world without a national securities regulator. You know, calls for a national regulator date back to 1935 and include the 1964 Porter Commission, a 1979 study by the department of consumer and corporate affairs, the 1994 memorandum of understanding between the Atlantic provinces and the federal government, the 2003 Wise Persons' Committee report, and the 2006 Crawford panel. There has been a regular call from people who've studied this issue in this country for the national regulation of securities. As it stands, it looks like B.C., Ontario, and the federal government are going to be entering into a co-operative regulatory system, and Alberta will be left out.

The need for this legislation perfectly illustrates the absurdity of continuing on without a national regulator for securities. We have to keep wasting government time and resources or those of the ASC in updating legislation and harmonizing with other jurisdictions across the country. If we had a national regulator, all of that time and resources could be better spent on enforcement and investigation to better protect Alberta investors. Madam Speaker, capital markets are increasingly integrated and increasingly global. It's inefficient and in many cases impossible for a provincial regulator to handle these complexities. A system of 13 different territorial and provincial regulators also leaves us vulnerable to fraud or simply increased regulatory failure.

9:00

The asset-backed commercial paper crisis in 2007-08, costing billions of Canadian dollars, was a symptom of the problem. Asset-backed commercial paper, or ABCP, is a type of commercial paper that is collateralized by other assets and typically matures within a month. They are derivatives. The IIROC, or Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada, found plenty of blame to go around. Banks and investment dealers sold ABCP to unsophisticated retail investors without a clear understanding of the product. The rating agency DBRS bestowed its highest score on much of the paper even though rival agencies Standard & Poor's and Moody's refused to even put a rating on it because of the flawed, Canadian-style liquidity agreements.

Canada's financial services industry and indeed all industry is less competitive without a national regulator. There are significant costs to companies and investors when they need to research 13 sets of laws and rules, applied through 13 different securities commissions, for each deal or investment. The lack of a national regulator also places a significant regulatory burden on small and emerging companies, who don't have the resources of major companies to deal with each regulator's filing fees and requirements.

Now, it seems clear that this PC government's opposition to the national model is at this point a case of putting the interests of oil and gas and its investors ahead of the interests of less sophisticated investors. It's smaller investors, with less knowledge of our securities system, that are at risk without a national regulator. They're the ones that fall victim to Ponzi schemes and high-risk investments as they try to keep up with a fast-moving economy.

Madam Speaker, Canadians as a whole lose billions of dollars a year to securities fraud. I've had the opportunity to meet with a number of individuals who've been put in this position and have spent years and years trying to recover their investments. Reports put the loss at about \$2.1 billion just for Albertans alone, so I think we have a responsibility to ensure that the rest of the province is not taken advantage of. The stakes are simply too high when you're talking about someone potentially losing their life savings. As I mentioned, I've met with people who have lost their life savings, and it's heartbreaking as they try to recover them.

It was too good to be true is a very, very harsh lesson to someone on a fixed income, and it appears that our provincial regulator is not strong enough to prevent this type of thing from happening. There are countless examples out there: for example, the Harvest Group, facing a half billion dollar class-action suit after bad real estate ventures; Platinum Equities, which took \$51 million from Albertans; or Shire International Real Estate Investments, a \$20 million fraud. In many of these cases the provincial regulator took action but only after the fact, due to wide exemptions on who has to register and report under our securities laws. In the case of Platinum one of its top marketers had already been fined by the Alberta Securities Commission, but that was clearly not enough to prevent it from happening again. Madam Speaker, that leaves vulnerable investors holding the bag.

I want to just indicate that we're generally going to support this bill despite those very serious reservations because there is some strengthening of securities protections for investors in this matter, as I indicated at the beginning of my speech. But I do want to firmly and once again put on the record the position that we've taken all along, which is that some form of national regulation of securities is essential in this country. That doesn't mean that it has to be entirely within the control of the federal government. It's quite possible that provinces working together could establish a national regulator for securities by being co-operative with one another, and that would satisfy the constitutional requirements and, at the same time, provide the kind of protection for investors and the type of regulation of securities that we believe is necessary.

We put this forward. Unfortunately, the province has not shown leadership, and now the federal government is moving in with the support of Ontario and British Columbia to establish a federally controlled regulator. It's not ideal, but they have capitalized on the glaring inability of provincial regulation to protect investors, and we've seen more than enough examples of that right here in Alberta, Madam Speaker.

On that note, I'll take my seat.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 15? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Alberta Liberal caucus supports the bill without amendments. Canada, unlike many other countries, has a decentralized securities regulatory regime. As such, it must rely on its provincial governments to enact legislation supporting the ongoing reform of the Canadian regulatory system. The changes proposed in Bill 15 are part of a national effort to harmonize securities rules and mirror those being made in many

other Canadian jurisdictions. Bill 15 builds on the earlier regulatory changes that our caucus supported during the spring and fall 2014 legislative sessions.

Madam Speaker, as a province and as a country we need to be doing everything possible to protect investors and maintain the integrity of our capital markets. If the 2008 global financial crisis taught us anything, it's that complacency and a lack of regulatory vigilance can quickly and catastrophically shake world markets. No country or jurisdiction is immune from the effects of a market collapse. Therefore, it is important that we all do our part to support the health and stability of the world financial system.

Madam Speaker, Alberta Liberals acknowledge that the proposed changes are necessary for Alberta to be able to honour its national and international commitments to improving securities regulation. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now in effect. Are there any members who wish to question or comment on the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark?

Seeing none, are there any other members who wish to speak in second reading on Bill 15, Securities Amendment Act, 2015?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a second time]

Bill 13

Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2015

[Adjourned debate March 12: Mr. Fawcett]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members who wish to speak on Bill 13, Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to speak to this bill. This bill approaches a very important issue, the protection of Alberta's waterways, particularly those in southern Alberta, that serve so many purposes from recreation to irrigation to drinking water.

Now, Madam Speaker, I want to indicate that we support this measure. The threat of invasive species, including zebra mussels, is too great to ignore. It's high time, I think, that we take steps to protect this. The bill would create a mandatory inspection system for boats along the southern border with Montana and the eastern border with Saskatchewan. Manitoba, which is always a progressive, forward-looking government, that our government often copies and steals a lot of their really good ideas from – and that's a good thing because they're good ideas, you know – has taken similar legislation. In fact, if you want to know what the Alberta government is going to do, just look at what the Manitoba government did three years earlier, and you'll probably get an idea of what's coming.

9:10

Dr. Sherman: They copy Liberals, not New Democrats.

Mr. Mason: I'm sorry. The government of Manitoba is not a Liberal government. I hate to disillusion you, hon. member.

The bill also serves to enhance the authority of fisheries officers and guardians and would not result in additional costs for boat owners. Those owners who are found to have zebra mussels or other invasive species on their vessels will have their boats cleaned at the province's expense. Inspections will be placed at the existing inspection stations already owned and used by the province for other reasons.

I think there are lots of things that we can say about these species. Zebra mussels have caused millions of dollars in damage by clogging up water pipes. They've altered the food chain in lakes. They present a threat to swimmers, who may cut themselves when stepping on sharp shells, and they create toxic algae blooms that can kill fish and birds. They decrease property values.

Another one, Madam Speaker, is Eurasian water milfoil, which reduces biodiversity by competing with native plants. It reduces oxygen levels in water, that can kill fish. It hinders recreational activities like swimming, boating, and fishing due to accumulation of plant debris. It can create stagnant water, which is the ideal habitat for mosquitos, impede flood control, water conservation, and irrigation works.

I think that some things have been done, but more needs to be done. It's been proven that washing boat hulls reduces the chance of transfer of invasive species to a new lake. Almost two-thirds of boaters do not currently clean their boats before changing lakes. A study suggested that additional management efforts would be helpful, so, Madam Speaker, it's more than enforcement. There have to be education measures included, and we think that the bill is a useful step in improving the environmental record of this government, but they sure have a long, long way to go.

The NDP has been a long-time supporter of environmental protection, and the government has not, in our view, done all that it should in the past to deal with things like blue-green algae and, you know, of course, the birds in the tailings ponds in the oil sands and so on. There's a lot of work to be done to protect wildlife, to protect our natural environment, but this is, I think, a positive step in the right direction. As a result, Madam Speaker, we will be supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that. I couldn't help but rise and show appreciation for my colleague across the aisle and say how much I appreciate him and agree with what he said because if I heard him correctly – and I was listening carefully – he said that our government constantly brings forward ideas that are right and proven. He did say that, and I agree with him.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, this is not Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Mason: I'm making a point of order.

The Acting Speaker: Oh, all right. The hon. member has called a point of order.

Mr. McIver: Madam Speaker, sometimes it's hard to give a compliment.

Mr. Mason: You're very good at giving compliments to yourself.

The Acting Speaker: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, your point of order.

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

Mr. Mason: Yes. Well, Madam Speaker, under 23(h), (i), and (j) I would just indicate that I did not say that the government always does the right thing. I did say that sometimes they get the few good ideas they do have from the Manitoba NDP government.

Debate Continued

The Acting Speaker: Thank you for your point of clarification, hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Again, Madam Speaker, as I just said, the hon. member made it clear that this government brings forward ideas that are both good and proven, and I thank him.

The other point that I would like to agree with the hon. member on as well as the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, that brought this forward, is that this is important. It might be one of the most important things we do this year. I would urge members to support it. Protecting our waterways: I can't think of anything more important, Madam Speaker. There's nothing more key to our success as a civilization, and the waterways are important for agriculture, for everything that we do.

I thank hon. members for their support, and I'm certainly proud to stand and express mine as well.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Is anybody wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, we'll move to the next speaker, the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think it's very interesting that we talk about this aquatic invasive species. Only as recently as last summer I was travelling on an irrigation tour with the Member for Little Bow. We had a very informative time and very interesting discussions about the species. So some of the information that I'm going to relate may be divisive, and possibly the Member for Little Bow could weigh in to provide discussion on my comments here.

While no one wants to see the devastation in Alberta that can be brought about by this invasive species, we have some questions and some concerns about the wording of the bill. Section 25 empowers officials to enter or pass over land without warrant to enforce or ensure compliance with this act. Section 26 empowers an official to enter and inspect any place or conveyance without warrant to carry out inspections to determine if there are subject organisms. Madam Speaker, that's concerning, to say the least.

Firstly, we'd like to ensure that prevention of the spread of AIS is the focus of any amendment or the bill. Passing over land should be done only in circumstances where fisheries officers have reasonable grounds to believe that AIS does exist on that property.

Secondly, we would like assurance that this level of authority to enter and inspect any place or conveyance or boat is limited to inspection stations. We also have questions about the implications of implementing these mandatory inspection stations.

As I've previously stated in the Chamber, I live along the Saskatchewan border, and I know that it's a very porous border both for farm implement transport and the transport of any sort of husbandry or, in this case, possibly watercraft. So my questions are: where will these stations be physically placed? Do they require buildings and/or specialized equipment? How will these inspection stations be staffed and at what cost? Will the impact of transportation or traffic be minimized?

Again, while we do not want to see AIS here in Alberta – and the Member for Little Bow and I saw possible visible problems in relation to that – we want to balance the level of the threat, while at this point it's quite low, with the level of authority needed to ensure that Alberta remains free of AIS.

Madam Speaker, I have had some experience, again, in my residency along the Alberta-Saskatchewan border with the control

of rats that like to transport in from Saskatchewan both in feed and animal husbandry.

We would also like the government to explore alternative means of controlling the threat, including public education and benign biological impediments, if and when required, as opposed to relying solely on laws and legislation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). Anybody wishing to make comments?

Seeing none, we'll go to our next speaker, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I've been following this issue probably for two and a half years now and was first exposed to it when I attended PNWER. It certainly was an issue that was on everyone's agenda who is aware of the danger that this province faces if zebra mussels and quagga mussels get into our system.

9:20

I think at this point in time – and I know that the hon. member that just spoke ahead of me had many questions. I'm not sure that we're at the question point. I think we simply cannot do nothing. We must do something. Irrigation is the heart of our sustainable resource, which is agriculture, in this province. Oil and gas is great, but we still make your food in southern Alberta, and we need water to do that. If these little mussels get into our irrigation pipes, most of which are now closed – they're not the open canals of the old-fashioned way of doing irrigation – they could clog them, probably within months. They're very, very difficult to get at. You would have to pull your pipes apart to actually remove these little mussels.

One of the things that is really important – and I did personally go to a couple of inspection stations last summer. It was voluntary at that point, and certainly some people with their boats just drove by, but some did stop, and I asked them why they stopped. What made them stop? They said: because they had actually spoken to somebody in Arizona, where they know that both Lake Mead and Lake Havasu are devastated because of these mussels. These are the mussels that then attach themselves to boats and come into Alberta.

These mussels originated, if I'm correct, from Russia. They came in on the big boats in the great lakes. They have gone from the big boats, and they've gone down the east coast of North America. They've come across the bottom via boats, and now they're working their way back up. They actually can still survive in the Alaska cold. This is a huge, huge, issue.

The inspections, I am very pleased and I'm trusting – and I thank the NDP for their support for this bill – will be mandatory. One of the easy ways to do it, that doesn't take an awful lot of people's time, is that there are dogs that are trained to sniff out these mussels. Often with the boats, particularly the ones that have the big ballast tanks, because they create bigger waves and people can sort of almost surf behind these boats, that water stays in there, and it's very, very difficult to get inside the tanks and actually look. Even if you drain them, the little mussels could still be in there, but the dogs can sniff them out, and then people can go further. The other place that they often hide is on the propellers of the boats. They'll go up into the water intake.

I'm just going to speak a little bit more because I will speak more in committee when I actually have my notes. The education part, I totally agree, is one of the most important parts of it. Any of the boat shows that are in the province I know have people there to be able to explain exactly what happens and why we need to inspect these boats and why we're not trying to make life difficult. I can assure you that for \$75 million a year it would be very, very difficult if it ever got into our irrigation ditches and our pipes.

There are other invasive species, certainly, that have been mentioned already, and they are also something that we must pay attention to. But at this point in time I am working very hard toward the eradication of any kind of mussels that would come into our province. I was raised on Lake Winnipeg lakefront property, so I know what a good lake should look like. Lake Winnipeg, unfortunately, is not one of those anymore. They also now have the mussels, that have come in on boats from wherever. Some of the rocks that people use as protection against the waves on their lakefront properties are now covered in those mussels, and certainly you wouldn't dare walk on them without very heavy shoes because they would just rip your feet apart.

I think I will leave it there because I will be speaking more in committee, but in my mind – and, of course, it's because I'm focused on it – I think it's one of the most important bills that we're going to pass during this spring session. It's very important that we get it, that we get it passed, and that we get working on it right now. People will be coming back with their boats, the snowbirds will be coming back with their boats, and if we can stop them at the border and get that education part of it going, I don't think it will take long before the whole province or any boater really understands the danger of not cleaning their boats.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). Are there any members who wish to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Strankman: Yeah. I'd just like to ask the member a question.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd just like to ask the hon. member a question. She says that these mussels are extremely difficult to control, so I want to know if any organic treatment is available. I understand that it is, but I want to know the efficiency of it.

Ms Pastoor: I'm sorry that I can't answer that question with any great authority, but my understanding is that there isn't an organic that would actually dissolve them. You have to physically scrape them off. They're almost like barnacles. I don't know if anyone's ever had a boat that had barnacles on it from the sea. I know from my experience on a seagoing yacht that we had electrical wires around the inside of the boat, and it would sort of vibrate, and it kept the barnacles off. But, basically, you just take your boat to dry dock and scrape them off, and I think it's fairly similar with the mussels.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We have a few minutes left under 29(2)(a). Are there any other members who wish to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, we will go back to second reading of Bill 13. The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think this government has barnacles, but I'm not sure they can scrape them off. Maybe they can be voted out. Who knows?

An Hon. Member: It's your job to get rid of barnacles?

Mr. Anglin: That is my job. That's right.

The bill itself is a good bill. This is, as some of the members have stated, serious business. It's a serious issue. I do have a question for the minister, and I hope that when we get into Committee of the Whole, the minister can answer some questions relative to the

funding and the personnel for actually enforcing this, because it's going to take manpower. This is not just something that we can legislate and pretend it's going to be done very easily. I'm real curious as to, when we're dealing with the specific issue of how we're going to battle this invasive species, where the funding is coming from and how it's going to actually be implemented so we can get ahead of this and do what we need to do. This is something that, in my view, is a good bill on the intent side, and it's a necessary bill, but it has to work. It just can't be something in words. In practicality we've got to be able to make sure that we can make it work so that it does what we want it to do.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to say a few words of thanks to PNWER, the Pacific North West Economic Region, because they were actually the ones who really started targeting this problem. I've got to name one state within PNWER that was very much the leader, and that's the state of Idaho. We were very lucky to actually hire one of their experts. We hired Kate Wilson away from them. She has been the very effective lead in this area, and we really appreciate her in the ESRD staff.

There were some earlier questions about control measures. There were some promising results using potash in Manitoba. We tried it in Manitoba. We actually did manage to stop them in the small bays that they were in, but it didn't, of course, kill the whole lake, so they are still there. We have shown, you know, that in a concentrated, small area, yes, the potash will work, but in a larger body of water there's just not that much potash to be able to dump in there. So in terms of the controls that are available to us, if they do ever get up here, then I'm afraid that at this point we have not yet found what would do it.

9:30

I just wanted to make sure that PNWER was recognized for taking the lead on this. Of course, they're closer to Lake Mead, where it's essentially totally wiped out that lake for anything except for the quagga and zebra mussels.

Anyway, I'm very glad that this is moving ahead. We do need that extra strength of making it mandatory for your boat to be inspected, and hopefully we can keep them out.

There is one other point I wanted to make. We are very lucky in that we have the headwaters to pretty well all of our waters, so if we can keep them out, we will be able to keep them out of Alberta. Unfortunately, the converse is also true. If we get infected in Alberta, that means that the provinces and the states that are downstream from us also get infected, so our responsibility is actually a little bit higher because of this.

Thank you very much for bringing forward this legislation. I call the question.

The Acting Speaker: We have Standing Order 29(2)(a) first, hon. member.

Seeing none, is there a member?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker: The question has been called.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a second time]

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

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Madam Chair. I wonder if in view of the hour and of significant progress made, we might move to adjourn this evening until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:33 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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