



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, June 22, 2015

Day 5

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 21 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1 Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, June 22, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, yesterday, on June 21, Albertans all across our province celebrated the contributions made by the nearly one-quarter of a million First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people who reside in our wonderful province. I would ask the members to bow their heads and contemplate and give thanks for the rich culture, traditions, and gifts that our first people have contributed to our province. Amen.

Please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem as led by Mr. Robert Clark.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you some very special guests, and I would ask that they rise when I say their names, please. Peacha Atkinson is the mother of the late Nina Courtepatte, a beautiful girl who was lost to us in 2005. Bernice Martial is the grand chief of Treaty 6 and a strong advocate for missing and murdered indigenous women. Charles Weaselhead is the grand chief of Treaty 7 and chief of the Blood Tribe in southern Alberta. Chief Isaac Laboucan-Avirom is the deputy grand chief designate of Treaty 8 and is chief of the Woodland Cree First Nation. Audrey Poitras is the president of the Métis Nation of Alberta and a member of the Métis Women's Economic Security Council. Stan Delorme is the vice-president of the Metis Settlements General Council. Muriel Stanley Venne is the founder and president of the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women. Wilf Willier is from the Sucker Creek First Nation and is the founder of the Nechi institute and served for three terms as a councillor with the town of High Prairie. Peggy Richardson is an Inuit elder and a member of the First Nations Women's Economic Security Council. Tanya Kappo is the acting grand chief liaison with Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta and on the national collective as a helper with Walking with Our Sisters, a commemorative art installation to honour the lives of missing and murdered indigenous women. Allan Pard is a member of the Piikani First Nation and a ceremonial elder, and he is also a senior adviser with the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations. Koren Lightning-Earle is the co-chair of the First Nations Women's Economic Security Council and a lawyer from the Samson Cree Nation. Grace Auger is the co-chair of the First Nations Women's Economic Security Council and a lawyer with the Legal Aid Society of Alberta at Siksika Nation.

Mr. Speaker, some of these individuals and many of the other special guests with us in the public gallery today are residential school survivors. All are advocates for missing and murdered women and, quite simply, outstanding members of their communities. I would like to draw your attention to members from treaties 6, 7, and 8 as well as from the Métis Nation of Alberta Association, the Metis Settlements General Council, the First Nations Women's Economic Security Council, and the Métis Women's Economic Security Council. Also in the gallery are Marianne Ryan, deputy commissioner of the RCMP K Division, and Chief Rod Knecht of the Edmonton Police Service.

I am touched that everyone took the time to join us today, and I would ask all members of this Assembly that you give them the warm welcome of this House. [Standing ovation]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Tracy Bear. Could you please stand, Tracy. Tracy is a PhD candidate at the University of Alberta, where she also is an instructor in the Faculty of Native Studies. Tracy is a proud Cree woman from Saskatchewan and has been involved with Walking with Our Sisters since it made its debut here in Edmonton in 2013. She is now on the national collective as a helper. The national collective provides support and assistance to communities as they plan, prepare, install, undertake, and deinstall Walking with Our Sisters. I would ask all members to join me in extending to Tracy the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly Mr. Maitham Salman Nima and Dr. Azhar Ali, husband and wife, constituents of Edmonton-Ellerslie. I ask them to please stand. Mr. Nima arrived in Edmonton in 1998 as a political refugee from Iraq and was later joined by his wife in 2003. Mr. Nima is an accomplished writer and photographer whom I met through the Mill Woods Artists Collective when he was named the Edmonton public library's writer in exile. Dr. Azhar Ali has been practising veterinary medicine since 2010 in different clinics in Edmonton and surrounding area, including the Edmonton humane society. Ever since she was a child, Dr. Ali has been around pets. The passion has led her to set her dream in life to be a veterinarian.

This June both Mr. Nima and Dr. Ali opened their very own veterinary clinic, called the Summerside Veterinary Hospital, equipped with the latest technology to serve residents and their pets in the city of Edmonton and area. Their business is located in the newly opened Summerside Plaza on 66th Street and Ellerslie Road southwest. I ask all members to greet them with the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

1:40

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly my husband, Mr. Jeremy Johnston, and also Mr. Adam Comartin, son of Joe Comartin, MP for Windsor-Tecumseh. Both men have been of great support to me. Adam shares his insight gathered from learning the ropes in politics from his father. Jeremy helps keep my morale up day in and day out, sacrificing his own

sleep in solidarity with the lack of mine, both during the campaign and after. Jeremy is one of the many faces of low-wage earners in the restaurant industry, sacrificing time with friends, missing weddings and funerals, all with the hope of making ends meet at the end of the month. Adam moved to our great province to start a family and share in the profession of being a teacher with his wife, bettering the future of our province through our publicly funded education system. These are merely two stories amongst the great number that we have here in Alberta. If they could both stand to receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other guests? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly my very special guests, Ann Zvonkovic and Iva Sarjas. Ann and Iva are both strong community leaders in Edmonton-Manning and have spent many hours volunteering at the Slovenian Canadian Association to ensure that Edmontonians and their families have learned more about the Slovenian culture. Due to their hard work the Slovenian Canadian Association now has a strong presence in north Edmonton. I would ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my friend Mr. Jamie Post. Mr. Post is a long-serving community volunteer. He's a board member for Edmonton's Food Bank, the chair of the Edmonton Naming Committee, and a board member for the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues. In his free time Mr. Jamie Post is director of communications and membership for the Alberta Council of Disability Services, a nonprofit association that exists to support service provider members, who, in turn, support people with developmental disabilities and brain injury. I ask that Mr. Jamie Post please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Did I see that the Government House Leader would like to do an introduction?

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Due to the large amount of business facing us this afternoon, I'll try and be very brief.

First, I'd like to introduce Susan Petrina, who is my CA. She has been a resident of Highlands for over 10 years, president of the community league, and she is also on the board of the Solar Energy Society of Alberta. Mari Sasano is my caseworker, and she has been active in the community of Parkdale-Cromdale. She is a writer and supporter of arts and theatre communities. I'd especially like to welcome Vera Petrina, who is Susan's 82-year-old mother, visiting from Kelowna, B.C. She has worked for many years as a unionized housekeeper for Kelowna General hospital. She has been retired for many years now but continues to work weekly as a volunteer. I would ask that they rise now, if they were able to be seated – there they are – and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure and privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly my guest, Mr. Christopher McBain. If you could please

stand. Chris is a passionate and vivacious leader who has advocated for marginalized communities in Edmonton, including the LGBTQ-plus community, HIV/AIDS, and various communities surrounding the issues of disabilities. Through his career and community work he has accomplished much, but his numerous accomplishments include having served as a board member for the Alberta positive living society. He was recently nominated by *Avenue* magazine for Top 40 under 40 for 2015. I would like to ask you all to join me today in giving Mr. McBain the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there any other guests for introduction today?
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given the importance of the ministerial announcement and the responses to follow, I'm going to ask now for unanimous consent of the House to permit the leader of the third party and the three independent MLAs to have an opportunity to respond to the ministerial statement made by the Premier. I would also ask for unanimous consent to extend the Routine to complete this item before starting question period.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Truth and Reconciliation

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On June 2 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada had a special event in our nation's capital. For six years leading up to this, thousands of courageous First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people spoke their truth about the devastating experience of residential schools. We as Canadians were witness to that truth. We were shocked and at times rendered speechless as we learned of the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit children forcibly removed from their homes, placed beyond the protection and the love of their families. We felt deeply for the adults who shared their journey to come to terms with the broken child within. They have given us their truth. Now as Albertans and Canadians it's up to us to become part of this healing journey through acts of reconciliation. As Justice Murray Sinclair so poignantly stated, "We have described for you a mountain. We have shown you the path to the top. We call upon you to do the climbing."

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is ready to follow the path. As our first step we want the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people of Alberta to know that we deeply regret the profound harm and damage that occurred to generations of children forced to attend residential schools. Although the province of Alberta did not establish this system, members of this Chamber at the time did not take a stand against it, and for this silence we apologize. These schools broke the connection between children and family, between community, between language and culture. These children too often lost the ability to connect again with their families, losing their identity and the confidence to pass on their traditions to their own children. With that, we also deeply regret the intergenerational damage that perpetuates itself in poverty, neglect, drug addiction, mental health issues, and great despair.

Today, Mr. Speaker, we are joined by many proud members of the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities of Alberta. Many are residential school survivors. All are advocates for missing and murdered women and, quite simply, outstanding members of their communities. To these honoured guests and to the residential

school survivors of Alberta I would like to say: as children you entered these schools alone and frightened; this past is too painful to endure on your own; in the journey of reconciliation you no longer have to walk alone; your truth has woken our conscience and our sense of justice. True reconciliation will only be achieved if we as governments and citizens are willing to make a fundamental shift in our relationship with the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples of Alberta, and we will do that.

Now, yesterday was National Aboriginal Day. On the longest day of the year we shone the light on the distinct cultures, histories, and heritage of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people in Alberta. Today I want that light to illuminate the hearts of all Albertans. I want the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women to come out of the shadows and to be viewed with compassion and understanding in the clear light of day.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission spoke to a devastating link between the large number of missing and murdered aboriginal women and the many harmful factors in their lives such as domestic violence, poverty, and the number of aboriginal children in the child welfare system. Mr. Speaker, the executive summary report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission also stated that this complex interplay of factors is part of the legacy of residential schools, and this must be examined alongside the lack of success that police forces experience in solving these crimes against aboriginal women. In short, too many indigenous women are missing, too many indigenous families have suffered, and too many communities don't have the answers that they need.

1:50

When Helen Betty Osborne was murdered in The Pas, Manitoba, it took more than 16 years for charges to be brought forward. During those 16 years there were people who knew who was guilty but said nothing. It was called a conspiracy of silence. That was 43 years ago. Today, out of that long, unsettling silence, a strong and determined voice has emerged, and we hear that voice across our province in the growing movement within the hearts and homes of Albertans, from family members and friends of those who are gone, and in moving art exhibits by those who were touched by the tragedies of our silent sisters.

Mr. Speaker, today our government joins these voices. Today Alberta joins the call for a national inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women. Our hearts and a strong sense of justice and humanity compel us to speak loudly and clearly for these young beautiful women, who were mothers, daughters, sisters, who were deeply loved and are now deeply missed. We join the families, national aboriginal organizations, the provinces, the territories to lend our voice to the call for a national inquiry because it is the right thing to do. Together all of us in this House must openly face the root causes that place aboriginal women and girls at such high risk. Harsh realities like poverty, racism, inadequate housing, and lack of educational opportunities are amongst those realities, and until these root causes are addressed, the violence will continue.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government will develop a renewed relationship with aboriginal peoples based on trust and respect and take true action on these root causes because we understand that true reconciliation is a matter of action, not just words. There is good work being done out there. Alberta is working with aboriginal communities and organizations to improve the lives and the safety of aboriginal women through local solutions such as supporting the Moosehide campaign, which is aimed to take a stand against violence towards aboriginal women and girls.

Alberta Justice and Solicitor General is working with our federal, provincial, and territorial counterparts on a justice framework to address violence against aboriginal women and girls and analyzing

the data from community engagement to determine the best practices for a culture of safe victim services response. Our government is working with aboriginal communities to address issues with early intervention supports to help keep children safe and to keep families together, to involve the extended family and the community when a child first becomes involved in our system. We also work with the First Nations Women's Economic Security Council and the Métis Women's Economic Security Council on the issue of trafficking of women and girls in Canada as it relates to missing and murdered indigenous women. Mr. Speaker, our government will continue to work with aboriginal communities and organizations until aboriginal women in Alberta can see a future for themselves that is safe and fulfilling.

So in this time of summer solstice we will not let the light dim on the crisis that is taking place across our province and across our country. With full conviction we lend our voice and our conscience to doing right by the women, their families, and their communities. The silence that once was has long since passed, and now is the time for their voices to be heard by all Albertans and all Canadians.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

As per the motion passed earlier, there is unanimous consent, so for a reply to the ministerial statement I would call on the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Premier, for your remarks. Hozu anejá. Hai, hai. In Dene: great job and thank you.

It is a pleasure to rise and speak to National Aboriginal Day. As a lifelong resident of northern Alberta I've grown up around our First Nations communities my entire life. I played ice hockey with the Janvier reserve Falcons for many years and have many family throughout Alberta on many reserves: the Janvier aboriginal band, the Fort McMurray aboriginal band, and the Mikisew band from Fort Chipewyan. I'm the youngest of 11 children in a blended family, and most of my brothers married First Nations women. I'm very proud to have many nieces and nephews who are aboriginal and who grew up on reserves and are both treaty and status aboriginals. They are very proud of their culture, proud of their treaty, as I am proud to have them in my family.

I've watched with pleasure in northern Alberta as I've seen many aboriginal communities make tremendous progress in becoming integrated into the broader economy while still maintaining their culture, their pride, and their sense of community. Just as there is no better social program than a job, there is no better way to preserve a culture than to have its members decide what to preserve, to make sure they're wealthy enough and successful enough to preserve exactly what they want to preserve, without interference from outsiders.

I was present in the House of Commons just a little while ago, over seven years ago, in fact, when the Prime Minister apologized to our aboriginal communities for residential schools. A complete tragedy. It was very heartfelt. Most people in the House did not have dry eyes. I was there that day. I've never been prouder of Prime Minister Stephen Harper than that day. In fact, I would suggest that it took great integrity and humility for him to do that particular apology, which was long overdue and no other Prime Minister had done.

The separation of aboriginal children from their parents caused incredible harm, and our First Nation communities are still suffering the consequences right across our country and province. We broke up families. It is unacceptable. We created a generation whose personal demons meant that they couldn't parent the way

they wished to parent, as all of us have the choice to do in our own families. That was unacceptable. An apology is necessary, and an apology is given.

Many of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission provide an opportunity for healing, for forgiveness, and most importantly for how to improve our future as a country and as Canadians. We now fully understand what happened to families and entire communities as a result of the residential school system. There is no road map for how Canadians can begin to heal from the history of residential schools, but I find some comfort in the importance that the commission put on education. Better education is the key for all of us. It is certainly the key for our aboriginal Canadians. It is a place where the government of Alberta can make a real difference because, of course, that is within the Alberta government's jurisdiction. We need to do a better job of educating non-aboriginals about aboriginal culture, and we need to do a much better job to make sure that aboriginal Albertans have access to higher quality education.

My dream for our aboriginal communities, for my family is a future where they are led by a generation of talented, well-educated, and principled leaders from within their own communities, a future where aboriginal communities are very well integrated with the broader economy, based upon their own choice and choices, a future where they preserve their culture and share it with pride with other Albertans and Canadians, and a future where all Albertans and Canadians respect and appreciate the contributions of aboriginal culture to a diverse fabric of our society.

2:00

Let me quote from the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. "In every region of the country, Survivors and others have sent a strong message . . . Canada must move from apology to action." The Premier today called for something which is in the federal jurisdiction. It is not action. What we need is action.

The average judicial inquiry takes many years to complete and many years to issue reports. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission made recommendations that are in the provincial sphere, that the Premier could take action on today, and we would encourage her to do so. We could provide the requested annual reports on the number of aboriginal children in provincial care. We could provide more clarity for the reasons for the apprehension and the continued apprehension of aboriginal children.

Measuring something is the first step to making it better. We have that opportunity. In fact, we could improve the standards of care for those aboriginal children in provincial care. That is action, and we call for that action from the Premier. We could do more to address the special needs of the aboriginal offenders with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. That is action, and we could start that action today.

If the Premier really wants to take action and make a difference on missing and murdered aboriginal women, she could act within provincial jurisdiction, of which she has complete control at this stage. She could reallocate or dedicate more resources to the RCMP's Kare, which investigates missing and murdered vulnerable persons, the overwhelming number of whom are aboriginal women from across this province. A \$2 million investment in Kare would make a big difference.

Let me end with a quote from the end of the truth and reconciliation report. "Reconciliation calls for federal, provincial, and territorial government action." Hopefully, in the future we will see provincial action rather than a speech calling for action from the federal government.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays. I would remind hon. members that I believe we are at a three-minute comment.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, thank you, and I want to thank the chief elected official of Alberta, our Premier, for her words and her actions today as well as the Leader of the Official Opposition for his statement. I think it highlights how important this issue is to everyone in this House. The truth and reconciliation report is one that ought to set a future path for our province and our government, and I'd like to hope that today will be the start of that. I would like to hope that today will be a part of us all working together to do what we can do.

I had the opportunity during my time on city council in Calgary, Mr. Speaker, to work with the aboriginal peoples, specifically the Tsuut'ina Nation. Through that relationship over a land negotiation for a road that the city needs, I had the great pleasure to become friends and, subsequently, as a minister of the government of the day to actually successfully negotiate an agreement that was outstanding for 59 years as well as other agreements with the Stoney Nation that were outstanding for about three decades.

I'm proud to carry an Indian name. You may not know that. It is Goes into the Night. I'm sorry to tell the members that it's not Goes Quietly into the Night; it's just Goes into the Night. The elder that bestowed that upon me, Mr. Speaker, said that that's because in the culture sometimes there's fear of the dark, and the elder felt somehow that I had less fear than some people do. I don't know whether that's true, but I'm honoured by the name.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many things that we can do together, positive changes that we can make. We know that aboriginal people are overrepresented in our criminal justice system, particularly in youth justice. We know that aboriginal persons on average have poorer quality of life and poorer health outcomes than non-aboriginal people. In social services we need to keep working to train government officials and social service workers to make sure that they have the cultural competence to work with our First Nations and aboriginal partners, our sisters and brothers.

There is so much work to be done. I could go on, but you gave a time warning before I started. I'm going to try to honour that, Mr. Speaker, but let me say this. Our party believes, as I believe all members of this House believe, that aboriginal people, aboriginal women want, need, and deserve nothing less than the full measure of satisfaction from the judicial system that everybody else gets, from every other way that a government operates. To provide less than a full measure of service, a full measure of investigation, a full measure of the considerations that non-aboriginal people get, is unacceptable and reprehensible, and we stand by providing nothing less than that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Liberal caucus let me begin by complimenting the Premier on her moving words and her commitment in a historic apology today, a good first step to real healing and more successful lives for our First Nations.

Here on Treaty 6 traditional land, Mr. Speaker, we gather to reconcile and begin a process that will address the chilling and shameful history of racism and cultural genocide. Through the actions and inactions of the government of Canada thousands of children were removed from their homes, subjected to neglect and physical, emotional, and sexual abuse at residential schools. These children were told that their lives and their traditions were evil, shameful, and savage. They were beaten or starved for speaking their language. For these and the many other abuses that the Alberta

Legislature stood silent on over the years, the Liberal caucus joins in the Premier's apology.

Too many of the scars left by residential schools have never healed and never will, and the damage done at those schools continues to manifest in poverty, mental illness, addictions, and learned violence passed from generation to generation. This dark legacy includes the failure of our health care and education systems to provide culturally appropriate services when needed by our indigenous communities.

Only by working together can we hope to heal these wounds. We must all commit as treaty people to working with our indigenous peoples to implement all the recommendations of the commission, including, importantly, a national public inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women. They deserve nothing less. If we are unwilling to address directly the reality that more than a thousand indigenous women have been lost with no adequate investigation or understanding, then we will have learned nothing from the years of work of the TRC.

We must now begin the journey to a reconciliation. It is my deepest hope that we have taken another step, perhaps a small step but a critical one, towards healing and reconciliation today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I acknowledge today that we stand in traditional Treaty 6 territory, and I offer my welcome to the distinguished guests of treaties 6, 7, and 8 and to representatives of the Métis nation.

Today is a historic day in the Alberta Legislature, and I want to thank the Premier for taking a strong stand in support of First Nations people in Alberta and in all of Canada. I offer my complete and unequivocal support for the Premier's statement. For too long this Assembly has been silent, and for that I join in this apology to all who have been impacted by injustices of the past and to those who continue to suffer from a cycle of poverty, addiction, abuse, and lack of opportunity that is a direct result of Canada's residential schools.

2:10

I am proud to be a member of the Assembly that has taken this important first step. This statement and these words of apology and support are incredibly important and show that we wish to share in this journey of reconciliation, but this is only one step in a long journey, and as important as these words are, they must be backed by action.

This is a statement that should have been made by the federal government. What we heard today should have been the federal government's response to the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Now is the time for the federal government to commit to an inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. The federal government needs to show that they're willing to back words with actions, but if they are not, Alberta should lead. If the federal government chooses not to act, let us come together with our counterparts in B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and elsewhere to conduct our own provincial inquiry. Alberta can lead and become an example of what we can accomplish when we set out to do more, to be more, and finally do the right thing.

It is time to break the cycle and remember those whom we have left behind or forgotten. Working together as Albertans, as Canadians, and shoulder to shoulder with First Nations peoples, we can take action to start a journey towards healing and reconciliation that will ensure First Nations communities thrive as true equals.

Thank you.

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

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the House for allowing me to speak on this matter, and I would like to thank the Premier for her words of support. I would also like to acknowledge that we are here on Treaty 6 territory.

This past week Canadians celebrated National Aboriginal Day, a day to celebrate the diverse history and cultures of indigenous peoples across Canada. In Alberta we honour and learn from the many different First Nations and Métis communities that make up the rich heritage of this province. My riding of Calgary-Bow is on Treaty 7 territory and borders the Bow River, the river where Treaty 7 was originally signed some hundred kilometres east of the Blackfoot Crossing.

This past week multiple organizations partnered and worked together for Aboriginal Awareness Week Calgary, hosting events throughout the week to share and celebrate. I would like to thank all those who contributed to the many events and thank all those who attended. Working together to share a collective history and learning from the many histories of Calgarians is an important step on the path of reconciliation.

Beyond National Aboriginal Day ongoing projects like Making Treaty 7 are important for better understanding our collective history and the history of First Peoples. On National Aboriginal Day we celebrate the diverse cultures of indigenous peoples, but we must also reflect on and learn of the trauma indigenous peoples have experienced because of colonialism.

The truth and reconciliation report, generated over six years by the federal Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has collected thousands of stories, histories, and experiences from survivors of the residential school system, a system that perpetuated cultural genocide on Canada's indigenous peoples. In Alberta the last residential school closed in 1975, a very recent history for us all. This report lays out the path not only for the Legislatures and present leaders but also for our future generations to repair the deep wound in our relationships. As Justice Sinclair said during the closing events of the TRC in Ottawa: "We are writing for the future, not just for this government."

This report does not mark the end of the struggle for indigenous peoples. Inequalities between communities must be addressed by all levels of government through partnership and listening to indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples have a strong, proud culture and have a wealth of knowledge to share, and I look forward to working as a House with indigenous communities as equal partners.

Yesterday was a beautiful day of celebration, as was this last week, and I want to thank all indigenous Canadians for sharing their rich cultures, traditions, and history. I want to wish all a happy National Aboriginal Day.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this has taken some time and time well spent, I believe, but it does mean that we will not be able to complete our Routine at 3 o'clock, so I would move and request unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 7(7) to allow the Routine to be completed after 3 o'clock.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Oral Question Period

Provincial Tax Policy

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, last Thursday the Finance minister held a press conference to celebrate his raising of taxes on Alberta's businesses and Alberta families. During the press conference the minister was asked if there were any circumstances under which he might possibly roll back these tax increases in the future. His response was telling. He stopped, he smirked, and he giggled. Will the Premier confirm that it is the official policy of her government to never lower taxes?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, this government was elected during an election campaign where the issue of taxes and, in particular, fair taxation came up. Now, interestingly, as a result of the changes that we are making with respect to tax infrastructure, 90 per cent of Albertans will pay less tax than they would have under the previous government. So, in fact, what we've done is that we've started by increasing fairness and decreasing what most Albertans are paying.

Mr. Jean: That's not very accurate, Mr. Speaker.

At the same press conference the Finance minister was asked about the Alberta advantage, which we're so proud of. His response, and I quote: it's a new orange day. People know we're more than beautiful mountains and trees and things like that. We can do better. It's a new Alberta advantage. End quote. So are higher taxes the new Alberta advantage? Does the Premier really believe that Alberta will have an advantage from having higher business taxes than Ontario, than Quebec, than British Columbia?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, during the election we had a conversation, a very, very robust discussion, with Albertans about what they perceive as an advantage, and let me tell you what they said to me. Those 12,000 kids having a teacher: that's an advantage. Health care for them when they need it: that's an advantage. Making sure that our postsecondary institutions educate Albertans so we can diversify the economy: that's an advantage. Making sure that all Albertans have access to those services: that's an advantage, and that's an advantage that I am very proud to be building here in Alberta.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On economic matters Albertans have become worried with this government. Last week we saw this government prepare to increase spending even faster than they are prepared to increase taxes. That's something. We saw that this government seems keen to increase taxes for the sake of increasing taxes. We were told that being taxed more than our neighbour is an advantage. Why is the Premier pursuing economic policies that are so out of touch with Albertans?

Ms Notley: I think I've kind of answered this question twice. In fact, there are a tremendous number of economic studies out there that say that fairness actually contributes to economic growth, and the farther you get away from fairness, the more you stifle economic growth. Under the previous administration that's what was happening, so what we are doing is ensuring that we promote a strong, stable, predictable system of health care and education. That is the backbone of good, strong economic growth as well as community growth and community well-being, and we'll carry on with that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second major question, hon. member.

Pipeline Development

Mr. Jean: Last week, in effort to be helpful, the Wildrose attempted to get this government to back away from radical policy ideas that will hurt Alberta's economy and threaten Alberta jobs. I tried to get the Premier to stand up for better markets for our oil and gas products overseas. That means jobs for Albertans and revenue for this government. Will the Premier please reassure Alberta's energy industry, whether it is raw bitumen or upgraded or refined oil, that she will be a champion for pipelines as a way to get our energy to new markets? A champion.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that in general we need to have more pipelines, and, as I've said before, I'm talking to my colleagues across the country, both in B.C. as well as eastward, about the potentials with respect to those pipelines. But we also know that at the end of the day the best outcome for Albertans is that more processing happens here. So does that mean that no bitumen gets shipped? No. But does that mean that we do everything we can to increase upgrading here in this province to create long-term, sustainable jobs that are less vulnerable to the ups and downs of bitumen prices? Absolutely, because that's in Albertans' best interests.

Mr. Jean: More pipelines: a great start.

Last week I tried to get the Premier to clarify that there is no greater intergovernmental or international diplomatic priority for Albertans than getting pipelines approved so that we can get our energy to new markets. The NDP elsewhere gets this. In fact, the Saskatchewan NDP is completely in favour of the Keystone pipeline. Will the Premier please reassure Albertans and Alberta's energy industry that getting approval for new pipelines is our and her top diplomatic priority?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I've already stated fairly clearly that we understand the importance of pipelines to our energy industry, and we'll continue to work together with them on the areas where we can have an impact. I will also say, however – you know, folks over there might not want to admit it, but we have a little bit of a PR problem with our environmental record, and it's about time that we start taking action so that we can actually develop credibility internationally and enhance our access to markets.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wildrose is here to help. But this government is committed to radical policy ideas that will simply cost Albertans their jobs. Our shadow minister for labour asked if the government had any plans to help the 118,000 Albertans who might lose their jobs when this government raises the minimum wage by 50 per cent. The answer he got shows that this government does not understand the impact of prices on supply and demand. Does the Premier really believe that increasing the minimum wage will lead to more jobs in Alberta?

Ms Notley: I absolutely believe that increasing the minimum wage will lead to more jobs. There are copious studies out there, Mr. Speaker, that suggest that when you put more money into the pockets of low-income people, they spend it, and they spend it in their local economy faster than anybody else does. In fact, study

after study shows that this actually grows jobs and it grows economic activity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays. [interjections] How could I possibly miss the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat? Hon. member, my apologies.

Calgary Cancer Centre

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No worries. Recently the Health minister said that there are no guarantees the NDP government will build the Foothills cancer centre and place this much-needed project under review. But in the last election the Premier herself promised this project, and her party campaigned on it. I want to give the Premier an opportunity to set the record straight. Premier, patients and their families need to know. Will you make good on your promise to build this project on time and on budget, or won't you?

Ms Notley: Well, that's a very good question, and certainly it's one that I know the people of Calgary are very, very concerned about. He's right. There's no question that during the election and even now I've stated that my preference is to move quickly, and indeed my preference is for it to happen in Foothills. However, the fact of the matter is that there are billions of dollars of investment in there, so we as a government and as a cabinet have to do our due diligence, review all the information before us, and then we will be making an announcement in the days to come. We understand that Calgary doesn't want any more delay than they've already had to deal with, so we'll be moving soon.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, circumstances have changed since the last election. The price of oil is a little higher. Taxes are, too. If the government can't build this project today, they definitely couldn't last May, when they pulled this bait and switch on Albertans. To the Premier: why did you make this promise when you knew you couldn't deliver?

Ms Notley: Well, quite honestly, Mr. Speaker, I reject the assumption underlying that question – the price of oil is down, not up – but more to the point, I didn't make any promise that I said that I couldn't deliver or that I at some point have concluded that I can't deliver. That's not what happened. What I said is that we're going to do our due diligence. We're going to review our options, and we'll be making an announcement soon.

Mr. Barnes: Albertans don't want excuses; they want solutions. The due diligence on the Foothills project has been done. The project has been fully studied, reviewed, and costed. If finances are standing in the way, the Premier needs to open the books and work with the opposition to find solutions. Premier, will you share the complete state of Alberta's finances so we can help you build the right project at the right time for Alberta patients and families?

Ms Notley: Well, I appreciate that the members opposite are prepared to give the third party credit for due diligence, notwithstanding that I believe the project has been outstanding for over a decade and it's been promised and changed and changed and promised. There have been a lot of reviews but not one done by a government recently given a majority mandate. What I have done, however, is that I've asked David Dodge to do a review of our overall capital expenditure and our capacity with respect to that, and that's someone whose opinion I think is valuable. We will look at that and other things and get back to you very . . .

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

Public Transit

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm almost blushing from all the compliments that are flowing.

Mr. Speaker, the throne speech gave little mention to municipalities in Alberta, but when it did briefly go there, it mentioned that there is transit to build. I'm sure this made several municipalities pay attention in anticipation of announcements yet to come. To the Premier: when can Edmonton look forward to a new announcement of funding for a desired transit line, or what other details can you share?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Certainly. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we've said, there are a number of very complex issues that have been left to us by the previous government, and we are reviewing and prioritizing all the issues that are important to us. Of course, in the campaign we talked about the fact that transit is a critical issue and one that is a major priority for us. So we look forward to getting the best information we can about how to move forward with respect to our capital spending, and we'll be making announcements going forward. Stay tuned.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the government used to think that running the government was easy when they were over here, and now they think it's complex. That's just an interesting observation.

Mr. Speaker, in Calgary much work has gone into planning their next LRT line, which they have affectionately dubbed the green line. In fact, a community group has formed to educate their neighbours about why it's important, where it will go, and other details. To the Transportation minister: can Calgary look forward to a funding announcement on the much-needed green line as foreshadowed in your throne speech?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for that question. As the Premier has said, transit funding is a priority for this government. It's something that we believe in and something we're going to be looking at very closely. I will be meeting shortly with the mayor of Edmonton, and I hope to meet as well with the mayor of Calgary in the near future to discuss their transportation needs, and when I have a fuller view of the opinions and needs of the city of Calgary, we will be moving forward in due course.

2:30

Mr. McIver: Well, let's try rural Alberta, Mr. Speaker. They also need transit in some cases to get to health care and to visit friends and family in other municipalities. To the Transportation minister. Now, you said a little bit more about this, about doing things in rural Alberta, so can you tell Albertans and this House: what are you going to do for rural Alberta transit as promised in the throne speech, and which municipalities can look forward to which pieces of transit provided by this government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the hon. member for that question. It's certainly clear that when we talked about rural bus service in the election, we talked about the need to improve that and to make sure that we took steps as a government to make sure that people had their transportation

needs met. That's going to be a priority for the government, and that will be something that we'll be considering carefully as we discuss and I get to know and meet with the various mayors of the smaller municipalities in our province. I've had that opportunity to meet with several of them, to talk on the phone, and we'll . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Flood Recovery and Mitigation

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My riding, Calgary-Bow, was one of those tragically affected by the 2013 flood. Many residents suffered devastating losses. Hundreds of homes were either damaged or destroyed. Unfortunately, for some who found comfort in the possibility of relief through the disaster relief programs, it has been two years and they have yet to see any financial aid. My question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs is: how does this government plan to address the need for DRP now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the hon. member for her first question in this Assembly. This weekend marked the two-year anniversary of the largest natural disaster in Alberta's history. I want to assure Albertans or let them know that our government is committed to assisting Albertans who've been impacted throughout this natural disaster. Although 95 per cent of files had been closed or completed, I completely understand the frustration of flood victims with the process of their claims.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Minister, as we all know, the fall budget may not pass until December. When does this government plan on funding DRP?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It'll be earlier than December, I can assure the hon. member. What I do want to make clear is that throughout the 2015 year, actually, the money that flowed through from the DRP has totalled \$282 million. I will remind all members of the House that in the interim, which is being debated and before the House right now, there is \$173.7 million earmarked for DRP.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been my understanding that the minister visited Calgary over the weekend and met with the Calgary River Communities Action Group. Could the minister elaborate on what's being done in regard to flood mitigation?

Mr. Bilous: I'll thank the member for the question. It is true that this weekend I visited several flood-affected communities, including the town of High River; I met with the mayor and councillors. I was with the mayor of Calgary this weekend as well in several communities in Calgary – Sunnyside, Elbow Park, Mission – and spoke with those that were affected by the 2013 floods. This government is committed to moving in a very

reasonable yet diligent fashion to look at the best way to mitigate Alberta's future floods and disasters.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Menthol-flavoured Tobacco Products

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week it was my honour and pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Legislature representatives from Smoke-free Alberta. They were here to welcome and congratulate our Minister of Health on the banning of menthol from cigarettes. To the minister: can you explain what the link is between youth smoking and menthol cigarettes?

The Speaker: I'd remind the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud that when he gets the next supplemental, there's no preamble.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Let me assure my colleagues opposite that I am well aware of the harmful effects of menthol products and the impact they've had on youth smoking rates. In Alberta the last study was in 2012-13, and at that time it was well documented that one-third of youth who were smoking were in fact smoking menthol products. By making this move, we're going to be removing that option for youth and encouraging them to make healthier decisions.

Dr. Turner: To the minister: how will banning menthol cigarettes reduce health costs for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Tobacco use is, of course, a serious problem, related to approximately 3,000 deaths in Alberta every year. This banning of menthol as well as previous announcements that were made around flavoured tobacco products in general will of course reduce the smoking opportunities for youth, we hope. Half of Alberta's youth are using flavoured tobacco products, so we're glad to be able to take that motion a little bit further and make sure that we make it fair and also eliminate menthol.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. How is the government making sure that our small businesses have enough time to address these important changes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Of course, our priority is ensuring the health and well-being of Albertans. To make sure that we don't impact small businesses or any businesses negatively through this decision, we're allowing four months for them to clear their inventory both from their current shelves and from what's in supply. By September we'll be at the point where they are no longer distributing menthol products, but until then they have an opportunity to clear their shelves.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Status of Women

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a mom I know that there's no shortage of issues facing women across the province. Women fleeing the streets need access to resources to be protected from violence and to build new lives. The people in Airdrie are without a women's shelter. We want to help create solutions, but the one thing we don't want is a bigger bureaucracy. How can Albertans be sure that this new department will be more than just funnelling money to a top-heavy bureaucracy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Of course, everyone will have an opportunity to debate the thorough budget in the fall, when it will be tabled, and I encourage the hon. members to do so at that time.

Mrs. Pitt: I own a small business, and I hope that all women are able to do what they dream of. I saw the new funding announcement last week. What stuck out to me was the million dollars for the status of women department. To me, that sounds like just a million dollars for bureaucrats to shuffle papers, create new letterhead, and pat themselves on the back. I'm here to help Albertans understand this. Can the minister explain how this million dollars will directly help women?

2:40

Ms Notley: I'm very excited to do that. It's long overdue for this province to have a ministry in charge of the status of women. Unfortunately, during the absence of such a ministry we've had a number of developments occur in this province like, for instance, the largest wage gap between men and women in the country. That is not the way you move forward. That's not the way you promote equality. So that very small ministry will be focusing on that issue as well as child care as well as violence against women and many other important issues that we need to make progress on.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie – and I mention it across the House as well – I would caution: please don't extend the preambles on the questions.

Proceed.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I know that in Airdrie women don't need bureaucrats in Edmonton just writing memos and policy papers, that they need support for local community initiatives that produce results, that they need legislation that puts the hammer down on criminals and protects our . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I thought that was a preamble. Did you have a question?

Mrs. Pitt: My question is: will the minister detail what programs Albertan women can expect from the \$1 million status of women department?

Ms Notley: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, you know, typically memos precede legislation, so I'm just throwing it out there that if you're going to actually provide leadership and develop a comprehensive plan, both legislative as well as policy-based as well as funding-based, then you need to think it through a little bit. For decades this province has not had a plan, so the result is that for decades women have fallen behind. We've said: that's long enough; no more; we're going to make sure that there's a difference.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to follow up on a question from the Member for Airdrie. In the recent campaign, of course, the new government pledged to Albertans to create this women's ministry. I'd like to point out that I'm the former associate minister of family and community safety. Women's issues were in my portfolio, and I began the women's equality and advancement framework, so the work was being done. My question to the Premier: do you plan to continue the work that I was working on with some wonderful people in Human Services, and will you commit to finishing the women's equality and advancement framework in this new ministry?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've asked the minister who is responsible for this portfolio to do an inventory of the work that was going on within government, which will include the program that the hon. member speaks of. We'll evaluate what's been going on, and then we'll match that up against our priorities and our focus on outcomes. As we move forward and as the plan for that ministry moves forward, information will be shared with all members of this House.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. A million dollars is a specific amount of money. We were talking about a framework that we were working on. I went to a first ministers' meeting a year ago in Yellowknife at which the province was lauded for the work we were doing. Can you tell us what kind of initiatives you're planning on working on going forward that build on the work that's already been done?

Ms Notley: The minister has not been in place yet for even four weeks, so we are going to take the time to make sure that we get it right. When we do, we will be sure that all members of this House and the people of Alberta are aware of the priorities that we identify. In the meantime I want to thank the member for the work that she did before that, and those parts of the work that she did that were contributing towards real outcomes in terms of improvements for the status of women in Alberta will be continued, I'm sure.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A final question to the Premier: is a mandate letter going out? Will we have a good sense of what the deliverables are so that we can keep track as the work goes along?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question, and indeed a mandate letter will be forthcoming to all our ministers over the course of the next few months.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When pressed for spending details on their minibudget, the government provided five different numbers. These five numbers came in a span of just 24 hours. The good news is that every time I ask, the number gets smaller. If I keep asking, maybe we'll have a balanced budget by the end of the session. Will the Minister of Finance tell us: is his

new spending \$1.8 billion, \$1.1 billion, \$776 million, \$682 million, \$624 million, or all of the above?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you for the question. It's not all of the above. We are looking forward to each minister coming forward and detailing the exact spending amount. I know those amounts are in the \$600 million area, and that's what we're spending on new programs and services as we go forward.

Mr. Fildebrandt: The \$600 million area: I'm glad we have some clarity.

After years of overspending and debt financing the government and the third party both want to raise taxes on Albertans, but the government's taxes cannot keep up with their new spending. Now, I sent the minister this question a few hours ago because I wanted to help, and I'm hoping that he'll be able to give us an answer. Before committing to new spending and new taxes, will the minister tell this House what he expects total revenue and total expenditures to be this fiscal year?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for the question. As he can appreciate, we're not going to do a budget on the back of a napkin and bring it for you today. On the revenue side we're taking steps in Bill 2 to address that by addressing taxes in a progressive way, something that should have been done many years ago. That being said, it's far too early to look at what the overall revenue will be. It'll be more than last year because we're going to have a progressive income tax in place, which is the best thing to do, and we're going to have a competitive fiscal plan before us in the fall.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, stay tuned, Mr. Speaker: answers coming in about six months.

Now, I've asked the Minister of Finance repeatedly over the last week and a half if he can answer some very, very simple questions about the impact of the new tax-and-spend measures. Given that it would be grossly irresponsible for this House to vote for new spending without this kind of information and to continue spending faster than they can tax, it will only lead to one outcome, even more debt. Does the minister actually know or have any idea what under his plan the deficit and debt will be this year?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. I expect all ministries to come forward with clear plans about what they need. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. I expect all ministers to come forward with very clear plans on what they need. The actual budget is going to be in the fall. I'm not going to tell you what that is now because we don't have those numbers before us, but we'll have them very soon.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Landowner Property Rights

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The last government passed several bad bills approximately five years ago that decimated the property rights of Alberta landowners. The Wildrose and the NDP, including the Premier and the Government House Leader, spoke many times between 2010 and 2015 about the problems with these draconian pieces of legislation. The new Government House Leader even spoke as recently as December 2014 against Bill 36, the

Alberta Land Stewardship Act, where he called this act, among others, "stupid legislation." Will the Government House Leader now commit today to repeal the bad provisions in that bill and protect the rights of landowners?

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for that question. Back when some of these bills were passed – Bill 19 and, I think, bills 36 and 50 if my memory serves well – the Wildrose didn't exist. It didn't have any seats in the Legislature, and it was the NDP opposition that led the fight for a balanced and fair approach to property. What that means to me is that people have the right of appeal, they have the right of due process, and there has to be a pressing need. Those things are important.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy, then. Bad property rights legislation has blocked landowner rights to fair compensation and due process and in the case of the former Bill 2, the Responsible Energy Development Act, access to the courts. Minister, will you commit to reinstating section 26 of the Energy Resources Conservation Act, which guaranteed landowners the right to appeal bad decisions by the Energy Regulator board to the courts, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. I will be looking into those regulations. They are new to me. I'm still learning all the processes. I understand currently, though, that through the AER there are processes for each individual landowner to appeal. Absolutely, I'll be looking over those and get back to you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Energy minister: I hope that is the case because that needs to be reviewed.

To the Government House Leader again, then. The Wildrose opposition is prepared to assist the new government and Alberta landowners in formulating and passing an Alberta property rights preservation bill. Will you, the Government House Leader, and your government commit today to working with us on this very important piece of legislation for all Albertans?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much to the hon. member for the question. We do insist on making sure that people's rights to their property are protected so that fair compensation is provided and there is a due process for people, including a right of appeal. Those will be things that we will be considering in the future.

With respect to the help that the opposition is offering in this particular regard, I think that it is not necessary, but we will make sure property rights are protected.

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

Impaired Driving

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have consistently shown that they want a common-sense, Conservative approach to crime and justice. The number one cause of criminal death in Canada is drunk driving. These tragedies are a hundred per cent preventable. Sadly, in many drunk-driving deaths the courts give

lenient sentences and thus rock the public's confidence in the justice system. Last week the federal Justice minister, Peter MacKay, announced changes to the Criminal Code that provide a six-year, mandatory minimum sentence for drunk drivers. It is about time that that does occur. To the Minister of Justice: will you today commit to supporting this initiative to stop drunk drivers who cause death?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. The government agrees that there are many senseless and needless deaths as a result of drunk driving. These deaths are tragic, and they are preventable. We are absolutely looking into ways that the province can assist in moving forward and making sure that these deaths are prevented in future.

In terms of the federal legislation, obviously, I don't have jurisdiction over that, but we will certainly be watching with interest.

Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. I am, of course, aware that you don't have jurisdiction, but I hope you support the legislation.

The Speaker: I would remind the member: 35 seconds, please.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again to the same minister: given that the convicted drunk drivers who cause death have blood alcohol levels three times the legal limit and that some have been found in excess of 200 kilometres an hour and that families have been devastated throughout Alberta by the perceived lack of justice for the victims, what are you prepared to do for the families of drunk-driving victims?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the hon. member for the question. We are aware that a number of families are devastated by these tragedies, and to them we express our deepest sympathies. As I've said, my government is looking into methods to prevent these tragedies going forward. All victims of crime have access to services through the victims of crime funding available. Yes, our intention is to prevent these crimes as much as possible.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much. Those were obviously great initiatives by the PC government at the time. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, finally, to the same minister: given that drivers can be impaired with drugs other than alcohol, will the Minister of Justice commit to lobbying the federal government to amend the Criminal Code to allow approved drug testing devices that can detect drugs in the systems of drivers where reasonable and probable grounds exist to require a sample and keep our roads safe while also supporting additional tools for the police?

Thank you.

Ms Ganley: Thank you to the hon. member. I do want to take this opportunity to deliver the message that no one should be getting behind the wheel if they've been drinking or if they've been doing drugs. We unequivocally condemn that sort of behaviour.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving, MADD Canada, issued a provincial legislative review on June 22, 2015. Alberta led the provinces, with a C plus grade. However, as I have committed to previously, more work is needed, and we are looking into ways to

work with police services to increase enforcement and to reduce the problem.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Bail Process Review

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A report into the involvement of the Alberta Crown prosecution service with Shawn Rehn, who shot two RCMP officers in January, recommends a comprehensive review of the bail process in Alberta. The review will look at who should continue to conduct justice of the peace bail hearings and under what circumstances. Albertans deserve to know how this will improve the system. My first question is to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. What changes do you expect to implement from this review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The report into the bail process will help us decide how the bail process can be changed to better protect all Albertans and, in particular, our first responders. We are proceeding with this comprehensive review to the bail process to answer the question we've asked, which is: would a different bail process help to make our communities safer and better protect police? We are also committed to ensuring that the appropriate representatives of the people appear at bail hearings to ensure that violent criminals are dealt with appropriately.

Thank you.

Ms Renaud: To the hon. minister: if the review determines that Crown prosecution should attend all bail hearings, what will that cost Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I think the first thing we need to do is figure out what's needed and go forward from there. This is obviously a complicated process given that we must protect both the rights of individual Albertans who are subject to prosecution by the state and the fact that we must protect our Alberta citizens and our first responders. We are committed to going through with the review process and to implementing recommendations that come out of that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: why are you doing yet another review when the report into the shooting of Constable Wynn has already been done?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The scope of this review is different than the scope of that review. This is a review of the entire bail process to see if there is any way that we can make it better, to ensure that we are both protecting rights of individual citizens and that we are protecting our first responders in addition to all of the people in Alberta. I can assure the member that the government is committed to public safety and to the safety of our law enforcement personnel.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

3:00 Forest Fire Fighting Contracting

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently concerns from several different constituencies have been brought to my attention about the fire line equipment contractors list. This list provides the department a master list of contractors supplying equipment for use in firefighting in Alberta. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: have you been made aware of any potential conflicts regarding this secret process?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. There's interim budget supply needed for firefighting. The equipment contracts have all been let. After that, then, there is a budget given for emergency firefighting. As far as I know, everything is in place, and there have been no concerns.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister. It is concerning that any process using taxpayers' dollars is not completely transparent and may be open to widespread suspicion and possible abuses. Given that contractors and taxpayers absolutely need to know these rankings, this could lead to a greater level of preparedness and lead time, crucial for the service these contractors provide. Given this would the minister consider a full review of this secret process?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think I heard a preamble in there. Nonetheless, we are going to let the minister answer.

I want to remind both sides of the House about the preamble portion of the questions after question 5. Thank you.

Mr. Minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our primary concern with forest fires is the protection of people, their homes, and communities. The Department of Agriculture and Forestry is working hard to fight these fires in order to minimize their human, economic, and environmental impact. This fire season has been particularly busy: 887 fires since April 1, which is up an average of 642 over this time last year. We will continue to monitor the situation very closely, and our government will provide any support needed to help our firefighters contain and extinguish these wildfires.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, as acknowledged at our earlier informal meetings, I realize that everyone needs to get up to speed. The Wildrose is happy to provide advice in any positive way we can. Will the minister work with the opposition to revamp and improve the fire line firefighters contract operators list so that it is completely public, fair, and openly transparent?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a team of dedicated, experienced firefighters, and our experts are working hard to keep Albertans safe. They have our utmost thanks. We'll continue to monitor the situation. Alberta has 84 helicopters and 31 air tankers fighting these fires or pre-positioned around the province ready to fight these fires. Two hundred and thirty-seven firefighters have been brought from out of the province for a total of 1,271. I

thank the member for his offer of assistance, but I do think we have the situation in hand.

Thank you.

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

Corporate Taxes

Mr. Bhullar: That would be me, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I'm going to talk about the government's least favourite subject, the economy and jobs. Minister and Premier, there are many things you cannot control on the economy, for example Saudi Arabia. They're increasing production, likely to hit 11 million barrels a day. But you can control your policy responses to the economy. Do you really think now is the right time to implement a business tax hike that can result in upwards of 20,000 job losses?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For far too long Alberta has not had a fair tax system. Now, going into the last election, that member's party said repeatedly that we face fiscal challenges; we all have to tighten our belts; we all have to chip in. They came up with loads of plans for families that earn \$50,000, \$60,000 a year to pay more. But at the same time they were committed to ensuring that corporations, profitable corporations that were doing well, not chip in. You know what? Albertans said, "We don't like that plan," and look where you are.

Mr. Bhullar: I'm quite happy to be where I am. I represent the people of Alberta, and I'll fight to make sure their jobs are looked after, Madam Premier.

Tell me what your plan is to find thousands of Albertans new jobs when employers pick up and move to Saskatchewan or British Columbia because of your new taxes.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's interesting because that was another issue that was discussed in the election, and at the time we were the only party that was actually talking about a job creation plan. We talked about a job creation tax credit, and we talked about ensuring that we take steps to increase the degree to which we upgrade our resources here so that we double the amount of economic activity in this province related to the resource which is ours. We talked about jobs; those guys didn't.

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, we have produced record economic growth in this province year after year after year. Madam Premier, it is your opportunity now to protect the economic interests of hard-working Albertans. How, ma'am, are you going to protect a dry cleaner, how are you going to protect a pizza shop owner, how are you going to protect your neighbourhood florist by raising their taxes by 20 per cent?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, one of the things that does ensure that we create and protect jobs is that we get off the royalty roller coaster, another common refrain that those folks used to talk about. One of the ways you do that is that you start stabilizing the nature . . . [interjections]

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The Member for Red Deer-North.

Walking with Our Sisters

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple of weeks ago I walked alongside our indigenous sisters who have disappeared or have been murdered. Each step I took gave me pause for thought for these women: the mothers, the aunts, the daughters who are gone, who vanished without a trace.

I took this walk in Red Deer, where I was meeting with the Minister of Aboriginal Relations, my colleague the hon. Member for Red Deer-South, and staff from the Red Deer Native Friendship Society. Together we visited the Walking with Our Sisters commemorative art exhibit, which took place until June 21, 2015. The exhibit was set up on the floor of the Red Deer Museum and Art Gallery, and it was massive. More than 1,700 pairs of moccasin vamps, which are the beaded top parts of moccasins, were set up on a winding path, on fabric lined with cedar boughs. As I bent down to remove my shoes and looked at the path I was about to walk on, alongside the exhibit, I saw the many unfinished moccasins, and was reminded of the many unfinished lives of the women who have vanished.

The installation represented all of these women. It paid respect to their lives and their existence on this Earth, and for me it was a humbling and deeply moving experience. Each of the moccasin vamps was created and donated by a caring and concerned individual, to represent a missing or murdered aboriginal woman. Each set of vamps reminded me that these women were cared for, that they were loved, that they are missing, but they are not forgotten.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

3:10 Mobile Dialysis Service

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lac La Biche has been promised a dialysis centre for years. In 2010 a mobile dialysis unit was provided as some sort of a compromise to provide services on a rotating basis throughout the area. Mechanical problems forced Alberta Health Services to park the bus in the Lac La Biche hospital parking lot, wheels removed, where it has remained ever since.

However, the bus does not provide reliable service, and some patients still need to travel to St. Paul or Edmonton for treatment. This is a long drive over some of the most dangerous highways in the province. This trip is a terrible burden for people who need dialysis treatment.

The bus is not designed nor equipped to provide comfort. This is especially important during our very cold winter months, when people often have a four-hour treatment three times a week. Being connected to machines in a cold bus is simply not acceptable. More importantly, there is no provision for emergency services. In May a patient collapsed on the bus, and the EMT personnel could not get a stretcher onto the bus. The patient had to endure the indignity of being treated on the floor.

This travesty of health services has got to be changed. We have an opportunity now with this government to address local concerns such as these in a collaborative way. On behalf of my constituents I have written a letter to the Minister of Health asking for a meeting to address this concern, and I would like to invite her to come out and see the dialysis unit first-hand. I will be following up and doing my best to ensure that residents of the Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills riding and others across the area will finally receive the health services they've been promised for so long. I promised my constituents that I would act on their behalf, and that is exactly what I will do on this matter and others as they come up.

Thank you.

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

Sexual Health Education Curriculum

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We speak a lot in this Chamber about the right to a high level of competency in our education system. That's certainly been the goal of Education ministries past and present. I believe those educational competencies extend to our children's right to comprehensive sexual health education as well.

When we arm our children with good information about birth control, sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy options, consent, abstinence, decision-making, sexual orientation, and gender identity, we are giving them the tools they need to be happy, healthy, well-adjusted adults. I hope one day to live in a province where all of those topics are included in our sexual health curriculum. Sadly, right now they are not. Sexual health programs vary from school board to school board. Some programs contain bare mentions of birth control options, many contain no reference to LGBTQ identities, and most don't even touch on consent.

Our kids deserve the best sexual health information as they navigate a changing world. When we give them all the tools they need to make smart choices themselves, we are sending them a powerful message: your body, your knowledge, your rights. Now, wouldn't that be the Alberta advantage?

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

Slovenian Canadian Association 50th Anniversary

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to congratulate the Slovenian Canadian Association's 50th anniversary. The Slovenian Canadian Association of Edmonton's goal is to bring openness and build bridges to preserve Slovene culture and to create a sense of community for present and future generations. Their focus is to bring members together through community events, music, dance, and language.

I had the pleasure of attending one of three events that was hosted this past weekend at the Slovenian hall in Edmonton-Manning. Over one thousand Slovenian descendants attended the events throughout the weekend, from small children to grandparents. Throughout the evening I had the pleasure of watching young children perform in their traditional language, while their parents performed dances and their grandparents sang in the choir. It truly was a family event, demonstrating all of the diversity of their culture.

I would like to thank the Slovenian Canadian Association for passing on their culture to their children and ensuring their traditions are part of our great community in Edmonton-Manning as well as enriching the cultural diversity of Alberta. You do both Alberta and your Slovenian ancestors a great service by maintaining these proud customs here in Edmonton. Thank you for continuing to share those treasures of Slovenian culture and for continuing to make Alberta a vibrant, exciting, and welcoming place.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Little Free Library in Beddington Heights

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saturday, June 20, was the second annual Neighbour Day in Calgary, marking two years since the floods of 2013, that galvanized communities in a time of devastation. Neighbour Day was established to honour the resilience and community spirit that pulled Calgarians together. I was fortunate to attend some Neighbour Day events on Saturday,

including the opening of a little free library in the community of Beddington Heights. The little free library movement was started in 2009 in Wisconsin by Todd Bol as a tribute to his schoolteacher mother. The mission of the movement is to promote literacy and the love of reading by building free book exchanges worldwide. This mission has been a huge success so far, with over 10,000 little libraries registered in over 40 countries. More than 1,650,000 books have been shared.

What I saw at the opening of this little library was a unique way to engage communities. The simple act of sharing books reaches across generations and provides an easy access for people to get to know one another in a meaningful way that connects them. While there was a lot of excitement at the opening of the library, the genius of this low maintenance project is that there is now a permanent way to bring people together. The library will be there on sunny summer days and rainy afternoons and cold winter nights, taking readers off to a faraway land or inspiring a recipe for Sunday dinner or helping someone learn a language and giving the people of the community a chance to share what they learned, what they did, and what they imagined.

I look forward to seeing more of these little free libraries appearing on the streets of my constituency and across Alberta, and I'm extremely proud and honoured and I am humbled to represent the very community-minded people of Beddington Heights, who take it upon themselves to create such a great place to live.

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

Minimum Wage

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to talk about the people in Cardston-Taber-Warner that are concerned about the rising minimum wage. A local restaurant owner, Dan Brown, wrote me the other day. Dan has been running his restaurant for five and a half years, and he is a very active member in my community. He is concerned about the impact minimum wage increases will have on youth employment. Dan is also very concerned about the impact the \$15 minimum wage will have on his labour costs. He is faced with some tough choices. He can reduce hours for existing employees or not hire new staff. Dan doesn't know how he would be able to afford to hire inexperienced staff. The labour costs are already high with training.

Dan would like to see a phased-in approach, some way that his restaurant can adapt to this drastic measure. The thing is that this issue has already been studied for over 70 years. This isn't new. This government knew that there would be harm to local businesses. Sure, a few would be helped, but many, many more would be out of work. Businesses would be in a crunch, some sort of hiring freeze or laying people off. What are they going to do? No one wants to be put in that position, especially Dan. I am proud to bring Dan's concerns to Alberta.

Thank you very much.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to section 5(3) of the Property Rights Advocate Act the chair is pleased to table with the Assembly the 2014 annual report of the Alberta Property Rights Advocate office.

3:20

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Ms

Ganley, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General and Minister of Aboriginal Relations, pursuant to the Metis Settlements Act the Metis Settlements Appeal Tribunal annual report 2014.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 201

Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act

Mr. Fraser: It's a great pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 201, Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act. I move the bill for second reading.

The Alberta heritage savings trust fund was established in 1976 after an act of the same name was given royal assent through this Assembly. Few could have predicted the ebbs and flows, the ups and downs, and what challenges it would have, that it would have lasting and dramatic impacts on the heritage trust fund. The challenges we face today mean that immediate action must be taken in order to secure and increase the strength of the fund and create a legacy that can be utilized by generations to come.

As a private member and a private member on this side of the House I can't introduce a bill that is interpreted as a money bill. A money bill is considered in Alberta to be a bill which in itself has the authority to appropriate a sum of public money to carry out its objectives. Alternatively put, the spending of public money out of the general revenue fund or authorizing public money to be spent before it reaches the general revenue fund is also a money bill. While Bill 201 does not speak of the spending but saving, it would still be interpreted as a money bill because of these very points. That is why we must charge the government to create a bill of their own that gives the effects of the contents of Bill 201. For this, we do not require royal recommendation.

The effects of this bill are simple but telling. This bill does not ask for a commitment to cap the spending of net income on the fund, which is the interest it generates as a result of access to a variety of revenue generators, including global equities, bonds, and fixed income money markets, nor does this bill address the contingency account, which is a separate account that is also made up of nonrenewable resource revenue. These are issues for another time, perhaps.

Bill 201 would call on the government to save a specific percentage of nonrenewable resource revenue into the heritage trust fund beginning from the years 2016-17. The figure would be 25 per cent and will remain at 25 per cent until the fiscal year in which operational revenue is projected to exceed operational expense as outlined in the government of the time's budget presented at the time of main estimates in this Assembly. From the following fiscal year 50 per cent of the nonrenewable resource revenue would be saved into the heritage trust fund for every subsequent fiscal year. Hon. members, this is by no means unachievable.

The province has taken a turn, and this turn will result in higher revenue generation through various levels of taxation. The result of this: that Alberta will now have the ability to put aside more of its nonrenewable resource revenue, and the ability will only increase as we return to a budget surplus in the years to come, as the government has promised Albertans. With firm spending principles in place this government could create the environment needed to ensure that growth of this fund is unparalleled. The real difference to the heritage trust fund will be made when its government returns to a budget surplus; however, there will be no reason why the work cannot begin now.

Some members on this side of the House may not share the belief that saving during recession is achievable. However, I would like to remind them and all other members in this Chamber that when these measures lead to a direct and identifiable return, it's not just achievable; it's a duty that we must live up to. This formula leads to a greater economic development and a vastly stronger Alberta. Colleagues, do not think of this as borrowing to save but investing to save. This province has the credit rating and the access to ensure this method of wealth generation is viable. Let's not waste it.

The fund has contributed over \$34 billion to fund the priorities of Albertans, particularly in regard to health care and education. Do not forget the important work that has already been undertaken and the need to have a strong heritage trust fund as we go into the future. The effects of the fund must be seen as assets, not just to the province but every person who calls Alberta home. Bill 201 would see the market value of the heritage trust fund increase to well over \$20 billion by the end of the 2018-19 fiscal year, and that factors in the government's spending of the majority of the fund's investment income.

The fund has played its part during challenging economic periods, and the results are obvious. We live in one of the wealthiest jurisdictions not just in Canada but in the entire world, and our standards of living are among the highest. However, our focus must shift now to securing the future for future generations to come, and we can only do that by the means and the contents of this bill. The bill would not bind in any way what you can spend from the heritage trust fund, but it sets in motion a framework of saving that would ensure the prosperity of Alberta for decades to come. Bill 201, Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act, tells Albertans that we will not waste the privilege of living in our time.

The right of this revenue will not flow forever, and we must be duly aware of this. The time to make a decision is now. The time to put a system of saving in place is now. I respectfully call on all members of this Assembly to vote in support of Bill 201.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to its own report from 1990 the Alberta heritage trust fund was worth around \$12.1 billion at that time. A single dollar from 1990 inflated to 2015 rates should be worth around \$1.86 now. Put another way, if the investments in the heritage trust fund had simply kept pace with the rest of the world while being reinvested and no further money was added or removed, the trust fund should be around \$22.5 billion. From the trust fund's third quarter report for 2014, the newest documents available online, the fund is now worth just \$17.2 billion, so it would seem that we have a gap. The trust fund should be worth at least \$22.5 billion, probably much more since the good people at AIMCo consistently outperform the markets, yet the fund is actually only worth \$17.2 billion.

That means that since 1990 we are missing almost 5 and a half billion dollars, and those missing funds are easily explained. Rather than allow the heritage trust fund to reinvest its own revenues, the government of the day skimmed those revenues off the top year after year. They did this to make up for significant gaps in their own budgets. The third party ran the government throughout those 25 years. Bill 201's sponsor belongs to that same third party, so I would suggest that this bill starts off with a major credibility problem. From 1990 on the now third party never once took seriously the idea of building up the heritage trust fund until just now, the first moment when their hands weren't on the controls. Now, despite the inherent hypocrisy embedded in this bill due to

the third party's past failures on this file, the underlying idea of reinvesting a portion of oil revenues into the heritage trust fund . . .

Dr. Starke: Point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

The Speaker: Point of order has been noted. We'll take it under advisement. My apologies to the member again. Could you state your reason for your point of order?

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, rising on citation Standing Order 23(i) and (l), using terminology that imputes false motives. When the term "inherent hypocrisy" is used to describe the motives of the member within the House, that clearly is a violation of our rules of order. I just would encourage the member to be cautious in her choice of words and perhaps suggest that she apologize and withdraw those comments.

The Speaker: Hon. member, could you cite that section for me again?

Dr. Starke: Standing Order 23(i) and (l).

The Speaker: Hon. member, are you prepared to withdraw your comments?

The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the hon. third party House leader, I don't accept that this is a valid point of order. What the hon. member simply said is that given the track record of that party while they were in government, it is very much at odds with the intent of this private member's bill and that while they had the opportunity over many years, decades, in fact, to implement the policy that's enshrined in this bill, they failed to do so. Now, at this hour, they've introduced a bill to do what they could have done but did not. The hon. member indicated that in her view this was inherent hypocrisy, not on the part of the member but on the part of the bill that he's introduced relative to the former government's own record.

So with the greatest of respect, Mr. Speaker, I would argue that there is not a valid point of order.

3:30

The Speaker: There is a disagreement made as to the statements. I don't have the opportunity of having access to the Blues at this point. I would take it under advisement and will report back.

The hon. member.

Debate Continued

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The underlying idea of reinvesting a portion of oil revenues into the heritage trust fund remains a good idea and one that I would encourage our government to act upon. However, handcuffing this new government to a fixed percentage, one that the previous government never even tried to make good on, strikes me as foolish and an obvious attempt at a poison pill piece of legislation. If we were to pass Bill 201, then we'd jeopardize this new government's ability to work towards a balanced budget, giving the third party something to complain about. Yet if we don't pass this bill, the third party would crow about the new government's lack of commitment to growing the very trust fund they ignored and took advantage of for so many years.

So we see that this private member's bill is designed to be a darned if you do and darned if you don't scenario. I find it

distressing that while the new government and the Official Opposition are trying to find ways to work together, we have third party members frittering away their limited opportunities to bring forward legislation on gotcha gimmicks like this Bill 201.

I encourage the members of this Assembly to reject such cynical politics and along with that to reject Bill 201. The core idea is good, and in due time I trust that our new Minister of Finance will find ways to reinvest a portion of our resource revenues into our heritage trust fund, but asking him to do so prior to this government's first budget and at a time when we know the province's expenses are exceeding its revenues would be to court fiscal disaster.

Furthermore, we know that this policy contained within Bill 201 is the exact same one that the third party advocated for during the most recent election. While we can debate how likely the third party was to make good on these commitments, the fact remains that Alberta's voters have roundly rejected these same policies that Bill 201 contains. We are here first and foremost to be representatives, so our vote on Bill 201 should reflect the already expressed will of the voters. Just as Albertans voted against this proposal, so should we.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to rise to speak to a bill that aims to ensure Alberta's future is secure. The principle of the bill is on point. Unfortunately, this bill's aim is a bit off. There is one very important step that needs to be taken before this bill could hit the mark.

There are dozens of similar funds around the world that look to set the wealth from nonrenewable natural resources aside. Alberta's heritage savings trust fund was one of the first, started in 1976. Unfortunately, it is now worth per capita less than when it was created and less than about 20 similar funds around the world. Initially it was created with the intention of putting 30 per cent of nonrenewable natural resource revenues into savings, 5 per cent more than this bill. At the moment there is no legislation stating how much is to be put into the heritage trust fund.

The Wildrose wants to see the heritage fund grow and become a nest egg for our future generations. In our election platform we outlined how much and what percentage of surpluses we would invest into the heritage fund. We want to invest 50 per cent of all budget surpluses into the heritage fund. I believe that we can all agree that investing into the heritage trust fund is in the best interests of all Albertans, but borrowing money to put into savings is not a good idea. I do not know one financial planner worth his stripes who would suggest to his clients that they borrow money in order to put that money into savings, especially if they are already spending more than they make, if their spending is already out of control, even more so if they have a mountain of debt already.

I'm not unlike most Albertans. I have to balance my own chequebook. I have to pay my own bills. I have to pay my mortgage, my car payments, and my credit card bills. There has not been one instance in my life where I have looked at interest rates lenders provide, whether through a line of credit or a credit card or a bank of dad, and thought: I should borrow money and put that borrowed money into savings. And I never would consider that in a year where I was planning to triple my debt already.

Some previous Finance ministers have argued that the rate of return on the heritage fund is a lot higher than borrowing rates, so it makes sense to invest in the fund even if it means borrowing to do so. Well, the Wildrose has argued for a while that while a guy with a good stock tip might raid his personal line of credit to invest in the odd stock, this would be irresponsible gambling for a government with taxpayers' money. If the market takes a downturn,

as it did in 2009, the heritage fund could quickly lose its value as it lost \$2 billion in that year. The interest paid on the ever-increasing debt caused by the third party and being added to by the current government is growing faster than Albertans can afford.

Again, I support investing into the heritage fund. The Wildrose supports investing into the heritage fund, but we are against borrowing to save. We need to balance the budget first. We need to start paying off our debt first. When Alberta is generating a surplus, then we can invest into the heritage fund. We will support, or at least I personally as a private member will support, the second reading of Bill 201, but we will require amendments that ensure that we are not borrowing to save before we back this bill at later stages. This means the deposit into the heritage fund must be surplus based. This is just common sense. You do not leave bills unpaid just to put money into savings. You do not invest while you are spending far more than you make. Worse is what this bill is suggesting: an equivalent to putting debt on the credit card in order to put that money into RSPs.

A balanced budget is a logical, required first step that is needed to be taken before money can be invested. And let's be clear. As one of the most prosperous jurisdictions in the world Alberta should be running a balanced budget. As the Infrastructure minister said before, Alberta should not be taking on debt. Why are we taking on debt? It's because of out of control spending, Mr. Speaker; \$8 billion a year more than B.C. is what we spend annually, and that is inexcusable.

We are proposing that 50 per cent of consolidated cash surpluses be legislated to go into the heritage fund. If this had been in place over the last few decades, the fund would be worth far more than the paltry sum of today. This will require not only amending the deposit formula but amending the definition of a balanced budget.

In order to make the budget appear balanced, the third party, while in government, opted to change the definition of a balanced budget. The result was the repeal of the Government Accountability Act and the Fiscal Responsibility Act and a focus on balancing only the operational portion of the budget. You see that echoed in this bill today. It says that if the operational budget is balanced, 50 per cent must go to the fund. That means that we could be borrowing an extra \$4 billion to \$5 billion a year on top of capital borrowing just to save.

The third-party changes pushed billions of dollars in capital spending off the bottom line, making it appear that the province's finances were in better shape than they actually were. If I had to guess, this is what the NDP discovered when they were starting to find challenges that are a bit bigger than what may have been featured in the Prentice government's campaign, quote, unquote, from the Premier, namely in respect to what the cash balance is.

3:40

While I was at the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, I made it my business to expose what the third party, the then government, was doing to our balance sheets: cooking the books. As I mentioned, they had separated the budget into three individual smaller categories and required only the operational budget to be balanced. The capital plan, which had been over \$5 billion for a decade, was at first taken entirely out of the equation, and then only part of it was brought back in last year under a so-called consolidated number, but this consolidated number was always somehow billions closer to balanced than the amount of debt they were taking on.

To ensure that we are not borrowing to save, we will need a balanced, consolidated, all-inclusive budget first, Mr. Speaker. No more additional \$6 billion side budgets that don't add up and are quietly paid off with debt. Does anyone here really think that future

generations will be proud of us when we tell them that we built the heritage fund by \$10 billion but handed them a bill of the debt for an extra \$10 billion?

The Wildrose wants to see this government be upfront with Albertans. The Wildrose wants to see a true and consolidated balanced budget. The Wildrose has been proposing to balance the budget for years. With that balanced budget plan comes a plan to reinvest into the heritage fund. The Wildrose surplus allocation strategy would also force deposits just as this bill proposes, but those deposits would only be allocated when we can afford them, when we're running a balanced budget. Surplus-based allocations don't add to the problem in years where we face steep debt and deficits.

With our plan, the Wildrose plan, 50 per cent of surpluses would go to the heritage fund, 25 per cent of surpluses to pay down the \$13 billion of debt run up by the previous government, and the remaining 25 per cent of surpluses would go to infrastructure to help municipalities and regions cope with growth during boom times. Of that last 25 per cent, 10 would go to our 10-10 plan for cities, and 15 to our infrastructure fund for things like ring roads. The key point of the Wildrose plan is that we would be investing in our future in a twofold way. Alberta's future is not secured by putting money into savings when the government is not balancing the budget; Alberta's future is secured by balancing the budget first and putting money into savings second. If these amendments are not made, I will be voting against this bill at its later stages.

We agree in principle. We agree that we must invest in our future, and we agree that we need to put money into the savings fund, but we need to agree that this is done after the budget is truly balanced. Without a balanced budget first, I cannot support this bill.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree in principle that it is very good policy to mandate a certain percentage of money going into the heritage savings trust fund. As a province that relies on nonrenewable resource revenues – as we're experiencing now, we know these revenues are unstable. It's very important that Alberta get off the resource revenue roller coaster. What I like about this bill is that it adds structure to what is currently an undefined and ad hoc approach to policy-making as it relates to revenue additions to the heritage trust fund. What I have to say – and this will be the first time, maybe the last, that I am swayed by the arguments by the Member for Strathmore-Brooks. I will say: please don't get used to it. It's distinctly uncomfortable.

In all sincerity, I think he makes a valid point. Borrowing simply to save is taking money from one hand and putting it into the other, and we achieve nothing. I do believe it's important that we enforce fiscal discipline along the way, that we find a mechanism to save nonrenewable resource revenues for future generations to ensure that government spending does not outstrip our ability to generate appropriate revenues, that our government follows good, strong fiscal discipline.

To do that, we need all options. We need new revenues, but more money is certainly not the answer to every question. Finding administrative efficiencies and ensuring that dollars are spent wisely in every area of government are the key to ensuring that our nonrenewable resource revenues can be invested, and only do that once we are out of debt. We need to ensure that we are focusing on economic diversification and other means of making sure that as the world changes around Alberta, we are not overreliant on nonrenewable revenues, that we're not crossing our fingers and simply

hoping that the price of a barrel of oil goes up to ensure that our kids can go to kindergarten.

What else do I want to say here, Mr. Speaker? I believe that we want to ensure that we get to a point where a minimum of 25 per cent of nonrenewable resource revenue is directed directly into the heritage savings trust fund but the rest of it is spent paying off debt, at which point we ensure that at least 50 per cent of future nonrenewable resource revenues goes towards the heritage fund.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The chair recognizes the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to speak to Bill 201, Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act, brought forward by my hon. colleague the Member for Calgary-South East. Having sat in this House for over a decade now, I've had the opportunity to witness many important debates that have helped form what Alberta is today and the direction for the future. The future is exactly what this bill is addressing. Bill 201 is quite simply proposing to task the government with ensuring that our children have a fund that offers financial security for whatever the future may hold. I'm not naive to the criticisms as to why these savings actions have not been taken in the past. On May 5 Albertans had their say on what they want for the future, and I stand here today with colleagues from across the House looking forward to our future.

What I've heard from my constituents is that the Alberta heritage savings trust fund is a source of great pride dating back to 1976, truly the envy of virtually any other jurisdiction in North America and beyond. This fund has paid for large capital projects that benefit Albertans across the province, including the Alberta Children's hospital in Calgary. Mr. Speaker, I could provide an extremely long list of projects paid for by that fund. It didn't just disappear. But, truly – I timed it – it would take up more than my entire speaking time. Suffice it to say that these projects have benefited Albertans greatly, but I think we all know that we can do more, and we can save more.

Bill 201 simply serves to ensure that this government has a mandate for saving whenever it enjoys a surplus. This bill serves to comfort Albertans that while the government is being attentive to the issues of today, it is also cognizant of the issues of tomorrow. You may know that at the recent G-7 summit there was a commitment made to phase out fossil fuels by the year 2100. This means, of course, for us right here and right now, that this opportunity has a timeline that ends. Mr. Speaker, I know that this government will point the finger back at us – and they have; that's pretty convenient – as to why this wasn't done before.

Great things were done since this fund first began. They might say that Albertans deserve their fair share of resource revenues. I understand that. Well, all Albertans have received the incredible benefit of this resource-rich province, including the lowest taxes in the country. We enjoy world-class public service that receives funding from nonrenewable resource revenue. There's a reason we continually lead the country in economic growth. The government of Alberta just released the population growth report, and once again we're leading the country.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is a reason why people are still flocking to Alberta, and this is why Bill 201 is essential. There must be savings for the future. This government has proposed increased taxes as a source of revenue, which should further strengthen the argument to put away nonrenewable resource . . .

The Speaker: I'm hearing a sound somewhere. Does someone have a phone on?

It seems to have stopped.

My apologies. Please proceed.

3:50

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just back up half a sentence.

The government has proposed increased taxes as a source of revenue, which should further strengthen the argument to put away nonrenewable resource revenue. My hon. colleague from Calgary-South East has provided flexibility to this government to bring this bill into force in tandem with or shortly after their first budget.

I do hope that members of this House do not dismiss the purpose of this bill. This is not just a request of our caucus; it's a request of Albertans who are proud of this. So I call on all of our members from all sides of the House to join me in supporting Bill 201 as just the first step for us all to work together to secure Alberta's future.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak today to Bill 201, the Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act. Certainly, my hon. colleague the Member for Calgary-Lougheed just spoke at some length with regard to the proud heritage of the heritage trust fund, and I would say that people of all political stripes can agree that in 1976, when Premier Lougheed instituted the heritage trust fund, it indeed was a proud moment for all Albertans. Perhaps that was the last point that everybody in Alberta agreed about the heritage trust fund and how it's been managed over the years.

I will say in defence of not only Premier Lougheed but the legacy of the third party that the heritage trust fund has been a legacy that has been extremely valuable to Albertans, and quite frankly the expenditures from the heritage trust fund have assisted and helped this province in many and varied ways and are a big part of the reason why we enjoy what we have in this province today. The heritage trust fund indeed has been used throughout the years to build many different forms of infrastructure throughout the province: airports, seniors' housing, parks, care homes, hospitals, and the list goes on and on.

Specifically, when we're talking hospitals, it includes the Walter C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre, here in the city of Edmonton. It includes, as my colleague mentioned, the Alberta Children's hospital. It includes facilities all around our province. There's scarcely an airport that you can walk into in rural Alberta and not see the heritage trust fund bronze plaque – that airport would have been constructed using at least some funding from the heritage trust fund – as well as seniors' housing throughout the province.

In addition to the investments made by the heritage trust fund in capital projects, we also have the heritage trust fund being involved in medical research through the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. Indeed, here in the province of Alberta, through the funding provided through the Alberta heritage fund for medical research, we have some world-leading medical researchers who have chosen to relocate from all around the world to do their work right here in our hospitals, in our educational institutions. Groundbreaking work is being done in Alberta in research, for example, into multiple sclerosis.

We have one of the finest research teams anywhere in the world, where there is co-operative research between the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge. I had an opportunity just last year to meet with one of those

researchers, who is from the University of Lethbridge. I spoke with her because she had a German-sounding name. As some of you will know, I am of German heritage, and I wished to try to have a few words with her in my mother tongue. She was fascinating, and I asked her the inevitable question: "Why are you here? Why aren't you in Germany doing this research?" She smiled, and she said, "Because the Germans are way behind us." The Germans simply do not have the infrastructure. They simply do not have the research teams for doing this kind of work, that is funded – how? – through the heritage trust fund.

So, ladies and gentlemen, while you can sometimes point to numbers – and I, quite frankly, have to smile when people say, "Well, why don't we have all the money that Norway has?" or "Why don't we have all the money that the Alaska permanent fund has?" Yes, it's true; the Alaska permanent fund has more money in it than the heritage trust fund does. But I had the opportunity to visit Alaska a couple of years ago. It was on a government trip – and the Member for Strathmore-Brooks can check out my expenses if he wishes, but I was sent to Juneau in January, so you can hardly call that an expensive government junket – and we spent two days at the Pacific North West Economic Region meetings, largely meeting with legislators from other jurisdictions. We met a lot of legislators from the state of Alaska.

Now, the state of Alaska is well known as having a considerable amount of nonrenewable resource revenue. In fact, 70 per cent of their operational budget comes from nonrenewable resource revenue. If you can think of a jurisdiction that needs some work with regard to diversification of their economic base, that would be one of them, and that was the question they asked. They said: "In Alberta, how did you do it? You're a resource-rich jurisdiction, but clearly with your infrastructure, with your universities, with the research that you're doing, you are doing better than we are. How are you doing it?" I simply said that we're doing it by strategically investing in initiatives that improve the quality of life in our province.

Now, are those initiatives always right, and do they always result in a positive return? Well, no, they don't, and there are well-publicized instances where those investments did not work out well. If they haven't already been pointed out, I'm sure the members from the party to the right of me, to the far right of me, will point those out. Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, there are lots of examples where strategic investments by the heritage trust fund have served Albertans extremely well. I will defend those investments, and I will defend, in fact, the legacy of the heritage trust fund.

I therefore am supporting this particular piece of legislation, because it is time that we set aside a specific, given amount annually for the heritage trust fund. Should we have done it sooner? Sure. I'll grant you that. Are there things that in hindsight we can do better? Of course, we can. But we have to always look at things with an eye to the future. We live in the present, and we make decisions for the future. We don't sit here and agonize over mistakes that were done in the past. When mistakes were made – and we saw an example of that earlier this afternoon – we acknowledge them, and we move on. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, that's what this bill is doing. It's saying: let's move on, and let's make sure that we make these strategic investments in the heritage trust fund going forward.

You know, Peter Lougheed was named as the foremost leader at the provincial level, the greatest Premier of all time in Canada, for a reason. He had tremendous vision, and he had tremendous ability to articulate that vision going forward. When he passed away, three years ago, I remember very vividly one commentator saying that the epitaph that was used for Christopher Wren is perhaps the epitaph that should be used for Peter Lougheed, that if ye seek his monument, look around you. Indeed, the province of Alberta, this

province that we love, this province that has so much in the way of infrastructure and resources and so many things that we can be proud of, I would say, is largely attributable to the vision of one Peter Lougheed, and a big part of what Peter Lougheed instituted was the heritage trust fund.

This bill strengthens the heritage trust fund. This bill imposes on this government and future governments – it might be these folks; we hope that it's us some day – fiscal discipline to make sure that savings go into the heritage trust fund. Let's make sure that we do that. We have that opportunity with Bill 201. To my fellow members, I would encourage you to vote in favour of this bill.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to say that I'll be speaking against Bill 201. I agree; there have been some important investments across Alberta from the heritage trust fund. I say this with the greatest of respect to the Member for Calgary-South East. Any discussion that focuses on being more responsible with the revenue received by government is certainly worthy of debate in this House.

However, any legislation binding government to arbitrary targets for setting aside revenue from nonrenewable resources is premature at best. Under this act future governments would be required to set aside 25 per cent of resource revenues into the trust fund. I do question the member of the third party and of the former government for bringing forward this bill at this time in this session. If they thought it was a great idea, Bill 201 could have been enshrined into law during any of the previous 44 years that they were in government.

It's also contrary to the direction that Albertans chose on May 5. On that day they voted for change. They voted for a government that is committed to openness and transparency. They voted for a government that believes in fairness in taxation. They voted for a government that believes that we need to build a more diversified economy that is less prone to the boom-and-bust cycles of the oil industry. They voted for a government that is committed to protecting health care, education, advanced education, and human services because Alberta families need those programs. Our government is delivering on those priorities.

4:00

In one short week in our first legislative session our very young government has brought historic, positive change to our province. My colleague the Minister of Justice has introduced legislation that would ban corporate and union donations to political parties. It is a bill that the members opposite in the third party did not support, but it is supported by the Official Opposition. It's great a day when legislation can have broad-based appeal and support from members across this Chamber. It's unfortunate that members of the third party didn't support that democratic reform.

Our government also introduced an interim supply bill that would restore funding to health and other critical services that I outlined earlier. As Minister of Finance I am also committed to bringing fairness to the tax system through legislation that asks the most successful corporations to pay a little bit more while introducing a progressive income tax system for all taxpayers. This legislation will also bring much-needed revenue stability to our treasury. That's a lot of work, and many more governments haven't gotten that much work done over many sessions that they've been in government. Mr. Speaker, we're working hard to honour our commitments to Albertans.

Bill 201 is not part of our agenda and is not what voters asked us to do. We believe in fiscal responsibility. We understand that there

is great value in saving during good times so that we have a financial cushion during more challenging times. We also see a great future in our oil sector, one where we will work to keep the energy sector jobs here and not export them abroad or to Texas. Because of the economic policies of the previous government, there is a deficit. Our focus over the next four years will be to return to balance and develop an economic plan that gets us off the boom-and-bust cycle and roller coaster. We can't support legislation that is a distraction to our plan and the hard work Albertans have asked us to do. It's premature until we have completed the royalty review that we committed to during the election. Our government believes in acting responsibly with scarce public resources. When we reverse the slide in this fund that occurred under previous governments, we'll be careful not to make the same mistakes. We'll not squander our resource wealth.

Bill 201 is the wrong legislation at the wrong time, and I would urge people to not support it. Thank you.

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

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have to confess that I am somewhat confused as to the real objective here in this motion. The PCs did have many years in which to do this. Instead, they spent both the interest and the nest egg, and now they are asking to increase debt in order to create the appearance of saving. The idea of saving from a party that saved nothing just confuses me as to the motive. I believe in saving. I absolutely do believe in saving. I've been a personal saver all my life. But saving, truthfully, is a function of disciplined spending, and without spending discipline there can be no saving. Until this House gets its spending in order, our province will be profligate and continually in a state of crisis and financial dysfunction.

Most reputable family financial counsellors would advise you with regard to your personal finances that if you have a surplus in cash, you should pay down debt first. It's one of the first principles of financial security, to minimize debt and to control debt. Debt is a great destroyer. I've had to counsel those who have struggled with debt and who are facing the prospect of bankruptcy. The pain, the shame, and the dispossession of bankruptcy is always preceded by debt. It happens in families, it happens in countries, as it is in Greece right now, and we just don't want to go down that path. At the risk of sounding scaremongering, even without bankruptcy debt enslaves. Debt robs you of cash flow. Debt today restricts you tomorrow.

As a last thing I just want to say that borrowing to invest is a zero-sum game. It takes risks that it shouldn't and a dose of delusion, hoping somehow to win. A trustee should never take such risks with other people's money. Actual saving is a good thing, and we need that, but posturing to feel good with borrowed money is not saving. We need real savings, and unless we can see that, I personally cannot support this bill.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today because I will be speaking against Bill 201, and I say this with great respect to the member. I say this because we have to look at this and say that yes, we can have discussion, and yes, it's worthy to have discussion on issues which affect savings and issues which affect the heritage savings trust fund because these are things that matter to Albertans and these are things that we need to focus on. However, right now is simply not the time to do it.

I'm going to echo the statements made by the Minister of Finance and say that now is not the time because right now we need to focus on passing the fall budget. We need to focus on developing these

things, and we need to focus on this without having our hands tied by saying that we must invest these arbitrary numbers that seem to have been pulled out of thin air, that we must invest these numbers that haven't been given a lot of thought because we've only been sitting here for a couple of weeks, that we have to invest all this money. We're going to say: let's just tie the government down and not give them any leeway on how they're going to develop their budget, not give them any leeway on how they're going to develop their plans moving forward for the next four fiscal years.

We look at this and say that yes, our government believes in fiscal responsibility. Our government believes in saving when times are good. Right now is not that time. Right now is not the time to be committing to things that the government cannot foresee. Right now is not the time for the budget to be tied down to something that we simply do not know will happen, when we cannot and will not be able to predict the future. So we say that we can't let this Bill 201, this legislation, distract us from what Albertans elected an NDP government to do. What Albertans elected us to do is to focus on the issues that matter to them and to ensure that we can fund those things in a responsible way moving forward, and that right now is this fall's budget. In the future we may have to re-evaluate these things. So we look at this and say that our government believes in acting responsibly with our scarce resources. We have these limited resources, and we do understand that some of these eventually will have to be invested in our savings and invested in furthering this province. We look at this, and again we say that now is not the time.

We ask that you look and say: how is deciding on these and pulling this number out of the air a good idea? How is that a good idea? You've brought this forward and haven't really thought it through. It's been two weeks. We tabled this legislation, and we say that we don't even know what the budget will look like. We simply have interim supply on the table right now, and that's something we're going to have to move forward with before we can even consider to be squandering our resources in ways that we haven't quite looked at yet.

As the Minister of Finance has said, once we reverse the slide and we reverse what the previous government has done, we can start looking at how we can do these savings, how we can reinvest in our heritage savings fund, how we can start doing that. We won't make those mistakes that the previous government has made. We won't go back and do the same things they've been doing and mismanaging for the last 40-odd years.

Now, what we're going to say today is that Bill 201 is wrong. I urge every member of this Assembly to realize that right now is not the right time. Right now is not the opportunity for us to look at something that hasn't been thought through. Right now I urge everybody to vote against Bill 201 so that we can look forward and focus and let our government focus on investing in things that matter to Albertans, let the government focus on things that matter to our constituents instead of forcing them to do things that they simply cannot commit to in this short fiscal period.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:10

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate all the debate that I have heard here in the House today. The hon. member who just finished speaking I think said: why now, and was it pulled out of the air? Well, he was kind of right about that. It was pulled out of the air. There's a draw for these bills. That's why it's right now. You're new here, so you might not have known that, but that's why. We draw for the order of business. That's why. That's when we had an opportunity to bring a bill forward. It's pretty straightforward.

Mr. Speaker, to you and to the hon. House leader from the government who's chirping I will say that this is one of the elements that was in the budget that we brought forward just before the election, to add savings to the heritage savings fund. So it's not out of the air. It's well considered. I guess at the time the government considered that this was the right time to make this change.

There have been a lot of questions asked, you know, about how we got here? I guess I'm always highly entertained when I hear the comment: if we did this differently, there would be more money in the fund; if we did that differently, there would be more money in the fund. To those people who make those comments I would say that they're about half right, simply because if you want to know – people say, well, where's the money that in those people's views should be in the heritage fund? I guess your kids are probably sitting in the schools that that money bought in some cases. You probably drive on the roads that some of that money bought in some cases. Mr. Speaker, Albertans paid lower taxes for decades. These are choices that the government made, to build schools, build roads, have lower taxes. They could have made different choices, to have fewer schools, fewer roads, and more taxes and put more money in there. That also would have been a legitimate policy choice to have made, but the government of the day chose to build schools and roads and hospitals.

It's great, actually, Mr. Speaker, to now hear the other parties chirping because they're all pretty happy when the schools do get built. For the ones who are saying, "You should have built more schools or more hospitals," potentially that would have been less money in the heritage fund, depending on the policy choices that that would lead to. You see where I'm going here? The fact is that – you know what? – they're policy choices that have given Albertans lower taxes, more infrastructure along the way, and Albertans have enjoyed the benefit of those things in the past. In many cases Albertans are still enjoying the benefit of those things today.

I was also entertained by some of the comments from my colleague in the opposition, particularly when he said that no financial adviser would ever advise somebody to borrow money to save. Well, mine did, and that's an interesting fact. I can tell you that . . .

Mr. Fildebrandt: We're not talking about Horner.

Mr. McIver: No, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I'm talking about our adviser from the Investors Group, who advised my wife and I, when we were getting close to paying off our mortgage, to put a couple of hundred thousand on the mortgage at a very low rate and invest more money. I see members of the opposition nodding. They probably got the same advice.

When the hon. member says that no financial adviser in their right mind would say that, I would say that I guess my financial adviser must be out of his mind. The fact is that my wife and I actually made enough money off that investment to pay it back, with tens of thousands of dollars more to secure our future. I will say this in defence of the member who said that. Every time you make an investment, it's a risk. Where I do agree with him, Mr. Speaker, is that if the investment that my wife made or any investment that the heritage fund made had gone down, it wouldn't have turned out so well. I don't take issue with that.

I do think that the hon. member does have faith that investments can turn out well. Otherwise, why would the hon. member say that you need to put a lot more money into the heritage fund? Now, it would be crazy for him to say that, and I don't think he's crazy. For him to say to put a lot more money into the heritage fund if he believed all the investments were going to go down, that wouldn't be a smart thing for him to say. Actually, I think he's a smart person, so I think he considered that.

But it does lay bare, Mr. Speaker, the inconsistency that you can't make money by investing. Clearly, members in this House want to put more money into the heritage fund. I believe that they care enough about Albertans to believe that they think those investments might go up. In fact, if you look at the track record of the heritage fund over the last few years, I think you would find that the results have been investment results that any investor would be proud to have achieved.

When you consider all of that, when you consider that the hon. member is presenting money to go into the heritage fund out of surpluses, it's actually, interestingly enough, kind of consistent with what everybody is arguing for. Yet they're coming to the other conclusion. I will ask you to reconsider what you've said, only the conclusion that you've come to, and to consider, actually, investing in a fund that benefits Albertans, particularly one with a good track record, particularly when it's coming out of surpluses. I think you might have all just talked yourselves into what a good idea Bill 201 is, and I encourage you to support it.

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

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak against Bill 201. While the Member for Calgary-South East is to be respected for his current focus on responsibly managing government revenue, legislation that will bind the government – bind the government – to setting aside revenue from our nonrenewable resources is not the best move for Alberta at this time. We certainly understand the value of the heritage trust fund and its potential for our province. While we understand the value of saving during good times for the future of this province, the member presents this legislation at a time when we are in a deficit due to the economic policies of the previous government. It is unfortunate that the member did not bring forward this bill in previous sessions, when the third party actually governed this province, so that Albertans would today have a financial cushion.

As they did not, at this time it is our responsibility and our priority to work hard to restore the balance, to develop an economic plan that moves us away from the boom-bust cycle. At this time it is our responsibility to move in the direction Albertans chose for us on May 5. Albertans voted for a government that believes that we need to support a diversified economy that is less prone to the boom-bust cycles of the oil industry. Albertans voted for a government committed to protecting health care, education, advanced education, human services, the things that matter to your average Albertan.

Mr. Speaker, our government is working hard to do that for Albertans, to stand firm on our commitments that we made. In our very first week of our first legislative session we've already taken a very significant step to move away from the boom-bust cycle by introducing legislation to ask the most successful corporations and individual Albertans to pay a little more to bring more revenue stability to our treasury. As we work to reverse the downward trend that occurred under the previous government, we must act responsibly with the scarce resources that we have and be careful not to repeat those mistakes.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 201, just simply, as previously stated, is the wrong legislation at this time, so I absolutely cannot support it, and I ask that all of you vote against Bill 201. Thank you.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

The Speaker: Hon. members, I do have a ruling on the point of order that was raised earlier in the day. Upon reviewing the Blues, I note that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods stated:

From 1990 on the now third party never once took seriously the idea of building up the heritage trust fund until just now, the first moment when their hands weren't on the controls. Now, despite the inherent hypocrisy embedded in this bill due to the third party's past failures on this file, the underlying idea of reinvesting a portion of oil revenues into the heritage trust fund . . .

I do not see that there is a point of order here based on the language that was used pursuant to the standing orders. However, in the short period of time that we have been in the House, I wish to remind all members of the House that if you wish to be productive, engaged, as you've all said you would like to be, be cautious of the tone that you use. I respect that you will apply that across the House to each other.

Thank you.

4:20

Debate Continued

The Speaker: I think the next speaker that we have is the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. Proceed.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To start with, I would very much like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-South East for bringing this motion forward. I think it's very important and very beneficial for all Albertans and particularly us in this House, entrusted with this great resource, to have the opportunity to talk and debate about the best way forward for ourselves and for future generations, and I look forward to being able to add to that. To me, the intent of this bill is almost to be split in two ways, the idea behind saving and the idea behind borrowing to save. At this point in time I will support Bill 201 and hope that we can have a fulsome discussion on some of the amendments that are necessary around the idea of borrowing to save.

The heritage trust fund, as other members have mentioned, has done tremendously good things in our province, from providing medical research, agricultural research, to building many properties that many of our citizens use today. But, to me, the debate centres around Alberta and Albertans being blessed with this tremendous asset of oil and gas, whether it's the oil sands, conventional oil, or natural gas, billions and billions of dollars of net worth. How do we commercialize that, honour the intelligent and hard-working Albertans and Canadians that add the value to taking that oil and gas and those oil sands out of the ground, converting it to a usable product for all Albertans and all Canadians, and taking a fair amount of tax and saving a fair amount for the next generation?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

There are many, many different ideas around it, but part of where I want to start is with the idea of what some other sovereign funds do. There are some sovereign funds that take the interest that their funds earn and do not invest them in their jurisdiction. The idea behind this is not to cause inflation; the idea behind this is to spread the risk. With our past government, of course, I believe it was \$33 billion in interest over the last 38 years that this fund has earned that has been put into our economy. Has this been the correct process? Has this caused inflation? What it has done, for sure, is that it has left the fund at the same absolute dollar value that it was at when Peter Lougheed started it in the mid- to late '70s, somewhere between \$16 billion and \$17 billion. Our calculations in the Wildrose are that if we had just left that \$33 billion and let it compound and accumulate over the last 38 years, we would have somewhere between \$200 billion and \$220 billion today in the fund.

Mr. Smith: That's a lot of money.

Mr. Barnes: A lot of money.

Mr. Cooper: A lost opportunity.

Mr. Barnes: A lost opportunity.

What does that cost us? I look at today's situation. My understanding is that AIMCo historically makes between 7 per cent and 7 and three-quarters per cent per year. So if we had \$200 billion in the fund, somewhere around \$14 billion, \$15 billion would be earned. Oil and gas royalties in most of our better years were \$8 billion or \$9 billion. In a year like this year, when oil and gas royalties may be as low as \$3 billion or 3 and a half billion dollars, what I'm hearing, that interest instead could go into our general revenues and fund the services we need, whether it's health care or education.

Mr. Cooper: That's stability.

Mr. Barnes: That is stability. That kind of stability leads to diversification. That is the lost opportunity of the 44-year PC government.

I want to tell this government, though, that to diversify the economy, you need more than that. You need low, competitive tax rates. It's an international world. Our companies have to compete with American states and jurisdictions around the world. Low, competitive tax rates bring business, attract capital.

We need minimal bureaucracy. Your government is inheriting a government that consistently was given a D or a D minus by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business for not reducing red tape and bureaucracy in Alberta. I ask that you please address that.

We need stable utility rates, another area of PC failure. Property rights: we need strong property rights to bring certainty and to lead to investment. Again, I ask your government to put this high on your list.

How should we handle increasing the fund? Well, a lot of constituents in Cypress-Medicine Hat think that the number should be around \$100 billion, \$110 billion, the idea being that when the fund can earn 7 or 7 and three-quarters per cent, that generates the \$8 billion or \$9 billion that we put every year into our budget, from what we earn from royalties now, to provide the stability.

How do we get there? The Wildrose members' policy I think is a good way forward and is based on that principle. Let's build the fund to where the interest earned equals what we would make from oil and gas royalties annually to build the stability that we need for our children, our seniors, our social programs. The idea of the 50 per cent of surplus: let's get back to a situation where spending is under control, where the royalties are a real opportunity, and the idea behind putting 50 per cent into surplus will build that fund accordingly but leave the other 50 per cent for what would obviously be growing and increasing needs. If we're having a surplus, no doubt it's a time of high economic business activity, and that would lead to municipalities in other parts of the province having other needs as well, so the other 50 per cent could be used for that.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Let's talk about the spending. As other members have said, on a per capita basis Alberta spent almost \$12,000 per year per person under the last government. The Canadian average for a province is more like \$9,600, \$9,800. That \$2,000 per year per Albertan leads to \$8 billion a year in additional spending, more than if we had just spent the Canadian provincial average. To the new government: please look at bureaucracy, look at corporate cronyism, and look everywhere where our hard-earned tax dollars aren't getting citizens the value that we need.

The Fraser Institute put out a report, authored by Mark Milke, showing that our last government over the last 10 years had spent

54 per cent more on operations and programs than population growth and inflation warranted. Over the last 10 years it's \$41 billion in additional spending that, again, I'm sure, has gone to high-level bureaucracy and areas that aren't enhancing our front-line services, our education, our health care. Please look there, too.

4:30

In summary, I absolutely support the idea of taking some of our valuable resource of undeveloped oil and gas, conventional oil and oil sands, and building up a fund that will shield us against downturns, that may help with diversity and diversification if we do some of the other right things.

At this point in time, though, I absolutely believe that borrowing to invest is not the way forward. Our sister province of Ontario is a prime example. I don't know the exact numbers, but I remember reading a short time ago: \$300 billion in debt, interest annually of over \$11 billion. I was shocked when I read that that's more than they spend annually on their advanced education and their job training. Can you imagine a government that spends more than all their universities and their job training and they spend that on interest? That's not where I want to leave this province for the next generation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm pleased to rise. I've actually enjoyed and appreciated the comments on both sides of the House with respect to this bill. It's a very important question, and I'm glad that the hon. member has raised it because I think it's certainly worthy of debate.

The question has been raised, though, about the timing. I also am curious about the timing because the previous government had made decisions with respect to the heritage trust fund. It was their idea. It is probably the single most important legacy of the previous government and one of which they should be very proud, in my view. The question, however, is why a bill that would require that a certain fixed amount of royalty revenue, nonrenewable revenue, be put into the fund comes now. This had previously been the policy of that government back in the day of Peter Lougheed, and that was at a time when the heritage trust fund did increase steadily in value. It's true that at that time there were also investments in infrastructure that were made. I don't think that that has been the case for some time. The question, then: why reintroduce that at this point?

Decisions were made to take out the earnings of the fund and put it into general revenues so that the fund didn't grow. There were related decisions that were made as well with respect to royalties. Under the Lougheed government they set a goal for realizing the value for the owners, which are, of course, the people of Alberta, of these resources. The goal was set that 30 per cent of the total value of those resources should come to the people of Alberta, who own the resources. They actually accomplished that goal and, in fact, exceeded it in some years.

But in subsequent governments, notably after the election of Mr. Klein, a decision was made to reduce the take on royalties very substantially, to the point where the take that we now get in terms of the royalties from gas and oil is about 9 per cent of the value. Mr. Speaker, that's actually lower than under Social Credit, which accomplished a level of 10 per cent of the value of the royalty revenue coming to the people of Alberta. So that was a decision also that affected the growth of this fund because it substantially reduced the amount of revenues coming from that source that could be invested in the fund, so the fund atrophied. It failed to grow, and it actually shrunk against inflation.

So why now? I sense that there is a tinge of regret. I think there is a sense that the government has missed an opportunity, and they realize that the time when they could have done the right thing by the fund, followed the course set out by Peter Lougheed, has passed, maybe not anticipating the change in government but a change in values of resources that made it more difficult to grow the fund. I recognize it was part of their platform, but I sense a feeling of a missed opportunity in this bill.

Now, I also recognize that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has made an excellent point, that had we retained the earnings of the fund and allowed the compound to grow, we would be now receiving over \$30 billion a year in revenue from the fund, which could have easily offset the drop in royalty revenues which we are now experiencing. So the opportunity was lost to turn this into – I'm looking for the right word – a fiscal balance, a fiscal stabilizer, to stabilize the revenues that the province received. Talking about the royalty roller coaster came, I think, far too late on the part of the previous government.

Let me get to the point, though, about the bill and why I can't support it, and that is because the bill requires that 25 per cent of nonrenewable resource revenue be directed unless operational revenue is expected to exceed operational expense – in other words, we're in an operational surplus position – and then 50 per cent. This easily could move the province's finances into a deficit; hence, the argument that it would mandate automatic borrowing on the part of the government. So it's too specific, particularly to deal with our present circumstances. It is tying the hands of the Assembly, not just the government but also of the Assembly, with respect to the budget that we can bring forward.

We certainly accept and believe that we should grow the savings of this province. We need to make sure that we have full value or fair value for the resources that we all own together in order to accomplish that and that the tax structure enables us to spend for our programs that are delivered by the government so that royalty revenue can in fact be invested in savings, as I think all sides of the House agree. But until we accomplish those balances and reach those levels, it will be very difficult to mandate 25 per cent of royalty revenue and in a surplus year 50 per cent of royalty revenue being invested in this fund. I think that that is far too restrictive in terms of what the Assembly can do, particularly given the circumstances that we're in now, with being handed a significant deficit to deal with and low prices for our commodities at the present time.

On that basis, Mr. Speaker, I would urge all members of the House to defeat Bill 201, and perhaps a different, more flexible approach can be considered by the government to be brought forward at a future time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak on this. Personally I agree in principle with Bill 201 with a few changes that we must implement before it goes further. Before we can start saving, we have a mess to clean up and we have a budget to balance and debt to pay off. The words "Alberta heritage savings trust fund" – unfortunately, over the last three decades we've lost our savings and we've lost our trust in government, resulting in the changes that we saw on May 5.

In 1995 the government asked Albertans about the future of the heritage trust fund in a survey called Can We Interest You in an \$11 billion Decision. Of the over 50,000 responses Albertans said to keep the fund for future generations and focus on generating better returns on long-term investments. The Alberta Heritage Savings

Trust Fund Act was amended to reflect the changes Albertans asked for in the survey results. Since that point we've frittered away close to \$30 billion out of that fund. Following the results from the 1995 survey, the heritage fund was restructured. The fund can no longer be used by government for direct economic development or social investment purposes. That was in 1997.

4:40

The state of our fund compared to 25 of the top oil-producing countries in the world: we currently sit at 23 out of 25 countries. Some of the investment savings plans in other countries: number 21, whom we are behind, was started in 2000. It's now worth \$18 billion, and that's the Iraq development fund. It's been at war pretty much the whole time since 2000. The U.S. Alaska permanent fund started in 1976, and they have been paying out dividends to their residents. It's sitting at \$51.7 billion. I think you can see the pattern here, that we had an opportunity, we squandered it, and now we're asked to commit 25 per cent of all of our revenue from oil and gas without paying down debt first. Just another one that we fall behind: Libya, another country that's been at war on and off for many years. They started their fund in 2006. It's now worth \$66 billion.

Many years ago I was advised by a very successful man that the most prudent financial plan – and I agree with my colleague – was to put away any excess money that you got. He said that even if you got \$100 at Christmas from grandma, put it against your mortgage rather than putting it into savings or into some other investment that may lose money. It's simple math of reducing principal on a loan rather than carrying the interest. He said that I would have more money to save when my mortgage was paid off, and he was absolutely right. It was a very successful strategy. I would suggest that paying down our debt and reducing our deficit by controlling excessive spending is the most prudent path forward. Once we have spending under control and have a balanced budget, only then can we look at adding to our savings, which I agree is very important for Albertans now and in the future. At that point I'd suggest that we follow the plan that the Wildrose has put forward of paying 50 per cent of all surplus into the heritage savings trust fund and also 10 per cent into the MSI fund to give stability to our municipalities.

More important at this juncture is that we use this bill to protect the existing Alberta heritage trust fund from further exploitation by this or any future government. I think that's we have to do, use this bill to protect the fund from any future stealing of its revenue or interest.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there any other members that wish to speak to the bill? The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, second reading is really about the principle of the bill. I don't think anybody in the House would quibble with the need to save in this wealthy province, that we have inherited with tremendous resource wealth, and a need to move beyond a nonrenewable economy, that once gone is gone forever. It doesn't pass without some irony that four weeks after this Conservative government was unelected, they suddenly are talking about savings. Well, where have they been for the last 30 years, I guess, is the question. Not only the most thoughtful and well-respected economists on the planet have been saying this for years; Albertans have been saying it for years.

Finally, I think we're going to get a government that, I hope, is going to see the merit of saving where we have the opportunity. I can't agree more with the hon. member that we do need savings. At this time of tremendous instability one could argue about the principle of saving and forcing governments to save. It's obviously

on a very pragmatic and practical level very difficult at this time to commit to actually borrowing for essential services, at a time when our economy looks like it's going to be in difficult times for at least the foreseeable future, a year maybe or maybe a year and a half. We all hope, I'm sure, that it will come back.

But the previous government was living on a wing and a prayer. Each annual report and each budget said that they were planning to save once things got better, and somehow things never got better enough to save even any of the surpluses that we had. So it's a very difficult thing to deny that we must save our nonrenewable resource wealth. I mean, it's just so basic.

The unfortunate timing of this is not beyond us. We have some critical infrastructure. We have some critical public services: education, health care, supports for families at risk. We cannot compromise that. To force a government to go into debt to honour a piece of legislation that forces them to save at a time like this raises some serious questions, and I guess we'll have to debate those both at this time and in the committee.

But perhaps the hon. member is open to some amendments and some suggestions for modifying the bill in some ways that would make it more palatable, so that we actually place a high priority on saving whenever it's feasible and then start to move toward a commitment, especially when there's surplus, to a percentage saving and lock that in, I guess, in legislation so that we don't give this government, as we did the last, the option to spend it or spend even the interest on this nonrenewable resource wealth, which has been done for years, and leaving it actually depleted – significantly depleted – compared to what it was even at the time of former Premier Peter Lougheed, which is a travesty to our children, to our future, to opportunities to provide that important buffer for the future.

I'm sure others have commented on the not dissimilar decisions that have been made in Norway, where they made a legislated commitment to saving. With the high taxes, of course, there they're able to follow through on that for the most part and draw down only on the savings when they are in a deficit position and require it for public services. There's some real wisdom, real leadership in that. Incidentally, for those of you who may not know, Norway brought in a carbon tax in 1991, and they haven't suffered greatly from providing that kind of incentive for the environment and for a reduced carbon-intensive economy. So they're sending the messages that I think most people on the planet want to send: save when we can; invest in alternative energy; put on a levy on the carbon that is going to increasingly cost us hugely in extreme weather events and health problems and food production and water management. These are really important times to be thinking about the kind of example that Norway has set even if we can't follow it to the letter that they have followed it.

So in principle – I absolutely support the principle of savings. It's difficult at this time to require a government to be forced to save at a time of tremendous economic uncertainty and with critical services that are now recognized, I think, to be about 20 per cent lower than the rest of Canada on a per capita basis, human services about 20 per cent less than the average per capita spending in Canada. We are behind. We are behind, folks. That's according to Kevin Taft's book *Follow the Money*, and that was completed in 2011 or '12, so certainly there might be some changes since then, but we have some catch-up to do. I know in my community about the number of homeless, the number of people without affordable housing, the number with addictions problems that aren't getting addressed, mental health issues, children at risk. We cannot keep going like this, I don't think, and we certainly could be forcing a government to go into debt to expand services in human services where they're needed.

So while I agree in principle, I doubt that I will be able to support this in practice. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Would the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View like to speak? Proceed.

4:50

Mrs. Aheer: As a private member I would like to say that I support the intent of this bill. I think that the government talks about how there was an ask for change, how Albertans looked and are looking for a change. Change doesn't mean that it has to be the complete opposite. It means that you can embrace an idea that is good at its core and look at it for what it is and make it your own. That's the purpose. It doesn't mean that you have to be opposed to that bill.

For example, in its intent, the borrow-not-to-save idea is a good idea. It's good public policy. It looks like we care about what is happening with Albertans' money, that we care about saving, that we care about a legacy, that we care about our children, that we care about our grandchildren, that we care about seniors, that we care about health care, and that we care about education. These are all things that putting your money into a savings plan mean to people. It means a lot in our own families when we do that, and it means something to Albertans that when their tax dollars come to this government, they are being put somewhere where they can physically see and understand the growth of their money.

Fifty per cent of revenue from nonrenewable sectors is a good idea. It's good public policy. It is money that can only be used with the eyes of Albertans on you, and it puts all of us into a position to be accountable and transparent. Those are words that I, personally, keep hearing over and over again: transparency, accountability, integrity. Well, we need to put some real numbers and some real ideas into that.

Transparency means putting your money into something where everyday Albertans can see it growing, where they have the pride and the knowledge that going forward the government is caring about what happens to their dollars. The heritage fund is the epitome of what that means. It means that we're looking into the future of the province. It means that we're going to stabilize a sector that's unstable and make it so that that money can be there for the future. The intent of the bill is correct. It is good public policy.

I would also like to reiterate what the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat had talked about. That number, \$200 billion, is a monster number, and it's a fabulous number if you think about what the future could hold if we actually did that. Wouldn't that be amazing? If you can think about it as you go forward in deciding, this is a private member's bill. You can vote on this; we can all vote on this independently, independently of how we feel we should move forward in Alberta. That means more than anything. It means that conscientiously we're making decisions individually on behalf of our constituents, on their future, to what happens with their dollars. Imagine \$200 billion. What could we do with that money?

Now, granted, as the third party members have said, the money had been used and spent on things that we've all benefited from in this province. So if we want to continue benefiting the people in the province, which is what I hear over and over again about services and ideas and things that this government wants to bring to the people, that money has to come from somewhere. If we want Albertans to understand where their dollars are going, they need to go into a fund that has transparency, that has accountability.

It's a nonpartisan idea. It's a decision that can help us create a legacy, something that all of us can participate in. It's just an amazing idea. It's amazing to be part of something that incredible, that we can all put our stamp on.

Significant opportunities have been missed to reinvest, and the resources are limited, but they need to bear fruit in the future. They need to have a future where whatever is available to us right now produces something for later, where it's not just gone on a whim and on an idea, which has happened in the past. We can't make ideas based on whims. We need to invest in the future.

We can talk about the formula. Well, the formula within the heritage trust fund is what actually keeps us accountable. We have to be able to show Albertans what that formula means and how that comes forward. Again, what is the government talking about? Transparency, accountability. That will keep us transparent and accountable to Albertans.

Pride comes from having done a great job. It comes from knowing the legacy, how it grows, and how it will continue. Pride comes from acknowledging that we've learned from our mistakes and that we can learn to pay it forward and not spend with no conscience. Spending isn't the answer; saving is actually the answer. We do not have a revenue problem. We have a management issue. So let's show how we're going to manage. If we're going to spend, let's spend appropriately. Let's show them how we're going to spend. That is our responsibility. The idea is good, and together we can make the plan fabulous.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other speakers who would wish to speak on Bill 201? I recognize the member.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak against Bill 201.

An Hon. Member: Aw.

Ms Babcock: I know.

With respect to the Member for Calgary-South East, a piece of legislation that requires this government and all governments in the future to set aside 25 per cent of resources into the heritage trust fund is not fiscally prudent. It is, with the uncertain fiscal climate we face today, premature and the opposite of forward thinking. Due to the economic policies of the previous government our province is currently in a deficit, and though it is incredibly important to save, there was little to no saving recently when there was extra to put away. The history of the heritage trust fund is important, and it is important to acknowledge the past mistakes with the trusts that have been given to us as elected members as well as some few successes.

But it becomes our duty, then, to act prudently as hindsight is 20/20. Under our current economic environment it would be financially irresponsible of the government to commit such a large sum of its revenue. Per the fiscal operating plan it would be, if it were to be instituted this year, \$2.3 billion for 2014-15, \$2.5 billion for 2015-16, and \$2.675 billion for the 2016-17 year, in which it was proposed to come into effect. Given the state of our infrastructure, hospitals, and schools that the previous government has left in such a state of disarray, a drastic commitment would severely limit the new government's ability to make prudent fiscal decisions.

These are also investments in Alberta's future, and when the government tables their own budget, it will ensure that Albertans get the best value for their tax dollar, and that will mean a balance between present challenges and future investments. This government has brought forth opportunities to invest meaningfully in the future of our province through restoring funding to important services such as education, advanced education, health care, and human services as well as physical infrastructure. These investments in the future of our province are tangible, and this government is committed to return fairness to the tax system by asking the most successful among us to pay a little bit more.

Given the uncertainty in our economy and the fact that this government has yet to table our own budget, it would be financially imprudent and careless of this government to support such a bill before the government can calculate its own financial metrics so that we can understand Alberta's liquidity, debt service obligations, revenues and expenses, and commitments free of the previous bias and rhetoric. This will help provide stability and the ability to stop depending upon the boom-and-bust cycle.

Bill 201 is not what we have been asked to do by Albertans. As a government there must be a complete royalty review so we can act responsibly with the scant public resources at our disposal currently, and when this downturn is turned around by the current government, we must be careful not to repeat the past and be more careful with our . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Stony Plain, but the time for consideration of this item has concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Surface Rights Legislation Review

501. Mr. Hinkley moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to conduct a review of existing legislation related to surface rights and work to ensure landowners' rights to fair compensation and due process are respected.

Mr. Hinkley: Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to speak to the Assembly. I am excited and delighted to be so fortunate to have the luck of the draw, 1 out of 87. This provides me the opportunity to speak and provide the first private member's motion of this session.

In pondering this issue, to commemorate this historical and personally unprecedented experience, many extremely important and very relevant topics have come to my mind. They have come from my constituents of Wetaskiwin, Camrose, Maskwacis, Millet, Gwynne, and Bittern Lake, but they concern all Albertans. Should I choose a topic and should I recommend that the government take action on Inspiring Education, postsecondary education, an Alberta inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women, recognize indigenous rights, initiate renewable green energy alternatives, child poverty in Alberta, electrical transmission and distribution fees, health care issues, the heritage savings trust fund, tackle seniors' issues, or rural economic diversification? So many topics. My list of important and relevant items grew and grew. No wonder the people of Alberta wanted a change of government.

During and since the election I received messages from individuals in Ponoka, Rimbey, Pigeon Lake, Battle Lake, Mulhurst, Westeros, Warburg, Devon, Ferintosh, Forestburg, New Norway, Stettler, Didsbury, Innisfail, and countless rural areas in between those cities and towns, but one recurring issue occurred over and over. Mr. Speaker, this issue forms the basis of my private member's motion.

As a rural property owner and an MLA in a government which is overwhelmingly urban, it is incumbent upon me to bring this issue to the attention of this Assembly, to right the wrongs done by previous legislation to diminish landowners' basic rights and the democratic process. I and my fellow MLAs have listened and heard the concerns of Albertans. It is now time for us to take informed, positive action to rectify past legislative errors. Legislative policy committees review all bills referred to them. I hope they will take just as seriously this motion.

Surface rights and property rights are a complex issue. Sometimes they are interchanged but definitely could be separate topics. Merely reviewing this legislation will not resolve the concerns unless action is taken. It is, however, a significant and mighty step to addressing some long-standing, serious grievances. At stake are issues of democracy. This issue is not only about social democracy but also about responsible environmental stewardship. The feelings and frustrations that property owners have as a result of government legislation allowing private companies to come onto their land, extract the resource, and leave once they have depleted the resource, with no responsibility to return their property to its previous pristine condition, with no recourse to seek compensation for their grievance, leaves rural Albertans feeling disenfranchised, unheard, and very angry about no opportunity to appeal during the process or of legal appeal later.

It is unfortunate that rural Albertans have been pitted against corporate Alberta, especially when corporate Alberta profits from extraction of nonrenewable resources, leaving landowners with the residue of polluted air, contaminated water, and toxic soils. The unconfirmed number of conflicts between landowners and oil companies around compensation, inconvenience payments, hydraulic fracturing, and abandoned and orphaned wells is growing.

Some examples from my constituency and nearby. One involves farmers near the Westrose district raising personal health and safety concerns due to blowouts. Another example pertains to the disposal of dry sorbent injection by-product, which is a toxic substance, into the ground and potentially affecting local aquifers. The company denies that the substance is toxic and will affect the watershed.

Another example from Battle Lake, beautiful Battle Lake, just west of Wetaskiwin, is the headwater to the Battle River that flows into the Saskatchewan River. An oil company is seeking to drill three deep wells around the lake then go horizontally under the lake in order to frac to extract the resource. There has been no consultation process with the local landowners and none with the First Nations of Maskwacis. Petrochemical engineers have done studies and produced papers outlining the dangers of drilling under this lake or any lake, for that matter.

A more famous conflict includes the well water on fire in Rosebud and the subsequent struggles of that landowner. There are countless other conflicts which both the Warburg and the Camrose surface rights associations could provide you, so I'll go on.

Tied into these issues are farmers' concerns about the effectiveness of the Farmers' Advocate and further concerns about the effectiveness of the Property Rights Advocate to adequately represent them. Also, there are issues with the Surface Rights Board over the right of entry; about contracts between landowners and oil companies, which were not respected; about oil companies hydraulically fracturing in a watershed against a landowner's will or the surrounding community's will. There have been debates about third-party mediation: could or should it be done by the Surface Rights Board or by another body? The legislation is unclear.

The legislation I would like reviewed but not exclusive to these three are Bill 2, which has become the energy act of 2013 and which, like all of the acts, is lengthy with multiple clauses that have extinguished a landowner's statutory right to a hearing when the government approves energy projects on private land.

Bill 24 and the surface rights acts from 2007, 2011, and 2014 determined how oil companies could come on farmland. It established the law that transfers ownership of every inch of pore space in the province from the landowners to the government – that's in section 36, dealing with compensation – it made it illegal for a landowner to sue the government in a court, and it limited a landowner's ability to appeal to the Alberta Energy Regulator,

which in itself is another major issue. I want to quote that in 2008 there were over 8,000-plus wells fracked in Alberta. In 2013 another 1,500 fracking licences were given out. In 2014 3,395 wells in Alberta were fracked. There are concerns about the nondisclosure agreements for fracked property. The need for more inspections and more enforcement of existing rules is creating further conflicts.

The third bill I would like looked at is called the Alberta Land Stewardship Act of 2010. Now, it also has information about dairy quotas, water licences, and confined feeding operations, which may be good, but more specific to my motion's concern is that that act took away a landowner's right to compensation, giving enormous powers to oil or energy companies, that they could decide if any compensation would be given to the landowners and how much compensation there would be. The Alberta Land Stewardship Act prevails over other acts, including the Expropriation Act and the carbon capture act. This is another reason why we need to review the legislation, because some legislation prevails over other legislation. Should that be the case?

To end this presentation, I just want to reiterate that during the election campaign forums, questions from individuals, letters to editors, e-mails, and property rights group meetings all highlighted the need for full legislation review. I am encouraging all members to support this motion to show that we have listened to our constituents, we are serious about their concerns, and we do indeed support democratic practices and responsible environmentalism.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The chair recognizes the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

5:10

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of this motion as I believe that with expropriation of land it's very important that landowners are treated with a great deal of respect. Whenever we're dealing with private property and government, there's an inherent imbalance in power. As we've seen with recently passed bills in previous Legislatures – Bill 2, Bill 36, Bill 50 – the balance has shifted the wrong way. Landowners must be not only fairly compensated, but a complete review is necessary of the impacts of bills 2, 36, 50. Certainly, I believe we need to revisit significant sections of each. New legislation needs to be brought in that genuinely protects landowners and their rights.

Now, as a significant proportion of Alberta's population lives in urban areas, this has created competition between different land uses. The trend continues, but we must never forget and never lose sight of the fact that Albertans from all around the province, rural or urban, demand fairness.

The Alberta Land Stewardship Act, formerly Bill 36, authorizes cabinet to adopt regional plans that legally bind land-use authority on private land. This may restrict a landowner's rights to use or develop land, and landowners cannot expect compensation if reasonable private use of property is left only to the owner. Bill 36 shifted that control and the emphasis from municipalities into the hands of cabinet in centralizing it. In an information bulletin about the Alberta Land Stewardship Act the provincial government explained the relationship the locally elected governments will have with these planners. The document says that ALSA managers will set out their plan for each region.

Again, the centralization of power and control is something that is of great concern to me and, as we've heard and we know, I think a great concern to many people both in this Chamber and certainly to the people of Alberta. When landowners have their land taken away for public purposes, compensation is normally given, but

when the government does not acquire the land but simply uses it, rarely is compensation given, or, if it is, it's not appropriate even where there's drastic loss of value.

There should also be clarification of subsurface ownership rights. The previous government amended several pieces of legislation, but the uncertainty continues over subsurface resource rights, natural gas storage, coal-bed methane, and pore space, as mentioned by the hon. member. The previous government did remove some people's claims to certain subsurface resources.

My concern remains, Mr. Speaker, with the imbalance in power between the government and landowners, and I sincerely hope that by passing this motion, we take the first step towards addressing that imbalance. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to debate Motion 501, a critical piece of the proceedings today. I'd like to thank the MLA for Wetaskiwin-Camrose for his efforts in bringing this important issue to the Assembly's attention. As the Official Opposition's primary individual responsible for property rights as well as a representative of a constituency with a keen interest in reinstating property rights I am pleased for this opportunity to address Motion 501 today.

I also feel that it's very critically important to point out that when we are addressing property rights, we are speaking about much more than just rural landowner rights. We're talking about more than surface rights. Rather, we are speaking about all Albertans' basic right to own and use property. That includes both urban and rural. Property rights are among our most fundamental rights, part of the foundation upon which our entire society is constructed.

Sadly, over the past number of years we have seen the previous government seemingly willing to trample on these rights by taking a ham-fisted approach to major infrastructure and planning initiatives, particularly when it came to power lines in this province. Under the previous government steps were taken to concentrate power in the hands of cabinet and limit Albertans' right to compensation, remove judicial recourse, and generally strip any semblance of fairness within our system.

These devastating changes were most immediately noticed and widely rejected by those rural Albertans who depend on the use of the land for their very livelihood. However, the previous government continued to ignore these citizens, and when they conducted consultations, it seemed that they had predetermined outcomes, and it became clear that the attack on basic property rights and the attack on rural Albertans were in full force.

Let me give you an example. Under Bill 36 the previous government – in fact, this challenge still remains today – provided cabinet the ability to rescind licences, oil leases, development rights, grazing leases, timber agreements, gravel approvals, and even livestock permits, all at the stroke of the cabinet pen.

Now, if you're a farmer and you operate a dairy, as my good friend from Drumheller-Stettler likes to point out from time to time, and the provincial cabinet chooses to revoke the water licence that's so critically important to your property, what good are your property rights if they can single-handedly revoke the licences that have been assigned to that property? By the same measure, if you're an urban entrepreneur who suddenly has a business licence rescinded, what good is the property in which you operate that business if the cabinet has the ability to do that as well?

Concerns about Bill 36 as well as bills 19, 24, 50 were repeatedly brought to the attention of the previous government, only to have many of those concerns rejected out of hand. Now, I will give credit where credit is due. The previous government, prior to its timely

demise, did take some necessary steps to repeal some of the legislation that they had put in place, but there is still much more work to be done. The public quickly recognized that the previous government's reviews of much of this legislation were orchestrated public relations events and, in fact, did not complete the full breadth of the review that needed to take place.

Today I rise to fully support the spirit of Motion 501. At the same time, I must point out a number of major concerns. The motion as it's currently worded is far too limited. It calls on this Assembly to urge the government "to conduct a review of existing legislation related to surface rights and work to ensure landowners' rights to fair compensation and due process are respected."

Let's be clear. The wording of this motion is unnecessarily limited and would potentially limit the scope of such review. At the same time, it does not specifically mention who would conduct a review. Simply handing this file off to the bureaucrats, many of whom got us into this mess, is not an option. It would be a short-sighted approach, only to further undermine the confidence of our institutions.

Rather, I would recommend that this Assembly conduct a full and public review of all legislation pertaining to Albertans' property rights. In fact, the public will not accept another property rights review whitewash, only to be done at the hands of the internal government workings. A full public and open review is exactly what is required. To this end, I would suggest that an all-party committee be established specifically to review current legislation, to seek expert testimony, and to provide specific recommendations, including legislative amendments, many of which my hon. colleague from Livingstone-Macleod will be speaking about, I would imagine.

Further, I would recommend that this committee of MLAs be empowered to seek the input of Albertans in both rural and urban communities at a series of public forums that will take place across the province, with a firm deadline to report back to this Legislature.

5:20

Finally, I would recommend that this committee be comprised of seven government MLAs and seven opposition MLAs because property rights is much more than a partisan issue. It is an issue that is at the very core of Alberta, and we ought not be scoring political points when it comes to something as important as property rights. I firmly believe that through such a process we can turn the page on the previous government's woeful record on property rights as we begin to rebuild the trust between government and all Albertans.

Well, there are many things that the previous government has done that I don't agree with. It's time that we turn the page. It's time that we move forward and look forward, stop blaming them for the past, and do what we can do to make Alberta better. That is exactly what we have the opportunity to do in the 29th Legislature, to put Albertans first, to make property rights, the very foundation which our province has been built on, a priority for all landowners, urban and rural.

There will be some significant differences between the new government and the Official Opposition, but I believe that much common ground can be found when it comes to reviewing and reinstating property rights for Albertans. We can bring back a sense of fairness to all Albertans and re-establish the trust that's so critically important when it comes to building the foundation of Alberta. Continually we must remind ourselves that it is Albertans, property owners, that make Alberta great, not this government or any government. It is Albertans.

I encourage members of the Assembly to support the motion, a motion that has the opportunity to do a meaningful review, and I thank the member for bringing it forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have as well prepared a presentation as the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, but I'd just basically like to touch on a few points if I could in relation to this topic. It's one that our party and a lot of our members have been working on for many years.

First of all, I'd like to thank the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose for bringing this forward. We did have a quick little conference the other day just to talk about things in general, and I realized that the wording of the motion was perhaps a little bit misleading in that it was a little bit vague. We talked a little bit about trying to understand where he was coming from. Today he provided great clarification, I think, and suggested many of the things that I suspected were in the motion.

It basically says:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to conduct a review of existing legislation related to surface rights and work to ensure landowners' rights to fair compensation and due process are respected.

To me, I think that leaves one to imagine that the writer of that motion, which the member obviously was, was also thinking about some of the things that were mentioned in the presentation he made and also in the presentations that were made by Calgary-Elbow and also by our Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. I'd like to touch on a few of those if I could.

I'm going to be talking a little bit about the previous opinions that have been made over the past few years here in this House regarding some of these bills. I'd like to talk a little bit first of all about surface rights, which have been mentioned here initially in the motion and talked about already so well. I'd like to also talk, as others did, on Bill 36, better known as ALSA, which is the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, and also touch on Bill 2, the Responsible Energy Development Act, where there are some issues that we dealt with a couple of years ago that are still a problem today.

As well, I think someone mentioned in the House Bill 24, which has to do with the pore spaces underneath our properties and how the government launched and passed a bill that suddenly took that property away from us.

Lastly, I'd like to talk a little bit about what we think is a great initiative at the end, and that would be to pass an Alberta property rights preservation bill so that from here going forward, property owners could have some guarantee that their property rights are protected.

Let's talk a little bit about property rights in general. We've talked about how property rights are basically the foundation of landowners' financial security and prosperity, but landowners need to know that their investment in their land and their livelihood is protected and that, therefore, there is some sort of sustainable and predictable way of doing business. They cannot afford, nor would anyone want to be involved in, a situation where their land could be devalued or their operations could be put into question by others, including government.

If that is the case and if government is going to come in, there should and has to be proper compensation. Yet the former PC government passed several bills related to surface rights and property rights in general that have compromised that very thing: the property rights of people, the landowners' rights to proper notification, to fair compensation, to appeals, and, finally, to appeal to the court if necessary. These things are fundamental in today's society, yet the previous government took all of that away with the passage of these bills.

We have called for a review of property and surface rights legislation before, since our inception, both prior to us being elected

in 2012 and throughout the period from '09 to '11, when some of these bad bills were put through. We believe that this motion is a fairly good place to start, and we're so happy and recognize that the government in power today has made on numerous occasions many statements regarding these bad bills. I referred to this in question period today – and I think we used the word “draconian” in those words that I talked about today – and also that some of the members over there that were here in that time, including the Government House Leader, referred to some of these bills as bad legislation and stupid legislation. I think this is a great idea, to go back in and start looking at this now and look at how we can protect landowners' rights to all of these things and ensure that compensation and an appeal process are there for them if and when necessary.

Let's just talk a little bit about, first of all, then, property rights and surface rights. I think it's important for people to understand that surface rights have a lot to do with the right of an oil and gas exploration and development company to go in and get access to land for the purpose of developing their resources, but at the same time we also have to involve property rights for the landowners. Most of all and most importantly, we have to guarantee that the landowners' rights, when these kinds of disturbances occur, are protected, that compensation is paid to them for the lease of that land, whether it's owned or it is leased by them as part of their major operation, and we have to ensure that reclamation and all the environmental concerns are properly looked after.

The Surface Rights Act now has a problem. Section 36 of that act, which is regarding compensation, has a bit of a loophole. We need to look at that very carefully, and we need to ensure that when a company goes bankrupt, there is some way that these landowners are properly compensated and that they continue to receive their fees and their lease payments no matter what happens. Right now that is not guaranteed in that act. I would urge the government, if you're going to do this review, to look into that matter specifically.

I'd like to mention now, too, with respect to Bill 36, which is the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, which was mentioned earlier, that there are actually several sections of that act that we believe need strong attention as soon as possible. I'll mention a few of these today, and I hope some of you or one of you is taking some notes on this because this is important.

Section 11 in the Alberta Land Stewardship Act talks about the regional plans, where they can rescind existing rights, including development rights, resource extraction rights, mining rights, water licences, grazing leases and dispositions, and approvals and permits. We need to get that thing out of there. It's a bad section.

Similarly, section 19 talks about a restricted right to compensation regarding water licences, grazing leases, and so on being amended or rescinded. Again, we need to get that out of there.

Section 13: no right to the courts unless the cabinet allows it. That's just an insult to democracy.

Section 15: that it is binding on all municipalities and all Albertans without question.

Section 15(3): no right to make claims against the government.

Section 15(4): the role and authority of courts are restricted by this act.

Section 17: that this act trumps all other acts.

5:30

Truly, these sections need to be reviewed. They need to be repealed. I urge the government of today, who has spoken against this bill before, to carry on, to do what they have promised to do, and, now that they're in power, to please look at this in the most urgent manner and effect the changes that are necessary in Bill 36 like I've just outlined. That concludes Bill 36.

I'd like to move quickly, and I don't know how my time is going, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You have about one minute.

Mr. Stier: Pardon?

The Speaker: About one minute.

Mr. Stier: Okay. Let's just get into Bill 2 very quickly, then, because I realize that I've taken longer than anticipated. Bill 2, the responsible energy act, stripped landowners of the right to independent arbitration and fair compensation. We need to put back into place what we had at the ERCB before they created the energy regulator. We need to put back the landowner rights under statute law so they can appeal the decisions to the court of appeal, to the highest court. We need to get that back, please. It's extremely important.

Bill 24 is when the government came along and said: we need a place to pump carbon, so we think that we should just take all the land underneath all of your properties and give it back to the Crown, and then we have the right to come onto your land and pump this stuff down below your home or your barn or your fields and any other properties you may have. This is a draconian act. This one, too, just like Bill 19, that was rescinded before, must be thrown out.

Lastly, the property rights initiative bill. I think that we would like to suggest to the government that it bring forward a property rights preservation bill. We'll work to assist you on that. We want to ensure that there's no private property being taken from a resident of Alberta by government without fair . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose for bringing this forward. I will make my comments brief. Like the mover of this motion, my constituents have come to me with a great number of concerns, which they hope and in some cases expect will be addressed positively during the next four years and beyond.

For well over a year landowners' rights have been a pretty hot issue in Lethbridge as a piece of our community's action on another related issue. Before, during, and after the election I have been visited, e-mailed, or spoken to by a great number of my constituents, and they all expressed their concerns over this issue. There seemed to be an incredibly high number who spoke specifically of this concern. They have been very direct in demanding that we follow through on the government's platform commitment to strengthen landowners' rights, to fair compensation and due process in surface rights issues. There were concerns expressed, from protecting our environment and water to fair and equitable compensation when one's property is excised. All very legitimate concerns.

The establishment and completion of such a review and the implementation of all of its recommendations are essential to address the concerns of all Albertans. As a previous speaker said, we must explore all options to find the best possible outcome for surface rights within our province in the future. I have listened to my constituents and will continue to do so. Now I am speaking in favour of this motion and will continue to do so until this issue has been thoroughly addressed.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other members that would wish to speak to this motion?

Mr. Loewen: I'd like to speak to this motion, too. Property owners deserve fair and equitable compensation and processes to deal with the energy companies and government accessing and acquiring their property. It shouldn't matter whether you own 1,000 acres of land, an acreage, a house on a lot, or an apartment. There is a standard of duty of respect owed to a person who is in control of their property.

Wildrose has long advocated for property owners in Alberta. It's good to see the present government getting on board with this important issue. It's long overdue and shouldn't drag on. We need to move through this stage to the review and on to action as quickly as possible. We need to respect not only the landowners but the governments and energy companies that are affected by these regulations, not create instability or uncertainty in their business plans by dragging this process on.

My constituents have been concerned about this issue for years. Something needs to be done. Property rights are a basis of our democracy. It's alarming to see Bill 36, where cabinet can renege on leases and agreements. That's just not right. There are other sections that need to be removed. We need a full review of these bills, with full and open consultation with Albertans. We need to support this motion to begin this process. Property owners need to be able to appeal and appeal to the courts when they feel they have not been treated fairly. Again, we need to support this motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there other members that wish to speak to this motion?

Hearing none, I would call on the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose to close debate.

Mr. Hinkley: Mr. Speaker, thank you again. Thank you to all of the hon. members for all of your comments and input. I see them as being very positive. It is an issue that goes beyond party politics. I appreciate that so many realized how important this motion is. Taking this first step, to review and understand what previous legislation has set out, is a good start to protecting property owners' surface rights. I know that we need to go further, but we always have to take the first step before we can run a marathon. This is it.

Social democracy requires that all stakeholders have a right to be consulted on topics pertaining to them. They should receive fair compensation when it is due, and they should have open, easy access to all avenues and agencies of appeal. It is our responsibility to ensure democracy for all, and it is extremely important that protection is provided to guarantee all Albertans fair, due process. By passing this motion, we take that giant step in respecting property owners' rights. This motion is very relevant because it gets to the heart of responsible stewardship of the land, which will be here long after many nonrenewable resources have been extracted. Therefore, I encourage all hon. members to vote in favour of this motion.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 501 carried]

The Speaker: Thank you, members.

The Assembly stands adjourned until 7:30.

I'm sorry. The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: I was going to make that motion, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:39 p.m.]

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