



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

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Issue 25a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third 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 (PC)
Amery, Moe, Calgary-East (PC)
Anderson, Rob, Airdrie (PC)
Anglin, Joe, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (Ind)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)
Bhullar, Hon. Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Bikman, Gary, Cardston-Taber-Warner (PC)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND),
New Democrat Opposition Whip
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)
Cao, Wayne C.N., Calgary-Fort (PC)
Casey, Ron, Banff-Cochrane (PC)
Cusanelli, Christine, Calgary-Currie (PC)
Dallas, Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)
Denis, Hon. Jonathan, QC, Calgary-Acadia (PC),
Government House Leader
Dirks, Hon. Gordon, Calgary-Elbow (PC)
Donovan, Ian, Little Bow (PC)
Dorward, Hon. David C., Edmonton-Gold Bar (PC)
Drysdale, Hon. Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-Calder (ND),
New Democrat Opposition House Leader
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Fawcett, Hon. Kyle, Calgary-Klein (PC)
Fenske, Jacquie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC)
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Fritz, Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC)
Goudreau, Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (PC)
Hale, Jason W., Strathmore-Brooks (PC)
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL)
Horne, Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (PC)
Jansen, 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),
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Lemke, Ken, Stony Plain (PC),
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Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Luan, Jason, Calgary-Hawkwood (PC)
Lukaszuk, Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC)
Mandel, Hon. Stephen, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND)
McAllister, Bruce, Chestermere-Rocky View (PC)
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Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
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Scott, Hon. Donald, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (PC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (AL),
Liberal Opposition Whip
Smith, Danielle, Highwood (PC)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W),
Official Opposition Whip
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL),
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VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC),
Government Whip
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (PC)
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)
Vacant, Battle River-Wainwright
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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Stephen Mandel	Minister of Health
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Fox	Sarich
Hehr	Starke
Kennedy-Glans	Towle
Luan	

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

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Amery	Mason
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Chair: Ms Olesen
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Eggen	Rodney
Fenske	Sandhu
Fox	Strankman
Fritz	Swann
Leskiw	Weadick
Pedersen	

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Hale	Sherman
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Brown	Stier
DeLong	Swann
Fenske	Xiao
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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Cao	Young
Fraser	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 24, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us pray that today we be given the necessary tools of mind and body that are required in order to help us fulfill our duties as elected representatives of those whom we are so proud to serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have many, many introductions today. I ask you please to be brief so we can get them all in and move on with other business of the Assembly.

Let us begin with school groups. The Minister of Service Alberta, followed by Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Khan: Thank you so very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some incredible students from my constituency of St. Albert. Today we're joined by nearly 40 students from Sir Alexander Mackenzie school. They're with their teachers, Ms Lina Rosato and Ms Wawrychuk. I want to congratulate Ms Rosato for being awarded teacher of the month in St. Albert. I'd like to extend a warm acknowledgement to the students. I went to Sir Alexander Mackenzie when I was in elementary school, so it's great to see the students here. If my colleagues could give them a warm greeting.

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

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my very great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 21 visitors from Holden school in the constituency of Battle River-Wainwright. They are accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Oslund and Ms Arychuk, as well as parent helpers Ms Hoveland and Mrs. Fairless. They are seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 26 very bright, enthusiastic students from St. Jerome school in my constituency of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. They are accompanied by Mrs. Laura Blythe, Ms Diane Lacika, and Mrs. Jennifer Lewin. I just want to add that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and I a few weeks back were judges at their annual science fair of some of the best and brightest minds in Edmonton. I would now ask all members to give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other school or education groups? Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you the members of Inner City High School that are here today to take a tour and to watch the proceedings. I think they

might still be on tour, but let's give them a hand for being here anyway.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

If not, let's move on to other important guests. Let's start with the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the first time in 14 and a half years I have the great privilege of introducing my family to you and through you to the members of this Assembly. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I'd ask them to rise as I call their names: the Jablonski family patriarch, Bob Jablonski, my husband of 44 years, my hero and my everything; my son, Jeremy Jablonski, president and CEO of The Coverall Shop, entrepreneur, and future MLA; my lovely daughter-in-law, Amber Jablonski, a cardiology telemetry RN and one of the best mothers of two that a grandmother could ever hope for – it might be faster if we just hold the applause because we've got to rush through; thank you – my granddaughter Camryn Jablonski, an honours student, competitive swimmer, and a piano player; my granddaughter Morgan Jablonski, also an honours student, incredible dancer, and the Energizer Bunny; my beautiful daughter Amy Corrigan, mother of two, administration manager for The Coverall Shop, and an elected director of the Servus Credit Union; my number one son-in-law, Tyler Corrigan, project co-ordinator for Pumps & Pressure and gourmet chef; my granddaughter Hannah Corrigan, an honours student and lifeguard in training; my incredible grandson Kaden Corrigan, builder of tree forts, Lego creations, and Nordegg breakfast sandwiches; my lovely daughter Krystin Jablonski, pregnancy and babies' family nurse for Red Deer primary care network and wonderful mother of one so far; my oldest granddaughter, Taiya Jablonski, an honours student and dancer extraordinaire; Ivan Smith, a close family friend, bison rancher, and entrepreneur.

Mr. Speaker, this is my family, of whom I'm very proud. I thank them with all my heart for their love and support, and I ask all members to give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. Member for Red Deer-North, I believe you have a second set of introductions.

Mrs. Jablonski: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you for making it as brief as possible. That's very considerate of you.

Mrs. Jablonski: Well, Mr. Speaker, every MLA knows that having an excellent assistant makes your life a whole lot easier. I'm fortunate to have had assistants who were always one step ahead of me and to whom I am truly grateful. I would ask them to rise as I call their names. From my Red Deer-North office I would like to introduce Cheryl Christie, a very experienced and efficient assistant. With her is her husband, His Worship Steve Christie, the mayor of Lacombe. I'm also privileged to have another very wise and experienced assistant from the Legislature, Marilyn Nixon. My heartfelt thanks and gratitude to both of them, and I would like to give them the warm traditional welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the Minister of Health.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the House my fiancé, Robert Stephen Spencer. Robert recently retired as VP membership from my Calgary-Bow constituency board. He worked extensively on the recent leadership campaign and the by-elections and is my unofficial and unpaid assistant. Most importantly, Robert has made my last three years as an MLA a joy: more productive and more satisfying. I ask that he stand in your Speaker's gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, a hard act to follow. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this House my constituency assistant, Cindy Ho. Stand, Cindy. Cindy has been an essential and valuable part of my constituency office in Edmonton-Whitemud, and she was also a big part of the previous person's who was there, whom we all know very well. Cindy, thank you for being here.

Mr. Speaker, it's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the wonderful staff I have in the Minister of Health's legislative office. As many of you know, they have been working exceptionally hard to improve health care for all Albertans. If they could stand as I list them: Christel Hyshka, chief of staff; Jennifer Pougnet, chief of staff; Claire Puyaoan, correspondence co-ordinator; Sarah Hamilton, deputy press secretary – look how tall they are – Steve Buick, not so tall press secretary; Allyson Seeney, scheduler; and Debbie Giroux, ministerial assistant. Thank you all very much. Can we give them the normal welcome?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to introduce to you and through you Julie Ali, who was excluded from the Good Samaritan Mill Woods Centre for trying to ensure her family's care. Her sister Rebecca had been evicted from the care home. The Ali family and the Alberta New Democrats are calling on the Health minister to help resolve this matter so that Rebecca can return home to one of the only two facilities in Edmonton that meet her specific medical needs. I would ask Julie to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations, followed by the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce my constituency manager, Mr. Bernie Trudell, who is capably looking after all the affairs of 42,000 people on the corner of 75th Street and Whyte Avenue in Edmonton-Gold Bar. Bernie retired after a career of service to the public in the GOA, and I'm so pleased that he serves the people of Edmonton-Gold Bar now. Bernie, please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you my chief of staff, Jonathan Koehli; his wife, Elise; and Anthony, the newest addition to their family and potential new Finance minister. Jonathan has been my closest aide for several years. I'd like to congratulate them on their first child. Jon hasn't been as tired as I would have expected, so it tells me how hard Elise must be working. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly my constituency assistant and the chief of staff to the independent caucus, who I think is probably one of the most qualified and best assistants that anyone could ever possibly brag about. Now, I understand that everyone believes that their assistants are the best – I understand that – but my assistants have to put up with me, and that makes them superior to anyone else's assistants. If Krista Nelson, my constituency assistant, and Kaelyn MacGillivray could please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly seven guests who have assisted me during these two terms as MLA. My first set of guests is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to stand as I call their names. They are my current and former leg. assistants: Marshall Thiessen, Justin Brattinga, Shannon Hamelin, and Terri Kemball. I would ask that my guests receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

My second set of guests is seated in the public gallery. They include my constituency staff from Bonnyville: Carmen Banman, who has worked in the office for 16 years and is the heart and soul of our constituency, and Julie Krawiec, who's been with us for five years. Also, it's my great pleasure to introduce my husband of 40 years, Ron. I couldn't have done this job without him. I would ask my Bonnyville guests to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Jill Sheward. Jill is a partner at Brownlee LLP, practising municipal and commercial real estate law. In addition to her practice, she serves on the board of directors of Junior Achievement of Northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories, is the president of the Edmonton Commercial Real Estate Women, and is a member of the steering committee for the Edmonton Famous 5 Foundation. Jill has spent some time up in the heartland area as a summer student, so she can't get rid of me. I would like her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two special guests, Dr. Joel Christie and Mavis Christie. Both are avid volunteers in my community, particularly Dr. Christie, who led the aging in place community fair last year, that drew over 800 people. My guests are sitting in the public gallery. Now I would ask them to rise and receive the thunderous warm welcome from this House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very important guest with us today. We're joined by Yolanda de Kleer, who is seated in

the members' gallery and is the mother of one of our wonderful pages in the Legislature, Erin. Yolanda and Erin moved to Alberta about five years ago from B.C., and they currently live in Spruce Grove. Erin is a student at Spruce Grove composite while her mother, Yolanda, works as a recreation therapist. Don't worry, Yolanda; I want to assure you that Erin, as with all our pages, is doing a remarkable, remarkable job. On behalf of everyone in the Legislature I would like to say welcome. I would ask that you now rise as our guest and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have two minutes per person assigned here.

Retrospective by the Member for Red Deer-North

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, for the past 14 and a half years I've had the privilege of serving the people of Red Deer-North and Alberta as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. During that time I spoke about great leaders in Red Deer, winning teams, and a young man who died because of a drunk driver. I also faithfully spoke each year about the Armenian genocide. This year is the 100th anniversary of that massacre.

I've had the opportunity to work with five Premiers and to make a difference. There have been small victories, and there have been huge victories. Among the most momentous was when I was granted unanimous consent to set aside Orders of the Day and proceed with early consideration of my private member's bill on PCHAD, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act. Today I am still greeted by parents who thank me for helping them to help their children.

I served as minister for seniors and community supports and helped to develop continuing care in Alberta. I helped to develop Alberta Supports, a one-stop program that eliminates duplication and allows people to tell their story once instead of three or four times. I served as chairperson for numerous committees. As the third Speaker in Alberta's 28th Legislature I made history by becoming the first female Speaker to preside over question period.

I would like to thank the hundreds of friends and volunteers who supported me and the PC Party throughout five campaigns and three leadership races. We've had many great moments of victory together. I especially want to thank my husband, Bob, and my children, who have stood by my side through thick and thin, and my five grandchildren, who are just starting to understand why their grandmother was away so often.

Winston Churchill said that we make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give. I want to thank my family, the people of Red Deer-North, the people of Alberta, and the members of this hallowed Assembly for allowing me the opportunity to give. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you. Heartfelt comments for sure.

Retrospective by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo

Mr. Hehr: It has been an honour to sit in the Legislative Assembly with all of you. With my time drawing to a close, I found myself going through the last seven years, assessing lessons I have learned. The first is that it is not easy being Premier. The second is that having a strong opposition is important to a well-functioning democracy.

Opposition matters. I can point to tangible moments where changes were made to government policy as a result of MLAs speaking out where government policies were unfair, unwise, or unnecessary. Three years ago I found out that Albertans living in long-term care facilities could only get one bath a week. The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and I raised this indignity, sounded the alarm, and the government changed the policy.

Last year I raised another issue about the safety and care of our students in Motion 503, which started the discussion about the need for gay-straight alliances in our schools. Although this motion was ultimately voted down, my fellow Alberta Liberal the MLA for Edmonton-Centre then brought forward Bill 202, which essentially continued the debate on the need for GSAs and as well contained legislative principles that would move this province forward on a path to ensure human rights and dignity for our LGBTQ community. Although this, too, seemed to fail, ultimately the government listened and implemented the main points of her bill.

Without opposition I doubt that kids in all schools would be able to have a GSA today, and I doubt that section 11.1 would have been removed from the Human Rights Act. Further, opposition members have often led the debate on the issues of our times. In particular, the Alberta Liberals and the New Democrats sounded the alarm years ago on the fact that our fiscal structure was broken.

Finally, I would like to thank the citizens of Calgary-Buffalo for electing me to represent them in the Alberta Legislature. It has truly been an honour not only to represent them but to share my life with them all.

Thank you, all, indeed. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: With your indulgence, I'd like to go quickly to Bonnyville-Cold Lake for her member's statement. Then we'll go on.

1:50

Retrospective by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been a pleasure to work for my community and all of Alberta for the past seven years. I'm proud to have been elected the 780th MLA in the province, a number that is more than just historic; it's also my area code. I am pleased to have been part of the class of 2008, which allowed me the opportunity to work alongside Albertans of such high calibre.

I would also like to say how proud I am to work with all the people at the Alberta Legislature, including the staff behind the scenes, who include my constituency staff, my leg. assistants, security personnel, our wonderful young pages, visitor services staff, custodians, human resources staff, and IT, who were always so available when I needed them. Please know that all of us sitting in this House are aware that we could not do this job without the people behind the scenes.

I am blessed to have been able to give seven years to the Alberta Legislature, and I thank God every day for the honour of serving the people of Bonnyville-Cold Lake and the people of Alberta in general.

I have a couple of legislative accomplishments I would like to highlight as a way of displaying the positive impact that individual MLAs can have in this role. In recent years I have brought two private member's motions, both of them numbered 503, that have become legislation because, well, I'm sort of a thorn in the side of all the ministers. My first motion, to eliminate provincial assessment exams for grades 3 and 6, took three years of persistence, and the second motion was a recent amendment to the Fisheries (Alberta) Act, with measures to guard against invasive aquatic species in our lakes.

While I will miss everyone here when my time wraps up and I will miss working in this majestic building, there is one aspect of this job that I will not miss, and that's driving highway 28.

Finally, there is a very special person I need to thank. I could not have done this job without my loving, supporting husband, Ron.

God bless you all. Continue doing the job you do so well, caring for our great, beloved province. Thank you. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members, for your indulgence there. Thank you for those heartfelt comments as well.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Let us move on to Oral Question Period, 35 seconds for each question, 35 seconds for each response. I will cut you off if necessary, as you know. Let us begin with the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition for question series 1.

Government Spending at Fiscal Year-end

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're calling it March madness. It's the government's annual use it or lose it, shop till you drop shopping spree, where departments rush around to make sure that they blow their budgets before a March 31st deadline. Last March spending ballooned by 117 per cent across government when compared to the average monthly expenses. It cost taxpayers an extra \$104 million. We've known this culture was rampant through government for some time, but now we have the numbers to prove it. Premier, this is why you can't be trusted with another dime of taxpayers' money. Why should Albertans believe otherwise?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each year a budget is approved for each department. They must stay within approved spending levels. Each ministry is accountable to the Legislature and the public for their expenses. We also have legislation in place, the Financial Administration Act, which provides direction on the disbursement of funds so they are made in accordance with all policies, procedures, and regulations, including several levels of approval.

Mr. Speaker, this Premier also made it very clear in December that there would be no new spending and that all departments will look at constraining their budgets. All ministers have done a good job of doing that. We will continue to do that in the future.

Mrs. Forsyth: On March 31 of last year, after the former Premier resigned, \$15,000 was spent on fine china and linen for the Premier's office. Who approved the expense? It was the Department of Infrastructure. At the time it was run by the jobs minister. Under that minister another \$81,000 was spent on chairs. If this spending was necessary, it wouldn't have been approved on the very last day of the fiscal year. To the jobs minister. Old management, new management: it doesn't matter. You were responsible. What is your excuse?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, in March of last year I was in the private sector. I can assure the hon. member that the only china in my office is cardboard, and it says Tim Hortons on the side of it. I would encourage you to stop by.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, somewhere we've got glass for the Premier's office, \$8,509, and china for your office, so you better find out where it is, Premier.

Every department saw this kind of wasteful spending explode last year. Executive Council would spend on average about \$10,000 a month on purchase services, but in March it spent over a million dollars. IIR spent \$100,000 on gifts in one month just because they could. March madness cost taxpayers at least \$104 million last year, and it's wrong, Premier. To the Premier: will you ensure the end of wasteful spending by your departments and return any surplus that they've . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

We'll have to hear from the Minister of Finance now.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the Premier has made it very clear that under his watch and under the new management of this government we will restrain our spending. He's made it very clear to all ministers in cabinet that we will make sure that the money we spend is in the best interest of all Albertans, and we'll continue to do so into the future.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions. Livingstone-Macleod, please.

Kananaskis Country Golf Course

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are worried about making ends meet and keeping their jobs, and while there's no more money for the Child and Youth Advocate's office, millions are being paid out to the Kananaskis golf course, that has friends high within the PC Party. Reports out today show that \$8 million has been paid out since the 2013 flood. The province is on the hook to pay maintenance and losses, apparently. Premier, can you release the contract and tell Albertans how much more money they are on the hook for for this legacy of PC waste and mismanagement?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I indicated yesterday that I was concerned about this, and I'm pleased to advise the House that the Minister of Finance will commission an independent expert report that will do two things. Firstly, it will review the 1999 and 2013 agreements to ensure that the public interest was protected, and secondly, it will develop an alternate private business model that will not require public ownership of the golf course. The Alberta government should not be in the golf course business.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you. Review or no review, taxpayers are on the hook for million-dollar payouts to friends of the PC Party. In November 2014 your government put out a request for proposals to spend \$15 million of repair work on this course, and now Albertans are bewildered that a contract exists between the government and a golf course that covers all their operating losses and almost every single one of their expenses. So can the Premier explain to Albertans how this contract was set up, please, and who at Kan-Alta management is having their bottom lines covered?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, this contract goes back to the 1990s, and under this Premier's watch he's made it very clear that we're not going to spend any more public funds on this golf course. He's asked me to look into the matter. I will bring third-party experts in to look at this and make sure that we get the best deal we can for Albertans moving forward and make sure that the golf course will not be run with public funds.

Mr. Stier: Well, the reality is that Albertans can't trust whether or not you will funnel tens of millions of dollars into more golf courses after the election.

Living close to High River, I don't recall any mom-and-pop shops getting any special contract bailouts from the government for the losses incurred by the flood. In fact, several of them waited for months for any DRP assistance while their houses were still being gutted, and some of them are still waiting. Can the Premier explain to Albertans why these businesses were left out in the cold while his government is stuffing the pockets of golf course owners?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That hon. member knows that we're working very hard with all of those poor citizens that were devastated by the floods of 2013, whether that be the business community or the individuals. We are doing everything to make sure – and we have the resources to make sure – that they are all able to recover from the 2013 floods.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St Paul-Two Hills. Third main set of questions.

Premier's Address to Albertans

Mr. Saskiw: This Premier has tried to suggest that spending \$100,000 of taxpayers' money on a PC infomercial is all above board. It's not partisan. This is just the Premier wanting to give Albertans a \$10,000 speech with \$36,000 in production costs. Well, just this morning the PC Party fired out an e-mail advertising that tonight's speech is a chance for him to "speak directly to [PC] members." We couldn't agree more. Will the Premier, then, stop this taxpayer boondoggle and have his party pay back the money for this purely partisan PC propaganda?

2:00

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly we face serious circumstances as a province. Too many Albertans are losing their jobs. I just came back from speaking at the University of Alberta, where young graduates are worried about their ability to find jobs. In these circumstances people want to hear from their government, they want to hear from their Premier. The Official Opposition may not have a plan to deal with this; this government does, and I intend to speak to Albertans.

Mr. Saskiw: The plan, apparently, is to spend \$100,000 of taxpayer dollars.

The Wildrose vision for this province is simple: lower taxes, ending payouts for things like golf courses, golden handshakes, and corporate handouts. The Premier says that Albertans want to hear their Premier give a \$10,000 speech about his central campaign platform. Now the PC Party is saying that this is for members. Albertans are saying that this is a waste of money. Premier, I'll ask you again: will you have your party pay back the money for this extravagant PC campaign ad?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, the young Albertans I spoke to this morning are concerned about how we're going to stabilize our public finances, not how we're going to run the province into debt, as suggested by the opposition party, how we are going to diversify our economy, and how we're going to strengthen this province for the future for young Albertans. That's what they're interested in, and I intend to speak with Albertans about that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, your point of order was noted at 2:01, during that last exchange. Let's go on with your final supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: It's your party that racked up all of the debt, Premier.

Here in the Wildrose we don't think spending \$100,000 on partisan campaign ads is right. The Premier clearly said that there is no more money. He also said that Albertans are set to pay billions of dollars in new taxes to pay for his government's mess. Premier, would you agree with me that, at the very least, spending \$100,000 of taxpayer money on a fancy PC campaign ad right before raising taxes is bad optics and that Albertans can't be blamed if they're upset with you and your government for this absolute waste of money?

Mr. Oberle: You know, Mr. Speaker, if you were to take the money that's planned for this event and spread it out on a per capita basis, it would work out to about 2 cents per Albertan. That party was offered the chance to give their two cents' worth, and they declined, so we're never going to know whether it was worth the price or not.

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

Small-business Assistance

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business released the latest business barometer survey, showing Alberta's small business confidence index fell 6.6 points in February, to 48.2. It's the third straight month of significant declines. Alberta's confidence levels are among the lowest in the country and approaching the recessionary levels of early 2009. To the Premier: why is the government failing to provide the environment where Alberta's small businesses can have confidence?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are doing that, and I'd ask the member to sit tight and listen to the budget on Thursday. All I hear from the opposition is about raising corporate taxes. All they say is: raise corporate taxes, both small and large. We as a government are not about to do that. We are a government about creating jobs and maintaining jobs in this province, to make sure that all Albertans can raise their families in the best province in Canada.

Dr. Swann: Small businesses deserve a tax break, not raises.

Small businesses have definitely fallen off this government's priority list, leaving them to fend for themselves. Another major constraint for them, according to the CFIB report, is dealing with the high cost of insurance, which is, of course, set by the market. To the Premier: what is the government doing to address the high cost of insurance, which has been identified as a major problem for small businesses' bottom line?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the hon. member across the way has probably read the polling and realized that small businesses are concerned about their jobs in this province and they're concerned about the fact that the opposition continues to talk about raising taxes. This government has never talked about raising taxes for small business, and we will not raise taxes for small business. We will do everything we can to regulate small business and make sure that we streamline regulations and that small business will have a chance to thrive in the province of Alberta.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that small business creates an enormous number of jobs in this province, particularly during economically turbulent times. Martha and Henry's families are the entrepreneurs driving our province's economy, and it's the entrepreneurs who Albertans will be relying on heavily to create

jobs, yet this government is woefully ignoring the needs of small business. When is the government going to stand up for small businesses, cut their taxes, and invest more in the entrepreneurs? Diversify, diversify, diversify.

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, all I can say is that I'm glad to see that the member across the way has finally got it. We've heard the opposition continue to talk about raising taxes, raising taxes, raising taxes. We're not raising taxes for small businesses. We're not raising taxes for large corporations. We're doing all we can to maintain jobs and create jobs in this province. We lost over 14,000 jobs last month, and more to come. This government is making sure that we have money in the pockets of Albertans so they can raise their families in the best province in this country.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, leader of the ND opposition.

Corporate Taxes

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the government released the results of its budget survey, and unsurprisingly the results make it clear that this PC government is out of touch with what Albertans want. Indeed, 69 per cent of Albertans surveyed are in favour of raising corporate taxes. My question is for the Premier. If you're asking everyday Albertans to pay more for less, why don't you think that corporations should pay their fair share, too, especially the most profitable?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the opposition raised the issue. As I said, last month we lost 14,000 jobs in Alberta, and we lost more in the coming weeks. [interjections] According to Jack Mintz, the Palmer chair in public policy at the University of Calgary, a 1 per cent increase in corporate tax rates would result in a \$6 billion loss in capital investments and would also translate into approximately 8,900 job losses.

The Speaker: Hon. member, first supplemental. And if we could just keep the noise down a little bit, that would be much appreciated, please.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, that particular source of evidence also wants a sales tax.

I would suggest that overall the evidence to support this government's assertions about the impact of a balanced, responsible corporate tax increase is tenuous at best, but the evidence to support the life-threatening impact of a 70-hour wait in an ER to a patient is overwhelming, and the evidence supporting the economic loss to a population that can't afford to access postsecondary education is conclusive. To the Premier: why won't you put as much energy into standing up for regular Albertans as you are for standing up for your friends in backroom corporate Alberta?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, these are serious circumstances that we're in. The province expects that their government will have a plan, that it will be a measured plan, a balanced plan, that it will deal with all of the circumstances that we face individually as Albertans. All of us are concerned about job losses. All of us are concerned about front-line services. Whether you speak of health care, whether you speak of education, Albertans want the quality of those services maintained. The government understands that, and we'll be dealing with it.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, today, while defending his government's reckless corporate tax cuts, the Premier said that in pursuing his agenda, it was important not to get distracted by the, quote, political noise. Now, 27,000 Albertans responded to this government's own budget survey by telling them to raise corporate taxes. To the Premier. What you're calling political noise is actually what the rest of us call democracy. So does the Premier want to take this opportunity to apologize to the hundreds of thousands of Albertans he just insulted with those comments?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have participated in the survey that the government put forward, speaking to how they attach importance to making sure that we get this right. In a typical year about 1,500 Albertans have taken part in this survey; this year more than 40,000 Albertans. We have heard what they've said. They speak about the importance of front-line services, they speak about the importance of getting off the oil roller coaster, they speak about the importance of diversifying our economy, and they speak about hope and about strengthening the future of this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Red Deer-South.

Farm Worker Labour Protection

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For decades this PC government has ignored the basic 19th century human right of paid farm workers, including children, to have a safe workplace under the guise of, quote, protecting the family farm. End of quote. Somehow our closest prairie neighbour, Saskatchewan, and every other province in the country has managed to balance the rights of workers with the interests of the agriculture industry. Not in Alberta. In addition, 9 out of 10 farm workers are not covered by Workers' Compensation because it's not mandated. To the Premier: when will you close the loopholes and allow the people that feed us to be included in occupational health and safety standards?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that here in Alberta farmers do have the right to choose Workers' Compensation Board. The associate minister of agriculture and I just yesterday met with a bunch of farm and ranch leaders in Alberta, talking about workplace safety, and I can assure you that they are doing a terrific job. Through the ministry of agriculture we have a farm safe program, and in fact we're getting results. The farms in Alberta are as safe as they are in other places, and we're still working on it. [interjections]

The Speaker: First supplemental if we can hear it.

Dr. Swann: Somehow farm workers are treated discriminatorily. Given that nearly 9 out of 10 farm workers are fully covered in every other province for WCB by their premiums, again to the Premier: when will you join the rest of Confederation and protect the people that feed us by including them under WCB? The other 90 per cent of Canada does. Why not Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every farmer or rancher in Alberta that chooses to be under Workers' Compensation Board actually has that right to do so today and has had that for

some time. We continue to work with farms. We continue to work with the farmers and ranchers. They care very much about farm safety and make a great effort to keep their farms safe, as I said earlier. Nonetheless, the work goes on, meeting with the associate minister of agriculture and I. We are looking for ways to improve. But Albertans should know that conditions are good today.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been fighting on this issue for a decade in the Legislature. I know the Premier likes to tell us that he's a real conservative, but perhaps he and his government could at least join the 21st century. Given that most farms are now large, industrial operations, not family farms, why is the Premier still allowing big business to profit from a situation that puts both adults and children at risk?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, the hon. member should be grateful for the fact that big business, which is agriculture, the second biggest business in this province, is thriving, and it's thriving because the farmers and ranchers and people that work there are doing a great job. [interjections] Rather than talk ill of them, perhaps the hon. member should be appreciating the great efforts they do, the success that they have, the money that they bring into this province, the taxes that they generate, and the food that they provide for every table, whether you live in the city or in the country.

The Speaker: There's no rule against heckling, but when it gets to a certain level, you can't hear a thing, so let's keep it down a little bit at least, please.

Let's move on to Red Deer-South, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Corporate Taxes (continued)

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all saw the results of the government online budget survey yesterday, but one minister I think had a few extra days with it. Albertans were really clear about this. They said to increase tobacco taxes, to increase corporate taxes, and to move to a progressive tax system. To the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board: why aren't you just listening to Albertans, increase those corporate taxes, cover up that \$7 billion gap?

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I just said earlier, Albertans have already seen 14,000 job losses last month, and we're seeing more every week as the days go by, and they're from both small and large companies as they cut their costs in order to keep operating. Jack Mintz from public policy at the University of Calgary has been very clear. A 1 per cent increase in corporate tax rate will result in \$6 billion in capital investment, which also translates to approximately 8,900 jobs. [interjections] Raising corporate taxes, especially in times like this, would kill jobs, and that's what the job killers across the way would like to see us do.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I would just ask, please, that you tone down the level of the heckling. If you would, it would be appreciated. I don't want to have to remind you again.

First supplemental, please.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know what Dr. Mintz said, but I also know what Albertans said. They agree with increasing corporate taxes. Won't the Minister of Finance at least reconsider his position on this issue?

Mr. Campbell: Let me be very clear, Mr. Speaker. This government is about maintaining jobs and creating jobs and diversifying our economy, and to raise corporate taxes right now would kill jobs in this province. This government is not prepared to do that at this time.

Mr. Dallas: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the Minister of Finance risks being – you know, it's said that he's perhaps in the pocket of big corporate Alberta. What do you say to that, minister?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, if you want to talk about pockets, let's ensure that Albertans have jobs where they can put paycheques in their pockets, paycheques so that they can provide for and raise their families in Alberta, paycheques from small businesses, small and large corporations that operate in every community in our province. Our government, again, is about creating and maintaining jobs and not seeing them disappear under the regressive tax reforms that the opposition would see us put forward.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this government wants to ship thousands of jobs down bitumen pipelines to the United States and China. They shouldn't be pointing fingers at anybody.

Kananaskis Country Golf Course (continued)

Mr. Mason: In an answer yesterday that was deliberately confusing, the Minister of ESRD claimed that his government would not be spending any additional funds on rebuilding a golf course, but the government still has to pay out \$8 million more to offset losses to the leaseholder caused by flood damage. It now appears that this obligation was only added to the contract after the flood damage had already occurred. Will the minister confirm this?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, we've said that this is under review. I've been asked by the Premier to put a third party in place to look at this. Again I ask the question: how many jobs is the opposition prepared to kill?

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government is well known for using reviews as smokescreens to avoid answering the real question, and he just did it again today. Given that the government has agreed to cover the losses due to flood damage to the operators and given that if the government doesn't repair the golf courses, which it said that it's not going to do, the losses will continue next year and the year after, can the minister please explain how not fixing the golf course and continuing to pay the operators \$8 million a year to not operate is going to save the taxpayers money?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's make one thing very clear off the start. This Premier is very decisive in the decisions he makes. When this Premier says that he's going to get something done, we get it done. I've been tasked with the project to look at this. It will be done in a very timely manner. I will make it clear one more time: we will not spend public money on golf courses in Alberta.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Well, the Premier's answer earlier makes it clear that he's just going to privatize a public park in order to solve this problem. Given that the \$8 million payment to the Tory insiders that have the golf course contract was not required before the flood but now apparently is and given that it's clear that this government signed a contract deal behind closed doors to cover the losses of their friends when they had no obligation to do so – they've left the taxpayers on the hook for millions of dollars – what can the minister possibly say to excuse this betrayal of Albertans' trust?

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Speaker, this government has no friends in the golf industry.

Slave Lake Family Care Clinic

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, having access to quality health care services is important to people in communities across the province, and constituents from Lesser Slave Lake are no exception. In April 2012 a pilot family care clinic was opened in Slave Lake to improve access to primary care and reduce pressure on the emergency department. Three years since opening, people in the Slave Lake area want to know if these goals have actually been met. My question is to the Minister of Health. What impact has the Slave Lake family care clinic had on reducing pressures on emergency care in the community?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Slave Lake health care centre is meeting provincial wait time targets, the most recent stats showing that 92 per cent of patients are discharged from emergency within four hours. Further, now that people have the option of using the family care centre, which is open from 9 to 9, fewer patients are going to emergency centres for nonurgent cases. From 2012 to 2014 the number of patients going to emergency has dropped on a monthly basis from 1,136 to 951. We're making some great strides there.

Ms Calahasen: To the same minister: if emergency concerns have been reduced, what other benefits is the FCC providing for patients and families in Slave Lake?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In addition to expanding hours, that makes it easier for people, family care clinics offer the benefit of a multidisciplinary care team. Their teams include doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses, mental health therapists, and other health professionals, resulting in better co-ordinated and more accessible patient care. Increased access to primary care in Slave Lake means that services are more convenient and that often patients get same-day access to their health care provider.

2:20

Ms Calahasen: To the same minister: given that we knew when we moved in there that the FCC would need more space, what are the next steps for continuing patient care needs for a bigger and better space?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The family care clinic has outgrown its current space. AHS is planning to move it to a larger place at the Slave Lake health centre. Having primary and acute care services available at the same location will make these services

more convenient for many patients. It will help to support and increase focus and attention on wellness for the health of patients and people in the region.

Thank you.

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

Maintenance Enforcement

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Justice and I agreed that maintenance enforcement plays an important role in supporting our children, and that's where our agreement stopped. I asked why so many cases were still in arrears, and the minister answered that it was on a case-by-case basis. Frankly, that just doesn't make any sense. So one more time: between 2006 and 2014 there has been only a 4 per cent improvement on collection of arrears. Does the minister or the program know why collection on arrears has barely improved?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to answer that member's question. The answer is because it's actually doing fairly well to begin with: 73 per cent regular payment rate, \$253.3 million net after refunds. That's \$253.3 million that maintenance enforcement collects every year.

Ms Blakeman: Minister, that is what they collect on a monthly basis. I'm talking about the arrears that are sitting there. MEP has been under budget seven of the last nine years. Why wasn't that money used to collect that outstanding half a billion dollars that should be for Alberta children?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, again, 58,109, that is the number of children that are impacted by maintenance enforcement. Again, this is a great program. It always can improve, but if anyone were to suggest that the maintenance enforcement program was failing, they would be incorrect.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Minister, the maintenance enforcement program works by monthly collection and by arrears, and there are arrears there. Given all of the pronouncements about eliminating child poverty, MEP sure looks like a good way to get money to kids. So where's the problem? Why is there half a billion dollars in arrears out there? Is it program organization? Is it political will? Is it a lack of incentives for debtors to pay up? Why can't you score this half-billion dollars for Alberta children?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much. I appreciate this member's passion for maintenance enforcement and putting money where it belongs, in the hands of working families. [interjections] At the same time, Mr. Speaker, some debts are simply uncollectable. [interjections] We have to understand that this . . . [interjections] I can't hear myself think over here. Again, 73 per cent regular payment rate: if you went to university, that would be a B. Of course, there's always room to do better, but this is a pretty good program.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Economic Competitiveness

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a former drilling consultant I am fully aware of the instability in the oil and gas industry. However, due to the astonishing fall in oil prices, the oil and gas sector has experienced unprecedented layoffs and closures, leading to investment insecurity in Alberta. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Alberta has a very well-respected international reputation. What is your department prepared to do to keep us competitive in the global market in spite of these recent changes?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member correctly and clearly outlines a deepening challenge that we face as a province and our industry faces. I want to underline that the viability and sustainability of our oil and gas industry is not in question. We have world-class resources being developed by world-class companies, but we are certainly challenged and will have to be careful to maintain our competitive environment: a low-tax regime, regulatory certainties, stable government, all the advantages that Alberta provides. We will also have to work on market access to make sure we get world prices for our world-class resources.

Mr. Hale: To the same minister: given that we're seeing many job cuts and companies slowing down production in our energy sector, what is your ministry doing to alleviate the potential job crisis in the oil and gas sector and provide stability in this industry? [interjections]

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, it is essential that we maintain Alberta's tax advantage, as the hon. member from the NDP just pointed out.

This is indeed a challenge, and we will weather the storm. Our industry will weather the storm as we have in the past. Companies are now reducing their overall level of capital spending and their labour numbers, but significant investment is still continuing, and production will continue to grow while these companies go through difficult times. We expect to see about \$25 billion in investment go into the oil sands in this incredibly rough time period for the industry. So, Mr. Speaker, it will be a time of confusion. We will do whatever . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

We'll have to hear the final supplemental.

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, to the associate minister of agriculture: given that agriculture is one of the most important economic drivers in the province and is world-renowned for homegrown and farmed goods such as our highly sought-after Alberta-born and -raised beef, what is your ministry doing to increase our agricultural economics at this time?

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. We've got a number of programs at work every day to help agriculture in our province. One of them is ALMA, which is the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency, which provides ideas and innovation for our producers and our meat plants. We have AFSC, which provides lending to our agricultural producers, and insurance programs. We also have the rural economic development action plan, which is helping to work with the kids of our future as we move forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Calgary-North West.

Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that the board at AMVIC is not holding fair, open, and impartial hearings for consumers. We have now learned that the same private eye that the PC Party used to investigate a member of this cabinet has been made AMVIC's lead investigator. Minister, the board is holding improper investigations. How could you allow another party insider to be made lead investigator?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for raising this question and promoting Service Alberta's commitment to the consumer protection agenda, but I want to be very clear about a couple of things. The Minister of Service Alberta does not have a role in the hiring by any political party or, for that matter, any delegated authority. AMVIC is an independent organization, and the executive director of AMVIC is responsible for the hiring of investigators as well as all of their staff.

Mr. Strankman: It's about optics, Mr. Speaker. This PC Party placement is now the lead investigator at AMVIC when the board is already full of major issues. As lead investigator this gentleman will be a peace officer, but his role within the PC Party presents a major conflict of interest. To the minister: why did you ignore this conflict of interest?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, I assume you'll talk about the government policy side only.

Mr. Khan: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

Again I want to be clear that as a minister I'm not responsible for hiring at the government party level, nor am I responsible for the hiring policies of AMVIC.

Mr. Strankman: The minister's answers aren't good enough, Mr. Speaker. The decision to appoint this party insider shows contempt for Albertans. This minister has done nothing meaningful to address serious allegations at AMVIC, and he's not releasing a report into what really happened because he knows it will make this government look bad. To the minister: you have a job to do; you're not doing it. You don't have the ability to protect Albertans. Don't you think the Premier should appoint someone else?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure all Albertans that our consumer protection agenda is of ultimate importance to my ministry and to myself. As the hon. member points out, we have a draft review of AMVIC. We've tasked the board with coming back with some recommendations. We're prepared to work with the board. It's always been my intention to make that report public, and we will do so in due time, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

Inspiring Education and Curriculum Design

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 17 a member of my constituency in Calgary-North West wrote to me expressing concerns about the zones of regulation concept being taught at her son's school. Her son never had any issues expressing himself or with his academics or his behaviour, yet now he doesn't want to go to school anymore because he doesn't want to have to talk about his feelings in public in terms of what colour he feels like he is. Without question,

we do want to make sure that students are prepared for a changing world. My question to the Minister of Education: wasn't Inspiring Ed initially subject to flexibility?

2:30

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, zones of regulation, this concept, which is not part of my pedagogy, is not part of Inspiring Education. Zones of regulation are also not part of the current curriculum or anything that is prescribed through the provincial programs of study. Resource decisions and pedagogy decisions like zones of regulation are made at the local level.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Education: since the introduction of Inspiring Education in 2013 has there been a review of this initiative and its efficacy?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Education does not dictate teacher practices within the classroom. We respect our teaching professionals, and we value their hard work. Inspiring Education is a vision for education based on dialogue with Albertans to share their hopes, their dreams, and their aspirations for kindergarten through grade 12 education in the 21st century and beyond. We continue to use this aspirational document as we move forward in the development of a world-class education system.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Education: can you confirm that your office will look into the concerns of the parents of Calgary-North West?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I know I share with the member who is asking the question the deep and abiding desire to make Alberta's education system the best that it can be for all children, so I certainly would be happy to discuss with her any concerns she and her constituents have with Inspiring Education initiatives so that Alberta children can succeed and thrive in this 21st century.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Calgary-West.

Federal Building Redevelopment Plan

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today the Standing Committee on Public Accounts met with the Department of Infrastructure and the Department of Treasury Board and Finance. As I understood it, the topic of the residential component of the federal building, or, as it is more commonly known, the sky palace, was discussed. My question is: can the chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts provide an update to this House on the meeting that took place this morning?

The Speaker: The hon. chair of Public Accounts.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for that great question. We did have a very productive meeting this morning, and the sky palace, to use the member's language, was discussed. The Department of Infrastructure went so far as to advise the committee that the residential component, or sky palace, was only cancelled on Monday, May 5, 2014. That would be more than a full month after Premier Redford resigned, for those who are keeping track.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. That's quite interesting. Thank you to the committee chair for that answer.

To the Minister of Transportation. You were not the Minister of Infrastructure on May 5, 2014, so why did you tell the House that you cancelled the project in 2012, when that clearly is not the case?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The information that was provided today at the Public Accounts Committee meeting is readily available. It's publicly available. It's information that actually came from an Auditor General's report. What we did is cited the information that's in the Auditor's report. This is a project that's long been gone. We're moving forth, building the infrastructure that Albertans need: the schools, the health facilities, the critical transportation infrastructure, not to mention our critical seniors' facilities.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Minister, thank you. We're just clarifying some dates.

Once again, this government can't seem to keep their stories straight, and it gets a little nasty here. The Minister of Transportation gives one story. The Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour gives another. The former Premier gives another, and all we have to show is six shades of marble. To the Premier: are any of your ministers going to be held accountable? Will someone please tell the truth?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We provided information today that's already been made public for many, many months. The Auditor General of the province has actually looked into this matter. He's concluded on this matter. He's put a report out on this matter, and we simply provided information that he provided in his report to members of the committee. The fact remains now that we are focused on building the critical infrastructure that Albertans need to ensure that they have the absolute best quality of life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Seniors' Care

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Senior citizens in Alberta move into the latter years of their lives with the expectation they will be treated with respect, dignity, and support. However, cases of neglect and abuse unfortunately do occur. To the Minister of Seniors. Funding for fire safety systems and the introduction of the affordable supportive living initiative are just the beginning in improving our system. What future initiatives is the ministry working on to improve the lives of our senior citizens?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member for his question and for pointing out some of the great work my ministry staff has been doing. In addition to the capital and safety items that we've already announced, the Premier has tasked me with creating a provincial housing strategy and working to review our elder abuse strategy. We've also got our ministry working to help develop initiatives to increase awareness of proactive approaches to preventative cognitive decline. We've also been very

focused on initiatives that are going to help our seniors stay and age with their spouses and their families in the communities that they helped build.

The Speaker: Supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the constituents of Calgary-West have raised serious concerns over the accessibility of mental health programs for vulnerable citizens entering supportive living, to the Minister of Health: how does this government plan to address aspects of mental health care such as depression and anxiety as our population continues to age and move into assisted living?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My department and AHS are very aware of the mental health challenges faced by seniors, and supportive living is pleased to provide a mental health consultation service for people in these residences. In addition, Alberta Health Services' seniors health strategic clinical network has a number of initiatives to address seniors' mental health issues, and recently the SCN has had a major success, reducing the inappropriate use of antipsychotic drugs in long-term care facilities by 20 per cent. It's working closely with my department on strategies to care for people with dementia and their families and caregivers. As you know, dementia is something that is just growing exponentially in our society.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, back to the Minister of Seniors: given the unique situation that senior citizens face as they move through a transition between nonassisted and assisted living combined with higher levels of dementia and Alzheimer's, what are the ministry's thoughts on a dedicated and stand-alone mental health branch within the Ministry of Seniors to help navigate potential crossministerial confusion?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He's pointed out a very important issue. I appreciate that those things can be stressful for seniors, especially when there's a diagnosis of dementia. I can tell you that Seniors and Health are working together with other partners, including the Alzheimer Society, to develop a dementia strategy for Alberta. Which ministry takes the lead on this is not as important as getting the work done, work like the \$2 million that's been dedicated by Health to improve dementia care, including the creation of a new clinical advice line, that the government hopes to pilot this fall. As well, the number of Albertans with dementia is rising, as the Minister of Health said, and one of our priorities is to make sure they have the care that they need, which is why the dementia...

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I'll address the matter of questions to the chair of Public Accounts very soon.

Let us move on and complete this set of questions. Let's go to Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Thank you for your notes.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has the lowest university participation rate in the nation, all because this government funds the fewest number of seats. Further, as a result

of this government's chronic underfunding of postsecondary ed we find it increasingly only accessible to those who have won the lottery, either by 6/49 or by accident of birth or whether or not their parents have money. To the minister of advanced education. Despite our young Albertans being unable to afford postsecondary, word on the street is that your government is going to lift the tuition cap. Can you confirm this?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are no imminent changes to tuition. We're focused on a system that is accessible and sustainable. Alberta provides one of the highest levels of support to postsecondary institutions. Alberta universities obtain almost 58 per cent of their operating revenue from government funding. This is 5 per cent higher than the national average and 16 per cent higher than Ontario. Tuition from Alberta university students accounts for a lower proportion of operating revenues, 30 per cent, compared to other provinces such as Ontario, where it's 50 per cent, or British Columbia, where it's 41 per cent.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I get a little worried, Mr. Speaker, when I hear weasel words like "imminent," so I'll ask the minister a very pointed question. Have you told any members of our postsecondary leadership that you will be removing the tuition cap after the election?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I'm committed to working with all Campus Alberta partners to ensure that we have a plan in place for long-term, stable, and predictable funding. This is not business as usual, and all options are going to be on the table, and we have to get off the oil revenue roller coaster. This work is going to go beyond the spring budget. After the budget all Campus Alberta partners will be asked to help build a Campus Alberta system that is sustainable, accessible, and achieves excellence. I'll be engaging with students after the budget and developing a long-term plan.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, I'm not asking for a long soliloquy about what postsecondary education is up to in Alberta. What I'm asking the minister: has he had discussions or has he told members of our postsecondary institutions that he will lift the tuition cap after this election? That's all I'm asking.

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, what I told our postsecondary students – we had a great meeting last week, and we talked about the importance of postsecondary education. I indicated to those students that there were no imminent changes to tuition in Alberta, and the students were very pleased to hear that. They are looking forward to engaging with this government going forward.

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

Mental Health Services for Postsecondary Students

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to continue along the theme of postsecondary education. I rise today to question if our government is doing enough to support the mental health of our next generation of Alberta's leaders and workers, our postsecondary students. Students are currently preparing and writing final exams and finishing up their final papers, and I can attest that it can be a

stressful time. My question is for the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. Are there enough mental health supports in place to properly help our students?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Scott: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Health and I recognize the need to address postsecondary mental health. This is a serious issue across Campus Alberta, and it's an issue that was raised with me last week by the young people who attend our postsecondary institutions. We are working with postsecondary institutions and community partners to develop a provincial postsecondary mental health and addiction framework. The University of Calgary is playing a lead role in its development. Government has provided \$3 million a year directly to the universities of Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge to expand Alberta's mental health services and develop models of care that can be used on campuses across . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's hear the supplemental, please.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the same minister. There is still a great deal of stigma when it comes to mental health. We've come a long way, but not everyone is comfortable with going into an office to ask for help. What is being done to reach out to the students who won't ask for the help they need?

Mr. Scott: Again, Mr. Speaker, it's not just government that's concerned about this issue. Student leaders are aware of and passionate about this issue and the mental health issues that they experience on campus. Funding has been provided to let student associations run outreach activities that they know will work. Twelve student associations ran awareness campaigns. Several of them brought in guest speakers, offered peer support, ran workshops, and all ASEC members but one have run special, fun activities to give students a chance to blow off some steam and learn about the resources that are available. I'm pleased to say that these activities reached more than 60,000 students across . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's hear the final supplemental.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. Addressing mental health concerns is not a one-year initiative, and then you walk away. How can students know you'll continue to stand by them?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, this government will not be backing away from mental health issues across Campus Alberta. As I mentioned, our government is working with postsecondary institutions and community partners to develop a provincial postsecondary mental health and addiction framework. There will be a long-term framework. I encourage this member to also bring his passion for this issue to our extensive Campus Alberta consultation happening after the budget. Together with our Campus Alberta partners we will ensure that our system is sustainable, accessible, and focused on excellence.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 102 questions and answers were offered today. That's a good average to strive for. We can do better tomorrow, I'm sure. In the meantime, let's take a 30 second recess, and then we'll continue with private members' statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Questions to the Premier

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, 17: that's the number of questions the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has asked the Premier on health care in the last two weeks. One: that's the number the Premier has bothered to answer. When she asked the Premier why he hasn't been answering her questions, he flippantly replied that it was because he felt his minister could handle it.

Well, maybe we should look at his record. Mould, asbestos, overcrowding, postponed surgeries, growing ER wait times, seniors waiting in hospitals for long-term care beds, profoundly inadequate mental health care: these are serious concerns, and Albertans deserve better.

Health care professionals call us to tell us that this PC government's neglect hurts the quality of care Albertans receive, yet the Premier doesn't answer. Families call us to tell us that their loved ones' surgeries are delayed because this government has the wrong priorities, yet the Premier doesn't answer.

Albertans deserve better than a Premier that ducks responsibility on an issue as crucial as their health. Albertans deserve better than decades of neglected hospitals. Albertans deserve better than disingenuous assurances that cuts can be made, thousands of positions eliminated without hurting the quality of health care received in this province even more.

This PC government has had a second chance and a third. In fact, they've had 43 budgets and 43 chances to get it right, but if they can't fix health care in the good times, if they can't fix health care in 43 years, why should anyone trust them to get the job done now? Albertans just can't trust the PCs to fix health care. They broke it, and every time they try to put it back together, they just make it worse. It's time to retire the PCs and elect a government that can do the job.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by Calgary-North West.

Retrospective by the Member for Calgary-Bow

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For 14 years I have had the great privilege of speaking for my constituents in this House and within government. In that time I've been gifted with so many dedicated and wonderful co-workers such as Allison Johnson and especially Colleen Winhold, with me since the beginning as my Calgary assistant, whose compassion for our constituents has been boundless.

I have also been gifted with so many opportunities to make a difference in people's lives along the way. Opportunity placed me as chair of the Seniors Advisory Council, allowing me to bring the voice of our seniors to government.

As vice-president of the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region I was able to give Alberta a strong crossborder voice with our neighbouring provinces and states. Bringing one constituent's vision to the government and thus seeing 2,000 acres at Poverty Rock rise to become part of Writing-On-Stone park was extremely fulfilling. But more fulfilling was working on the low-income review which led to higher AISH payments for those most vulnerable in our society.

Standing here before you, Mr. Speaker, and all my colleagues, I find myself awash in other memories, memories of the warmth and camaraderie of my fellow MLAs, memories of my constituents and

how profoundly they have moved and changed me, of baby Sierra and baby Brooklynn, who inspired me to advocate change in the philosophy of children's services to one of strengthening families rather than of apprehension.

Finally, the memory that'll stay with me forever: watching thousands of Albertans come down to Bowness to help their neighbours after the floods swept through our province, mud-caked faces, bright smiles, and hard work, a community in the truest sense of the word. That is what being an MLA in this great province means to me, community.

Mr. Speaker, it has been my privilege to serve my community to the very best of my ability, *and it has been a greater privilege to watch the constituents of my community working to improve the lives of all Albertans.** [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you. Well spoken; well said.

Let us move on, then, to the final private member's statement for today, and that would be Calgary-North West. Thank you.

2:50 Inspiring Education and Curriculum Design

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the introduction of Bill 18, the Education Act, in 2011 this province has seen the rollout of initiatives like Inspiring Education and curriculum redesign. Albertans have recognized that our education system needs to adapt to meet the challenges and embrace the opportunities of an ever-changing world. Through the Inspiring Education dialogue Albertans have identified a vision for the future where students are inspired to achieve success and fulfillment as engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit. We're so pleased that stakeholder organizations like the Alberta Teachers' Association, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, the Alberta School Councils' Association, and the Alberta School Boards Association have all demonstrated support for Inspiring Education and curriculum redesign.

Unfortunately, these innovative initiatives have not always been the original flexible programs they were meant to be. The original rollout of Inspiring Education included province-wide consultation that brought Albertans together to talk about the future of teaching and learning. The outcome was a broad policy framework developed to describe the overall direction, principles, and goals for education in Alberta.

The initiative was not meant to replace the pre-existing traditional method of learning but was meant to assist and aid in new, innovative ways to stay up to date with our current technology. Along with Inspiring Education, a similar initiative was created in curriculum redesign, and the purpose was to make sure it was continually being reviewed and improved to ensure our students are developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to be successful in the real world.

Although our original efforts were ground breaking, Mr. Speaker, I am afraid we are losing steam by not staying present with the concerns of Alberta education's front-line members. Those are teachers, students, and parents.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Justice, I believe you have a bill.

Bill 23

Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Denis: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 23, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2015. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of the bill, recommends same to the Assembly.

These changes relate to the province's civil forfeiture office, referred to as the CFO, and specifically to the operation of its fund and processes. I'll start by pointing out that these changes are in no way related to the victims of crime fund or the victims of crime units in our communities. To avoid future confusion between the programs, part of the proposed amendments would be to change the name of the act to the civil forfeiture and restitution act.

The proposed amendments will create a regulated civil forfeiture fund. In addition, the fund will now be able to cover expenses that the CFO incurs in obtaining the forfeitures. We are following the model of other provinces by permitting certain direct expenses to be paid from the proceeds of the forfeitures, which will allow the CFO to operate regardless of the province's budget situation. The amendments would also prohibit a person's objection to administrative forfeiture from being used against the person in a criminal trial and will permit the regulations to be made in the future, which will list offences of cause bodily harm or profit. Lastly, the bill makes technical and minor improvements to business operations.

This is a continuation of our common-sense, conservative approach to justice, and together these amendments will help the province's civil forfeiture office continue its valuable work in reducing victimizations by reducing crime.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a first time]

The Speaker: Before we proceed, could I have unanimous consent to revert quickly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well thank you to the Assembly, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is a great privilege. I've seen two outstanding women enter the Chamber here, a mother and daughter dynamic duo, both from my constituency: an incredible teacher in Drayton Valley and now retired, Becky Prins, and her outstanding daughter Amy Prins, who joined me first as an intern. She was so outstanding, we hired her as a special assistant. Then I had the honour and privilege of her working with me as my chief of staff. I would ask that both of them please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I don't believe there are any others, so let us move on.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Let's start with Calgary-Cross, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

*The text in italics exceeded the time limit and was not read in the House.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is five copies of a letter I received March 4, 2015, from the Injury Prevention Centre, School of Public Health at the University of Alberta. They wrote to thank me for championing a private member's bill in 2001 that made bicycle helmets mandatory for Alberta's children. "You have been responsible for getting thousands of children to wear bicycle helmets and protecting many of them from life-changing head injuries." They are grateful for "the legacy of your work, nearly 15 years later, [as it] is a generation of cyclists who protect themselves and now their children" while enjoying cycling. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table, also, five copies of a news release I wrote, dated February 4, 2015. It highlights the successful programs that have enhanced and protected the quality of life for vulnerable Albertans over the past 20 years.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, I understand your tabling is not today.

Ms Blakeman: No. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other Tabling Returns and Reports?

Seeing none, I thank you. I think that concludes items other than points of order. We had a couple of points of order.

Let's go with the one that Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills raised at 2:01 p.m. Citation and point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against Members

Mr. Saskiw: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising according to Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), and it is with respect to a comment made by this Premier. He alleged that members on our side were promoting debt in this province. I think this is more of a clarification, but I would just like to put on the record that it is this government that has put this province into almost \$20 billion of debt, and that's on the basis of spending on things like golf courses; brand new MLA offices, about \$400 million; hundreds of thousands of dollars for campaign ads; you know, carbon capture and storage, corporate grants to those companies. I think that when he impugns the opposition members, making statements that are clearly false – clearly, clearly, absolutely false – it creates disorder in this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask that you either have the member retract the statement or offer that clarification.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have got to say that if I'm so fortunate as to win a third election, I'm going to really miss this member. I really enjoy our legal banter, and I wish him well in whatever area of law he goes back to. But the one banter I have here is that truth is an absolute defence. It may be inconvenient if somebody actually goes and says something. We may want to cover it up. We might want to run away from it if it's against our own political interest. But I'll quote again a document that I'd quoted from a couple of days ago. One of the leadership candidates, Linda Osinchuk, had indicated: "We should be looking at selling bonds, Alberta bonds. And we can actually use this to create revenue." This is a prominent member of his organization who's talking about debt financing.

Again, what the Premier said, with respect, Mr. Speaker, was true. This is the Wildrose. It does support debt financing. I would just go and ask that this member realize that this is a point of clarification and not a point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're not looking to engage in a large debate on this. As you well know, points of order should not be used as an opportunity to extend debate.

Hon. leader of the Wildrose, why don't you rise and just bring this matter to a conclusion? It is more of a point of clarification, but I will allow you a brief moment to comment.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, if we're going to talk about leadership candidates, maybe we should go back to last June, when the now Premier of the province was a leadership candidate, and to all of the promises he made that he's now broken to Albertans. I think that's something that doesn't need to be clarified. You want to talk about truth. That's the truth. He made a bunch of promises; he's broken his promise not only to people in this Assembly but to Albertans.

The Speaker: And you can see why we don't get into this too much; nonetheless, those points are now on the record, and they have been duly noted.

This is clearly a point of clarification. I believe both sides involved here have clarified their positions, and now we are going to move on. So thank you for that clarification. That concludes the matter.

3:00

Statement by the Speaker

Questions to Committee Chairs

The Speaker: Now, earlier today, as you will remember, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek rose and asked a question to the chair of the Public Accounts Committee. I want to make it very clear that a similar circumstance as this has occurred here before. Yes, questions may be directed to chairs of committees of the Legislative Assembly about the schedule and agenda of such committees. For future reference you might want to visit *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 506. There are just a couple of sentences here, but I want to read them into the record because the minute something happens that is a bit unusual, I get notes and comments and phone calls and everything else, so hopefully this will address that. I'll be brief.

I quote from page 506 from the second edition, 2009, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, wherein it says under the heading Questions Concerning Matters Before Committees:

Questions seeking information about the schedule and agenda of committees may be directed to Chairs of committees. Questions to the Ministry or to a committee Chair concerning the proceedings or work of a committee, including its order of reference, may not be raised. Thus, for example, a question would be disallowed if it dealt with a vote in committee, with the attendance or testimony of Members at a committee meeting, or with the content of a committee report. When a question has been asked about a committee's proceedings, Speakers have encouraged Members to rephrase their questions.

And I might well have looked at doing that, other than that it was getting a little bit noisy. Believe it or not, it is difficult sometimes to hear the question being asked when there's the heckling and everything else that I admonished you about earlier today on two or three occasions.

Nonetheless, there is a great deal of leniency that is usually given for members who want to talk about events that have occurred in a committee meeting, but usually there are leniencies given when they are posed in the context of questions to the government. In that

respect I would invite you to visit the *Hansard* of May 1, 1997, page 319, where under the heading Speaker's Ruling, Questions to Private Members it states:

The gist of these rulings is that the purpose of question period is for members to hold the government accountable for its actions. Clearly, there can be no other finding by the Chair, as the principle of the executive being responsible to the Assembly is the cornerstone of responsible government in this country.

And the Speaker of the day went on to conclude by saying:

Secondly, questions may be asked directly of members who chair committees of the Assembly, but this would be a narrow range as these committees are not part of government. Certainly it would be highly unusual for these members to supplement answers by ministers.

So please remember that, and we'll be vigilant for any future circumstances such as that. That is the point of clarification from the Speaker's point of view.

With that having been said, why don't we move on.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 22

Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act

The Speaker: Let us move on to the next speaker on Bill 22. The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Quest: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 22, the Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act.

This legislation is related to artificial tanning. It's a priority area under Alberta's cancer plan. Alberta has one of the highest usages of artificial tanning in Canada. Strong evidence exists linking artificial tanning and skin cancer. In 2012 599 Albertans were diagnosed with melanoma; 72 died from this preventable disease. Rates of melanoma are now increasing in Alberta; 700 new cases are expected in 2017. There is also evidence that youth are at a higher risk of skin cancer from artificial tanning than older adults, which is why youth are the focus of this proposed legislation.

The legislation would do several things. It would ban artificial tanning businesses from providing services to minors, restricting those under 18 from using artificial tanning. It would also restrict direct advertising of artificial tanning to youths under 18. Some specific examples would be advertising targeting minors as a main audience such as high school yearbooks or teen magazines. Another important part of the legislation would mandate warnings about the health risks of artificial tanning. Health warnings at point of sale would help consumers be more aware of the dangers of artificial tanning.

We're also proposing banning self-serve artificial tanning equipment. Unsupervised self-serve artificial tanning devices are common in other parts of the world but not yet here in Alberta. We want to get ahead of the curve on this one.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to note that this legislation does not apply to spray tanning as it does not emit cancer-causing UV radiation.

Government made moves years ago to protect youth from the dangers of tobacco. The skin cancer prevention act is another important step on the road to reduce cancer incidence in Alberta. This legislation will help us meet commitments under Alberta's cancer plan and protect the health of all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask this Assembly for its support in passing the second reading of Bill 22. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to stand up and give my initial support on the Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act. I was one of those people that – I guess I was older than that – wished I hadn't done what I did as far as artificial tanning because of the ... [interjection] Somebody is yelling. Unfortunately, I don't know how many times people in this House have to be reminded that I can't hear. All I see is a bunch of lips moving, you know, so it goes past.

Mr. Speaker, I was one of those people. I actually started off with the tanning because of a skin ailment, which I know is one of things that you can have a prescribed doctor's note for. I know that for people with psoriasis and that it was extremely helpful. But I eventually liked the colour that I was turning, and I thought: well, this is much easier to get done than trying to sit out in the sun for three or four hours, getting the rays. You know, you go 20 years ahead, or whenever they brought these tanning beds in, and it shows on your face. It just drives me crazy when I go past all of these Fabutans and see these young kids go in, and I think: "Oh, my God. What are you doing to your skin? Do you realize some of the things that can happen with skin cancer?"

It's a good move by the government. There are some things that I'm struggling with, and it's something that I'm hoping, if we have the ability to get to committee, that the mover of the bill, who's just moved second reading, will be able to answer. That's, of course, the enforcement aspect. We've just seen the distracted driving bill pass through third reading, from the Member for Calgary-East, and when I spoke in support of his bill, I also talked about the enforcement part and the need for more boots on the ground – if I can use that – more sheriffs, more police officers.

On page 4 of the bill it talks about the enforcement officers, inspections, and investigations.

The Minister may, by order, designate an individual as an enforcement officer or, by regulation, designate individuals within a class of individuals as enforcement officers for the purposes of this Act or the regulations.

I'm just not sure what that means.

I think everybody in the House has good intentions by the many, many bills that this government passes. I hit the paper about a week ago when Quill and I tried to enter a restaurant in Edmonton and were denied. Well, we all know that the service dog legislation in this province is one of the toughest, but unfortunately with service dogs, Alberta has the worst record. At that particular time – as someone who owns a service dog there are many rules and regulations that you follow. The first thing is to try to inform the restaurant that what they're doing is wrong, and then you leave quietly, and you let the association, the Lions foundation, know that you've been denied entrance. Then they write a letter, and then they ask you to go back after that. Education.

3:10

I can't imagine, when I was out last week just wanting something to eat, that I am going to end up phoning a police officer on a very busy night. So, I guess, how are you going to enforce this? Are you going to do the same thing if you see someone enter the establishment that's under age and that's going to go tanning? Do you phone an enforcement officer? Who are you going to phone? It says in here that "an enforcement officer may conduct an inspection or investigation with respect to any matter." I am trying to understand the process. I do understand the process that I have to go through with the service dog. It has clearly been articulated to me. I'm just not sure how you're going to enforce this, and I am

hoping that the minister – do you send a warning to the tanning salon?

You know, there are just so many things. I'm hoping that in committee there will be some questions because it's quite detailed. In fact, section 6.1 is about who is designated. Then it goes on: "An enforcement officer may conduct an inspection or investigation with respect to any matter for any purpose related to . . . [that]." It goes on: "An enforcement officer may, without a warrant, enter premises, other than a private dwelling." And it goes on to talk about reasonable grounds and things like that. So I think it's important to establish who that enforcement officer is, who the designate is, who you'd consider designating to be an enforcement officer as far as the fines, and things like that.

The other thing that I really would like some clarification on is prohibitions, nonapplication, defences. Under section 2 it says:

No person shall sell, offer for sale or provide artificial tanning services to an individual who appears to be less than 25 years of age unless the person . . .

And it has the prescription one that I had talked about.

. . . is satisfied that the individual is at least 18 years of age.

To the minister: is it under 18, or is it under 25? An adult in this province is considered 18. I guess I'm wondering why "appears to be less than 25 years of age" is in this piece of legislation, which is confusing to me, quite frankly, Minister. Are we saying that if I'm 24, considered an adult in this province, I can be stopped from accessing tanning, et cetera? So if you could clarify that for me, that would be extremely helpful.

I'm not going to take a lot of time because I'm sure that there are many other members that would like to speak on that, so I am looking forward to clarification on your enforcement because I think that's important. When you have businesses that are involved in a business that provides a service, I think that they need to know also.

Those are my short questions. Obviously, when we are in second reading, we talk about the intent of the bill. So I will look forward to committee, if we have the opportunity to get to that, to find out what you have to say about that. I appreciate the time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Do we have another speaker at this time? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of this bill. There are some questions that quite possibly the minister could bring in on the enforcement side, I think, in a sense, versus some authority from a provincial level, but opening up these tanning salons to liability from the public under a tort action might be more efficient on an enforcement level.

Now, I speak to this bill on a very personal level. As a person of very fair skin I have been battling with basal cell, squamous cell, and I've been subject to melanoma. I've undergone cancer surgery for skin cancer, most recently within the last couple of months. All of this is, I believe, a direct result of my exposure, particularly when I was in the tropics as a young man, not understanding the damages of what the sun can do. That is the whole intent of this bill. People, particularly young people, who are concerned about their appearance – and it's an odd thing. People with light skin want to have dark skin, people with dark hair want to have light hair – we have all these things going on in our society – and people with no hair want hair. Then people with hair shave their heads. I don't get it. But vanity is vanity.

This bill does a number of things. Not only can it protect our youths; it can save our health care system lots of money and lots of dollars. There's nothing better to save money in health care than

preventative health care practices. On the issue of skin cancer I will say this. My son, who is now in university, who is quite fair skinned, has never had the issues that I've had just because of education around this subject matter. People are learning, and this is the whole process that we're going through. The medical field has done tremendous work in dealing with skin cancers. You know, had they had sunscreen back when I was younger, I can tell you I would have used sunscreen. You watch families today protecting their kids. This is significant.

For the issue that we're dealing with today, if we can get this message out to our young people and enforce this bill we're about to pass to prevent the abuse of these skin tanning salons – and it is abuse. The science is there, the medical studies are there to show that this contributes to that. To me, it's a no-brainer in how we want to go forward to keep our medical care costs in control and how we want to go forward to educate people about taking more responsibility for their health. As these young people grow a little bit older, a little bit wiser, they generally get onboard, as most adults do, with trying to eat a little bit healthier and taking care of themselves. For anyone who has experienced any of these types of cancers, after a while it does get old, and you wish that you had taken preventative measures as a young person.

I will be supporting this bill, and I want to thank the government for bringing it forward. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available should anyone wish to take advantage of that. I see no one.

Is there anyone else who wishes to speak?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I won't be long. Yesterday, after the bill was introduced by the hon. member, we had an opportunity to listen to some individuals that have been impacted by skin cancer and tanning salons, and it was quite heartbreaking to hear the impact that it's had on their lives. I think that this particular piece of legislation will begin to go to the heart of it, where there are so many people under the age of 18 using these facilities to make themselves look more presentable or in some way better. At the end of the day, we need to make sure they understand the tremendous risk in doing this form of trying to make yourself more beautiful. I think that we need to enforce it every which way we can. The minister will use the authority that will be allowed under the legislation to take every step necessary.

You know, oftentimes today, as I get older, people look younger, so if you're 25 years of age today, you could look 25, you could be 25, or you could also be 15. We need to be very cautious in how we look at people and make sure we oversee anybody coming in that might have a potential.

I applaud the member for bringing this forward, and I support this. It is an excellent piece of legislation. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

I see no one wishing to take that up, so let us move to the next speaker. It'll be Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise and speak to Bill 22, the Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act. I'll keep my comments fairly short. I just want to say to all members of the Assembly and to Albertans that the Alberta NDP do support this bill in its entirety.

3:20

A few facts that I'd like to share with members. The Canadian Cancer Society states that melanoma is one of the fastest growing preventable cancers, and research indicates that using indoor

tanning equipment during youth increases the risk by nearly 60 per cent. The National Cancer Institute in the United States says that teen girls make up a growing number of tanning bed customers.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Alberta Health estimates that 1 in 3 17-year-old girls in the province has used indoor tanning equipment. Of those that have used tanning indoors, two-thirds report having started before the age of 16. Even industry is onside with this. The Joint Canadian Tanning Association, JCTA, an industry group based in Kelowna, B.C., said that it welcomes the move, and the province's largest provider of these services, Fabutan, instituted similar bans at its own facilities last summer.

In the end, it seems the only question here is: what took so long? Other provinces, aside from Saskatchewan, have all passed laws like this. It's definitely the right thing to do.

I thank the member sponsoring this bill for bringing it forward, and I will be supporting it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, I'll look for the next speaker. Call the question?

The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park to close?

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate everybody's comments and will address the questions from the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek in committee, assuming we get there.

You took the words right out of my mouth, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that you call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a second time]

Bill 24

Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 24, the Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act.

Before us today we have a straightforward proposal to repeal the Public Sector Services Continuation Act, which was originally passed by this House in December 2013 but was never proclaimed or put into force. At the time this legislation was needed to act as a deterrent to illegal strikes in the public sector. It was intended to strengthen our labour laws by introducing higher fines.

Recently the Alberta government announced that it would be reviewing its approach to public-sector labour relations and that it plans to put in place an essential services model of legislation. Of course, maintaining public safety and ensuring that the public has access to essential services during times of labour disputes will be a key part of any new legislation that may be brought forward. Moving to an essential services model will go a long way towards that goal since it will reduce the likelihood of strikes being illegal in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, given this change in the province's approach to labour legislation it is clear that the Public Sector Services Continuation Act is not required. We have already begun reviewing the essential services models that are in place in other jurisdictions in the country, and following our discussions with Alberta public-sector employers, employees, and their representatives we plan to table new public-sector labour legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I recognize the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 24, which is repealing previous legislation. I just find it really interesting that the hon. minister would be tabling this legislation because according to the record in this Assembly he voted for the legislation previously. He voted for it; now he's voting against it. Which one is it? He just changed his mind very quickly. I'm wondering, you know, if the minister is going to provide some justification to this Assembly for his complete flip-flop in a very short period of time. He voted for it, and now he's voting against it. I look forward to the debate in this Assembly where he provides that justification for how things miraculously changed in that period of time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased, very pleased, to be able to get this opportunity to speak in favour of the repeal of what we know as Bill 45 because that was a really awful bill and extremely punitive to the labour movement and the collective bargaining process and, frankly, to working people. I mean, this government is clearly not a fan of the organized labour movement, but it should be because much of what we as Albertans see as basic working rights in fact came about as a result of action that the organized labour movement took.

I've managed to grab a few things that let us know where these came from, things like 40-hour workweeks and/or weekends off, whichever way you want to look at that; breaks at work, including lunch breaks, which came about because of organized labour and the collective bargaining process working for this; paid vacation or paid holiday time; family leave or medical leave; short-term and long-term sick leave; even in one case, which I'll come upon later, social security; minimum wage; a number of laws that prohibit discrimination in the workplace; overtime pay; child labour laws – the government has rather gone backwards in that one because I think they've changed it so that 12-year-olds can work in the food industry, so we'll have to get on that again – occupational health and safety laws have always come out of that sector; workers' compensation; unemployment insurance; in some cases pensions; wrongful-termination laws; age discrimination; in some cases whistle-blower protection; personnel evaluations and merit increases; sexual harassment laws; pregnancy and parental leave; military leave; the right to strike; public education for children; and equal pay for work of equal value.

These are pretty integral parts of our workforce today. They didn't come about because government decided to stand up and just do it out of the goodness of their heart. People had to work very hard to get this, both in negotiations and in some cases having to take to the street.

Let me reinforce here – and I've said this previously, but it needs to be said again – that people do not go on strike because it's fun. They go on strike because they believe every other reasonable avenue to get the employer to make changes has been exhausted. They go on strike to try and get the employer to come back to the table and negotiate in good faith. That's why people go on strike. It's no fun, especially in this country, where we have eight months' worth of winter and four months' worth of construction. You are almost always bound to be walking a picket line in the snow, which is, you know, really not fun.

These are people, in the public service anyway, who wanted to serve, who wanted to be working for the public, who are working for unions. In this particular instance, Bill 45 was very specifically directed against AUPE, which is primarily public workers for the Alberta government. This government really was not, I would argue, bargaining in good faith. They've already designated almost every – I mean, this one really gets me. It really brought it into high relief when the sponsoring member earlier was saying: oh, well, you know, we have to have all these essential services. At one point I met a fellow and said: what do you do? He repairs VLT machines. Oh. Okay. And he was an essential worker. I thought: okay. That whole concept of essential worker starts to disintegrate when the government is designating a lottery terminal repairperson as an essential service. I think that really clarified things for me. You know, I know that the government doesn't like having to step into public service strikes; no employer does. Neither do the people that are going on strike, but it is an attempt to try and get a settlement.

3:30

At the time this bill was brought in, I thought it was regressive and punitive, nasty. There was just a whole tone to the whole debate that was particularly crude. It was quite distressing. It was at the end of session, more or less where we are now although we've only been in for three weeks. Think about this, House leader. Just add another week onto this, and imagine how cranky people are going to be. I did warn you that three weeks is enough. Don't go for four weeks. But, no, you wouldn't listen to me. That was at the end of a particularly long stint in the House, and it was at the end of – well, you can tell by the numbers of the bills, 45 and 46. People had been in the session for quite a while, and we'd seen enough of each other.

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. We had. Well, the previous speaker used to describe politics as a blood sport, and I really felt that during this debate. It felt like a blood sport. It felt like a really nasty battle.

So I'm pleased, however this came to be. It's a bit like watching sausages being made. I don't quite want to know how the government came to this point or how the unions got them to this point of repealing this bill. I would like to urge the government not to bring in new legislation that is equally regressive, please. If we cannot negotiate reasonably with the people that we work with, then there is something seriously wrong with the system, and I think that's an indicator of it.

I do approve of this repeal of Bill 45. I'm glad to see that the government got there. As I said, I don't want to know how you got here. It does serve to show us and allows me to highlight some of the reasons why we should value organized labour, the collective bargaining system. The ones I just gave you, I think, were Canadian examples. I pulled some of the U.S. examples. Again, they talk about the weekend, fair wages and relative income equality, child labour, leading the fights for family and medical leave and, in the States, of course, health coverage, which was a big deal there until Obama-care came along.

Some of what's been worked on in Canada are things like mental health advocacy. I know that every year, coming up soon, actually, is the Jim Shewchuk award, which is the fundraiser that – oh, boy; I'm not going to get it – the coalition of civic unions, maybe, puts together for United Way. As part of that, at the beginning of it there's always a graduation ceremony for people who on their own time, as volunteers, have taken courses that qualify them to be counsellors in the workplace, particularly to identify and help people to move on, to get assistance, to get help around mental illness, alcohol abuse, and drug abuse. These are peers. This is a

peer support program that union folks volunteer to take and train in to work with their peers in the workforce.

We also can thank a number of the unions for fundraising and for supporting a number of the charities and volunteer-based associations that we have and for supporting legal defence. I've always been a donator to LEAF, which is the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, which is not a union; it's a women-based organization to fight constitutional challenges. But the same theory and dedication have come through the union movement, who has paid for a number of court challenges that have resulted in a better workforce for everybody, and I appreciate them putting their money toward that.

One of the examples, in the States anyway, was pay equity. We have on the books pay equity in Alberta, but as people pretty quickly figured out, pay equity doesn't help much, so they never used the phrase again. As just a gentle reminder to the minister, pay equity just says, you know, that you're going to pay all truck drivers X amount of money, and if there's a female truck driver, well, she'll get paid the same. What it doesn't recognize is that people tend to work in gendered clusters of employment, so you end up with a lot of administrative support – a huge number of administrative support personnel are women, but a lot of janitorial staff, particularly in the heavier sectors, are men. Well, saying that you're going to pay a male truck driver and a female truck driver the same is great, but it doesn't reflect the diversity of the workforce. It doesn't reflect that you have women in so-called pink-collar jobs who are paid substantially less than men that are doing more or less the same kind of job in a different sector.

Equal pay for work of equal value is about breaking down the jobs and assigning metrics to each that say: "How much responsibility do you have? Do you oversee people? How many? How much physical work is involved? How much strategic or thinking work does it need? What does your reading skill level need to be," et cetera, et cetera, et cetera? That's what makes it a more equal-paying labour force. I would strongly recommend that the government look at this again because this is largely the reason why we have such a huge income gap in Alberta, and we've just had a study come out that underlined that pretty graphically. Here we are, supposedly a wealthy province, with a major income gap, the largest in Canada, between working men and working women, and that just shouldn't be.

I'm sure that lots of my colleagues in here will have great fun and amusement in giving the government a hard time for reversing itself on this bill, but I'm glad they did it. I mean, I'm not going to give any great credit to the government for any light bulb going on, but for whatever reason they came to this decision to repeal Bill 45. I'm glad they did because I do believe in organized labour. I do support collective bargaining. I think that what the government attempted to do with Bill 45 was wrong. At the time I said that it was wrong, and at the time I also could foresee a court challenge coming. In fact, it did, and the government lost, as it should have.

It really startled me to see government ministers talking about people in AUPE without seeming to connect that when they went back to their offices, those were the very same people that they were saying weren't worthy of being paid and weren't worthy of negotiating with to bring them to the table. There was just such a disconnect there. It really started me, so I'm glad to come to where we are today.

On behalf of my caucus members in the Liberal caucus I indicate our support for this bill in second reading. We do not plan on bringing any amendments, and we will be here to support the swift passage of this bill, that will repeal Bill 45.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to speak to Bill 24, the Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act. I will try to be brief, but there's lots to share on this bill. First, it does repeal contentious Bill 45, which my colleagues and I fought vehemently against in this Legislature. It was an unprecedented attack on workers' rights. It was completely unconstitutional, which we shared with the Assembly on numerous accounts, although I will jog the member's memory to the fact that this was one of the bills on which the government invoked closure. So not only was it trying to ram through an unconstitutional bill; it tried to do it at breakneck speed by shutting down debate and discussion within this Chamber and Assembly. For that, shame on the government.

3:40

Yes, this is a step in the right direction. In fact, this is something that many of our friends in labour are celebrating. However, we should have never gotten here. The opposition warned the government numerous times of this, how it was in defiance of the Constitution and the Charter, and of course the government in its infinite wisdom needed to be reminded after the fact and dragged back.

I just want to highlight why we were so opposed to this, just in case there are members who can't quite remember Bill 45. It prohibited public-sector employees or trade unions from doing anything to cause or consent to a strike, and that was even talking about a strike. If they did, unions were charged \$1 million a day for strike threats, paid to a liability fund to recover employers' costs. Fines on unions were \$250,000 plus \$50 per employee, multiplied by the number of days the strike occurred. There were \$10,000 daily fines for individual officers or reps of a union, fines for employees equal to daily pay, and a \$500 fine for any Albertan organization for supporting a strike threat. You know, this was any employee who causes or consents to a strike; an employee who does anything considered a strike threat, which wasn't defined in the legislation, of course; a union that engages in a strike threat; a person who counsels anyone to do anything considered a strike threat; an employer that does not suspend the deduction or remittance of dues to unions; a person, employer, or union who contravenes an abatement order.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre in her speech was talking about: why did the government come to this conclusion? I have an answer. It was because of all of the work that public-sector and private-sector unions did: speaking out against this bill, holding rallies, and getting Albertans to speak up around the province. You know, I will note that it wasn't just the public-sector unions that this bill was affecting. This bill was so offensive that workers, unionized and non-unionized, around the province were saying: this is absolutely absurd, that you are trying to shut down speech. This is the irony, of course. I mean, the government has numerous lawyers – either all of them were sleeping, or I'm not sure what they were doing – who should have recognized that this was directly a Charter violation of their fundamental rights in our country. It was the workers and the people of this province, alongside my colleagues in the Alberta NDP caucus, who raised these concerns and spoke out against this.

I can't help but think that the timing of this repeal is more than coincidental, you know, as we're coming up to an early election call, election 2015, that's about to happen, and maybe the government realized: well, we shouldn't be chasing public-sector

workers and basically forcing them to turn on us; we may actually need their support. But I'll remind the government that they learned their lesson and saw how you treat them in this.

Going to the legislation, the legislation wasn't about wages or unions. It was about undermining the rights of Alberta workers and the safety of all working Albertans. In second reading of Bill 45 we called this legislation "an unnecessary and heavy-handed piece of legislation that goes too far." We raised the fact that Bill 45 "redefines strike in a way that it has never been defined in this province." It was my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona who said that.

This piece of legislation was absolutely a Charter violation, which has been affirmed by the Supreme Court in their decision in *SFL versus Saskatchewan*. In section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms it states:

Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms:

- (a) freedom of conscience and religion;
- (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication;
- (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and
- (d) freedom of association.

The Supreme Court found that in Saskatchewan a similar bill violated 2(d), freedom of association.

But this legislation was also unprecedented because the following did not appear in other Canadian pieces of legislation or to the degree that it was proposed here in Alberta, and that was the strike threat, the abatement orders, or gag orders, and gag laws on employees and other Albertans who indicate that they support a strike threat. Now, gag law and Albertans: I mean, as far as this goes, section 18 of Bill 45 stifled all dissent. Essentially, it reminded me of the thought police here: \$500 daily fines to any Albertan who supports a strike threat, which includes any act or threat to act that can be reasonably perceived as a strike threat.

Section 73 of the Public Service Employee Relations Act states that the fine for an illegal lockout is not more than \$10,000. This government doesn't issue fines or penalties for fatalities or unsafe worksites or for corporations guilty of environmental destruction, yet this government has no problems with going after the men and women who place their lives on the line daily for this province and really are the backbone behind our public service and help us to be able to have the life that we do in this province. As I've mentioned, you know, unions would be charged a million dollars a day for a strike threat, which is absolutely absurd.

So I will be supporting this bill. The Alberta NDP supports this bill in its repeal. But I want to give credit where credit is due, and that's not to the government. The credit is due to the public-sector workers, the men and women who spoke out against this draconian piece of legislation to say that it was not only unconstitutional; it was wrong. It was an attack on workers and, essentially, an attack on all Albertans. Essentially, any Albertan could have been fined for discussing a strike threat. Again, the last time I checked, we lived in a country that protected freedom of speech, but apparently this PC government decided it would try to rewrite that legislation. So I'm very happy that this is a victory for Albertans.

Again, we know that it never would have come to pass because of the constitutional challenges in the Supreme Court, but once again this PC government has to be dragged across the finish line to do the right thing because, Lord knows, it wouldn't happen on their own. And I do question the timing of this again, conveniently right before we all head to the polls and Albertans head to the polls, in the hope of trying to glue together the tattered relationship that this government has with its public sector.

You know, in light of all this, Mr. Speaker, I found it quite rich that this piece of legislation came up shortly after the former Premier and numerous cabinet ministers thanked on a regular basis all the men and women for the work that they did during the floods in southern Alberta, risking their lives and reaching out their hands, their wallets, their hearts to help Albertans in need. It was the front line or many public-sector workers, from our EMS, police, fire, emergency crews to social workers, et cetera, and they are the very people that this government then turns their guns on.

Again, I'm glad that Albertans spoke out against it. Once again, I think that this was a victory not only for Albertans. You know, we were very happy to play our part. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting this bill, that never should have been introduced in this Legislature, and I truly hope that it never will.

If there is a message that I can pass on, it's that there still is great concern as far as public-sector pensions and legislation that will be coming. That will be coming after the election. So it will be very interesting. We'll keep a watchful eye on how that plays out, yet again another moment in Alberta's recent history where our men and women on the front lines spoke out against a bill that would have been a direct attack on them and their livelihood, and once again here we are where the opposition, in combination with working Albertans, has to shame the government into doing the right thing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:50

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker, the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of this bill, and I will differ from my previous colleagues speaking on it. It was inevitable that this was going to come here regardless of what happened in Saskatchewan. When this bill was first introduced, Bill 45, closure was passed and enacted before we could even get into second reading. It was quite sad that we would violate the democratic process like that and limit debate and end up here today repealing this. As far as I'm concerned, this is the fruition of bad governance, and I've seen nothing yet to show that we've changed the way we govern. We may have changed the manager in charge, but we have not changed the way we're behaving in the democratic process.

Regardless of what the unions thought of Bill 45, I don't have a problem looking at penalties for illegal acts and debating to make sure that the penalties of an illegal act, the fines, fit the crime, so to speak. There ought to always be deterrents. What this bill did was violate some very fundamental rights: the right of freedom of association and the right of freedom of speech. These are two paramount rights that make our democracy work, and we should never ever pass a bill that infringes upon those rights. Here we are today repealing this, yet we passed a bill just earlier this week where we gave a fish adviser the authority to enter onto people's property without a warrant, violating what I believe is due process of law. [interjections] Fish adviser, whatever. It's a nice title: fish adviser.

It's a sad state of affairs, to be perfectly honest. It's a sad state of affairs. What it shows us is the consistency that we have going on here with a government that constantly has to backtrack, yet it continues to violate the rights of its citizens by not being thorough when it introduces legislation and railroading that legislation through. That is what happened with Bill 45; it's what happened with the amendment on this fish bill that we passed with the fish adviser. It drives you nuts sometimes as you watch this happening,

but the sad part is that nothing is changing. We're continuing down that path.

The good news is that we do have a court system that can look at the constitutional aspects of some of these bills, at whether or not they're within the Charter or outside the Charter. This was warned early on, in the beginning, when this bill was brought forward, that it was highly questionable if it was going to survive a Charter challenge. Now, this bill never actually got that far. It never went that far. It was clear from what happened on another law that was very similar in another province that this bill was never going to go down and survive that Charter challenge.

Yet we still as a government here are putting through laws. These people are passing laws, railroading them through without legitimate debate, without the necessary debate, I should say, that would expose some of this and be open-minded to remove some of this from laws before they are passed. I suspect that we will be back here again with repeals of some of these other acts that violate issues dealing with property rights and individual rights before we're done.

I will support this bill. I was opposed to Bill 45 originally; I was opposed to Bill 46 originally. I just felt that they were overkill beyond reason. It violated due process of law, in my view. The idea that we would punish an individual for the acts of two others, even the idea that they would be discussing under their right of freedom of speech, under their right of freedom of association, if somebody were to overhear them discussing anything that could be deemed illegal, not that it was illegal but could be deemed illegal, a third party could be punished – that was never going to survive, in my view, and I'm glad the government finally came around and said: we've got to deal with this.

It was also the way they came around. Clearly, we are now in that election mode of preparing for the election. I know some of the members were heckling earlier as if they didn't understand it, but they should at least look at the supplemental bill we just passed. There's \$28 million in there for the election, and we passed that. Clearly, whenever that writ is brought forward and dropped, we will be into an election mode, and the government can go out and say: well, we repealed this. But were they going to do it of their own volition? Were they actually going to do it on the efforts of the opposition or even the efforts of the public? That's debatable. But it was clear that they had to do it because of what happened in the court system.

So here we are. You know, the government gets credit for it. They'll take credit for it in the election, but it was the fact that it was so egregious and such an offence to the rights of the citizens of this province that the higher courts were not going to allow it to stand in the first place. So it was inevitable we were going to end up here.

With that, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker.

If there are no other speakers, I'll offer the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour to close debate.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Several things that the hon. members who spoke said I agree with. This is a victory for Albertans. This is their government and their workers coming together in a closer, more collaborative, more co-operative way and a strong indication that this government and this province are under new management. I believe that repealing the Public Sector Services Continuation Act will indeed be the first step toward a new

era and a new relationship with our workers and their collective bargaining representatives, their union representatives.

Mr. Speaker, this government wants to build a new spirit of co-operation with our workers and their representatives because they are a key element in this province. They are the ones that are going to enable us to weather the current economic difficulties and move forward in a sustainable manner. When Albertans get excited about the work done by their government in Alberta, they get excited about the work that the workers do.

For that reason I am proud to carry Bill 24, the Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act, and I ask and encourage all of my colleagues in the Legislature to support it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 24 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 20

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present for third reading Bill 20, the proposed Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015.

I would like to thank all members who participated in second reading and Committee of the Whole for their supportive comments. Bill 20 is an important piece of legislation that will fulfill the commitment by the Premier, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and Alberta's major municipal associations to bring forward legislative amendments on matters on which municipalities, business, and industrial stakeholders have reached consensus; demonstrate progress on the Premier's commitment to develop city charters; clarify administration of off-site levies; confirm existing policy decisions by moving them into the act or creating new regulation-making authority for various regulations; address several housekeeping items to support consistency, clarity, and readability. The MGA impacts every Albertan, Mr. Speaker, the private sector, and every ministry within government in one form or another.

4:00

Our government is committed to supporting communities. A key part of this is reviewing the MGA so that Alberta's municipalities have a strong foundation upon which to grow and thrive. Bill 20 is an important step in ensuring that the MGA continues to support strong, viable communities in the future.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 20 is an excellent example of collaboration with our municipal partners and industrial stakeholders, and I am very proud to support it. I would like to encourage all members to support Bill 20.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak at third reading of Bill 20, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015. There are a number of changes in Bill 20 that we are very supportive of, and we fully appreciate the work that the minister, as I said last evening, and the department staff have done working with stakeholders to get agreement on these items.

The new rules around a closed meeting provide some guidance for councils around the province and will support clarity and

transparency for meetings and promote better communication with community residents.

Another change that Albertans have asked for is the codes of conduct for elected municipal officials. Adding some clear standards for the behaviour of our elected leaders will help decision-makers, councillors, staff, and citizens to better understand the role of the council and the expectations that we have of them.

However, we do have some concerns, as I mentioned last night as well in Committee of the Whole. Bill 20 has moved very quickly, and several of the provisions in the bill leave the meat and potatoes to the regulations. This means that when we get to the actual rules around annexation, amalgamation, and the codes of conduct, those discussions will not happen inside this Assembly, and citizens and opposition MLAs will not get to talk about the details before they become law. This is not governing with transparency, in our opinion.

It appears that this government has delayed all of the contentious aspects of the MGA review down the road and until after the election. Anything in this bill which could have caused any dissent will be handled safely during the fall and spring. The part that allows city charters does exactly this. Bill 20 allows the city charters to be created through regulation. These charters are enormously important pieces of legislation, and having them developed outside of the Assembly is lacking in transparency.

Yesterday evening the Minister of Municipal Affairs said:

We also heard during second reading, Madam Chair, debate, concern over the transparency of a charter being developed as a regulation that would be approved by cabinet before it would take effect. I want to be clear. This amendment will not alter that approach. If we were to require that charters could only be implemented as legislation rather than through regulation, charters would take considerably longer to develop, and this would not be in the spirit of the agreement we signed in the fall.

So this government has put its timelines ahead of making sure that there is good, thorough consideration of the charter in the Assembly.

We had intended to bring forward, actually, an amendment yesterday evening, and we weren't able to. For the record I'd like to read this amendment into the record today.

Mr. Stier to move that Bill 20, Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015, be amended in section 14, in the proposed section 141.4, by adding the following after subsection (6):

(7) Despite any other provision of this Part, a charter shall not provide taxation powers to a charter city that exceed the taxation powers available to the city under this Act.

Now, there have been several ministers of Municipal Affairs since the last election, and they have taken different positions on new taxes for big cities. One minister was clear that there were no new taxing powers coming. Another said in an interview that perhaps there could be new taxing powers if the city had held a plebiscite.

The city mayors have clearly said that they'd like to have some new revenue-generating tools. Given this history I think that everyone will benefit from complete clarity when it comes to this government's intentions. New taxation powers for our city would be a very impactful change, both for our big cities and for the pocketbooks of Alberta taxpayers, and it's important to be open about it. Our amendment looked for some clarity on this issue, and we don't have that clarity at this point, Mr. Speaker.

I hope that the minister can spell out the intent of the charter legislation with respect to taxation for this Assembly before this bill actually passes. As we've said from the beginning, Wildrose supports the concept of a city charter, absolutely. But the powers allowed to the future charters in this bill are very broad. The power of the

charter documents could be very far reaching, and Wildrose believes that these powers need more consideration.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I had spoken to this bill in second and had raised a couple of issues which were in fact covered partially in the amendment that the minister brought forward yesterday and which was subsequently passed. I understand what she's saying, that if all charters had to be negotiated as separate pieces of legislation, it would take forever, but frankly that's just not a very good excuse. This Assembly has far too many examples of passing legislation that's essentially shell legislation. It says that the minister can do whatever they want under regulation, almost anything they want under regulation, and then it's passed off, and it all happens behind closed doors, and that's just not appropriate when we're talking about a big-city charter or a city of Calgary act or a city of Edmonton act. It's not appropriate to have it in regulations.

Now, I will note that I think the city of Calgary has been very clear. They do not want this to be in regulations. They want a city of Calgary act. Good on them. I think the city of Edmonton has been less vocal; as far as I know, they may even be willing to do it under regulations. I'm not willing for them to do it under regulations because it's just not a wise idea if this is going to be the same government in place. What the government giveth, it can take away very quickly, actually, even as a sort of pre-election giveaway or takeaway.

We've had a number of things reversed recently by the Premier as pre-election goodie bags, and some people will be very happy with some of the things that he's done, but it does go to show you that if it's not in legislation in front of this Assembly, it can be reversed without any further discussion ever taking place. What's done on the Assembly floor has to be undone on the Assembly floor. What's done in regulations: poof. Whatever. There's no *Hansard*. There are no tape recordings. There's no live streaming. As far as I know, there aren't even minutes kept, so the ability of anyone to hold the government to account on deals they may or may not have made behind closed doors in changing regulations: nada. Boy, I wouldn't want to be a big city trying to get a big-city charter or even a small city trying to get a civic charter and have it so unstable that it could just be whisked away by an order in council or a ministerial order or an adjustment in regulations.

An Hon. Member: They wouldn't do that.

Ms Blakeman: Ha ha. Oh, one of my colleagues here is feeling kinder today than I am.

I think it's important that that section not be allowed to go by. I understand that the clause about the city charters is somewhat of a placeholder while they proceed with the actual negotiation on this. Okay. But I still think it's important that it come before the Assembly as an act.

The proposed charter would be published on a website. Yes, that's transparency, but, no, it's not transparency. To be debated in front of this House, where people can come and sit in the gallery and watch us do it or watch it live streaming: it's not the same thing.

The cleanup that happened around giving itself extra powers, it's in here in the amendment under section 14, "authorize the charter city to modify or replace, by bylaw, a provision of this Act or any other enactment, with respect to the charter city, to the extent set out in the charter," which was a fix that needed to happen, although

I'm sure that people I know in the city won't be happy for some of us having outed this one because the way it read, it actually did allow cities by bylaw to change anything in the MGA. No. So that has been clarified with additional language, specifically adding in "to the extent set out in the charter," which is a good thing.

4:10

There was also that council has to hold a public hearing before second reading of a bylaw that would be enacted in that particular way. That's fine. Most of them have public hearings anyway. Certainly, the cities of Edmonton and Calgary operate that way. I'm assuming that a number of the smaller ones do as well, but if they don't, then it's giving consistency across the board, and that is a good thing.

Oh, the one other thing was around levies. I've been flipping through here, looking, and I haven't been able to find the section that was specifically, I think, correcting or attempting to correct a problem with levies being assessed against the primary developer. Then if it wasn't all of the assessment that had to happen under the current laws, the city wasn't able to go back and get the rest of the money because the legislation did not allow them to go back and say: "Oh, and there's more." It just said once, and that was it. I understand that that has been addressed in this act, but, to be perfectly honest, I haven't found it yet, and standing here looking for it while I'm talking to you, I doubt I'm going to find it that way either.

I will say thank you very much for the changes here. I still think we've got a ways to go. There are some other things I'm looking for in the additional amendments and updating to the Municipal Government Act. I think there are certainly some things that can be done around zoning permissions, not only who but what.

For example, where cities are trying to say, "No; we want a certain number of homes, you know, 5 per cent of homes, in this development to be handicapped accessible or wheelchair accessible," my understanding is that they don't have the ability to do that now or to say that this will be affordable housing. I think there are some zoning questions, not only sort of what is developed but who it's developed for and some of those other restrictions that have to be offered to municipalities or particularly the larger municipalities that are trying to have some control over how the developments happen.

I know in the city of Edmonton we have a great commitment to not expanding any further and to creating more density in all parts of our city and not continuing to push outward all the time, frankly, outward on very high-quality, arable land. It's just wrong to plunk houses and acreages on land that should be farmed because that's what that land was there for. We are trying to do that. It is a struggle for people, but the city's ability to make all of that happen is sometimes restricted by what is and what is not in the MGA.

I look forward to the additional discussions. I understand that's another act that's coming in about a year. Mr. Speaker, you hear a lot from people about – well, to be honest, I use a swear word . . . [interjections] I know; I'm not going to, so relax – blankety-blank wheat fields, as though that's all there is to Alberta. That's not all there is to Alberta. Alberta is an urban province, and I'm one of the few MLAs in here that actually talk about Alberta being an urban province. Two-thirds of our people live in higher population areas. That includes towns. That includes cities. That includes smaller areas, smaller towns that have a higher density of people, and that's as it should be, but we have an imbalance. We put a lot of time and energy into looking at what needs to happen in rural areas and not a commensurate amount of time and attention and love and care into what is needed to make our cities safe and vibrant and livable and all of those things.

I mean, we have one Municipal Government Act, and we have – I don't know – how many acts that deal with life in lesser populated areas of Alberta? A lot. Even just in front of us right now we've got an agricultural organization bill, and that's quite common, where we have bills that are dealing specifically with life in less-populated areas but only the one bill that deals with what's happening in populated areas.

So I think it's important that we remember that we are an urban province. I go into this election with an aggressively urban agenda, and that's not to say that my colleagues in here are not worthy. Of course, they are. They're going to represent their constituents as well as they can, but so am I, and I'm going to start pushing back more and more and more to make sure that urban Alberta gets their fair share and is able to participate in the life of the province to the degree that they should.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Liberal caucus is in favour of supporting this bill with no amendments, and off we go.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've spoken to this bill at several stages, so I'll keep my comments short. Again, you know, I am glad to see that this bill coming forward was done through a consensus model, that organizations like AUMA, AAMD and C, the mayors of Calgary and Edmonton are on board with these. I do find it fascinating, though, that the easy stuff is taken care of first and done first. Essentially, I think Albertans could read between the lines: take care of the easy stuff, or the pre-election goodies, as I like to think of it, now, and then deal with the contentious items, those that, quite honestly, Edmonton and Calgary specifically have been asking for for a long time now, the tools, the resources, and the ability to provide the services and programs that two-thirds of the population of this province rely on.

I do look forward to the discussion on what tools the province will give to the cities, but quite frankly the current model is not working. Our cities are taking on record levels of debt, infrastructure debt, unable to keep up with the pace of growth that our province is experiencing. You know, a large part of that, Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, is because property tax is a regressive form of tax, but it's also one of the only tools that cities have. Now, I know that Edmonton and Calgary have a few other tools at their disposal, but they are very few and far between. Quite frankly, the cities need new tools to be able to keep up, again, just with infrastructure demands and with the fast growth of our two largest cities.

The other thing that I highlighted last night, Mr. Speaker, which is important to reiterate, is the fact that many Albertans have to come into Edmonton or Calgary to find specialized services that they need, because their communities, whether they're bedroom communities to the two larger cities or if they live in other parts of the province – just because of population they need to come into Edmonton or Calgary to find services. The challenge with that: I mean, yes, it's great for the cities – you have more people coming in, spending money in their businesses, et cetera – but they're also using, you know, city streets, roads, sidewalks. There's the wear and tear issue that's going on, yet the city has no way to recoup some of the costs or dollars from those folks because they only pay property taxes in their home jurisdictions.

4:20

You know, Edmonton and Calgary are under a crunch. Like I said, they're facing record-high levels of debt. It is clearly

unsustainable. It's clearly not working and needs to be addressed. This is something that the two cities have been talking about for years.

Again, I'm happy to see a baby step forward in the fact that there is a placeholder for a charter in this bill. I had questioned last night, Mr. Speaker, the fact that it is referred to as a city charter and not a big-city charter, the province reluctant to acknowledge the very different roles that the two largest cities in our province play compared to other urban municipalities.

Now, I'm not saying that other urban municipalities shouldn't be given a more broad set of tools to use as well. I know that cities like Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Lethbridge, Red Deer are also growing at a very fast pace and are in need of new tools as well, but I think there is a difference between, say, the fifth-largest city in the province and the city of Calgary, you know, again, in their sheer size, in their growth, in their volume, in their use of city resources. I will be curious to see how these details are hammered out.

Again, I wish the government had something to bring forward at this time, which – they don't – is fine. We'll have to wait, but I will continue to be a voice, you know, lobbying for a fair system, one that does take into consideration the unique needs of different urban centres around the province.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting. The Alberta NDP does support this bill. I know we want to get it through fairly quickly – well, I guess we are; we're already in third reading – but I do, like I said, question the timing of this. It does look like pre-election goodies to me. I look forward to a very robust debate in the fall and next spring as far as when, you know, the next bill comes forward that has, I'm sure, more contentious items in it.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Are there other speakers?

Seeing none, I'll invite the Minister of Municipal Affairs to close debate.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll rise and move third reading. In doing so, I'll just make a couple of comments, if I could, and thank, first of all, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West for doing such an outstanding job carrying this bill – as a former minister he did a lot of work on this – and the staff that have worked as well. I also want to thank all the members in the House for the discussion and for the input.

I'd like to just make two comments if I could. To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, on the question with regard to what sections the levies are in: section 71. For your reference sections 67 to 69 are areas that you can find that in.

As well, to the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod – I wasn't in the Chamber; I just stepped out for a quick moment, but I heard him – with regard to taxation powers. Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear that we have always said that charters are not about taxation powers for cities. Furthermore, the Supreme Court of Canada has already ruled that taxation powers can only be dealt with via legislation and specifically that taxation powers cannot arise incidentally in delegated legislation such as regulations. In other words, if there ever was contemplation of additional tax powers for cities, those powers would have to be granted to the cities through legislation approved here in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and subject to the full rigours of this House. Therefore, the input that was given: we hear it, but it's already been decided before in the Supreme Court.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would move third reading of Bill 20.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 20 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 24

Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and speak to some of the comments and questions raised earlier about Bill 24, the Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act. If I sponsor another bill, I promise to say it three times in advance so that I can say it more easily than I have been able to today.

Some of the comments today. I think we got one question from the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills: why the change? Well, several things have changed, Mr. Chair. Probably the first one, the biggest one, and the most important one is that this government and this province are under new management. Through that we intend to reset our relationship, improve our relationship with our workers and those that represent them, and because of that we made it known that we intend to bring forward essential services legislation. The other thing that has changed – it was raised by the hon. member from the New Democratic Party in his earlier remarks – is that there was certainly a Supreme Court decision in Saskatchewan recently. When you add all of these things together, it's certainly time to make this change.

Government is now reviewing its approach to public-sector labour relations, and we plan to put into place essential services legislation. We want to move forward with a new co-operative approach to public-sector relations, and, Mr. Chair, we've already started with that better relationship. I've started meeting with union leaders from several of our employee groups in a respectful two-way dialogue, that we intend to continue in that manner, asking them what's important when we go ahead with our essential services legislation. I've made it clear to them when we have spoken that any meeting that we've had won't be the last one unless they want it to be. In other words, the door is open for more input, more consultation, more advice, more comments, and that's the way that we intend for it to be.

So repealing the Public Sector Services Continuation Act is a logical step in this process. Mr. Chair, we're interested in working collaboratively with public-sector employees, employers, and employees' representatives through the collective bargaining process and providing Albertans with the services they need when they need them and doing so in a way that is fair and thoughtful to taxpayers and also to the Albertans that do the work.

We have already begun reviewing the essential services models of legislation that are in place in other jurisdictions, looking for best practices, and we plan to table the new legislation that will follow in the not-too-distant future.

Mr. Chair, with that, I will listen, and I'm looking forward to comments from members of the House, hoping for their kind support at the end of it all.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Questions or comments from this side of the House?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on the bill. Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 24 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

4:30

Bill 14

Agricultural Societies Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: Hon. associate minister of agriculture, did you have some comments to add?

Mr. McDonald: No.

The Chair: Are there other questions or comments? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to be extremely brief on this. I'm fully in support of it. I think it's excellent advancement for policy in the province and for the rural areas.

Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: Speaking on behalf of my colleagues in the Liberal opposition caucus, I am in favour of this legislation. Speaking for myself, coming from a background of not-for-profit management, I was really pleased to see this because it is bringing in those agricultural societies, which have a very long and rich tradition in this province, and updating them in line with the Societies Act. I expect that this will help them in their governance and help them move ahead with some of the other advantages that were available to other groups but that they have not been able to take advantage of.

These are groups that do an enormous amount of work in rural areas; I mean, the curling rinks and the ag halls and in some cases, I think, even the exhibition grounds and the fairs. It's just a huge number of volunteers that are involved here. I think there were questions about liability, about governance, as I said, powers of the person, powers of the – no, I'm not going to get that word right. It'll come to me. It allows groups to borrow money, for example, or to purchase land.

I'm just really glad to see this, and I thank the minister for bringing it forward. Of course, we are in committee, but I will notify you that the Liberal caucus has no amendments to this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll make my comments brief. I just want to start by reiterating that we do recognize the importance, the significance that agricultural societies have and especially their contributions to our communities throughout the province. I also want to extend an appreciation to the minister's staff, who responded to me this morning as far as questions I had last night in second reading. Getting a response back was greatly appreciated, and my questions are answered. Therefore, I will reiterate that I'll be supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other questions, comments, or amendments?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question.

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 14 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? So ordered.

Bill 19 Education Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Mr. Dirks: Thank you to all members who have offered their thoughts on this particular bill. I do want to respond to some of the comments that we received yesterday, and I thank you, all, for them.

As you know, the Education Amendment Act, 2015, does not in any way change the intent or overall policy objectives of the act. Let me just briefly comment on four issues that were raised. One was the reference to assessment language. One of the amendments in Bill 19 changes all references to “evaluation,” to “test,” and to “examination” throughout the Education Act to “assessment.” A concern was raised that this substitution reflects a change in approach. I can assure you that this is not the case. This amendment is simply to ensure consistency in terminology across policy and legislation.

Regarding the issue of residency, the topic of residency as defined in the Education Act was also raised. Again, I would like to restate that the purpose of Bill 19 is to provide increased clarity and accuracy to ensure alignment with other legislation. The policy surrounding student residency has been solidified in the Education Act, and the amendments in Bill 19 only serve to provide additional clarity and accuracy to the act. In this case, the amendment ensures that the term “resident” indicates that a student only has to reside in Alberta during the school year, and it is not mistaken for the residency requirements for voting or running in an election.

The questions raised in the debate regarding student residency were not relevant to the Bill 19 amendments but to the Education Act policy itself. That being said, I’ll take a moment to address concerns in this area. Under the Education Act student residency, not the parents’ residency, will be used to determine which school jurisdiction is responsible for providing educational programming to a student. This student-centred approach is one of the main pillars of the Education Act and evident throughout the legislation.

Yesterday the member raised concerns regarding this policy and the funding impacts it may have. From the government perspective, students will be supported regardless. In some cases funding may be directed to a different school board than under previous legislation. While this could have a nominal impact on school boards, I along with others at the ministry will work with our stakeholders to address any concerns that may arise from this change. In the end, however, we believe that this approach, which is consistent with other Canadian provinces, is best for the students.

Regarding trustee disqualification, the question was also raised about section 87(1)(c) of the act, which relates to the disqualification of a trustee. Again, as the member who mentioned this acknowledged, this does fall outside the scope of the purpose of this

discussion. No amendments proposed in Bill 19 impact this section of the act. However, I would like to provide assurance that there will be robust processes in place to ensure the integrity of the education system. We will empower boards to have appropriate processes in place to deal with a wide range of situations, including serious matters such as trustee disqualification or potential trustee disqualification. But, again, that issue does not have bearing on the Education Amendment Act.

Finally, with regard to Northland the topic of the Northland school division was raised. This situation is independent from any debate regarding Bill 19. That being said, providing all Alberta students with a quality education is of the utmost importance to me and to the ministry. We are working with Northland school division and local communities on improving student learning and ensuring effective governance of schools in that particular region. I thank the member in the Assembly for her good support.

I would once again like to thank all members who have offered their thoughts on and support for Bill 19, the Education Amendment Act, 2015. This bill will ensure that the Education Act, upon proclamation, will be effective in serving the long-term needs of Alberta students, and therefore I hope all members will join me in supporting this important piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I’m glad I did get an opportunity to speak briefly to this today while we’re in Committee of the Whole. There are a couple of things. Gee, I didn’t read the *Hansard* from last night, so I hope I don’t duplicate what other people have said, but I’ll tell you that one of the issues that I’m concerned about the minister just touched upon. I’m sure he and I have been so involved in the debate around GSAs. Both of us are aware of very uncomfortable situations with boards of trustees, where one or two members might be seen as the outliers or the other side of the issue or however we want to cast that.

I think it would be very unfortunate if we did not take care to put strong limitations but also appeal processes in place to ensure that a board of trustees cannot eject or disqualify, you know, one or two trustees because basically there’s a differing of ideologies or the way people approach things or how aggressive one side is over the other side in taking on new ideas or old ideas or whatever. I mean, it’s not hard to see. We can even see it here. You do end up with people kind of grouping up with like-minded people, and it can make it really hard for people that are sitting outside of that kind of in-crowd.

4:40

I feel really strongly that it’s the voter who is the boss, and if the voters elected that trustee or that MLA to be in place, it’s really not for anyone else to be removing that person. Now, I understand that there are extraordinary grounds, but they should be extraordinary to anyone looking at the situation. So we’re talking about severe mental illness, where, you know, someone doesn’t have control of their finances and of their daily living and that sort of thing. Anybody would recognize that. The test needs to be very high.

It can be tough in this province when every board, every agency, even outside boards and agencies have the majority of people who are appointed to it or that are active with it as members of an hon. colleague opposite’s family. It can be hard to raise issues and stick to your guns about things. I would know this. I think we need to be really, really careful here. I have always been deeply shocked and

distressed when I have seen members of cabinet on the government side dismiss a school board or dismiss or appoint an administrator on a town council.

You know, I believe that Albertans are quintessentially sensible, well-meaning, fair, and progressive people, and I really don't like going over their heads to say: no, no, no, we're going to get rid of that town council. I know it happens. I've seen examples of where things just got so out of control and it was so divisive that, literally, a town council couldn't serve their people. I know it happens. We put things in legislation to address those extraordinary circumstances, but we cannot make it so easy that those clauses can be invoked and proceeded with without a great deal of caution, and I would also say this for trustees.

I think we have to use a reasonable-person approach here. We have to be careful, one, that the minister doesn't have the power to wipe out a board of trustees – I just think that's wrong – and, two, that we don't set up a situation where the inside group can boot the outside group. That happens a lot. You know, you end up with those 6 to 7 votes – and it always comes out that way – or 9 to 3 or something like that. Gee, wouldn't it be convenient if they could just get rid of those three people? We have to be very, very on guard about that. So that was one rebuttal I wanted to give the minister.

Special needs: the section on page 4, section 8, amending section 19(1), alternative programs. My concern here is always around funding for special-needs students in schools. Actually, I was door-knocking on Sunday and had a special-needs teacher say to me: "So, Laurie, what are you going to do? What do you think is important? What would you recommend for the school system?" You know, I had some opinions, as I always do. But, really, what I was reminded of was how we fund mild and moderate special-needs students in our system. We tend to fund only the severe special-needs kids but not the mild and moderate. What happens is, as we are doing with the health care system – that's the other place that you see this modelled – that we tend not to be able to or not want to treat people in the beginning stages of something, so we tend to say, "Well, that's okay. You go home for the night. We'll send you home from ER," and then they get sicker, and they come back again at the point where they're really sick. Then they get into the hospital.

Ditto for the kids with special needs. They're not doing well. They're struggling. There are behavioural problems, blah, blah. Well, that's mild and moderate, but that can move into high special needs, and that's when they get the funding. So where's the incentive to try to work with kids to help them integrate better, to make sure that the supports are in the classroom so that teachers can teach and not be dealing with managing inclusion kids in their class, who sometimes can be hostage takers? That's a really dramatic term to use, and I know that. I don't mean to offend the parents, but that can be what happens.

I just want to make sure here – no; I can't make sure. I've been talking about this for 18 years. But, really, if we believe in education – and we as a public do. We all support education. We all pay taxes to education, even people that don't have children, even people that don't have kids anymore or yet. We all support public education because we understand that it's the key to the next generation. If we're going to do that and we want inclusive schools, we have to give the supports for that, and that support has been eroding quite a bit, so I just want to underline the importance of that.

I think what was being done here was that some schools, in order to provide these services, were in fact charging extra, specialized schools, alternative programs. It uses a particular teaching philosophy but is not religious education – making sure that they couldn't be charging extra for that, which is absolutely appropriate.

The other thing that I wanted to raise was education services agreements for First Nations students, page 6, section 13: "or a person authorized by the council of a band" after "Indian Act (Canada)." This is about Northland. The minister did talk about it a bit. I also pulled the Auditor General's special report on Northland school division. You know, clearly, the AG was very frustrated with the inability to enforce attendance. I wonder if this isn't somewhat of a cultural issue that is just not being addressed from a holistic point of view. I know that when my mother was teaching in the Northwest Territories, they really worked hard to make it a fun and cool and safe place to be to get those kids in school and keep them engaged. Mostly what this AG report is going over is that they couldn't even keep adequate attendance records, so there was no ability to enforce truancy. Now there's an old-fashioned word.

An Hon. Member: Very.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah.

I'm not sure that that's really at the bottom of what the problem is here. I know that this has been an ongoing heartache for people in education as they try to address this and to provide not just adequate but excellent education to kids that are living in the north and kids that are living in remote areas. Frankly, it's an issue that I have not seen any real resolution to. I understand that this was to make sure that the education service agreement standards applied to agreements between Alberta school boards and tribal councils or educational authorities authorized by council. The Alberta Regulations Act does not apply to an order made by the minister pertaining to the education service agreement, so I hope that isn't what the minister was talking about earlier. I was trying to grab my file and was not giving him undivided attention, so if he hasn't spoken about that, I'm wondering if he can explain why and what's behind that. If he did explain it already, I will just read it in *Hansard*, which I'm happy to do.

4:50

The rest of this. The dissolution of the school by the minister, appearing on page 11 under section 22, amending section 117, appears to have only two possibilities, which are, "The Minister may by order declare that any school division is dissolved," and on so doing, the board is dissolved and ceases to have any rights, powers, or privileges, and they can "establish a new school division in accordance with section 112." What's going on here? A lot of what I've seen in here is addressing particular schools and particular situations. In some cases I could sort of go through and call it the memorial, insert name of school here, amending section. I'm wondering what's anticipated by that particular section.

One last sticky note here. Why was the minister taken out of the petition section? Is that just a modernization? Petitions are a very long-held tradition to allow the people, the plain old people, to come forward and present a request to whoever is in power by doing that. I think that that very simple and very direct relationship or opportunity needs to be honoured, so I'm wondering why the minister has been removed from that. Now it just says: "when this Act provides for the doing of anything by petition or an elector wishes to present a petition to a board or the Minister." Now it would just be to a board. The petition must be in accordance with the regulations, so I'm wondering why the minister got cut out of that.

Right. Thank you very much. I appreciate getting responses to those questions, but other than that the Liberal caucus is in favour of this, and there would be no – let me double-check that – amendments.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: I'm just taking my time here because I'm not sure if the Minister of Education is choosing to respond to some of the Member for Edmonton-Centre's questions. Some of the member's concerns: I share those concerns, raised them yesterday evening, so there are some of them that are brought up.

I have a couple of specific things that I want to bring in. First of all, I do want to thank the Minister of Education for responding to my questions. I do think it's important, and I'm happy that he did. I wished all the time that for questions the opposition presented, questions around bills, the answers would be provided. Often they're not, so when they are, it is noted and appreciated.

I do have a couple of amendments that I plan to bring forward at this time. I'm just going to talk for a minute before I actually table the amendment if that's okay with you, Mr. Chair.

The first one is actually dealing with an issue that is occurring in Northland school division. However, you'll see shortly that the amendment deals with the issue of: when a board is dissolved by the minister and a trustee is appointed, I think it's really important that the length of time that a trustee can serve, an appointed trustee, before a board is re-elected needs to be limited and legislated. Right now the situation up in Northland school division is that the board was dissolved five years ago, so there has been a single appointed trustee serving for five years. Now, I'm not trying to point fingers at the trustee. I know that Northland school division is still struggling with school attendance, especially with chronic absenteeism, as I highlighted last night.

It is disappointing that part of the reason the minister at the time dissolved the board five years ago was because the Ministry of Education felt that the board wasn't doing as good of a job, in their opinion, as they could, encouraging attendance and improving attendance and completion rates and success in school. Now, I'm not about to stand here and either pass judgment on whether that was good or bad or otherwise, but the unfortunate part is that five years later, after a trustee has been appointed, we're still facing challenges, especially chronic absenteeism, up in Northland school division, so I think this needs to be addressed.

I'm sure there are members of the House that will have heard from residents up in Northland who are very vocal about getting local authority back, getting their autonomy back and their right to elect a board. That's something that I have asked ministers in Public Accounts in the past as far as when this will come to pass. When will the people who live in Northland school division be able to elect their board?

With that, Mr. Chair, I will give the requisite number of copies, the original is on the . . .

The Chair: We'll just pause for a moment, hon. member. You'll distribute those and send the original to the table, please.

Hon. members, this will be amendment A1, and you may speak to it, hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll read this amendment into *Hansard*. I move that Bill 19, Education Amendment Act, 2015, be amended by striking out section 15 and substituting the following:

Section 72(1) is amended

(a) by adding "for a maximum term of one year" after "official trustee";

(b) in clause (a) by striking out "section 71" and substituting "section 70."

What this essentially does is what I was speaking about, Mr. Chair. This isn't just about the situation up in Northland school division although that is our clearest . . . [interjections] Thank you.

That is our clearest example of when a trustee has been placed in lieu of an elected board. So the purpose of this amendment isn't just to address the issue in Northland school division; the purpose of this amendment is for the future to ensure that . . .

The Chair: Hon. members, can we keep the side conversations down, please? Thank you.

Proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you. The purpose of this is so that in the future if a board is dissolved and an official trustee is appointed, we limit the amount of time that the trustee can serve. Part of it, Mr. Chair, again, is my concern that at the moment, with the legislation as it stands, there is no limit to how long the official trustee can serve. The concern is that it's been five years; the people of Northland school division are wanting their powers to re-elect or to elect a board of representatives as opposed to one that's been appointed. This amendment ensures that they can elect a trustee and that there is a time limit placed on it. I felt, Mr. Chair, that it was reasonable to put a one-year maximum limit, which should be sufficient time for a school division to sort out the challenges that they face.

5:00

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll take my seat, but I will urge members of the Assembly to support this amendment.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Speaking to the amendment, the hon. minister.

Mr. Dirks: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the concern of the member opposite. I do think, however, that this would be an imprudent amendment to make. In the Northland situation we are moving forward with a process that will eventually result in an elected board of trustees, and to simply say that you're restricted to one year or any terms as such would likely hobble the ministry and may not be, in fact, the best decision at a particular point in time for a board that has an official trustee.

So I will not be supporting this particular amendment and would urge members to likewise not support the amendment.

The Chair: Thank you.

Other speakers to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It does beg the question, and while I have the minister here, I would love for him to comment. When will, then, Northland school division be able to elect a board of trustees and move past the appointed official trustee? If the minister could comment, it would be greatly appreciated.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dirks: We are in the process of consultation at present, which has just started, as some of the members know, that will lead, first, to a preamble for a new act that will govern that particular division that needs to come into being. Once that act has been passed by this Assembly, then the process of election can begin. I cannot give you a predicted time frame as to the conclusion of that. We'll have to see where the consultation on the preamble to that act goes, and then we'll be in a position to have some indication as to how expeditiously thereafter we might be able to bring draft legislation to this House. I wish I could provide more definition, more clarity for the member, but it will be a process of consultation that we have to go through first. We are committed to move in that particular direction.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the minister for his response. A couple of questions that the minister may or may not be able to address at this time, again, dealing with this amendment. I am curious, as are many Albertans who live in Northland school division and, truthfully, folks who live throughout the province, as to why this process has taken so long. We've had five years of an official trustee who's appointed versus an elected board. Again, this is where this amendment is coming from, to ensure that in future we're not dragging our feet as far as trying to resolve issues.

The second question is more of a point. You know, the board was dissolved in part because of how the ministry felt that students were falling between the cracks, that there were some major issues and areas of concern going on in Northland school division. My concern today is that the most recent Auditor General's report came out and indicates that, you know, again, chronic absenteeism is still extremely high in Northland school division. In fact, one-third of students are experiencing chronic absenteeism.

Now, obviously, we know and the Auditor General noted that students can't learn if they're not present. If they're absent, they're not going to be learning the material that they need to and developing the skills that students need to develop in order to continue along their educational pathway and be successful. The dissolution of the board and the appointment of the trustee was supposed to curtail some of this absenteeism and, essentially, be a solution or part of a solution, and the reality is that it hasn't. In fact, the absenteeism, again, is about 900 students out of 2,700 who are chronically absent.

Now, I would recommend to the government to be looking into reasons for absenteeism, which the Auditor General couldn't through his report identify, but I'm sure it would be a combination of things, from distance in transportation to potentially looking at the socioeconomic situation of families, looking at value of education, looking at, again, how they're connecting, what practices are being employed.

Now, I don't doubt for a minute, Mr. Chair, that the individuals, the teachers, the staff at these schools aren't trying their hardest because I know that they wouldn't be there if they didn't care about the education and the future of their pupils, but clearly we have a problem here. Again, I don't think having an appointed trustee continue on has necessarily had the outcome that the ministry, I think, had hoped. Questions are: why has it taken so long? I appreciate that the minister has only been the Minister of Education for several months and not five years ago, but again we do have the same government in power, that's been there when the elected board of trustees was removed and this one was appointed.

The purpose of this amendment, again, is to move forward in a timely fashion. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Are there others?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on amendment A1.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Back to the bill. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I shall attempt to amend this bill again. You know what? I'll send these up to the table before I begin.

The Chair: Please do.

This will be amendment A2, hon. members.

Please proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This amendment, I'll read it into *Hansard* here. I move that Bill 19, Education Amendment Act, 2015, be amended by striking out section 3 and substituting the following:

3 Section 4(1) is amended by striking out "in which the student resides" and substituting "in which the student's parent resides."

The purpose of this, quite frankly – and I spoke to it last night, Mr. Chair – is the concern with the changes to the residency requirements and the impact that that will have on school boards and school boards' abilities to provide special programs. The example that I gave last night, if there is – okay. Let me back up before I get to the example. When we switch from a parent to a student residency requirement, it's going to be a lot more difficult for boards to ascertain, to prove where a student lives. Parents have bills, they have records that are much easier to assess where the parent lives. A student could say that, well, they're staying with a friend who happens to live in that catchment area. So the concern of some of the school boards is that they're going to be over capacity because, quite frankly, a student could enrol and claim that they're in a catchment area, and now the school will go over capacity. That's the first concern.

5:10

The second concern. The example that I gave last night I think is a very prudent example. For example, the Alberta School for the Deaf: that school costs a significant amount of money to run and to operate, obviously, more so than a standard school, but that programming is very important, and we want to ensure that all students have access to high-quality education. But that school costs Edmonton public school board a lot more to operate than it does another school.

The challenge with the change to the residency requirement. If a student comes from another jurisdiction – let's say they come from Fort McMurray, where the parents live. The student comes to the Alberta School for the Deaf. Edmonton public would go to Fort McMurray or Wood Buffalo public school division and ask them to share the cost of the student going to the Alberta School for the Deaf because the funding that the government currently gives school boards is not adequate for the cost of specialized programming like the Alberta School for the Deaf. So EPSB would recoup the other half of the cost. They would share the cost with Wood Buffalo public school division.

If we moved the residency requirement to where the student dictates, and the student from Wood Buffalo, you know, moves to Edmonton, their residency is Edmonton, EPSB does not have any way to recoup some of the costs of operating that school. The concern is that if this happens, in numerous examples, EPSB will simply not be able to afford to run a specialized school like this because they're not even recouping their cost. What that means is that they're drawing money from other schools. They're using money to pay to ensure that those specialized programs continue to run.

You know, as much as I appreciate the minister's intentions by saying that the government will ensure that schools get the funding, I can tell the minister right now that specialized schools do not receive the dollars that they need to operate. The school boards that operate them are using money that should be going to other schools, to other programs in order to pay for them because there simply is not enough money in their budget.

My concern is that – and Alberta School for the Deaf is just one example of a specialized program. They do exist throughout the province. But they're very, very important, Mr. Chair. Part of the reason they're extremely important is because, again, we want to ensure that every student in Alberta, regardless of ability or disability, has the opportunity to receive the highest quality of

education. In order to do that, we need to provide and boards need to provide specialized services. But those specialized services cost money. At the moment this government is not investing enough money into education.

You know, we have examples of schools running massive infrastructure deficits. Interestingly, in Public Accounts this morning the Minister of Infrastructure was quite excited to talk about how the government has decided to put \$100 million toward the infrastructure deficit. However, when you look at the current infrastructure deficit, between Edmonton public and CBE, Calgary board of education, it's about a 1 and a quarter billion dollar infrastructure deficit. CBE is getting close to a billion dollar infrastructure deficit in their schools. Edmonton public is at about \$250 million. So when you hear of an injection of \$100 million versus a shortfall of \$1.25 billion, yeah, we're still significantly short. That's only two school boards in the province. Granted, the two largest boards in the province; however, only two out of a significant number.

This amendment, the intention of switching back to the parent residence, is because of the concerns that I have as far as ensuring that boards will get adequate dollars to operate and offer these specialized programs. For that reason, Mr. Chair, I will encourage members of the Assembly to support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Other speakers to the amendment?

Mr. Dirks: I appreciate the member's concern. However, Mr. Chair, Bill 19, as presently stated, is a student-centred approach to the main pillars of the Education Act. It supports that. From the government perspective I did indicate earlier in my comments today that students will be supported regardless, and that's what we want to see for all students. This particular approach on student residency is consistent with other Canadian provinces, so I do not believe that the amendment would be an improvement, and I would urge members not to support it.

The Chair: Other speakers to the amendment?

Ms Blakeman: I was listening carefully to both parties, hoping that there would be clarity. It's interesting because – I think it was actually called the Alberta School for the Deaf at one point – it used to be the only school that was directly under the minister's control. It was the minister's school, and I wonder now if that wasn't partly because of the specific requirements of that school for specialized funding, let's call it.

I am concerned because I represent a downtown riding. I would like to hear from the minister something a bit more specific about how the students would be supported in a school like the School for the Deaf so that we're reassured that the school itself is not pulling finances off the school board, which is the point that my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview was trying to make and that dovetails with one of the issues that I was raising to the minister earlier, about the funding for special needs.

So, one, I am wondering if either one of you can tell me how many of these schools there are in the province and, two, if the minister could give me the Coles Notes on how these students get – oh, my God. You're not talking about voucher funding, are you, Minister? Okay. That was a good face. Well, sorry. It just occurred to me that you were talking about student-centred learning, and then as I'm trying to work my way through that, I'm thinking: "Oh, yes. Okay. So funding is following the student." Whoa. That's code for a voucher system, where. . .

Ms DeLong: It already does.

Ms Blakeman: Well, not quite in that way. Thank you for the participation. I'm always thrilled when I engage people, even if it's just to have them look at me and go: "Don't you know that already happens? What's wrong with you?"

To be fair, that's not my understanding of it. The voucher system that I'm talking about is the one where the parents are, you know, kind of given: this is the amount of money that you have, and you can send your kid anywhere you want, and the money will go with them. That's a slightly different voucher system than what we're talking about, is it not, Member for Calgary-Bow? Gotcha. So I'm sure that you'll be helpful in correcting me on that one because that is my bottom-line concern on this, that we're not changing the system from the way that we understand it to something like that dreaded voucher system, which I hope you have a different definition for.

But I am also interested in how many times this happens because I think that sometimes we get too caught up in a particular situation that we're sympathetic to, and then we end up doing a monster change for not very many people, and that's not always appropriate. So I'm hoping that I will get some answers from people about this particular situation. If I could just get some idea of how the minister thinks the funding would not be a problem in this particular instance.

Thank you.

5:20

The Chair: Other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was hoping that the minister was going to jump up because the Member for Edmonton-Centre took the words right out of my mouth as far as how specifically and precisely – if this amendment does not go through and if we leave the wording the way it is, where it's up to a student where the student resides, how do we ensure that school boards do in fact get the dollars they need? I can tell the minister right now that the programming cost to run the Alberta School for the Deaf is more than what they receive per student and that it is the school board that is making that decision because it is a priority to offer that programming. The point is that they are taking operational dollars from other schools, from elsewhere in order to operate the school.

I do believe that these specialized programs are necessary. We should be delivering them and offering them to students throughout the province, absolutely, but they definitely need to be funded and adequately funded. I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that they are not. I can tell you that that's not just coming from school boards. I speak to teachers around the province regularly and can tell you that there is a shortfall of funding. We've got class sizes continually going up. Classroom complexity is constantly growing. We're dealing with, again, I mean, students of varying needs in a classroom. You know, quite frankly, if we want to ensure that students have the best possible education, we need to fund it.

I do hope that if the minister does not have a response at this time, he would in all seriousness provide a response, you know, not just an assurance that funding will be in place for specialized programming but details on how much funding and how he can ensure that that funding will go to the school boards and go to those specialized programs. Again, a simple solution to this is for funding to revert to going to the residence of the parent as opposed to the student.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Other speakers?

Mr. Dirks: In fact, Mr. Chair, it's not a simple solution. In fact, it greatly complexifies things to do exactly what the member opposite is suggesting. Whether or not there is adequate funding provided for unique, one-off school situations such as the members have been referring to is a matter of debate and discussion and analysis and so on. In fact, we really do want an Education Act which is student-centred. Funding follows students. Where the student lives is where the funding should go, and that particular board will then be responsible. It's not some other board in some far-off locale in the province, geographically speaking, that is now going to be somehow responsible for funding. I do think that we have calibrated the language of the act appropriately and, as I indicated, would not be supporting this and would urge all members to follow suit.

The Chair: Thank you.

Other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Last comments. This is one example that I've provided; this is not a one-off. There are specialized programs that only exist in certain centres, that do not exist in all schools throughout the province because of a capacity and an ability to provide specialized programming or specialists in certain schools.

You know, I appreciate and I accept the minister's comments as far as: it's not necessarily a simple solution. But my concern is that with the way this bill is currently worded, boards are going to have to take more and more money out of other areas in order to continue to operate and fund specialized programming. That just puts even more of a burden onto a system that has already been running very, very thin and doesn't have enough dollars for all of the programs that they'd like to offer and to get the ratios down, as far as student to teacher.

Thank you.

Mr. Dirks: I appreciate the issue that the member opposite is raising. I just think that it is an inappropriate solution to ameliorate the matter that you believe is a real matter. I think that it would be the wrong way to ameliorate that particular kind of unique, one-off or two-off or three-off problem, however many there may be. Completely redefining student residency would not be the best way. In fact, it likely would be a very imprudent way to seek to ameliorate that particular issue, so I would just encourage the member to come at it in some different way, perhaps when, you know, funding estimates are being considered or during question period, to raise it as an issue that could be considered at that time. I don't think that it's really solving a problem. It perhaps is creating more of a problem at the end of the day, and I offer that respectfully to the member opposite.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there others speaking to amendment A2?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Back to the main bill. Are there other questions or comments on the main bill?

Shall the question be called?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 19 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? So ordered.

Bill 21

Safety Codes Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This act was first passed . . .

An Hon. Member: Agreed.

Mr. Casey: Agreed? Good idea.

This act was first passed in 1994. It's been 20 years. Very few amendments have been made to this act since. This is a great opportunity to update the act, to modernize the act, and to make some really valuable changes that are needed in the industry today, so I'd encourage everyone to support Bill 21.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there questions, comments? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I do thank the member for bringing this forward. I appreciate what this bill is intending to do as far as its goal, but I do have some concerns. To start, the idea of improving the safety standards for things covered in the act like elevators, gas systems, electrical systems, et cetera, is a good thing, and as long as we're ensuring that standards are moving forward and making everyone safer rather than moving away from regulation, it's a positive thing.

The bill does seek to automatically align the safety standards used by the province with some of the most respected national and international standards or standard-setting organizations such as the Canadian Standards Association or the National Research Council, which I am quite happy to see. But there are a couple of concerns with the automatic alignment of standards as it's laid out in the bill.

First, there are significant loopholes under which the Minister of Municipal Affairs can almost unilaterally halt the application of some standards by delaying their use beyond a few years. If the standards have been signed off on by panels of experts, then why would we want to delay their placement into the standards of our province any longer than we need to? By placing these types of decisions around the acceleration or delay of the standards in the hands of cabinet, I fear that the real concerns that members of this Assembly might have with regard to the immediacy of the need for these standards or legitimate reasons they should be delayed in the Alberta context could actually be ignored.

5:30

The establishment of the safety codes authority, the SCA, in the second section of the bill is interesting. Now, while it's good that costs for actions the province takes in smaller communities without their own designated safety codes authorities will be offset by the greater access to fees, I mean, there is a possibility of an extra level of authority that could hamper the accountability of the system just as we have seen in our health system through the imposition of AHS. However, I do appreciate that in some of the smaller municipalities, this, I believe, is intended to assist them.

Now, it also appears to me that one of SCA's main roles is to ensure that private permitting agencies get paid. I'd like some clarification if possible on the exact integration of the public and private spheres that are going into this bill, into the legislation.

At the end of the day, Mr. Chair, it does seem like a decent development, but again I'm just curious why there's a need for an additional body when these are tasks that the province has been assigned to take care of since 1993. Again, if there is a cost savings, I would like to be aware of it or, again, look at the reasoning behind it.

As for the administrative penalties being added to the list of tools at the disposal of those tasked with enforcing safety standards, just a few questions and a little bit of a concern here that the administrative penalties, which can be rescinded or reduced by officials, could be used in situations where institutions either put people in grave danger or whose negligence actually caused harm to individuals. So while these may be useful in some instances as a tool to increase general compliance, I'm wondering if these tools might be used to reduce the generally applied maximum penalty for contraventions of safety codes. If that's the case, then clearly there is a concern there. I'd like to know more about how this is going to be applied moving forward, and I want to ensure that, obviously, those Albertans and those people who put their lives and communities at risk are properly held to account for their failure to properly recognize standards and to follow them.

The fourth and main thrust of this bill, which allows municipalities to make their own bylaws on code issues, I think, again, is a positive step. I mentioned that last night. Municipalities should have the power to take steps to manage things, like private sewage systems, that could pose risks to their communities. I like to see authority placed back into the hands of people at the local level, who are closest to it.

With that, I hope it is possible to get some answers to my questions. In general I do appreciate the intent and spirit of this bill and what it is going to accomplish, but I've tried to highlight a few of my questions and concerns.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Questions or comments from others? Maybe we'll get the Member for Banff-Cochrane to respond, and then I'll come back to you, hon. member.

Mr. Casey: Just very quickly on the private permitting with the permit fee, what has happened previously is that the minister was responsible for administering the Safety Codes Act in unaccredited municipalities. They would contract with an agency to provide that service, so an accredited agency. That accredited agency would then hire safety codes officers and so on to administer at the street level. Unfortunately, what has happened in the past is that agency that is contracted: the only real authority that the minister has had to deal with that agency for compliance has been the contract. When there have been issues with those people, sometimes they were getting the money, either going out of business or leaving, and then the person actually on the ground doing the work was not getting paid.

The way this will work now with the safety codes administrative authority is that the fees will in fact be paid to that authority, and when the work is completed, that authority then will directly pay back to the safety codes officer. So, in fact, it really does enhance the whole process. It also enables one body to be way more accountable. That body will be able to do the auditing there, so the safety overall will be greatly enhanced in all unaccredited municipalities.

As far as the automatic alignment of the codes goes, you really do need a mechanism because currently once those codes are approved, we will then adopt them automatically, but there is a one-year time frame to allow everyone to adapt to that code. In

certain circumstances there are portions of that code that need more work and a longer, detailed discussion, and that allows the minister to postpone some of the portions of the code. It isn't that the minister will step in and do away with parts of the code or interfere with the technical side of this, but what it does is that it allows us to adopt the code after one year but to make certain exceptions to it if there are areas that need further work.

As far as the administrative penalties go, the administrative penalties are really to be used in a case where there are ongoing concerns with a company or a contractor. Currently we only have the courts to deal with, so we issue an order and then we have to go to prosecution with that. The administrative penalty is meant to be high enough that, in fact, you encourage people to comply, right? It's really more immediate. The easiest thing to think about is a fire code violation, where you have an establishment that exceeds their occupancy load night after night after night. They accumulate a whole list of orders and sort of notifications from the safety codes fire officers, but in fact there's very little immediate action that is taken. This allows that administrative penalty to take effect, and every day that they are out of compliance, they could be issued a \$10,000 fine, up to a maximum of \$100,000.

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, and I do thank the member for clarifying. Just a couple of quick questions. I do appreciate the explanation of this system, of actually making it simpler and making companies more accountable to a body. That does make sense to me.

With the example that you gave as far as a situation where the minister may either accelerate or slow down the application of some standards, I appreciate that's the intention. It's just that I get nervous when we through legislation continue to give the minister more authority and the ability to make some unilateral decisions again. I know the current Minister of Municipal Affairs would never think to act outside of the best interests of Albertans. But future ministers: who knows? So, you know, it's making sure that legislation isn't overly restrictive, but at the same time it doesn't give carte blanche to the front bench or to the minister.

Then my last question I think you answered, but my concern, again, is the administrative penalties. Could they or would they supersede the existing maximum penalties for contraventions of safety codes, and will those two align? Again, I don't want to see – and I appreciate with an administrative penalty that the intention is to be a deterrent, but if that levy or fee or penalty is far less than the maximum penalty for contraventions of safety codes, including if it is outside of just a monetary punishment, I mean, for breaching or wilful negligence of safety codes, I wouldn't want to see that company only being given a tiny administrative fee. So I'm not sure if one supersedes the other or if they're going to be in line with that. If the minister could comment, that would be greatly appreciated.

5:40

Mrs. McQueen: I think I can help out with that piece. You can either do an administrative penalty or prosecute. You can't do both. I hope that helps. You can't do both, and it in no way affects the maximum penalty for administrative penalties, so clarity for you on that.

The administrative penalty is only issued by the minister's appointee. Prosecutions can be carried out by a local authority. So just to put some clarity around that for you, okay? Perfect.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, boy. This is one of these acts that is always really hard to describe to constituents when they phone in and they have concerns or questions, because it all tends to get sort of muddled up: safety codes, fire codes, who's the inspector, who do

they report to, who gets in trouble with whom? So any clarity on this is appreciated.

To my reading of this, there are four sections, four points that this bill is attempting to address: the timely adoption of safety codes, the administrative penalties, bylaws, and the administration of it, which is what they were talking about before. I just want to talk about the last two, which are the administrative penalties, which I think is a very good idea – thank you very much – because I know that there have been problems in that area, where it's too little or too much. As a result, sort of nothing ever really works because in order to levy the big penalty, there's so much of a test. There's such a high threshold that you have to meet in order to make sure that you've been fair in putting that forward, because it's like a court case, that it doesn't happen very often and people – let me be careful here – and companies appear to get away with stuff, which really lowers consumers' faith in the system. Yet this is a system that is set up to make sure that they should have faith in something.

I think the administrative penalties are great because they are a kind of middle ground and they can be done for things like repeated noncompliance, that the sponsor was talking about, and that kind of middle ground of persistent and annoying: not a huge thing, not a small thing, something in the middle. So I'm pleased to see that.

I can't say that I'm thrilled to know about private sewage disposal systems being out there in the world, because that's a little bit of a scary thing. So I'm just as happy to see that there are some controls being put in place to allow municipalities to control these. I guess we shouldn't be surprised because, you know, we used to have government-owned – you know, I really believe in publicly owned utilities and service deliveries, garbage collection and things, but the rest of the world doesn't agree with me there. It shouldn't be a surprise. We've got private garbage collection and recycle collection and, in some cases, water delivery, so I guess we shouldn't have been surprised that there was private sewage. But that is an area that does have a public health component to it, and I think it is very appropriate that the municipalities would get control over that. So thank you for that.

The second piece that I noticed was the addition of barrier-free standards. There it is at the bottom of page 2, adding in, which we didn't have before:

This Act is to be interpreted in a manner consistent with the principles of barrier-free design and access to allow persons with physical and sensory disabilities to more easily and safely access and use buildings, facilities and services to which this Act applies.

Please also make this housing. It does include housing, but I just think we need more housing. There's 5 per cent of the population that is in need of barrier-free-access housing, and we don't build anywhere near enough of that. We make them cope with something else, which is not right, in my opinion. It's very nice to have that put into the definition and expectations.

The fact is, you know, that this is hard to do, to get industry, organizations, municipalities, and safety code stakeholders – that's the name – to get them all to agree that this is what needs to happen. I'm surprised that this is as thick as it is for this bill. I can't imagine trying to mediate your way through that one. Given that those are the people that are really dealing with it and it's also both sides of it – I'm always looking to see whether there's a fair balance in who's been involved in creating, and if there's a good ability to kind of fight it out, I'm usually pretty good with the results.

I'm okay with this. The Liberal caucus is okay with it. There'll be no amendments.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers, other comments?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 21 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Bill 22

Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll just reiterate quickly what the intent of the bill is. It'll ban businesses from providing artificial tanning services to minors, prohibit advertising for artificial tanning directed towards minors, mandate health warnings in artificial tanning facilities, and prohibit unsupervised, self-service artificial tanning equipment in public places. We know that skin cancer is linked to artificial tanning, an especially high risk for our youth, whom this is primarily aimed at.

I just want to address a couple of questions that came earlier from Calgary-Fish Creek. It was with respect to enforcement: who would enforce? This, Mr. Chair, would be very similar to the enforcement practices and the designated enforcement officers that we do with tobacco and alcohol. The penalties are outlined in section 9(1).

The member's other question was with respect to whether the regulations or bill would apply to banning tanning for people that are under 25. Just to be clear, it bans tanning for youth under 18 years of age, but the requirement for the checking of ID is for individuals that appear to be under 25.

Hopefully, that clarifies their questions.

With that, I would just ask that all members of this Assembly please support this very important bill. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there other speakers, questions, comments?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 22 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would move that we rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

5:50

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure tonight to rise and report that the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 24, Bill 14, Bill 19, Bill 21, and Bill 22. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We can't have false information being perpetrated around here, but it is close to 6 p.m., and I would therefore move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:51 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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