



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, June 24, 2015

Day 7

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.

Wednesday, June 24, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us reflect that we as members of our province's Legislature fulfill our office and duties with honesty, integrity, and mutual respect. May our first concern be for the good of all of our people. Let us be guided by these principles in our deliberations this day. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a school group from Cypress-Medicine Hat, from Ralston and Jenner schools. It's great to have you all here today. I know what a distance you came at the very end of the school year. We met earlier and had great conversations, and it's also important to my colleague from Drumheller-Stettler because many of you live in his constituency as well.

As our Speaker knows, colleagues, what a neat part of the province these people come from. Of course, it's ranching country, but it's also prairie rattlesnake country. It is home to the largest military base in the Commonwealth, where between 6,000 and 8,000 British soldiers come annually and train in the Suffield-Ralston-Jenner area. Of course, many of the students are from Britain.

I would like to please ask you to stand as I call your name. I would like to first introduce teacher Ian Spiers from Ralston, teacher Jennifer Herrell from Ralston, education assistant Candice Worrall, and education assistant Elaine Osadczuk. We have parents making the trip as well: Patricia Knauer-Bravo, Toby Simpson, Ivan Jesse, Wayne Connor, Lesley Konosky, Jody Stennes, and Leslie Kochie. Could I now ask all the students from Ralston and Jenner schools to please rise and my colleagues to show them the generous warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: If the House would allow me, I would like to also echo the words of my fellow southeastern Alberta representative. Welcome. Good to see young folks coming out.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to members of this House one of my favourite people in the world. She's contributed to this province in many, many ways. Professionally she's working right now as constituency office manager for my colleague the Member of Parliament for Edmonton-Strathcona, Linda Duncan.

I hate this. You know, the minister here suggested I do this, and I have to say that I find that it's always a challenge for me to introduce dear friends. Nonetheless, let me say that, in general, perhaps with the exception of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I'm not sure that any one of us on this side of the House would be here were it not for the contribution of this person. She has not only worked more recently, as I said, for the MP for Edmonton-Strathcona; she also managed her breakthrough campaigns. She's worked on my campaigns. A decade and a half ago she volunteered as provincial secretary for our little party, when

we couldn't afford to pay any staff. She's one of those people on whose shoulders we all stand. I would ask that Erica Bullwinkle rise and that the rest of you join me in welcoming her to the Assembly.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: I would recognize the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. It is my great privilege today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the House my father, Leo Piquette. Mr. Piquette is the former Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche, a large part of which is now part of my own riding of Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater. Although he is today most famous for the Piquette affair in 1987, where his refusal to apologize for speaking French in the Legislature touched off a national and international controversy, he has long been active in his local community, the francophone community, and provincial politics. He was a former school board member of the Conseil scolaire Centre-Est in 1994 and was chair of the board until 2004, when he was elected president of the Fédération des conseils scolaires francophones de l'Alberta. He is also a founding member and president of the Chambre économique de l'Alberta. Actually, I could keep going for another maybe half an hour on the other boards and things he's done. I would like to call upon our members to grant to Mr. Piquette the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-South East. My apologies again to the House. It was the fun that we had last night. That's my excuse today.

The Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Pastor Bruce Gritter and Sharon Top-Gritter, husband and wife, constituents of Edmonton-South West. Bruce and his wife, Sharon, moved to Edmonton in 2001 and have enjoyed growing with and helping to build the social, physical, and spiritual infrastructure of southwest Edmonton ever since. Bruce is the lead pastor of the River community church, and Sharon is the director of Brander Gardens Rocks, a social service agency that supports various individuals and families living in low-income housing in southwest Edmonton.

Bruce and Sharon have been involved with numerous community boards, including TRAC, which helped get the southwest recreation centre built. Currently they are passionate about development of the new South Pointe community centre, a creative public-private initiative that will provide much-needed community space in southwest Edmonton. They are also co-chairs of the Heritage Valley Spectacular, a brand new Canada Day fireworks and music celebration launching this year at South Pointe on July 1. Bruce and Sharon have six children, including two beautiful aboriginal foster girls, and are proud to be Albertans and Edmontonians. I ask them to please rise so that all members of the Assembly may greet them with the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the

Assembly the Elder Advocates of Alberta. This group supports elderly members of our community. They are actively involved in protecting the rights of seniors and fiercely advocate for their continued mobility. It is a great honour to have this group represented, and I applaud their continued hard work. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, and I ask that they stand as I call their names: Jim Savoy, Kerry Modin, Ollie Schultz, Roy Avery, Mary Pelech, Julie Ali, Helga Martens, Shauna McHarg, Barry Snell, and Ruth Maria Adria. Please give them all the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two incredible people. Although I was elected three years ago, this is the first time that I rise to introduce these two very special people. I'm incredibly blessed to have two of the most generous, supportive, and giving parents. I wouldn't be standing here today if it wasn't for their commitment, self-sacrifice, and hard work. I'd now like to ask my parents, Orest and MaryAnn, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The 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 Ms Maria Victoria Venancio, also known in her community as Vicky. Vicky is a 29-year-old from the Philippines who came to Edmonton to work in the service industry under the temporary foreign worker program. She came to Canada in search of a better life for her and her family. As the sole breadwinner Vicky would send money back home to her parents. However, in June 2012 she was struck by a truck on her way to work, leaving her quadriplegic.

Many people have rallied around Vicky to advocate in her best interests and the interests of other temporary foreign workers. One of them, joining Vicky today, is Marco Luciano, director of Migrante Alberta. Migrante is an organization that aims to educate, organize, and mobilize Filipinos in Alberta so that they know their rights. They also work to generate support and work to build a more just and humane society. They work with other migrant and social justice organizations as well as trade unions.

I would ask the members to provide these guests with the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly some very special guests. I met our first guest, a constituent of mine, Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies – and I'd ask her to stand if she would, please – about a year and a half ago on the front steps of this very Legislature as she organized a protest against the government's support for discovery, or inquiry, learning. This brave lady has been organizing Albertans and has been fighting to protect our system of education. Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies has been and is responsible for organizing the math petition of 20,000 Albertans who have spoken out against the inquiry methods of education. Sitting with her – and I'd ask these individuals to please rise – are Dr. Ken Porteous, U of A professor emeritus of engineering; Cynthia Cheung, with a

bachelor of commerce degree from the University of Alberta, a designated accountant; Dr. Marion Leithead, with a doctorate in education, retired; Mr. Bill Leithead, mechanical engineer, retired.

These Albertans have been tireless advocates for a world-class education system in Alberta, with a focus on preparing our children to be active and competitive citizens within Canadian society. I would ask my guests to rise, if they haven't done so already, and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to the House two guests from the Alberta and Northwest Territories division of the MS Society of Canada. This year was the 26th year of the Johnson MS ride, and over \$2 million was raised. This is the most successful ride across Canada. On June 13 over 1,900 cyclists left Nisku to cycle to Camrose, and on the following day they braved the elements to cycle back. It's a gruelling 180-kilometre ride. I've had the pleasure of doing this ride as a cycling marshal for the last few years, and I stand in awe of the number of cyclists with MS who do the ride.

One of those cyclists is the Johnson MS Bike Tour spokesperson Patrycia Rzechowka. Patrycia gave a moving speech on the Saturday night about her struggle with MS and how she was not going to let the disease beat her. Accompanying Patrycia is Julie Kelndorfer, the director for government and community relations for the Alberta and Northwest Territories division of the MS Society of Canada. I also have the pleasure to introduce a page for the Legislative Assembly, Matt Owens, who also was on the ride and raised a substantial amount of money and was one of the fastest riders.

I would ask that the House offer the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly to these guests. Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure today to continue what is apparently bring your parents to work day in the Legislative Assembly. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly my father, Gib Clark. After a very distinguished legal career of 35-plus years on both the prosecution and defence sides of the bar, my father has retired and spends most of his time now as a grandfather. He in fact has sought elected office for this very seat that I hold today, and it gives me great pleasure . . .

Dr. Swann: For which party?

Mr. Clark: I believe it was a different party. He has, however, seen the error of his ways.

So I would ask, please, with that, that my father, Gib Clark, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. Are there any additional guests to be introduced?

If I might just take a moment. In my short period of time along with all of you I think you would share the view that when we hear these introductions of our fellow Albertans, it is we who should be impressed rather than the way it is sometimes framed. Welcome to all of you who represent our strong province.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Environmental Advocacy

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud of my work as a faculty member of NAIT's School of Sustainable Building and Environmental Management. There is no question that government can do more to ensure Albertans can enjoy clean land, clean air, and clean water, but Albertans are also moderate and responsible citizens. They believe our energy industry should be approached as partners at the table and not as adversaries. They believe that through innovation and entrepreneurship Alberta can continue to be a leader in clean, renewable, and responsible nonrenewable production, and they believe all this and more can be done alongside our conventional energy producers while growing the economy and leading our province into long-term economic and environmental prosperity, powered by a mix of energy configurations using conventional and renewable sources, which is why, after reading a book that our environment minister helped to inspire, contributed to, and wrote the introduction for, I have some grave concerns.

An Action a Day Keeps Global Capitalism Away is the title of the book. It demands radical action against Alberta's economy. It seeks to inspire vandalism and militant action against our energy industry. It calls for blockades to stop Alberta's resources from getting to market. It calls for an end to capitalism and free markets, and at one point in the book it delivers a series of radical cheers. One reads: let's shut down the oil machine; the time has come for oil to go; you can't take us for a ride; you must stop the genocide.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, Wildrose stands for moderate and responsible advocacy for our environment. In my work as an author and instructor in the alternative energy industry I taught my students to separate between environmentalism based on emotion that hurts an economy and science-based environmental action that systematically leads to an increased economy.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Government Policies

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, we have come to the time in session where we have to deal with government's fibs, misstatements, and, as the Premier likes to say, hoey. Yesterday I asked the Education minister why he insists on using the figure of 12,000 extra students in Alberta's schools this fall. That number is false. It's incorrect. It's hoey. Public data from the school boards actually shows clearly that there will only be 7,500 students, not 12,000 students. His press secretary actually discovered all of this information a month ago, so he must know. Why are the minister and the Premier using the number that the government knows clearly is false?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Certainly, it's important to clear this up. We are using numbers that are from the finance board, and they give us a figure of approximately 12,000 students. From all of the school boards across the province as well, if you add them up from our website, it adds up to about 12,000 as well. So I'm not sure where these guys are getting their math or how they're doing their mathematics on this, but certainly we know that we are financing \$103 million to ensure that students get the education that they need in the fall.

Mr. Jean: Actually, if you add up the numbers, there are over \$200 million in your own press release.

Yesterday I asked the Premier if she knew of any businesses which plan to hire more employees because of this government's plan to increase the minimum wage by 50 per cent. She said that she did, but when asked, she didn't name names. I'm surprised the media, actually, didn't pester her about this for more details. Exactly which employers have told the Premier that they plan to increase the size of their workforce because she is raising minimum wages by 50 per cent? Could she give us some names and table a list, please?

Ms Notley: Again, Mr. Speaker, I must say that the notion of a supplemental question is quite broadly interpreted right now. That being said, what the question asked yesterday was: in the current environment do we know of any employers that are going to hire new employees? And I answered that yes, I did, and as I said previously and yesterday, for instance, just on Friday I was at a press conference where Telus announced that it would be investing a billion dollars in the city of Edmonton, notwithstanding that they knew about our plan about minimum wage, and that there would be . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: It's all about hoey. The labour minister and the Premier have both said more than once that increasing the minimum wage by 50 per cent will result in more jobs in Alberta. They say that the consequences of this policy are all good, all wonderful, and no harm will come to Alberta. So let me ask a policy question. Since the Premier says that there is no harm and only positives from boosting the minimum wage by 50 per cent in three years, why isn't she actually calling for a 100 per cent boost? If this policy increases employment, why don't you set the minimum wage at \$20 or \$25 or \$30 since we're going to get more jobs?

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, it comes down to this. The folks over there think it's totally appropriate for a single mother of two or three to have to work 70 hours a week in order to earn a living wage. I say to you that they're just wrong, and that's why we are changing the minimum wage in Alberta.

The Speaker: The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Environment Minister

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, there's a big difference between being the fourth party in the Legislature and being the government. Some might say that it's akin to growing up. Being government means setting aside radical ideas of youth and making grown-up decisions. The Premier's environment minister wrote the introduction to a book, *An Action a Day Keeps Global Capitalism Away*. This radical book calls for blockades and street protests. It refers to our energy industry as genocide. To the Premier: what does she have to say about this?

Ms Notley: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I think that the folks over there are confusing writing the foreword for a book with writing the book. So that's the first thing. Secondly, when you're in opposition, I understand that it is very tempting to engage in mudslinging, which is what these folks are doing right now. What we are interested in . . .

The Speaker: Hon. Premier.
First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, anyone who's been around Alberta for a while has heard of Mike Hudema, the radical environmentalist. He's led all sorts of extreme environmental protests. He's a radical's radical. Albertans care about the environment, but Hudema is on a radical fringe of these issues. Hudema said that he could not have written this radical book without the help of the environment minister. Surely, the Premier recognizes that this sends the wrong signal to Albertans and industry.

Mr. Mason: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader with a point of order. Are we on a point of order?

Ms Notley: Yes, for afterwards, I believe.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I think this is really interesting. Sort of a friend of a friend of a friend, so we're going to start attacking the government based on friendships that are 10 years old and all that kind of stuff. But let's just go back three and a half years, when the former leader of that party publicly said in an election debate that she didn't think climate change was real. That's radical, my friend.

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, the radicalism of the environment minister is an issue. She embodies the issue we raised in Bill 1 about unions donating paid labour to the NDP. The environment minister was the Alberta Federation of Labour's person in Lethbridge, where the AFL has no office. She's also the spokesperson for the NDP in Lethbridge. She was paid by the AFL, but she worked for the NDP. If the Premier isn't worried about radical writings, is she worried that the minister is a poster woman for donation loopholes?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what I'm worried about is ensuring that this government finally after many years establishes a reputation on environmental protection that will allow us to develop new markets and protect Alberta jobs. I am not at all worried about the ridiculous mudslinging that's coming from over there that actually embodies opposition efforts that do not work towards making things better for Albertans and certainly don't help Albertans.

The Speaker: Might I remind all of the House that in order for the Speaker of this entire Assembly to hear, I would show respect for the other parties as they answer the questions that are asked.

The Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Inspiring Education Framework

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be tabling a petition today signed by thousands of Albertans urging the Minister of Education to reverse the implementation of the Inspiring Education doctrine. The Wildrose has opposed the fads in Inspiring Education since the beginning. Will the Premier assure Albertans that this government also rejects the failed approach of Inspiring Education?

Ms Notley: I think that the member is mistaken when he talks about the overarching issue of Inspiring Education. There are a number of elements of Inspiring Education that had value. I do however understand the issue that he's concerned about with respect to the math issue. I will say that I actually share a number of his concerns, and I've articulated that to the minister. We will ensure that there is a proper evaluation of the way in which math is taught in our schools because I want to make sure that Alberta students learn the way they need to learn. I think that there are some important points that we need to reconsider and revisit.

2:00

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, given that there are questionable practices, which we can both now see there are, embedded in Inspiring Education such as placing methods ahead of content and academic results, mandating teacher instruction styles, replacing the three Rs with the three Es, will the Premier commit to an educational system that ensures that students obtain the basic foundational skills and knowledge needed to excel in the global economy?

Ms Notley: Well, I think that's sort of a given. We care a great deal about our K to 12 system, and that's one of the reasons why, unlike the folks over there, we thought it was really important to ensure that those 11,500 new students had a teacher when they started school in September. That's why we took action just yesterday to make sure that that happens, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dr. Tran-Davies, the organizer of the petition tabled today asking the minister to reverse the implementation of Inspiring Education, is in the Legislature today. I introduced her to you earlier. She has written a letter asking the minister to meet with her. Will this Minister of Education meet with Dr. Tran-Davies today, and if not, why not?

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. I think it's always important that we do these things in a congenial sort of way. The person is here, and certainly my door is open for meetings. We can book a meeting time for that to happen. I think it's important, in the spirit of collaboration, that we look for ways to strengthen our education system, as we did by putting \$103 million for the 12,000 students that are coming into the system. You know, let's do it that way, and I think we will end up serving children better in all ways.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Minimum Wage

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Restaurants Canada recently submitted information to the Premier and the Minister of JSTL on the \$15 per hour minimum wage threatened by this government. It is puzzling that a government such as this, which seems to want to appeal to young people, is actually taking jobs away from those in the age group 15 to 24. This May 40 per cent more of them are unemployed versus last May. About 1 in 5 Alberta careers starts in the hospitality business. To the Minister of JSTL: why would you intentionally hurt the very young people who helped elect you just last month?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak on this issue. It's something that I'm very proud of. You know, it's interesting. Federal labour data in the U.S. – people were asking where we got this – showed that 13 states raised the minimum wage in 2014, and in 12 of those cases all had higher employment in the first five months after raising the minimum wage. I'm not quite sure that I accept your premise, hon. member. I continue to believe that when you put money into the pockets of low-wage people, you actually generate economic activity.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, nonprofits sweat and struggle to raise money now. The Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations,

when asked about the \$15, was quoted as saying: many nonprofits would have a hard time with that transition. They followed that with: they need time to plan it out and finance it. To the same Minister of JSTL: why would you intentionally hurt the nonprofit sector with this plan? Isn't it a bit early for this new government to alienate all of their friends who are not big labour?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you also to the member for the question. The Premier and I met not long ago with members of the sector he's talking about, and we also met with business and industry. We're moving forward on increasing minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2018, and we're doing it with the consultation and input from all these stakeholders. Absolutely we're taking that into consideration. It's very important for us.

Thank you.

Mr. McIver: Yesterday the Premier was recorded in *Hansard* saying: "We do not want a province where the only businesses that survive are those that require people to be paid at two-thirds of a living wage. We cannot grow our economy on the backs of the poor." Mr. Speaker, we cannot grow our economy on the backs of the unemployed either. To the labour minister: now that your government has worked to take jobs from youth, older workers, nonprofits, energy, agriculture, tourism, and those that need their first job, who do you think is left to build the economy on the backs of?

Ms Sigurdson: Well, we know that when we support the most vulnerable workers, they right away are spending money in our economy, which means that they're investing in local economies, which helps all of us and actually does increase employment. We're doing that to invest in Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Childhood Immunization

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under the previous government Alberta saw disease prevention programs weaken and child vaccination rates go down, raising the prospects of more outbreaks of serious preventable diseases. Recent data showed two-year-old vaccination rates at only 74 per cent. Action is required to protect Albertans, particularly children. Public policy experts have recommended a system that simply requires parents who choose to not vaccinate their children to be informed of the risks and sign a waiver. This simple requirement improves vaccination rates substantially and saves lives. To the minister: will your government show leadership and adopt this straightforward policy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I look forward to working with him to ensure that we move forward collaboratively in addressing the mental health needs of Albertans, and I'd be happy to review the study that he's just shared with me today in this House.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that another school year is starting soon, it's vitally important that steps be taken in the short term to improve Alberta's low vaccination rates: diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, measles. Will the minister commit to

creating a system that informs parents of the risks and benefits of vaccinating preschool children, and if not, what is this government's plan to improve vaccination rates?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the important question that he raises. I'm glad that he raised it at such an early opportunity in our tenure so that we can have an opportunity to develop a strategy together to make sure that we do increase vaccination rates. I'm happy to announce that I recently reviewed the college of physicians report, and I'm really happy to hear that since more physicians are able to do vaccinations, rates have actually increased significantly over the last year. I'll be happy to share that information as well.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, it's a straightforward proposition, and I hope the minister will act promptly. Vaccinations save lives and health care costs. Given that Alberta is lagging behind, why is the government not ready to commit to a system that simply requires parents who choose to not vaccinate their children to sign a waiver? What's so difficult about that?

Ms Hoffman: I'm not ruling that opportunity out. I look forward to reviewing the report that's being shared by the hon. member and having an opportunity to take it into consideration just like all of the great opportunities that we have now that we're in government, and I look forward to working with members from all sides of the House to do that.

I misspoke to the last question. It's pharmacists. If you haven't had your vaccinations, look forward to going to get flu shots and other vaccinations at your pharmacy, please.

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

Injured Temporary Foreign Worker

Mr. Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Vicky Venancio, whom I introduced to the Assembly earlier today, has been living without medical coverage to pay for treatment since her accident. Fortunately, she has been receiving free physiotherapy as part of a research project at the University of Alberta. Vicky would like to stay in Edmonton to continue her physiotherapy and some day begin working once again. To this end, she has applied for permanent resident status on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. To the Minister of Health: how does the minister respond to the challenges Vicky is facing?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for raising the question, and thank you, Ms Venancio, for being here today so that we can have an opportunity to hear a little bit more about your story and to communicate with you directly. I look forward to setting up a meeting with Ms Venancio in the days that follow session. She is an amazingly strong individual, who has overcome a very tragic situation and is making the best of it. I want to say thank you to her for her courage and inspiration as well as to the Albertans who have rallied behind her, donating financially. She has fallen through the cracks provincially, federally with the temporary foreign worker program and now with applying for permanent status. I look forward to getting to know how I can help you more.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Loyola: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health once again: will you commit today to helping Ms Venancio receive the care that she needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I just mentioned, we have a woman here who is falling through the cracks of a federal and provincial struggle. The College of Physicians & Surgeons recommends that the patient receive a full cycle of care. That's solid advice that's coming forward from medical professionals. I am wanting to explore every opportunity we have to ensure that she gets the support that she needs, and I think that we have an opportunity to work with the federal government, whether it's today or whether it's in the fall, to make sure that tragedies like this have happy endings, not sad ones.

Mr. Loyola: Mr. Speaker, the temporary foreign worker program, as we've seen from Ms Venancio's experience, is fraught with problems. To the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: what is being done to protect the people who come to this province to work?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. First of all, this program is a federal program. We in Alberta are concerned about how it's been laid out, and we're working very hard with the federal government to improve it. Temporary foreign workers here in Alberta have the same workplace rights as other Albertans. They are under the employment standards, occupational health and safety, and workers' compensation regardless of their immigration status, so they are able to access all of the rights of other Alberta workers. We're committed to developing Alberta's workforce here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Urgent Health Care in Sylvan Lake

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We needed the funding model for primary care networks fixed, and I'm grateful that the Health minister listened. Sadly, Sylvan Lake is still without access to any 24-hour emergency care for our sick and injured. Ours is the fastest growing community in Alberta, with over 15,000 residents today and 900,000 tourists annually. Will the Minister of Health please confirm that an urgent care centre for Sylvan is contained within this \$18 billion minibudget?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I think he's referring to the interim supply bill that we've brought forward to this House. Interim supply is something that we've had an opportunity to vote on. We've proposed that we put \$500 million back into public health care, which the third party had proposed cutting. I wish that Members of the Official Opposition had supported us in that. The only way we're going to be able to fund health care is if we have additional revenue to do so.

Mr. MacIntyre: In the pre-election March budget our community was promised for the umpteenth time an urgent care centre. Frankly, the council, local health professionals, and the community have put years of resources and time into trying to make this a reality, even raising \$66,000 for equipment. We shouldn't make them wait any

longer. They just need an answer. Will the minister please confirm that Sylvan Lake will receive this desperately needed urgent care centre?

The Speaker: I presume there was a "given" in there at the beginning. I may have missed it.

The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: I am happy to answer the question, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity. In terms of negotiations that may have happened with past government and the Official Opposition around floor crossings and promised infrastructure projects, I can't speak to what happened before the election. What I can speak to is what happens after the election. On May 5 Albertans gave us a clear message. They voted for a party that believes in a strong public health care system, strong public education, and making sure that we create jobs, and we're proud to deliver on that mandate. We're not going to make announcements in the time it takes to write press releases. We're going to actually analyze data and make sure that when we do make a commitment, we follow through on it.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you. It really is unfortunate that we have to bother the minister regarding details of this minibudget. Will the minister please encourage her colleague the Minister of Finance to live up to her party's promise of transparency? We've been asking for details on this interim supply, and we haven't been given the details of this thing, so communities across the province don't have the information that they need.

The Speaker: Hon. member, what's your question?

Mr. MacIntyre: The question: will the minister please encourage her colleague to let the details be made known?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I've actually gone into quite a great deal of detail around the Health estimates. I'm happy for you to review that, and if you have additional questions around the interim supply discussion that we had with regard to Health, I'd be happy to go into that in further detail. In the fall we will have a whole and fulsome budget for us all to be able to debate in great detail – we've been very clear about that – and we look forward to bringing forward a sunshine list around infrastructure projects as well.

Rural Economic Development

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, last year, after a province-wide consultation, Alberta agriculture and rural development released the rural economic development action plan. Rural Albertans supported this initiative, as they essentially wrote it. But now rural development has been dropped from the ministry's title, and based on a recent examination of the ministry's website, the rural economic development action plan has also mysteriously disappeared. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: do you remain committed to the rural economic development action plan, and why has this plan been removed from your department's website?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. I'd like to thank the member for reminding the House about the importance of that program, and I look forward to discussing it in more detail with him soon. As the House knows, farm families work extremely hard and are a pillar of Alberta's economy. That's why I've been meeting with farmers and producers to hear their concerns and their ideas and why as

government we're working actively to strengthen agriculture and the communities that they support to help grow Alberta's economy.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, that was certainly very well read.

Given the broad range of public consultation that went into the rural economic development action plan and given the vital importance of having a vibrant and sustainable rural economy to the economic diversification and overall success of Alberta, can the minister outline how he has determined that he knows better than rural Albertans on this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I in no way think that I know better than rural Albertans, and that's why we are doing our best to consult with farming families and the rural communities. The interim supply bill is simply a way to keep current programs operating for this year. I look forward to discussing funding priorities in more detail with this member and this House as we develop the full budget coming into the fall.

Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given the propensity of this government to ignore not only the recommendations of rural Albertans but rural Alberta in general – first on health, now on rural development – there's a palpable and growing sense of resentment in rural Alberta towards this government. To the Premier: what other recommendations from rural Albertans does your government plan on ignoring?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that the member is perhaps overstating his case just a little bit. We are very concerned about ensuring the sustainability of our rural communities. We are very concerned about ensuring that we give those kids who grow up in rural communities a reason to move home, to come back home. That means supporting our strong public services in our rural communities as well as ensuring that we focus on job creation opportunities in rural communities. As we move forward on our job creation strategy and as we move forward on our budget in the fall, we have every intention of ensuring that the interests of rural communities feature prominently in the work that we do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

2:20

Wildlife Regulations

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last election Albertans wanted openness, they wanted transparency, and they wanted consultation before any new laws or regulations were passed. Even the new minister has said that she believes that Albertans expect fulsome and comprehensive reviews before decisions are made. But the minister recently approved a series of controversial changes to hunting regulations that ignored the recommendations and objections of landowners. Why didn't the environment minister consult with landowners before she pushed ahead with these controversial changes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for his first question of the environment minister. It's an auspicious day. I will take the member's concerns under advisement. I do know that there were some very small changes made recently, and I'm certainly happy to take it up with the member afterwards if there was anything in particular that he found problematic in those wildlife regulations.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, given that these changes involve doubling the hunting days allowed in the big-game season, landowners had a number of ongoing concerns. Minister, we understand that there are competing interests here, but do you not think that more consultations would be a better solution to the issue rather than getting it wrong?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I would remind the member to speak through the Speaker when he asks questions.

I am happy to revisit some of those consultations if the hon. member has any particular concerns with the changes that were made. I'm happy to follow up with him outside of the House, and we can report back to the Assembly together.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, I understand that this government is new, but Albertans I've heard from want to know how this decision got made, and given that the last government regularly ignored the rights of landowners – and I hope that this government isn't offering more of the same – I ask: did you know what you were approving, or did you just sign whatever the bureaucrats put in front of you?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will ignore for now the wording of the question and, leaving that aside, simply say that our province is dedicated to sustainable practices in hunting and wildlife and that we are dedicated to sustainable resource development on the land in consultation with landowners.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been raised.

The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Minimum Wage (continued)

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past few weeks we have heard the government casting themselves as the champions of the underprivileged and downtrodden, as if they hold a monopoly on all things charitable and decent. This morning, however, we heard from nonprofits and charitable organizations that not only talk the talk but also walk the walk every day on the front lines. They have expressed grave concerns over the dramatic rise in the minimum wage. Has the minister consulted with the charitable and nonprofit sector and asked how this policy will affect them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you also to the member for the question. I must say that I not only have spoken with them, as has the Premier – we had a consultation regarding minimum wage – but, you know, I am a social worker by profession. I have worked for many nonprofits supporting vulnerable and marginalized people, and I've worked in child protection as a child protection social worker. I feel like I do have some good understanding and knowledge of serving vulnerable people.

Thank you.

Mr. Hunter: That's great news. I hope it's true.

Can the minister table a list for this House of charities and nonprofit organizations that she has consulted with?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has a commitment to make sure that Alberta is for all of us and that it's fair and just. We already have met with nonprofits, the business sector also and labour, and we will shortly be moving forward on what's happening with the minimum wage. We've done a fulsome consultation, and we're moving forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you. Given that the largest group to clamour for this increase is not those who are on minimum wage but, instead, the special interests of big labour, can the minister assure us that this policy is not designed to pander to their largest voting block?

Ms Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, this commitment was part of our platform, to move to \$15 by 2018. Alberta has the greatest inequality of any province in Canada. We currently have the lowest minimum wage. We're moving in a phased way to increase it. It's the fairest thing to do.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mandatory Country of Origin Labelling

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The House of Representatives has recently voted to repeal mandatory country of origin labelling for fresh beef, lamb, pork, and other fresh items, which required producers and processors to identify where an animal was born, raised, and slaughtered. It was costing Alberta agricultural producers millions of dollars to comply. This vote to repeal COOL was a great step forward for Alberta agricultural producers. My question to the minister of agriculture: as this decision by the House of Representatives goes forward to the U.S. Senate for consideration, what are you doing to ensure that Alberta ag producers see this law repealed for good?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for bringing up this very important issue. Alberta livestock producers work extremely hard and are an essential pillar of Alberta's economy. Our government is working to protect Alberta's farmers, which is why we are pleased that the WTO has ruled again, for the fourth time, that these regulations are unfair. Our number one priority is always standing up for hard-working Alberta families and protecting Alberta jobs. We are committed to protecting our livestock industry, and we'll continue to encourage the U.S. to lift these unfair and damaging rules.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: given that last week you confirmed that you have not spoken to Rob Merrifield in the Alberta Washington office or any other staff working abroad, for that matter, how can you say to the Alberta agricultural sector that you are working on their behalf to lobby our southern cousins to repeal this regressive legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I said last week, actually, was that I'd spoken with my deputy minister in that department. In fact, I've been advised not only through the deputy minister but through other people that our representative in Washington has done quite a good job on country of origin labelling issues and that that work is continuing to go on. So, you know, we're in good hands. I know we're making progress on that issue, and I anticipate more work being done through the minister of agriculture in conjunction with it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of agriculture: given that you will be receiving very little support from this Premier, what can Alberta agricultural producers expect from you to offset the negative effects of having a government that is solely urbancentric?

Mr. Carlier: Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to explain that these discriminatory practices do hurt Alberta's farming families and need to be changed. I met with the U.S. consul general just yesterday and discussed this issue. The U.S. House of Representatives has voted overwhelmingly to lift these unfair restrictions. It is now up to the U.S. Senate to follow suit. I understand there is a Senate committee hearing on this very issue tomorrow.

The fact is that the U.S. is almost out of stalling tactics. We are working with the federal government. I have spoken with Minister Ritz to offer our support to ensure that Alberta's interests are protected and that the appropriate measures are taken if the Senate does not act to remove these regulations.

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

2:30 Postsecondary Education Accessibility

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While thousands of students are able to attend postsecondary institutions, including myself, the province continues to have the lowest student participation rate in the country. Even though people want to attend our postsecondary institutions, many struggle to find the resources needed to complete an advanced education. My question is to the minister of higher education. What is this government doing to make higher education more accessible to all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our government is committed to making universities, colleges, and apprenticeship programs accessible to all Albertans and affordable. Last week we announced a reinvestment of \$40 million in postsecondary and apprenticeship programs and froze tuition to ensure that students have access. We're very proud of this.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her answer. Given that over the years advanced education has experienced huge funding cuts and given that while the province announced a new cash injection into postsecondary education, the previous government's grant rollbacks have led to reduced student spaces, what's the government's plan to ensure that there are enough postsecondary education spaces for all qualified students in our province?

Ms Sigurdson: Well, we are working both with postsecondary institutions and with student groups to hear what needs to happen to move forward. We're going to do an intensive consultation process over the next couple of years to make sure that we're moving forward so that students do have access to affordable, accessible education here in Alberta.

Mr. Connolly: As a result of the aforementioned funding cuts, institutions like Mount Royal University and the University of Alberta have had to cut programs to save money. What is the minister going to do to ensure valuable programs are preserved in Alberta's advanced education system?

Ms Sigurdson: Institutions regularly review their programs to see what is best. For some programs it makes sense for them to actually close. For other programs they might want to expand capacity. This is just done routinely. The insertion of new funding won't necessarily change these decisions by institutions, but we certainly are working closely with all institutions regarding those decisions and making sure that the right training is available here in Alberta.

Thanks.

Dialysis Service in Lac La Biche

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, Lac La Biche has been promised a dialysis centre for years. In 2010 a touring dialysis bus was provided as a bandage. The bus broke down in the parking lot. AHS removed the wheels, and it has remained there ever since. To the minister. This is a travesty and an embarrassment to all Albertans. There is room in the hospital for the unit. When will you get rid of this bus and give my community the permanent dialysis unit it deserves?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for raising the question again today. I did hear his member's statement yesterday and passed him a note saying that I will be looking into that, and I absolutely will. I want to work through Alberta Health Services to make sure that we're providing the best service possible for all Albertans no matter where they live.

Mr. Hanson: Given that there are no emergency services on the bus and considering that in May a patient collapsed on the bus and paramedics could not get a stretcher onto the bus, which meant that the patient had to endure the indignity of being treated on the floor, when will you tow this bus out of the parking lot and provide a permanent solution? When?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. Some previous governments may have heard a question like this, written a press release, and pretended that things were going to be fixed without actually putting a plan or funds in place. You don't have that in this government. We're not going to make a promise unless we can keep it. I can't make you a promise today, hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, while Alberta Health Services was wasting millions of dollars on salaries, severances, and bonuses, the good people of Lac La Biche raised over \$100,000 for the dialysis centre the government promised them but never delivered. As the minister said, nothing needs to change at AHS, and things are stable. Should my constituents expect more of the same AHS hokey, or should we expect to see the treatment centre we need and were promised?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. What I was talking about was when the same party was asking for simply having a reorganization and that that would magically solve all problems. Albertans disagree. Albertans need stability in the public health care system. We've had only five years. We're trying to make sure that we have opportunities for the fatigue from change to actually be addressed and for the staff to be able to bring forward solid recommendations. I look forward to updating this House when I have an opportunity to do so.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-West.

Bail Process Review

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this House two days ago the Minister of Justice talked of reviewing Alberta's bail process. Perhaps the minister is unaware that in 2009 a short-term bail reform pilot project was implemented at the recommendation of a task force that gave Crown prosecutors the role of the bail hearing officer, with the goal of putting more police back on the streets. We don't need more studies. We need action, and we need leadership. To the Justice minister: why reinvent the wheel when you can adopt this previous initiative and implement a better bail process in short order?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. It is absolutely crucial to this government to make sure that we are reviewing the bail process and that we make the right decisions to keep our communities and our front-line officers safe. In this case we want to look at the information, and we want to make sure that we are making the right decision so that we can move forward with the right solutions to keep everyone safe.

The Speaker: Hon. member, first supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, again, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force provided a thorough review of the bail process and also suggested other ways to reduce crime in its Keeping Communities Safe report, which I have with me and will table later in the House, will you commit today to build upon the recommendations of the task force, which I will, of course, table in the House for your reference?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. At this point we're moving forward with the review. We're looking into it. We would like to put information ahead of decisions because this is an issue that is critical. It deals not only with the rights of people who are subject to the state's power; it also deals with the safety of front-line workers and with all of our communities. So we would like to have information first and action second.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much. I appreciate you looking into this, but as I indicated, we need leadership on this.

To the same minister: given that you have worked as a criminal defence lawyer yourself and are well versed with the bail process and I, of course, am a former police officer with 12 years' experience and formerly recognized by the Chief Crowfoot Learning

Centre of the Calgary Police Service as a subject matter expert on bail hearings, will you accept my offer today to work with you to help improve the criminal justice system, to improve its effectiveness for all Albertans while ensuring both members of the public and first responders are better protected?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We are absolutely committed to working with all stakeholders going forward. The review will engage all of our stakeholders. It will engage with all the police forces throughout the province, and I would be happy to hear from the member on that matter.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Calgary Young Offender Centre

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The future of the young offenders in Calgary was called into question just a few short months ago, when it was announced that the Calgary Young Offender Centre would close and move young offenders to Edmonton. Concerned Albertans made their dissatisfaction about this decision clear. In response, Alberta's new government put interests of youth first and announced in May that the Young Offender Centre in Calgary would reopen to continue to serve youth in Calgary and southern Alberta. My first question is to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. What is the reason behind your decision to reopen the Calgary Young Offender Centre?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I think that reopening the Young Offender Centre shows the values of this government, and those values are in supporting vulnerable youth and supporting our communities in ensuring that they are safer. By reopening the Calgary Young Offender Centre, we have ensured the long-term safety and rehabilitation of the offenders as well as the safety of the communities.

Thank you.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: The closure of the Calgary Young Offender Centre was supposed to save the province money. Less than two months later it's being reopened. To the same minister: how much money will this reversal cost Albertans?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. This was a common-sense decision that was made in favour of Albertans. We believe that the cost of reversing the decision is far less than the cost of closing the centre, which would have had an impact on youth of the southern Alberta communities. This will allow those residents to stay in their communities, to stay attached to their support networks, and to increase their rehabilitative possibilities, which will save the system money in the long term.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Again to the same minister: if you put the campaign platform aside, what does opening the Calgary centre really mean for the youth of southern Alberta?

Ms Ganley: Thank you to the hon. member for the question. The decision to reopen the Calgary centre will allow youth to access programs and support and education while staying in their communities and staying linked to their families and their wider support networks. Mr. Speaker, we believe that the effectiveness of these services is significantly increased when these young offenders not only have access to the programs they need but also have access to supports from their families.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day

Mr. Piquette: Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this occasion to extend greetings and best wishes to the francophones of Alberta on behalf of the provincial government on the occasion of Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. Saint-Jean-Baptiste is the patron saint of French Canadians, and this day has been celebrated in Canada since 1636, yet to my knowledge this is the first time that Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day has been recognized by a statement in the Alberta Legislature. It's about time.

Thanks to the efforts of individuals such as my own father, Leo Piquette, who stood up in this Legislature on April 7, 1987, to ask a question in French and was silenced, the right to speak French in the Legislature has been affirmed, and I would now like to take advantage of it.

Je suis très fier de souhaiter aujourd'hui à tous les Franco-Albertains et à mes collègues dans la Législature une très bonne fête Saint-Jean-Baptiste. La fête Saint-Jean-Baptiste est une importante célébration de la vitalité de la Francophonie canadienne et albertaine.

Nous voulons, comme le nouveau gouvernement, remercier les importantes contributions des Franco-Albertains au développement économique, éducationnel et culturel de l'Alberta. Aujourd'hui plus de 200,000 Albertains parlent le français. Ceci est grâce à nos excellentes écoles francophones et aux programmes de l'immersion française. Les jeunes qui fréquentent ces écoles représentent une importante force économique et culturelle pour notre province.

[Translation] As a francophone I am very proud today to wish a very Happy Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day to all Franco-Albertans and my Legislature colleagues. The celebrating of Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day highlights the vitality of Alberta and Canada's Francophonie.

As Alberta's new provincial government we wish to recognize the important contributions Franco-Albertans have made to the province's economic, educational, and cultural development. Today more than 200,000 Albertans speak French. This is thanks to our excellent francophone and French immersion schools. Students in these programs represent an important economic and cultural force in our province. [As submitted]

Au nom du gouvernement néo-démocrate ... [Mr. Piquette's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Hon. member, the clock, in French or English, is always still the same.

Rural Issues

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, a strong and vibrant rural Alberta is vital to the success of our province. In 2009 the Conference Board of Canada estimated rural Alberta's contribution to Canada's economic activity at \$77 billion. Our farmers produce wholesome, premium-quality foods that are highly sought after around the

world. Alberta is a leader in the development of innovative and sustainable agricultural practices.

That's why it's hard to understand why this government has apparently ignored agriculture and, in a broader sense, rural Alberta. There's not one word in the throne speech about agriculture, our largest renewable resource. Rural communities finally get mentioned on the very last page of the throne speech and then only to be told that they need to keep contributing to the prosperity of Alberta. Rural Alberta is little more than a cash cow for this government, and based on Bill 3, we're going to need some more cows. They want to milk those cows, but they could care less about the condition of the barn or her pasture.

Mr. Speaker, rural Albertans know all about contributing to the prosperity of Alberta. There are no farms or ranches, there are no forests, coal mines, or oil wells in our cities. The people who grow our food, log our forests, and extract our mineral wealth don't ask for much, but they expect to be treated with dignity and respect and not to be forgotten or ignored by their government. That's exactly the message they've received in this throne speech.

People tell me, "Well, all their MLAs are from the cities," but that's not accurate. There are 11 government members, fully 20 per cent of their caucus, that represent constituencies that are at least partly rural. I expect that even they are frustrated by their government's lack of commitment or attention to rural Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, a strong Alberta depends on strength in all regions, urban and rural, from the largest cities to the tiniest villages to the hundreds of thousands of Albertans that live on the land and provide the food that nourishes and sustains us. It's high time for this government to acknowledge this and show rural Albertans some respect.

5th on 5th Lethbridge Youth Services

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, I am standing to make the following statement about a key issue among many issues in Lethbridge, the issue of youth support programs. At this time I'm going to speak about 5th on 5th, a youth support service for youth between the ages of 15 and 30. This is an amazing program which has operated in Lethbridge for the last 20 years. During this time the program and its incredible staff have supported thousands of youth in Lethbridge and from many areas of southern Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, 5th on 5th plays a pivotal role in youth homelessness prevention, crime prevention, reduction of those on income support, and increasing youths' self-esteem and their quality of life. I know because my grandson was one of them. Our communities are happier, safer, and healthier places because of the success of this program.

Some of the programs offered are resumé assistance, printing 14,000 and developing 500 annually; career mentoring of 300 people, with a 75 per cent success rate; express literacy, with 100 people per year meeting learning goals; referrals, with 60 to 100 calls and visits per day; a job board posting 400 non-online job openings; a resumé bank, with 25,168 resúmes on file for 12,244 clients.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-South West.

2:50 South Pointe Community Centre

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to share with the Legislative Assembly a project under way in Edmonton-South West. A group of dedicated citizens have taken it upon themselves to convert a former church into the South Pointe community centre. Should funding be approved, this new community centre would be

a partnership between private business, the city of Edmonton, community leagues, and the province of Alberta. This remarkable group has been able to identify an ideal location for a new community centre that will serve the surrounding communities at a fraction of the cost of building an entirely new facility. Once completed, the centre will provide program and office space for local community leagues, a performing arts and theatre space, a banquet facility, a daycare, a small conference centre, and a community library. It will become a social hub for the residents of the neighbouring communities.

Southwest Edmonton is one of the most rapidly growing areas in the city and in the province. There is a need for space for public events, indoor programming, and meeting and daycare facilities. This new community centre will provide some of this much-needed space. The renovation and expansion of the proposed centre would provide an exciting, practical, and viable solution to addressing the needs of communities in southwest Edmonton. It would also expedite the provision of needed community space that would otherwise take years to develop.

It is exciting to see community members coming together with a vision and energy to make their neighbourhood a better place to live. I'm proud of the work being done by residents of Edmonton-South West to ensure that everyone has access to the very much-needed community space and services. I look forward to being a part of what lies ahead with this project.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Nathan O'Brien Children's Foundation

Mr. Rodney: A terrible tragedy occurred on June 29, 2014, when five-year-old Nathan O'Brien and his grandparents disappeared. However, Nathan's spirit continues to inspire people to make a change in this world for the good of society in the form of the Nathan O'Brien Children's Foundation.

With the support of volunteers and friends and colleagues and corporations, Nathan's family received a wonderful gift to honour Nathan, a hockey game at the Saddledome, to make his dreams come true while helping other children. It was an unforgettable evening which featured superheroes and flash mobs, TimBits hockey players, Flames and NHL alumni, and Nathan's heroes, which included Calgary police investigators, generous corporate citizens, and our MLAs. The O'Brien family felt that it gave them the opportunity to follow Nathan's lead in life, to always play hard and have fun. The game raised almost \$60,000 for children in need, and the family thanks every single supporter, whom they refer to as real-life superheroes.

Now, since then the Nathan O'Brien Springbank TimBits tournament donated their proceeds of \$11,000 to the foundation, and the Airdrie Dads golf tournament and Shaw Communications added to that, and the Cougar Ridge soccer association, Nathan's previous league, recently held a drive to send soccer jerseys to Central and South America, and there is more.

The first annual Nathan O'Brien Children's Foundation superhero decathlon with Kids First will be held on August 15 and 16 at Springbank park for all seasons. The fundraiser will keep children in sport by adding coaching and equipment and extra sport training. Jennifer and Rod O'Brien have told me: "We've seen tragedy turn into something beautiful and quite unbelievable. We've been blessed beyond belief with our foundation and our chance to be parents to Nathan's spirit forever. Our prayer is that other parents who've lost a child could receive such blessings. We invite everyone to follow the Nathan O'Brien Children's

Foundation on our Facebook page to see just how great his spirit is and the great work that continues in his name for other children.”

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Affordable, quality child care is out of the reach of far too many Alberta families, and this is particularly true in my own constituency of Peace River. Universal public child care has social and economic benefits. It enhances the education and the well-being, the social development and education of children, and it enables parents to contribute financially to their own families, which improves their well-being as well. It's an important issue for our government, and to that end I'm really pleased to present this petition. It's sponsored by the HSAA, the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, and the petition was signed by almost 2,000 Albertans. It reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, [petition the Legislative Assembly] to introduce legislation that will provide universal, accessible, affordable, quality and public child care for children in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there other petitions?

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to table this petition on behalf of Dr. Tran-Davies. The petition is entitled Petition against Inspiring Education. It has thousands of signatures and represents massive support by Albertans for her position.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Three o'clock approaches, and we have not quite finished the Routine. I think it would be in the interests of the House if we did, so I would request unanimous consent to extend Orders of the Day until we complete the daily Routine.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure again.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to give oral notice of Government Motion 12, which reads as follows:

Be it resolved that:

- (1) A Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee of the Legislative Assembly be appointed to review the Election Act, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, the Conflicts of Interest Act, and the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act, consisting of the following members, namely Gray (chair), Payne (deputy chair), Renaud, Cortes-Vargas, McLean, Nielsen, Miller, Loyola, Miranda, Anderson (W), Cyr, Nixon, van Dijken, Jansen, Starke, Swann, and Clark.
- (2) In carrying out its duties, the committee may travel throughout Alberta and undertake a process of consultation with all interested Albertans.

- (3) The committee shall be deemed to be the special committee of the Assembly for the purposes of conducting a comprehensive review of the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act as provided for in section 37 of that act.
- (4) In carrying out its duties, the committee may solicit written submissions from experts in the field.
- (5) The committee is deemed to continue beyond prorogation and may meet during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued.
- (6) Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid, subject to the approval of the chair.
- (7) In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may, with the concurrence of the head of the department, utilize the services of the public service employed in that department or the staff employed by the Legislative Assembly Office and the officers of the Legislature.
- (8) The committee must submit its report, including any proposed amendments to the acts, within one year after commencing its review.
- (9) When its work has been completed, the committee must report to the Assembly if it is sitting. During a period when the Assembly is adjourned, the committee may release its report by depositing a copy with the clerk and forwarding a copy to each member of the Assembly.

3:00

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the rural economic development plan, which is on the Agriculture website. It gives us a solid base to build on going farther to further develop rural Alberta.

Thank you.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I have copies to table today of two documents that I referenced in my questions today, entitled Alberta Minimum Wage: Submission, by Restaurants Canada, and also the media article Non-profits Raise Concerns over NDP Plan to Hike Minimum Wage. I have the requisite number of copies.

The Speaker: Are there any other reports or returns to be tabled?
The hon. member.

Mr. Ellis: Yes, thank you. Mr. Speaker, I have five copies of the Keeping Communities Safe reports, which I will be tabling to you.

Thank you very much.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the Hon. Ms Hoffman, Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Medical Diagnostic and Therapeutic Technologists annual report 2014, the College of Medical Laboratory Technologists of Alberta annual report 2014, the Alberta College of Pharmacists 2014-2015 annual report, the Alberta College of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists 2014 annual report, the College of Alberta Denturists annual report 2013, the College of Licensed Practical Nurses 2014 annual report, and pursuant to the Public Health Act the Public Health Appeal Board 2013 annual report.

Point of Order
Imputing Falsehoods against a Member
Reflections on a Nonmember

The Speaker: I'd like to move the Assembly now to the two points of order that had been addressed today. I'll call upon the Government House Leader to speak to the first point of order.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During question period the member for Chestermere-Rocky View engaged in some questions to the minister of environment and the status of women. I have two citations, which I would like to cite. First of all, that the hon. member opposite imputed false or unavowed motives to another member, being the minister. This is under section 23(i) of our standing orders.

The second thing that occurred, Mr. Speaker, was a reference to Mr. Hudema, who was the author of a book that was referenced by the hon. member in her question. There I would like to cite *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms* at page 151. It is section 493(4). "The Speaker has cautioned Members to exercise great care in making statements about persons who are outside the House and unable to reply."

First of all, I'd like to deal with that portion, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member in her question referred to Mr. Hudema – and I don't have the Blues – as a radical's radical. She made a number of disparaging comments about Mr. Hudema, who is not present in the House to defend himself. That is certainly not in keeping with the direction of Speakers and the precedents of this House. That is not acceptable practice.

But then the member went on to try and smear the reputation of the minister of environment through guilt by association. Having smeared Mr. Hudema in the way that she did and used the disparaging language that she did, she then attempted to associate the minister with him. Mr. Speaker, that is unacceptable. That is really, in my view, a very low form of criticism in question period. Unfortunately, it's very consistent with the pattern that we saw with the Wildrose opposition before the last election, where personal attacks and smears are substituted for constructive criticism of the government and its program, and it is unacceptable.

The minister indicates to me, just to set the record straight, Mr. Speaker, that at the time that Mr. Hudema wrote that book, he was the president of the University of Alberta Students' Union and the minister was an employee of the students' union whose job it was to edit the introduction of the book. She is in no way associated with the statements made by Mr. Hudema in that book and takes no responsibility whatsoever for those opinions and comments.

For the member opposite to attempt to associate the minister with all of the comments and opinions of the young man who was the president of the students' union at that time is completely unfair, unwarranted, and unacceptable as far as I'm concerned and certainly constitutes imputing false or unavowed motives to another member. I would argue very strongly that in doing so, the hon. member has transgressed the rules of this House and has dealt very unfairly and unacceptably with another member of this House by associating with her views that are not her own or were not her own at the time. Furthermore, she has spoken very disparagingly about an individual who is not present in the House to defend himself, which is also in contradiction of the rules and practices of this House, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. House leader – Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: We'll all get there some day. I mean to the House leader part. I don't mean you, sir.

It's my pleasure to rise on the point of order. I guess there's a large smattering here this afternoon that quite possibly could become a matter of debate. I'm just not a hundred per cent sure where to start, but let me start with addressing Mr. Hudema. It seems to be the start here.

The hon. member across has suggested that we made disparaging comments against Mr. Hudema. I just have a couple of points of reference. In fact, I think that we didn't say anything disparaging about this particular individual because he says these things of himself. I have a newspaper article here that I am more than happy to table where he's quoted saying: I am radical to the core. He speaks in his book, which I'm also happy to table in the House, about his first experience with radical cheerleading as he is a radical cheerleader. The hon. member was merely pointing out that this individual is a radical. He has associations or had had associations with the minister, and this side of the House was looking for some clarification around those associations and some of his radical viewpoints.

I might just add that when it comes to an individual that's not in the House to defend themselves, there is a wide range of opinion as to exactly who they're referring to, whether it's former members or if it's the general public, so there's a matter of debate within the good reference books that we use. But I might just add that moments after this interaction, which, clearly, is a matter of debate, the Premier made disparaging comments about some other member who used to be in this place. So if the Government House Leader is rising to say, you know, "You can't be talking about people outside of this House," and the Premier mere moments after is making disparaging comments of not just the general public outside of this House but of former members, who many of us agree or disagree with, I just think it's a little bit disingenuous to use one argument to benefit themselves and another when it benefits them.

The last thing that I will say on this point of order is that perhaps we will take the point under advisement and we will be much more cautious in the future when describing close, personal friends of the minister.

3:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to offer some comments from the third party with regard to this matter. I, quite frankly, agree with the Government House Leader with regard to the nature of the comments. But I do have to point out that using that same clause or that same subsection from *Beauchesne*, from page 151, with regard to references to persons absent from the House and unable to reply, I have to confess, sitting here in the third party caucus over the course of the last several days, that if I were to leap to my feet every time a person who is absent is disparaged using terminology like "corruption," "incompetence," "mismanagement," and some of the other stuff that's been thrown around both by the government and also by the Official Opposition, I'd have worn out the floor under my chair from leaping up and down so much.

So, Mr. Speaker, while I would agree with the Government House Leader that the comments I think went a little too far, it is indeed a difficult thing to parse that down to determine exactly where that line exists, and it is unclear exactly where that line exists. If I could offer my own personal opinion on this, I think we err better on the side of not impugning those not present and not impugning those present. Quite frankly, as has been ruled by Speaker Zwozdesky in the past Legislature, this only serves to raise

the temperature within the Chamber and reduce the level of co-operation between all parties within the House.

As a result of that, Mr. Speaker, you know, from our standpoint this point of order I believe is in fact well taken, but at the same time I would caution that, again, if we go down this path of leaping to our feet on a point of order every day on *Beauchesne's* page 151, which is a very commonly cited section of the rules and orders, we're going to waste a lot of time defending those not in the House.

The Speaker: Are there any other hon. members who would like to speak to the point of order?

Hon. members, a recent citation that members should exercise caution when making statements about persons who are outside the House and unable to reply: *Beauchesne's*, paragraph 493(4) as well as the *House of Commons*, page 616 to 617. I have the advice of the table on a particular ruling on this order. I have however decided to take it under consideration myself and report to the House tomorrow.

I can't say enough to this issue. The hon. member just cited time. This is the most valuable commodity that you have in this Assembly. I, too, do not wish to rise as often as I have because every time that I do, I'm taking away time from you. The word of caution applies across the House, not just on the opposition side.

I share with you these preliminary views. If you do not wish this Speaker to rise and interrupt and take time from your questions, I would ask all of you – and I think there are some specific ones in the House, that I choose not to name at this point, that already know who I might be speaking about.

I, therefore, at this point in time would defer my decision until tomorrow.

The second point of order. The hon. House leader of the Official Opposition.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief here. I just wanted to bring to your attention, sir – I will be citing section 23(j), "language of a nature likely to create disorder." In question period earlier today we saw the minister of the environment and the status of women, in response to a question from the opposition, used the words: I'm going to ignore that. While the word "ignore" itself may not be unparliamentary, we have all been elected to this House to debate the issues and to debate policy, and if there was any question today that was specifically based around policy – we were speaking specifically around a hunting regulation issue, and the response of the minister was: I'm going to ignore.

Here we have a situation where the government in the form of the minister is clearly being disrespectful and, some on my side have suggested, insulting. As the citation indicates, they used language that is disrespectful of the debate, to ignore one side of the House that's been elected to represent their constituents. If this type of language and attitude towards the Official Opposition isn't likely to create disorder, I'm not entirely sure what is. Sometimes it's not the words, whether they be radical or some other language that we can debate is parliamentary or not. Sometimes it's how we say the words that may be determined parliamentary or not.

When we take this sort of position – and I understand that there may have been some frustrating parts of question period for the hon. member, but to use language that is likely to create disorder certainly goes beyond the scope of our rules, and I would hope that in the future this type of language wouldn't be used when it comes to addressing questions that are fair and reasonable to be asked in this place.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With the greatest respect to my friend opposite, I do not believe that there is a legitimate point of order. I don't have the Blues, but my recollection is that the question went along the lines: is the minister making her own decisions, or is she just signing documents her staff put in front of her? There was an insulting implication in the question, which the minister then responded to by saying that she would ignore that and went on to answer the meat of the question, so quite the opposite of what the hon. Opposition House Leader is suggesting. I would suggest that it was actually the question that was more likely to create disorder as it was very insulting in its insinuation, and it was to the credit of the minister that she chose to ignore that implication and that insult and went on to answer to the best of her knowledge the meat of the actual question.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I will read from the Blues that have been provided to me. I believe the sentence in question is as follows: "Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will ignore for now the wording of the question." The minister, I believe, was simply commenting on the innuendo in the member's question. I would also interpret the sentence to read: "I will ignore for now the wording." I would therefore rule that there is no point of order.

3:20

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order. Before we proceed, I just realized that there was an oversight when we first called the committee to order last week. For the newer members, who perhaps don't understand the process as well, when we're in committee, it's a little bit more relaxed. The men are allowed to take off their jackets, people can walk around, and you're able to sit in another seat as long as when the vote actually comes, you are in your own seat. Some of this arose last night when we were still in session, that members were sitting in different seats, which is not allowed until you are in committee. So, you know, feel free to be relaxed. You can bring in your coffee in the proper cups and that sort of thing and kind of enjoy that slightly less formal committee atmosphere.

Bill 2 An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue

The Chair: I'll recognize the Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today to Bill 2, a bill which the Wildrose caucus cannot support in any way. Raising taxes to cover the excessive spending by this government and the previous government is not good or responsible governance. Since the NDP will not listen to reason and abandon this bill or even send it to committee for study, I hope that they will accept this amendment.

Madam Chair, I would like to present an amendment to Bill 2. I will pause while the House distributes copies.

The Chair: This amendment will be known as amendment A1.
Please proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam Chair, small businesses are the engine of Alberta's economy. According to Industry Canada, here in Alberta

there are 165,607 businesses; of those, 158,049 are classified as small businesses. That means that small businesses make up 95 per cent of the businesses in Alberta. They, just like large businesses, are job creators for Albertans. Small businesses like Rocky's coffee shop and bakery in Strathmore are hubs of local activity. One of the best shows on TV in recent years, *Corner Gas*, was based on a small Canadian business. Although life isn't always that funny in rural Canada, that show portrays the effects of a small business and what it can provide for a community.

I am worried, Madam Chair. I am worried about our small businesses. That is why I have submitted this amendment. Let me read it into the record. I move that Bill 2, an Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue, be amended in section 1(3)(b) in the proposed section 22(2.1294)(b) by striking out "9.0%" and substituting "10%".

Let me explain for a moment what this amendment means. This amendment changes the difference that small businesses pay compared to large businesses. Small businesses do not make as much as their larger counterparts; thus, Canadian provinces tax them differently. The effective tax rate at this moment is 3 per cent. By changing 9 per cent to 10 per cent, we lower the effective tax rate from 3 per cent to 2 per cent. This amendment would take some of the bite out of the economic hardships of the NDP bills before us on small businesses.

The government is imposing onto Alberta policy after harmful policy that will hurt small businesses. Many who both own and work in small businesses in my constituency of Strathmore-Brooks have expressed their concerns to me directly. They have told me face to face that they are worried for their jobs, for their businesses, and for their futures. They do not know how they will afford to pay their employees 50 per cent more and still keep their doors open.

They have to stay competitive with larger businesses. Larger businesses can keep their prices low by the sheer volume of product they produce. Larger businesses have an army of accountants, lawyers, and other employees on staff who can assist them in finding places to cut or to move money offshore. Small businesses do not have that luxury. Small businesses do not necessarily have anywhere to cut. Large businesses can often absorb losses by many different means. Small businesses are limited to a few options such as how many employees they pay or by raising their prices. Small businesses are operated sometimes by two or three employees, not counting the owner or his or her wife or husband. By forcing those businesses to pay 50 per cent more for their employees, two employees will now cost what three employees used to cost.

Jobs will be lost because of the minimum wage increase. I have not seen one serious study to suggest otherwise. According to Industry Canada, private businesses employ 1,315,227 people here in Alberta. Of those, 1,053,244 are employed by small businesses right here in Alberta. This increase to the minimum wage directly threatens, by some estimates, upwards of 10 per cent of Alberta's jobs. The only questions are: how close to that number will we actually come and what portion will come from small businesses? Small-business workers need our help. Small-business owners need our help. They need all of our help. This amendment will help them. By cutting the tax rate for small businesses, they may be able to recoup the cost of the minimum wage increase. This tax cut will allow small businesses to stay competitive with larger businesses.

I admit that I am doing this for somewhat selfish reasons. I want to make sure for selfish reasons that small businesses will stay open. I want to be able to ensure that the schnitzel truck around the corner stays there and doesn't go out of business. I want to make sure that Smiley's in Strathmore continues to provide their delicious products at a competitive price. I would rather that none of these tax hikes

go into effect, but the least that we can do here is try to protect small businesses and mitigate the damage.

My worries about small businesses are increased by the negative effects that the royalty review could have on this province. With jobs already being cut from the energy sector and companies backing out of Alberta, the number of people with money to invest in small businesses or at all is shrinking.

3:30

In Duchess, just outside of Brooks in my constituency, the Whistle Stop for years was a busy hub of business activity. It provided sandwiches to oil patch workers who needed a tasty meal at a cheap price really quickly. If you go there today, Madam Chair, it's empty. They're barely keeping the doors open. They're hurting.

When the recession of 2008 hit the global marketplace, the Bank of Canada wisely reached out to help Canadians. The people at the Bank of Canada knew that during times of economic downturn something needed to be done. The Bank of Canada lowered interest rates to help Canadians get through the rough times, but we cannot expect interest rates to stay low forever. The low oil prices and the royalty review are pushing Alberta to the brink of another economic downturn. We should not turn a moderate economic downturn into a full-blown recession. The NDP should follow the example of the Bank of Canada and help Albertans instead of hindering them.

Don't raise Albertans' taxes. We are trying to hold the line on raising all taxes for Albertans because we know that this will not help them. But since the NDP insists on raising personal and business income taxes as well as the minimum wage, we believe that this small-business tax cut is both affordable and fair. This tax cut will be a minor stimulant to the economy, in need of desperate help. This tax cut will possibly generate more revenue.

Let me refer back to everything that the Wildrose caucus has stood for and said over the last week: lower taxes encourage growth; lower taxes encourage new businesses; lower taxes create more jobs. Growth, new businesses, more jobs: all increase the tax base and thus increase the overall revenue for the government. At the moment Alberta has the highest – let me repeat: the highest – small-business tax rate in western Canada. British Columbia's rate is 2.5 per cent, Saskatchewan's is 2 per cent, and Manitoba's small-business tax rate is zero, an NDP accomplishment which I hope can be replicated here someday. This decrease, a 1 per cent decrease in small-business taxes, would give Alberta at least some competitive advantage. This bill effectively removes Alberta's advantage when it comes to attracting large businesses. So let's give small businesses a helping hand. Give Alberta a slight help toward bringing back the Alberta advantage by lowering the small-business tax rate by 1 per cent.

Now, I know that we can agree on this amendment because this idea is not mine. As the House leader will know, I love to take credit for ideas and coming up with something brilliant like the idea of cutting the small-business tax rate. Instead, I must unfortunately hand all of the credit to the Premier herself. Let's all give a round of applause for the Premier. In 2012 the Premier campaigned on lowering the small-business tax rates. I will read a quote from the Premier that she gave on the 29th of October 2012.

In the last election campaign the NDP proposed to raise corporate tax rates by 2 per cent while reducing taxes for small businesses by one-third to help them grow. We were, ironically, the only party of any of the political parties in the election to propose a tax reduction. That was a tax reduction for small business.

Well, I've never agreed with the Premier more, Madam Chair.

The Premier has kept her promise, unfortunately, to raise taxes on large businesses. The Premier may have forgotten that she promised to lower taxes on small businesses. It's a good thing we're

here to help and remind the government. I'm helping the Premier bring in an amendment that she herself campaigned on. I am helping the Premier by introducing an amendment that helps small businesses.

This amendment will provide a beacon of hope in a storm of increasing personal taxes, changes to the royalty structure, increases to the minimum wage, and increases to business taxes. This amendment may not fix the damage that the combination of these bills will create, but it will help. Members of this House, I plead with you: let's help small businesses; let's help the Alberta economy; let's vote for this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I won't be supporting this amendment. The reason I won't be supporting it is that the 2012 NDP platform did talk about reducing the small-business tax. That was in a very different economic climate. Fast-forward to March 2015. The PC budget that was produced really showed everybody, because of the economic outlook, that it was going to be a tough, tough fiscal environment. The budget that this NDP government ran on did not include a tax cut at that time for small business.

The environment for all businesses in Alberta, including small businesses, is very strong in terms of what they can have. We have a low-tax environment overall. We have many other things that small businesses rely on. We have an educated population and strong infrastructure, both physical and social.

The cut itself that's being proposed would cost a significant amount of money, about \$167 million. We have a different fiscal environment. We need to ensure we have stable revenues. It's really interesting that the member opposite wants to chastise government on one hand for not having put forward a budget this month but on the other hand is proposing a tax cut when he really has no understanding or idea of the impact on our programs and services.

I would say that, on balance, we have a good plan going forward. Small business will benefit because we have a globally competitive environment in this province. They're going to benefit from all that's going on here. A reduction like this, on the back of a napkin, perhaps is not the best way to do things.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam Chair, how much time do we have left for this?

The Chair: That was it. Oh, you have 20 minutes yet. I apologize; the timer hadn't been set.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'll briefly respond to this before allowing my colleagues to continue the debate. I think it is incredible that the government would accuse anyone of not costing something out under the present circumstances. I will remind this House that the Wildrose balanced-budget plan actually added up before we presented it to the media during the election.

I'll remind this House that the government has given us six or seven different figures in the span of 24 hours on what their new spending will be. The best answer we got was that it was somewhere in the \$600 million area. This is a bill that is raising taxes without any idea about how much their total revenue will be for the year. They have previously passed a bill in which they have no idea how much new spending they will be putting forward to Albertans this year.

If the minister is concerned about costing and the affordability of this tax cut, then I would recommend that he table figures to this House detailing what he expects the total revenues of the

government to be. Unfortunately, I have asked him nearly a dozen times, and at no time has he ever been able to provide that answer.

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have to admit to being just a little bit gobsmacked when the Finance minister popped right up and knew it was \$167 million. Wow. That is, like, the first answer we've gotten from you that's complete and to the point. Thank you. I'm amazed.

But what I find amazing about it is that when I asked the government, you know, for example, how much they thought they'd raise by increasing corporate taxes by 2 per cent, something that they had in their election platform, something they've talked about for months, something that they dragged into this House in a bill, they haven't got a clue. Why do I know they don't have a clue? Because they said that they don't have a clue. I'm taking their word for it that they don't have a clue, Madam Chair, because they said that they don't know how much the tax they want to raise is going to bring in. That's why I'm so sure, because the government told me. That's why I know.

3:40

However, it's amazing that when the opposition brings up a tax decrease, well, that number came right to the Finance minister's mind between – I don't know – the time the document was handed out and the time the minister was on his feet, maybe seven minutes. You are brilliant. I just wish that you took a little more time with your own work. If you are waving around the Wildrose document, which is against the House rules – but we'll ignore that right now – I would be embarrassed, if I was you, that the opposition parties know more about what they're talking about than the government does.

The Chair: Hon. member, just a reminder, please: through the chair.

Mr. McIver: Yes, Madam Chair. I thank you for that reminder. I am grateful for it, and I will heed it.

Consequently, I find this amazing. The government minister – I think it was the House leader at the time – a couple of days ago, when I was asking questions about other topics, also didn't have answers about where the other \$500 million has gone. Actually, the government's numbers are so inaccurate, Madam Chair, that they couldn't actually tell me whether it was \$500 million or \$600 million, couldn't actually tell me whether they are spending less than the \$1.8 billion or, if they were indeed spending that, what the heck they were spending it on. I believe that, too, because I heard it from the government. That's why I am so very sure that I'm right about that, because I heard it from the government.

Madam Chair, referring to the Restaurants Canada document that I tabled in the House today, they did talk about a typical restaurant business 101, and in the document that they furnished the government with, at least the labour minister and the Premier, they talk about a \$10 restaurant bill. Their breakdown of the \$10 restaurant bill goes like this: \$3.48 for wages and benefits, \$3.40 for food and beverage, \$2.41 for operating expenses, and 71 cents for pretax profit. So if you've got a 7 per cent pretax profit and the government is taking 3 per cent out of that, that's taking a big bite out of small business, a very big bite.

Now, I appreciate it's not the sense of the bill, but it does speak to how important this is, Madam Chair, and to what a good idea this amendment is, which is why I'm going to support it, and I hope all members of the House do. When you've got the average restaurant, which is probably not completely typical of all small businesses –

but I'm sure there are a lot that mirror that – and government has already taken 3 per cent out of that 7 per cent, down to 4, leaving them with 5 instead of 4 has got to be a good thing, particularly when we know that those same small businesses, be they restaurants or otherwise, are still, I assume, going to have a \$15-an-hour wage increase inflicted upon them.

Let's keep them open. Let's keep them open. Let's not tell Albertans: you have to cook at home because we're closing up all your restaurants. If the restaurants stay open, there's no way they're going to be able to do it without radically increasing prices. That's what restauranteurs and bars do. I do have the occasional adult beverage in a pub, Madam Chair, and the people in those pubs tell me – their words, not mine – that when this \$15 comes in, the cost of the beer on tap is going to go from \$6 to \$9. In terms of percentage – it's one and a half times – I think that is probably a believable number. You know who's going to suffer the worst? The people making the 15 bucks. If they could afford a beer once a month now, they won't be able to afford a beer once a year. So if you think you're helping them, you're not.

That takes us right back to the amendment before us. The government has said that they are going to torture and hurt small businesses by adding to the minimum wage by 50 per cent. Let's let them live. Let's let them live. The House leader said this to me the other day, because I asked him that, and his words were pretty close to: the same as they were with your government, \$500,000. But just doing quick and dirty math, \$500,000 a year divided by 365 days is \$1,300, \$1,400. If that's not exactly right, forgive me, but I know it's not far off.

So if you've got a business that's doing \$1,300, \$1,400 a day worth of business, how much profit are they making? Seriously, I mean, even at 30 per cent they're making \$500 a day. A small-business owner typically puts in 12, 14 hours a day, and that's assuming that they have no other expenses to take out of that. So letting them have a little bit more so that they can keep their business open, so that they can keep employing other Albertans – be they young, be they seniors, whatever – seems like a very good idea. Giving a smaller tax burden on businesses that are already small is a very good idea.

I support the opposition's motion, and I encourage all other members of this House to do the same.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Madam Chair. I apologize for waving the piece of paper. I'm learning many things here in this House this week, my second week, sitting in a chair when I shouldn't be sitting in a chair and waving a piece of paper I shouldn't have waved, and I apologize. Forgive me.

The paper in question was something that I pulled off the Wildrose website. It came out at 11:48. It talked about a 1 per cent tax cut to the small-business tax rate. So I asked my staff if they would cost what that was, in the time between when it came out, earlier today, and sitting here and rising to speak to this point. The small-business tax rate, at 3 per cent in the March budget of the PCs, would have brought in \$503 million. When you take a point off that, that's \$167.7 million. The idea that we should do that on the back of a napkin or as a result of a press release doesn't seem like a really strategic way to look at a fiscal plan going forward.

I do want to remind everyone that the tax environment in Alberta is still, even with the tax changes that we're talking about in this bill, An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue, towards the low end, all across the country. That is why I'm suggesting that we not do this. I insist as Finance minister in this government that we look at the revenues and at doing the best job with the expenditure of

revenues to support small businesses and other businesses in Alberta through a competitive economic environment in this province.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to talk about the amendment to Bill 2 and to express my concern that the governing party is not in support of this. I have to say that as a small-business man, I know what this would have done for my business.

In order to be able to clearly articulate my concerns about this refusal to support this, I want to give you an example. There seems to be a misperception about small-business men, that they make huge amounts of money. I have been a small-business man since I was 14 years old, the first time that I had the opportunity to be able to rent a lawn mower from my father, the first time that I had an opportunity to be able to use his rake and go out and generate money. I worked hard. It gave me a sense of purpose. It gave me a sense of the ability to do something on my own and to have ownership. This is the sort of thing that is at risk here.

3:50

There is a perfect storm beginning in Alberta. Where the Alberta advantage defined us, now we seem to have this perfect storm starting where small-business men are being squeezed out. I don't think that that's the intent of this government, and I'm not saying that it is. But I want to just point out that if you do squeeze out the small-business man or the small-business woman, it creates less competition in your economy. It provides larger corporations, who have higher margins – they have higher economies of scale, so they can weather these bad policies, in my humble opinion. I don't think that it is the intent of this government to punish small businesses, but in reality their policies are punishing small businesses. Because small businesses don't have the ability to weather these things as larger companies do, they will shut the doors, and there will be less competition, and that's always bad for an economy.

Now, I tell you this from my own perspective. I didn't read this in a book. I did go to university. I did get as much education as I could, but this is knowledge from the school of hard knocks. I have had the opportunity of running many businesses, starting up from scratch, which is the most difficult thing to do, and I have seen what the Alberta advantage did for me. If there is opportunity, an entrepreneur will look for that opportunity, and they'll try to make it happen. They put in their own time, their effort. They wear many hats. They invest what scarce resources they have, and they become chief bottle-washer in every way.

This is the sort of thing that every economy – if you take a look at historical precedents, every economy that has helped small businesses and given them what they need has prospered. Every economy that has not helped or has hindered – red tape, barriers to entry, whatever it is, lack of competition – has always faltered. I am concerned, greatly concerned, at the tone and the optics of what we're seeing here.

I'm concerned that we have other provinces in western Canada, B.C., at 2.5 per cent, as my colleague has said; Saskatchewan, at 2 per cent; Manitoba, at zero. Now, obviously, we need to address an issue here that seems to be lacking. I've brought this up a few times, and I think it needs to be brought up again. We are losing our comparative and competitive advantage. In small business we understand that principle. We understand that in order for you to be able to make it work, you have to be comparatively advantaged to another company. You need to be competitive, and if we lose that competitive edge, then as small-business men we have to close our doors.

Now, I think that on a micro scale that can transfer to a macro scale as well, as the government is a larger business. There's only one income. That's taxes and fees. If you take a look at that as a static, nonmoving pie and you just need to take some more of that, then, obviously, if you have a spending problem, you're going to try to take more of that pie. A conservative approach – the reason why I am a conservative is because conservatives take a look at the economy and say: "You know what? This pie can be grown. What can we do to be able to help this pie grow?" The best way to help a pie grow is to stimulate the economy through helping small businesses grow. They are the major driver in an economy, the absolute major driver in any economy that actually is doing well.

I think that with the intent of the sitting government being to help the economy, to help supply social programs that I believe in – I believe they're important. They help the people who need it the most. You want to have that pie or the portion of that pie to be able to do that. I would caution you to think about this for a second. If you want that pie or you want more, to be able to increase social spending – to take more of that pie just means that you're going to drive out businesses. If you take more out of a small business's pocket and they don't have high margins to be able to cover that, then there's no way that they can survive, and they go out of business. Then your pie shrinks, and now you have less that you can actually use for those social programs. If you really, really are concerned about having the money to be able to provide for these social programs, then the best approach to this is to be able to help small businesses.

Now, making us competitive, which I believe this amendment will do – it allows us to be more competitive. It stimulates small businesses. This is why I'm in support of this amendment to Bill 2. I hope that by doing this amendment, it does actually restore the fairness to public revenue. I hope that this argument has been heard, and I understand that there might be ideological reasons why it hasn't been. But I can tell you again that this is not coming from a person who's read a book about some possible way of being able to do this. I've actually lived it. I've lived it most of my life.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, it was brought to my attention – and I apologize; I didn't notice – initially that you weren't in your proper seat to speak, and that was something I neglected to also mention. While you can move around in committee, you must be in your seat to speak or to vote. Just to clarify that for any other members who wish to do that. That's in accordance with Standing Order 16.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, did you want to be recognized to speak? Then I can recognize you next.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to get up to speak in support of this motion. I think anyone who was part of the campaign recognizes that the Alberta Liberals were pushing the agenda for small business to get a break, especially during these down economic times. We don't have the lowest small-business tax in the country. We have an opportunity to give an olive branch, especially during the challenges faced in these last six months and the foreseeable future, frankly.

I think we have to assume that there may be a longer downturn than we initially anticipated, and some of the best predictors, as if anyone can claim to be a best predictor – but many of the pundits in the oil industry and internationally are saying that this could last longer than we thought. The Saudis have a large reserve. They can play this game indefinitely, and I think we need to look beyond party lines to see how we can reach across to the small-business community, enhance new economic opportunities, increase or

stabilize the jobs where we can, and look at the opportunity to send an olive branch, I guess, during these times of challenge.

There's been a little too much polarization in our debates in these last 24 hours, 48 hours. I'd like to see some opportunity to reach across and find some common ground here. It's a small change. It's a reasonable and responsible change. I think it would send a good message, especially at a time when we're looking at so many uncertainties. The government is looking at a royalty review, a carbon levy, both of which I supported, but it is going to have to be seen in the context of some of the negative impacts it's going to have on jobs and business.

Actually, if we adopted this amendment, we would fall into closer line with the rest of the country and send a strong message that we're not totally ideological, not entirely going one way. So I would encourage the government to really, seriously think about it and allow a free vote on that side. It would also send a good message to the Legislature that this is something that has partly to do with balanced thinking, a balanced approach, a democratic response. I dare say that many people on that side of the House are in touch with small businesses and have a sense of what this would look like in their communities as well. I don't need to say very much more except that it would be a powerful statement, reaching across the aisle and seeking to co-operate at this early stage in our work.

I support the amendment, and I hope others in the Legislature will.

4:00

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for his very constructive comments. It's a very rare and strange day when we agree on very much, and today is one of those days. He is an elder statesman in a Legislature that does not have – not to impugn his age or imply an expiry of any kind . . .

Dr. Swann: I just changed my mind.

Mr. Fildebrandt: We have now lost the support of the Liberal Party.

But he is an experienced statesman in a Legislature that does not have very many experienced statesmen, and I think that we would be well served to heed his advice, to not blindly follow our ideological zeal. We all have it. We all have our own ideas, our own principles, ideologies, or philosophies, but we should not blindly follow them without being open to evidence or to amendment or compromise. In my maiden speech to this House I said that we should stick to our principles but not refuse to accept "a proverbial half-loaf of bread" at the expense of those principles.

This is a responsible measure. This is a measure that will help take the bite off some of the other measures the government has proposed or already passed. Whatever those members think about how correct those policies may be, they must recognize that they will have adverse effects on businesses, especially small businesses.

I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for his comments. He brings a lot of wisdom to this Chamber, not wisdom that I will agree with most of the time. He is a member of this Legislature who appears to agree with the governing party on the vast majority of the issues. Perhaps his independence of mind relative to members of the government gives him a certain clarity, and I beseech members of the government to listen to his advice.

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I, too, rise to support this amendment, making that perhaps nearly unanimous on this side of House. I echo the comments of the Member for Strathmore-Brooks and echo the request from the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, that we do have an opportunity here to demonstrate to Albertans that, in fact, those of us here in this House in the 29th Legislature are ready to operate and to govern differently, to hear good ideas irrespective of which side of the House they come from, and to support those ideas. And I encourage all members of the House, both on the front bench in government as well as private members on all sides, to think very hard about what this amendment will do, the positive impact it will have.

One of the great things about this province that I think we lose sight of sometimes: as Albertans if you have a good idea, if you work hard, if you're honest, you will do well in this province. That's the entrepreneurial spirit, that makes Alberta a great place, and it's something that, unless you have lived and worked overseas – in my case my wife has moved from overseas to Alberta. We sometimes lose sense of that perspective. Even in other parts of this country that entrepreneurial spirit is not as strong as in this province. So this allows a vibrant and strong culture of small business. It allows Albertans to hire Albertans. It creates jobs. It creates prosperity. It creates wealth, and when we have wealth creation, all Albertans benefit. So this policy is consistent, certainly, with Alberta Party policy, and I support it without reservation.

One thing I would encourage the government to think about is the consequences of their policies, whether intended or unintended. Now, one of the key concepts of taxation policies is the concept of integration. Integration is an important principle in the Canadian tax system, especially for businesses of all kinds, Canadian-controlled private corporations, and their shareholders. It's based on the premise that an individual earning an income through a corporation should be in the same tax position as if an individual had earned the income directly. In other words, an individual should be indifferent, from an income tax perspective, as to the type of entity used to earn income. Now, this may sound like dry accounting-speak, Madam Chair, but it is very, very important. It is a critical and very key point to understand when we talk about tax changes of all kinds.

Income earned in a corporation is first taxed in the corporation, and the after-tax amount is then further taxed at the personal level when it is distributed to an individual as a dividend. The combined personal and corporate tax represents the effective tax rate of earning income through a corporation. So in order to achieve integration, dividends received by individuals from taxable Canadian corporations are subject to a dividend gross-up and dividend tax credit mechanism. The individual shareholder includes income in a grossed-up amount representing an approximation of the corporation's pretax income and then gets a credit representing the tax paid in the corporation, so in theory the tax is effectively paid at the personal tax rate.

Now, that's a very important point. Prior to the introduction of this bill Alberta entrepreneurs and shareholders enjoyed near-perfect integration as the Alberta dividend tax credit effectively operated to provide taxation rates on the flow through of business income at 39.6 per cent for income earned at the small-business rate and 39.3 per cent at the general business income tax rate. So when compared to the top marginal tax rate for personal taxation, previously 39 per cent for Albertans, there was essentially no material difference between earning income personally or corporately. With all the numbers the important point, I'll say again, is that there was essentially no material difference between earning income personally and corporately.

Now, with the changes announced here in Bill 2, the gap between earning business income and earning personally has grown

dramatically. I won't quote the numbers, but I can assure you that there is an imbalance here. This amendment, Madam Chair, creates an opportunity for businesses to generate more income, to generate more wealth, and to create more jobs for Albertans.

Let's state again that Alberta has a higher small-business tax rate than our provincial neighbours. B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, all have lower small-business tax rates. Add to that – the fact that Alberta is no longer in a strong position of integration creates the very real possibility that Alberta entrepreneurs will perhaps purchase a revenue property in B.C. or Saskatchewan, and perhaps they will declare that as their taxable residence on the 31st of December each tax year. That means that there's significant tax leakage risk out of the province of Alberta. Whatever we can do in this House to prevent that from happening and keep those tax revenues in this province to fund the very important programs that Albertans rely upon – I think it is incumbent that we do that.

I also think we need to think about not just the revenue side of the equation; we do need to think of the expense side of the equation. We need to think about whether our Alberta tax dollars are in fact spent effectively. I find it unfortunate that we haven't had much discussion in this House about the cost-efficiency side of things, about good management of Alberta's public services and good stewardship of our finances. Is our public service as efficient and effective as it could be? Has the government taken steps to ensure that key ministries like Health but all others focus first on cost efficiency before simply asking for more dollars? What has the government done to change the culture of Alberta's public service, that is significantly more expensive than other public services around the country? My worry is that if there is what seems to be an infinite amount of someone else's money in the mix, there's an awful lot less incentive to find savings.

So, Madam Chair, with that I would again reiterate my support for this amendment and encourage all members of the House, on both sides but in particular government private members, to give very serious consideration to supporting this amendment.

Thank you.

4:10

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. I also rise in support of this amendment today and to reflect on a few topics that maybe I see here emerging. I see big government, I see big taxes, and I see big labour, none of whom seem to be overly concerned about the plight of small business here today.

Deficits – I think small businesses call them losses – cannot be financed by a wave of the Finance minister's magic wand. Let's keep that in mind. Small businesses live and die by their annual revenue that they keep, by the taxes they pay, by the wages that they pay, all issues that we've discussed here today. Those deficits, those losses mean a loss of livelihood, employment, and ultimately, in many cases, the failure of small businesses, hard-working owner-entrepreneurs, risk takers that help build this province. I think the figure, that 95 per cent of businesses in this province are small to medium-sized businesses, has been stated before.

But when I think about my constituency – we don't have a lot of big corporations in my constituency. It is primarily small businesses that add vibrancy to the community. They take risks. They pay rent. They employ young people or maybe senior citizens, in many cases, or people who are looking for part-time employment. I look at the Cornerstone café: owner managed, hard-working people there. They have coffee, they have homemade food, and they provide a venue for local music. A popular spot. Only about 25 or 30 seats there. I'm sure they struggle at the end of every month to decide

whether the owner-manager can take any wages themselves to support the risk that they take to run that enterprise. Madam Chair, I worry about businesses like that.

A new business, that I actually met the owner of during the election, Around the Bend soft pretzels: in the community he's tucked away back in a strip mall, probably the only spot he can afford as a new business. He actually lives in Calgary-South East, but he wants to move closer to his business, so he's going to buy real estate there. He's going to invest. He's looking at schools for his children. He and his wife both work there. She has a full-time job, but she comes there. And the opportunities I've had to go into that store: young people from the community, living in the community, are employed there quite happily, with a new entrepreneurial – a new concept. First concept of its type, I think, in Alberta.

I worry about their viability, their ability to survive. I hope that they can come through this. But every little bit helps. A minimum wage, which is going to deeply affect them, is already a problem. This amendment at least allows some relief on the other side of the coin if they're lucky enough to have a profit that is going to be taxed. Let's hope that they can achieve that.

Sunshine, a local Vietnamese noodle house; Razors Edge Barber Shoppe; Deer Valley Florist; the local Bonavista computer shop: all their success, viability, or failure could hinge on the small latitude which could be accorded by this amendment. As mentioned before, small business is big business in this province. It's the entrepreneurial spirit of Alberta.

Madam Chair, I support this amendment to protect the businesses. And let's be honest. If those businesses disappear, there will be no taxes. The livelihoods and the people and the families affected by this and by what seems to me to be a blatant disregard for Alberta's entrepreneurial spirit and by extension the Alberta advantage – thank you.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, you're on my list. Did you wish to speak? Go ahead.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Madam Chair. I thank you for the opportunity to speak on this amendment. Just as my friend the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks said earlier, I'm not for raising taxes. I think we've been pretty clear on that over the last few days.

Having said that, though, I do believe that this amendment can undo some of the harm that this bill will do to Albertans. A 50 per cent increase to minimum wage is much easier for a large business to absorb than a small business. Small businesses are run by a very small number of employees. Forcing a small mom-and-pop shop to pay 50 per cent more for their employees will mean, in some cases, that they can only afford to keep 2 out of 3 employees. Madam Chair, this is just not a viable option for small business. I've heard members across the way from the NDP caucus say time and time again that they support local business, and I'm sure that they do believe that, but this is their opportunity right now to prove that that is really true.

Local businesses, Madam Chair, are not Walmarts and they are not Starbucks in your local area although I'm sure that you can expect the price of your nonfat soy milk latte to go up. They are, though, in fact, the shop on the corner whose owners wake up every morning to make breakfast for their neighbours. They are the shops at the local farmers' markets in my community, that bring fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, local meat, and fresh-made doughnuts. This amendment would help those small businesses cope with the harsh policies that this government is implementing. This amendment would help those small businesses cope with the increase to the

minimum wage and an economic downturn that a royalty review may encourage, that this government is planning.

This is a small tax cut, Madam Chair. This is a 1 per cent tax cut, but it would help Albertans. We want to help Albertans. The members across the way say that they want to help Albertans. Well, this amendment helps Albertans. To the members opposite through you, Madam Chair: I would like them to know that even your Premier suggested that this tax cut would help offset the overall hike to 12 per cent. Even your leader wanted to lower small-business taxes. Even your leader saw the benefit that a 1 per cent tax cut would make for Alberta.

Now, the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks went on at length about what the Premier said in regard to small-business tax cuts. I suppose, though, that the argument could be that a lot of that was said in 2012 and that the climate may change. So maybe we should have a look at what the now Minister of Municipal Affairs said when he was in opposition just a little over a year ago, on April 22, 2014, Madam Chair.

I'd like to remind the House that the Alberta NDP was the only party during the 2012 election that had in our platform a reduction in the small-business tax. We would have reduced it by a third. We understand that small businesses really are what drive the Alberta economy. But, again, instead of helping out the little guy, this government . . .

And he was referring to the government of the day.

. . . is interested in returning the favour of the bigger corporations, the ones that help them get elected election after election. You know, it's quite frustrating.

This is now the current NDP Minister of Municipal Affairs.

I would say again through you, Madam Chair, to the members across the way that this amendment can help Albertans. Everybody in this House claims to want to help Albertans, so they should want to get behind it. So I'll say on behalf of all small businesses in Alberta: please vote, all members, for this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Madam Chair, thank you very much. I rise today in support of the amendment by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks to amend section 1(3)(b) in the proposed section 22 by striking out "9.0%" and substituting "10%," which will effectively make Alberta's small-business tax rate 2 per cent instead of 3 per cent, as the New Democratic government is proposing, on top of the already 11 per cent charged by the federal government to small businesses.

I support a lower tax principally for four reasons: first of all, the nature of small business; secondly, the timing of this tax increase and the nature of our economy now; thirdly, the efficiency and the value and the wealth that the small-business economy adds to Alberta like no other part of our economy does; fourthly, the \$167 million that this cut would put back into the pockets of Albertans, potentially, is about one-third of 1 per cent of what already the most expensive per capita government in Canada is spending, and that's where we should look first.

4:20

I want to talk about the nature of small business. I've had much opportunity to work with small-business people, be friends with small-business people, and see what small-business people add to our province and our community. Madam Chair, you cannot walk into a small business without somebody behind you asking that business owner for a donation, a helping hand, a barbecue spot, some things that 99.9 per cent of the time small-business people do to make our charities stronger, to help our people, to help our communities.

Owning a small business: I think the statistics are that 4 out of 5 go broke or shut down in three years. I think the statistics are that very, very few of them are that profitable anyway. I can't count the number of times that I have talked with a small-business person who has said something to me like: I don't have an RSP; my RSP is my business. Or worse yet, during times like now they say things like: I had to take my RSPs out to pay my suppliers, to pay my staff, to pay my rent, to keep my business going.

To the New Democratic government: these are the people you're hurting. These are the Albertans that the Wildrose is fully prepared to stand up for and make it so that they have a better chance to share. And we owe them. They provide so much for us. Every community has many businesses that provide us choice and options and competition and give us better services and better pricing. Their reward, after the New Democratic bill is through, will be the least competitive small-business tax rate in all of western Canada.

Needless to say, small businesses also employ our friends, our children, our neighbours. They purchase goods and services so that all of us have jobs, so money flows through the economy. I've heard many small-business men talk about how hard it is to stretch a dollar. That dollar generally has three or four places to go – and it's amazing how they make it work – and our new government is adding to this burden.

The second reason I'm totally in favour of the amendment of the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks to keep our small-business tax rate competitive is the timing. There's one bad-news announcement after another of people being laid off, of businesses closing in Alberta, big ones and small ones. The economy is cyclical here. It's part of the process. It's part of what could happen, for sure.

Many of our good small-business men will get under this, find a way to be more efficient, find a way to be more competitive, work longer hours, stretch that dollar even further. But now they're going to have to find a way to pay our government, already the most expensive government per capita in all of Canada, even more of the fruits of their hard-earned labour. At the same time in the next three years they will be facing a 50 per cent increase in their cost of labour. My goodness. How much do you expect them to do? How much do you expect them to give up rather than look at your own house first? And I know you inherited that house. That's maybe the best opportunity to take a look.

The third reason that I'm in favour of a 2 per cent small-business tax rather than the 3 per cent increase the new government is providing is the efficiency, the efficiency of money that small business leaves to the economy: how this money circulates, how other jobs are created, other taxes are paid, other purchases are made. Small businesses and the not-for-profit sector of our economy are easily the most efficient, are easily the best way for us to have more quality of life and more choices, and every chance we get, we should promote it and help encourage it and help make it stronger.

We've talked a lot in Alberta for many, many years about diversifying the economy. Many people will say that the best way to diversify the economy is through competitive tax rates, nationally and internationally. You combine competitive tax rates with stable utility prices – and we all know what the previous government did to our transmission costs on our utility bills, especially for our seniors, and I wait for the day when we can talk about that again.

Balanced budgets: it's important to have balanced budgets.

Running deficits: businesses know that it's just a future tax, and they know that a lot of the time they are the target of that future tax, so they prefer to locate in a jurisdiction that doesn't run deficits.

Minimal bureaucracy is another way to diversify the economy. You're inheriting a government that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has given a D to for five or six years in a row, so there should be lots of room for improvement there.

The last thing is property rights. The government needs to have strong property rights for individuals as those are the foundation of wealth. Governments need to know their limits so that individuals and businesses can create wealth and have their say.

One PC Premier several years ago cut taxes, put in a 10 per cent personal flat tax, cut corporate taxes. It led to \$17 billion in the sustainability fund. It led to several years of prosperity, wealth creation, and job growth. It's a model that works. It's a model that will allow individuals to flourish, that will allow governments to then tax them. The pie can be bigger. Individuals can have more freedom.

I just want to close by saying thank you to all the small-business people for all they've provided in terms of the choice, in terms of the jobs that they provide, in terms of the wealth that they create. I would ask this government to at least stay competitive with other provinces, with other states. Look for that \$167 million from the \$45 billion we already spend annually, and let Albertans have the freedom and the choice that that would provide.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to the amendment put forth by my hon. colleague, neighbouring colleague, Strathmore-Brooks. As I'm sure like all ridings throughout the province – everybody here represents one – my constituency of Little Bow contains a number of small mom-and-pop-style businesses that do not make more than \$500,000 a year in profit.

4:30

Small local businesses provide job opportunities for local residents. This can be in the way of part-time help or full-time management. Local jobs keep the residents in town, so the advantage is generalized outward as the employee spends money at the local restaurant during meal breaks, gasses up at the local gas station to get to work, and stops at the local grocery store on the way home at night. The advantage of a small local business employing local residents creates a domino effect that helps the community as a whole.

Small local businesses support the area through their everyday needs. Small businesses open accounts at local banks, hire local CPAs and attorneys. When they need supplies, they can simply step out, go down the street, and pick them up. Reducing the small-business tax from 3 per cent, the highest in western Canada, to 2 per cent keeps the money at home, so to speak. It allows small businesses to retain earnings and reinvest in their businesses during this time of economic uncertainty.

British Columbia and Saskatchewan joined with Alberta to form the New West Partnership in order to reduce trade and investment barriers across our three economies. It would be a real step in the right direction to be able to harmonize that small-business tax across the three jurisdictions to show how friendly the west is to small business in these troubling economic times. Alberta's small-business tax rate is one full per cent above Saskatchewan's and a half per cent higher than B.C.'s, and of course we've heard that Manitoba's is zero. Alberta appears to be the true sore thumb here.

Now, the NDP have talked about this very subject in the past. In 2012 the NDP proposed reducing the small-business tax. It was within their platform, on page 18. There are even references going back to 2004 that the NDP wanted to reduce this tax. In fact, as has been said here twice already, the Premier supported cutting small-business tax. Her quote is within *Hansard*, and I don't need to read that again. Although I don't necessarily agree with what the comment from the Finance minister may have been regarding the

context of what was going on in the world at that time, I would say that was a quote. This isn't a court of law. It's just something that is in *Hansard*, so we quoted it.

While the amendment alone will not stop the NDP government's philosophical agenda against entrepreneurs, it will provide a beacon of hope for small businesses from every corner of this province, small businesses like the Coffee Bureau on Jasper Avenue, here in Edmonton; or the Coaldale Bakery, in downtown Coaldale; or the local food producers who attend the farmers' markets all over this province. This tax reduction would be a boon to those who want to promote and buy local food.

A high tax on small business is one of the least efficient ways to raise money. High taxes hurt jobs and economic growth and directly impact local communities. We hope that the NDP will put pragmatism before ideology and work with the opposition to make this positive change to the legislation.

The Wildrose will continue to stand up for Albertans by standing up for small Alberta business, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment?

If not, then we'll call the vote.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:33 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Fraser	Pitt
Barnes	Gotfried	Schneider
Clark	Jean	Starke
Cooper	Loewen	Stier
Cyr	McIver	Strankman
Drysdale	Nixon	Swann
Ellis	Orr	Yao
Fildebrandt		

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Ganley	Payne
Babcock	Goehring	Phillips
Bilous	Hinkley	Piquette
Carlier	Hoffman	Renaud
Carson	Horne	Rosendahl
Ceci	Kleinstauber	Sabir
Connolly	Larivee	Schmidt
Coolahan	Loyola	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Mason	Shepherd
Dach	McCuaig-Boyd	Sigurdson
Dang	McKitrick	Sucha
Drever	McPherson	Sweet
Eggen	Miller	Turner
Feehan	Miranda	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Nielsen	Woollard
Totals:	For – 22	Against – 45

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Back on Bill 2. The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Actually, Madam Chair, I'm rising pursuant to Standing Order 32(3), requesting unanimous consent of the House

to shorten the bells' interval to one minute for the remainder of this session.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Chair. At this time it's my pleasure to introduce an amendment, which I assume will be called A2. I'll give the pages a moment to come around and pick it up so that it can be distributed, and then I'll chat more to it.

The Chair: This will be amendment A2.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to move amendment A2 to amend Bill 2, An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue, that it be amended in section 1(2) and (3) as follows: (a) by striking out "July 1, 2015" wherever it occurs and substituting "January 1, 2016" and (b) by striking out "June 30, 2015" wherever it occurs and substituting "December 31, 2015."

Madam Chair, it's a rather straightforward and simple amendment, the intent of which is to afford the opportunity of the corporate entities, the businesses that will be affected by the 20 per cent increase in the corporate tax rate, at least a little bit of time to adjust and to budget properly for this rather significant change that now is scheduled to take effect in six short days.

4:50

It's been discussed at some length in the Assembly already that there are a number of things where the new government has let the House know that they need time to prepare a budget and to study things. You know, I'm prepared to accept that discussion because, certainly, putting together a budget is a complex piece of work, and they are new at it. So I am quite prepared to cut them some slack on that although I'd certainly like to see it happen as early in the fall as possible, but it needs to be done carefully.

In the same breath, for this government to introduce this taxation act and to bring in a corporate tax increase 15 short days after the Speech from the Throne to me is acting with undue haste. Last evening we had considerable discussion about the merits of referring this bill to committee, and that was rejected, which in my view is unfortunate. But in lieu of that, Madam Chair, I think it's a very good idea and I think it would be very prudent on the part of the members of this Assembly to put back this increase to January 1, 2016, so that companies could have a chance to do proper budgeting and not, if you want to use the term, change the rules in the middle of the game. This is a major change, and it will have major effects.

I'm sure the Minister of Finance has probably already got the calculations from his office because I know that the Finance deputy minister and staff are excellent at doing those sorts of calculations. I'm sure he has the numbers as to how much revenue this will mean that the government will forgo. I understand completely, when we see the kinds of spending increases both accounted for and unaccounted for in other pieces of legislation, that this government wants to turn on the revenue tap full blast as fast as it possibly can. But, Madam Chair, that is not without consequences. That is not without effects on our economy.

Again, I will offer the experience that I had serving on Treasury Board in the last government. One of the things that, you know, all of the economists we spoke to told us very carefully is that these changes to the budgeting process and to the taxation structure need to be made carefully, and you need to take the time to do them and to give proper forewarning. Instituting a 20 per cent increase in

corporate tax rates with virtually no warning other than that it was policy in the election, but then to turn around and do it so quickly, with so little warning in my view is not prudent, and it does not allow the corporate entities – hence, the amendment that I am moving. I would encourage members to carefully consider this, and I look forward to the debate.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's a delay, of course, of several months, half a year in this case, of CIT. Six months' delay in CIT, when we know that CIT on an annualized basis will bring us in \$350 million to \$550 million is quite an expensive endeavour to take. It's an expensive hit to take. I can't recommend it. It would only balloon the rather large deficit even larger. So I would urge my fellow members on this side to reject it out of hand because we can't afford it.

The former government and the third party's own PC budget would have added to the PIT rate. It would have been slower and lower; I grant you that. Nonetheless, they were talking about taxes at the PIT level. But what they didn't talk about was corporate taxes even though, I think, a rather large percentage of Albertans who chimed in on an Internet survey to that extent, to look at what they wanted to see in government revenues going forward and the balance, were quite supportive of CIT. About 69 or 67 or 70 per cent of the people on average wanted to see that, and for some reason that didn't show up.

The hon. member is correct. It did show up in the successful party platform of the NDP government as a 2 percentage point increase from 10 per cent. Frankly, when I was at the doors talking to voters, they were quite supportive of raising the CIT, not because they wanted somebody else to pay for it but because they knew that we all had to share in the burden that was before us in terms of the deficit of this province.

So, Madam Chair, I would say that the amendment put forward by my friend across the aisle would just be going down a bad road. We can't afford it. We need to stick with the program. I think we've got a good fiscal plan going forward that will get us out of this deficit in four years.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, I want to speak a little bit about my dad, whom I love to death. As I mentioned before, a single dad, he started a business back when I was a little kid, and I learned everything about that business. As I got older and in between a not-so-stellar professional hockey career and school, I worked for him and learned about the business. One of the things I remember about my dad is that under the Progressive Conservative government – I don't typically do this, where I mention the Progressive Conservative Party, but I guess since I'm on this side now, I'd better get used to tooting our own horn a little bit harder – he had the ability to groom that business, that, you know, at one point employed 30 people and fed 30 families.

The one thing that I do remember: the government of the day, whether it was even the federal government, when they made changes, it affected our family. When there was a downturn in the economy or something changed in the housing market, it affected our family. It affected things like the ability to pay for postsecondary education, the ability to go on vacations, the ability to do home renovations. Once again, I think that we've got an opportunity here. Everybody understands the platform of the governing body. Certainly, you feel that's your mandate to govern. But I think that

one of the important things in any kind of leadership is that you have to have grace. Far too often what we see in this Chamber, in this House is not too much grace afforded to the people that went before us because it's easy to armchair quarterback after the fact.

I think we also need to recognize the contributions of businesses, large and small, throughout the province, what they've been able to give Albertans, the charities that they helped fund, the events that they put on. We've all been a part of that. I think, once again, that this would be a great opportunity to afford these folks some grace, to afford families some grace. In all honesty, the people that I'm talking to are concerned about jobs. They're concerned about their jobs. Now, whether it's oil prices or some of the new things that the government is instituting in terms of policies around finances, this would be a great opportunity to allow people some time and some grace to put their own fiscal house in order and, you know, provide some breathing room.

So I ask the members of this House to support this amendment. Thanks for your time.

5:00

The Chair: Any others? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate your recognizing me this afternoon. I rise in support of the amendment from our colleagues down the aisle here a little to the left. You know, I think we've heard a lot from this government about the importance of consultation, the importance of getting things right, the importance of spending time to prepare and to plan. They're taking May, June, July, August, September, October: six months to get it right. As an everyday Albertan I hope they do. I hope that our province is better because of their governance rather than worse, and I hope that we can play a role in ensuring that happens.

Today I rise in defence of the many, many, the thousands of Albertans and the family businesses and businesses that don't have a voice here in this Assembly. They have been given no time – and by no time I mean seven days till the 1st of July in one case and to October in another – to make the necessary adjustments to their planning. I think it's a little disingenuous of the government to talk about the need for planning but then not give the very people who elected them that opportunity or that same ability to plan.

I think that this afternoon we have the opportunity to do what's right for Albertans, not just to move this desire of the government to rush through this. You know, it's becoming more and more clear that the government has a desire to rush into these massive increases of 20 and 50 per cent in some cases. But this could potentially be a small token, a gesture to recognize the importance of those outside of this place by allowing them the opportunity to take the necessary steps to prepare for the incoming change that this government is bringing.

So I rise in full support of allowing that to happen, and I encourage all members of this Assembly to think about the individuals and the Alberta businesses that don't have the same sort of ability and latitudes that this government does.

The Chair: Any other hon. member who wishes to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will be brief, but I rise also to speak in favour of this amendment. You know, I committed to the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, when he told me what this amendment was going to be, to listen to the case and the arguments that would be made on both sides of the House and that I would make up my mind based on the evidence presented in the House. Based on the evidence presented by the hon. members who

have spoken, I do support this amendment, in particular the very short time frame that businesses of all kinds have been given to adjust to this change.

Business demands predictability. It demands a stable environment. I believe that amending this to give them just that, an additional six months, is more than appropriate. Ultimately, over the course of the next three and a half years, I suppose, from the time this amendment will come into force to the time of the next election, this government will be able to collect increased revenue, as is their desire. But I believe in predictability and also as an indication to Alberta's business community that this government is willing to work with them not only in word but in deed and in action.

With that, Madam Chair, I'll sit. But, again, I speak in favour of the motion. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

If not, then we'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Moving back to the bill itself. The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. At the risk of inciting the statement that doing the same thing over and over and over again and expecting a different result is the first sign of insanity, I do have another amendment.

An Hon. Member: The first sign of opposition.

Dr. Starke: And that, too, I'm getting used to. Thank you.

I'll wait for the pages to distribute this amendment. I'll maybe just say a few words to preface this. Where the last amendment dealt specifically with the sections of Bill 2 that were dealing with the change in the timing of the implementation of the increase to the Corporate Tax Act, this has to do with the sections of Bill 2 that have to do with Alberta's Personal Income Tax Act.

So I'll allow the pages to complete the distribution of this, and then we will go into the details of the amendment.

The Chair: This amendment will be known as amendment A3.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Chair. The sum effect of all of the changes that are listed in amendment A3 are essentially, again, as was attempted in the last amendment, to move the effective date of this to January 1, 2016. Specifically here – and we discussed this briefly last night – one of the portions of this amendment is the coming-into-force date. The coming-into-force date is on the very back page, on page 22 of the bill, in subsection (20), which indicates that the coming-into-force date will be January 1, 2015. There is a practical or, shall we say, a mechanical reason for that, and that is so that the tax rate that is to be instituted as of the 1st of October can then be applied for the full taxation year, from January 1 to December 31, but at a one-quarter rate to reflect the one-quarter portion of the year that it applies to. I'm certainly familiar with how all of that works.

My difficulty, Madam Chair, is that by setting a coming-into-force date, in fact this government is taking ownership and actually applying what they are doing, the changes in their policy, to a period of time where they weren't actually elected. I have a fundamental democratic problem with that. I cannot tell you if it is completely unprecedented. It has not to my knowledge happened in the time that I have been here in this Chamber, but that does not mean that it has never happened before. Indeed, my concern is that it introduces a retroactivity to what is being done within this motion.

You know, I'm opposed to the degree of the increase in personal income tax. Hon. members on both sides of the Chamber will know that our party proposed in our most recent budget prior to the last election a modest increase in personal income tax phased in over the course of a couple of years to those income earners over a taxable income of \$100,000 per year, which would be approximately 9 per cent of Albertans, and a further half per cent taxation on those Albertans earning over \$250,000, which would be approximately 44,000 Albertans, roughly 1 per cent of the population. To me it's essentially very similar to what the members of the government proposed in their platform, differing only in degree and magnitude and differing only in terms of how quickly it was imposed. Here, again, the reason for that more gradual imposition of those changes is simply because the best advice that we received from the Finance department was that doing it more quickly and more suddenly would in fact be negative to the economy and create difficulties for our economy.

To me it is cleaner, it certainly makes things a whole lot easier if these changes are instituted as of the 1st of January, at the beginning of the tax year. Then we don't have all these transitional issues, we don't have the things with the different calculations, and we don't have, you know, the truthful and the very real situation where people will now be taxed additionally for income they've already earned and income for which they have already had their tax deducted. To me that's a sort of retroactivity that says: well, your take-home pay was X number of dollars from January to June, but now we're going to take a little bit more of the taxation off so that that rate can be applied for the full year. I have an issue with that. I don't think it's fair.

5:10

I know that this government ran on a platform of fairness. It was one of the big watchwords in the platform: let's be fair. You can also make the argument, because I've certainly heard it, that: well, for someone who has a taxable income of \$200,000 a year, you know, it doesn't matter. Fairness doesn't have a price. Fairness applies whether you earn \$50,000 a year or \$500,000 a year or \$50 million a year. Fairness applies at all levels.

Quite frankly, I'm concerned – and it really bothers me – when I sense that members of this government, in their zeal to adopt some of the socialist policies which they haven't been able to adopt for 110 years of Alberta's history, now having the levers of power and the keys to the treasury, are very enthusiastic about following socialist dogma and bringing it into place just as fast as they possibly can. You know, that's certainly the appearance. I hear my friend from across the way suggesting that that simply isn't true, but that's the way it appears to me. I would suggest to my colleagues across the way that this is the time for pragmatism. It's better to be pragmatic than dogmatic. For a veterinarian to say that is a little odd. Nonetheless, it is a time where we have to consider the pragmatic effects of these changes and recognize that these effects can be profound.

Madam Chair, it's perhaps a quixotic attempt to tilt at a windmill, to move this particularly amendment. But I would again suggest to the members of this Assembly that a retroactive clause, as subsection (20) lists, and a coming-into-force date a full five months before the actual election date are unprecedented. I think that it is a dangerous precedent, and I would question whether that, then, would allow this government the opportunity to bring in legislation that has a coming-into-force date that might precede the date of their election by one year, two years, five years, or longer to rewrite history that they feel has been wrong over a period time.

So, Madam Chair, I would encourage members, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow indicated, to listen to the debate that

will ensue on this particular issue, and I would encourage members to vote in support of this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would urge people not to support this amendment.

There is just one small correction in something that was said. This change for personal income tax would be from October 1 forward, not from June 1 forward. I think it was just misspoken.

So we're really talking about a tax change that comes into effect after we got here. We got here on May 5. We're talking about October 1 for changing the taxes going forward. The reason that it's written the way it is in the bill, Madam Chair, is that the personal income tax system only supports one annual rate. As a result, the lower pro-rated rates are being introduced for 2015, and they have to be introduced effective January 1, 2015, to reflect the October 1 introduction of the full rate. That's why these numbers for 2015 on the personal side are things like 10.5, 10.75, 11, and 11.25 per cent. When you annualize that, it comes out to the 10, 12, 13, 14, and 15 per cent that will be in place for 2016.

I just wanted to also point out that we're not changing the level at which the tax rate jumps from 10 per cent to 12 per cent. It's at \$125,000, and 93 per cent of tax filers in this province as a result won't see a change in their taxes; 93 per cent of tax filers are at \$125,000 or less. That 7 per cent balance goes up the graduated levels up past \$300,000.

I'll just use the word "fairness," that was identified earlier. Bill 2 restores fairness in our income tax system by asking the most successful corporations and the highest income earners to contribute a little more. This bill establishes a progressive tax system for those who earn \$125,000 and beyond. It will be implemented on October 1, and salaried individuals will see their tax change at that point in time. For self-employed individuals who file their taxes at the end of the year, the tax rate will be pro-rated, as I said, Madam Chair, so that they contribute the same amount as individuals who are salaried.

That's why I think we're not doing anything untoward or in any way other than being clear about why we need to see the taxes change on the personal side. I think there is precedent, actually, or I heard there was precedent from members of the ministry, in that a province in this country introduced a change in taxes mid-year, and they went through a similar process as we've got before the House in this bill.

Thank you.

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

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. In listening to the Finance minister, I have no reason to doubt that he believes what he's saying, but I am saying that his argument actually indicates, maybe even better than my colleague did, just how unfair this is because what he's saying is that this goes back to January 1 of this year. It's one thing to say that we're only going to give somebody five or six days or a short period of time to get ready for a tax increase. This isn't changing the rules in the middle of the game. This is changing the rules after the game is just about over for the year and after people have put budgets in place and made financial arrangements and estimated revenues and estimated expenses and estimated whatever other personal and business costs they may have and saying: "Yeah, well, your estimates are no good. We've just changed them because we can."

With all due respect to the government, Madam Chair, what I just heard indicates even more strongly that what is being proposed in this amendment actually makes it more fair, much more fair. For a

brand new, shiny government, that I think would say that it prides itself on fairness for Alberta, unless you support this, you're not proving it. It's just the way it is.

I will ask you and other members of the House to support this. It's a way of saying to Albertans: "We actually want to treat you in a fair and equitable way. Even though it doesn't match our particular philosophy or dogma exactly, we're going to do it because it's the right thing to do." I'm going to support the amendment, and I urge other members of the House to do the same.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise also to support this amendment. One of the key reasons that I think it's very important to move the date to the 1st of January is that it has become significantly more complex for Albertans to file their taxes based on a couple of elements of Bill 2, the first being that going from a single tax bracket to five tax brackets makes it more complex for ordinary Albertans to figure out how much exactly is above this amount and below that amount or above this amount and below that amount. It's a challenge, and it's another reason why Albertans would then need to seek assistance of an accounting professional to complete their taxes, which are complex enough as it is.

5:20

But I also wonder how many Albertans are going to receive a significant bonus on September 30, 2015. I also wonder how we're going to determine how much income was earned from January 1 to September 30, 2015, and how much income was earned from October 1 to December 31, 2015. Are we going to require Albertans to get two T4 slips? That adds confusion. It also adds, I think, the opportunity for Albertans to shift income into a certain period and to perhaps not have the desired effect that the government would like. At the end of the day, I think we'll find that the difference between making the changes effective October 1 and the changes effective January 1 is probably not that significant and material to government but, I can tell you, is very significant and material to Albertans.

In my statement in speaking to the previous amendment, I talked a lot about efficiency and the importance of asking the questions: "Why do we have taxation at all? What's the purpose of it and making sure that the government is always mindful of the value of the money that Albertans entrust to them? Why do we have taxes?" Well, we have them to pay for badly needed programs that Albertans rely upon. I want to make sure the House understands that I'm not against taxation. The Alberta Party ran on a platform of subtle, measured increases to corporate taxes, 1 per cent, not 2, which would have maintained Alberta as the lowest corporate taxed jurisdiction in the country, which would have allowed us to ensure that we have a low-tax advantage and not created any incentives for companies to perhaps seek a different jurisdiction in which to do business.

The reason we have those taxes is to pay for important programs in public health care and public education. I am a strong believer and the Alberta Party is a strong believer in public health care and public education. We're strong believers in long-term care and home care for seniors. We're strong believers in a strong and robust postsecondary education system. We believe in our parks and recreational opportunities. We believe in strong, equally enforced, and predictable environmental regulation. We believe in infrastructure building, including – and I'll note it especially – flood mitigation. But those things won't be there if we don't manage our public finances well, if we don't deliver government services

efficiently and effectively, if we don't get good value for the tax dollars that Albertans entrust to us.

I encourage the government and all private members in this House to consider supporting this amendment from the perspective of fairness to your constituents, transparency, and ease of completing their own taxes when that time comes.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A3? Hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, you wish to speak?

Mr. Gotfried: Just brief remarks, please, Madam Chair. I know that we're talking about some key issues here. I know that the term "balanced budget" is not necessarily something that is going to be well known across the floor here, but many households actually try and live by a balanced budget. They have tax and retirement planning to do, and much of that is done before the end of February every year. Many of those people also have no pensions, so their ability and their planning for contributions to RRSPs and to RESPs for their children's education is extremely important. Tax deductions, if I'm not mistaken, are generally distributed by employers in January to set the rates of deductions for the year ahead.

Granted, \$125,000 sounds like a lot of money, but if you have a family of five, you're trying to save for retirement, you're trying to save for your children's education, and you're planning for a mortgage, you may be stretched on that a bit, as many Albertans are, but you've made those commitments and you've made those plans for a balanced budget. You have family costs. You have sports. You have extracurricular activities. You may have uncovered costs. If you do not have a pension, if you don't have a health plan, you may have kids' braces or you may have health care costs that come up. Here we're going to change the game in the middle of the year albeit it said that it's going to be in the fourth quarter of the year, but in fact it's not. It's actually going to be retroactive and stretched across the entire year.

I would encourage this House to support this motion, again, in support of fairness for Albertans. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other speakers on A3?

If not, we will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: We're back on Bill 2. Any further speakers? We've got the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair, for allowing me to speak on Bill 2 and what are its short-sighted, misguided, and detrimental provisions. No matter where I've travelled in this province, I have found one thing to be universally true. Albertans are a motivated, industrious, and humble people. We are prudent with our finances. We work diligently towards success. We don't expect more than our share, nor do we object to sharing the fruits of hard-earned labour.

Why do we do these things? Because Albertans are builders. I believe it's in our DNA and our heritage, and it defines this province. We work to build better lives for ourselves, better communities for fellow citizens, and a better future for posterity. We toil, and we create. We strive, and we achieve. We work, and we build. I say this so that the human element to our discussions may not be forgotten.

If there's one lasting remnant of the previous regime that I found truly discouraging, it's the depersonalization of the Alberta taxpayer. I've listened intently to this debate, not just now but months prior. From the previous government I've heard time and

time again about the need to find new revenue streams. Madam Chair, Albertans are not revenue streams. We are people: builders, creators, entrepreneurs. We are neighbours, family members, and caregivers. Albertan taxpayers are not a piggy bank to be smashed when the mood strikes nor a limitless supply of blank cheques for the latest spending scheme.

Let's dispense with the euphemisms and cut right to what this is about. This government wants more money and must take it out of the pockets of Albertans. Make no mistake; this money will come out of the pocket of Albertans, all Albertans. Any tax involves a certain amount of economic disruption. There is no such thing as a consequence-free tax, and the cost is ultimately borne by everyone in the economy. When money is moved from the productive sector, it shrinks investment and deters entrepreneurship and growth. This is why Winston Churchill famously said that a nation trying to tax itself to prosperity is "like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up by the handle."

Of course, that is not to say that taxation doesn't have its place. Society accepts a certain amount of taxation, harmful though it may be, as a necessary cost of running a government. Given that taxation depresses economic activity, the art is in finding the minimum levels necessary for the administration of the province.

We are being told by those across the aisle that the province has not been collecting the appropriate levels. Let's address that for a moment. This fiscal year is projected to be the third highest – the third highest – for revenue collection in Alberta's history. For all the talk of a revenue roller coaster we have seen this increasing steadily for years. Consider that even now, with our economy on unsteady footing and projected royalties down, we are still expected to bring in this tremendous revenue. We have been asked repeatedly by our government to pull together or to do our part. Albertans could be forgiven for wondering why the government refuses to hold up its own end of the bargain.

5:30

Before trying to extract even more money from our economy, from our communities, from our job creators and innovators, I would again suggest that the government explore many possible ways to bring our runaway spending back to sustainable levels. Before asking for yet another blank cheque, perhaps this government should produce some results for the vast resources it has already been given.

There's no question that the previous administrations did not provide enough value to show for the wealth hard-working taxpayers gave them. It's also true that we let a fantastic opportunity waste away by not building savings instead of accumulating debt. But for this administration to turn to the people and ask for even more money to finance sprawling, bloated, inefficient government is to only compound the mistakes of the past. Worse, it serves to put the blame for those mistakes on the people, Albertans, who have provided more and more money to the government. The government is telling Albertans that despite near-record revenues, the problem is that Albertans still aren't providing enough. Hard-working and prudent people who have wisely managed their own finances – wisely managed their own finances – are being asked to provide even more to a government that cannot manage its own.

What more does this government need to properly do its job? They've insisted that they require more money from the productive sector to finance health and schools and public service. Given our untamed levels of spending, have they first considered fixing the administration of these programs? If the governing party is so insistent that we have not seen appropriate results in these programs, then I would suggest to them that they now have all the tools

and levers of power necessary to go about improving the delivery of these programs.

Instead, the new NDP government appears to be doubling down on the trends of the past. They're continuing the old way of trying to fill the holes we've dug with barrels of hard-earned taxpayer money. The waste and inefficiencies of the existing system have made it seemingly impossible for the government to live within its income at any level, and the only solution we've seen proposed is to accelerate the ever-bloating levels of spending.

You know, a constituent joked to me years ago that the only reason the NDP couldn't beat the PCs was because they could never figure out a way to outspend them. Well, they're certainly giving it their best shot now, and most troubling is that they're giving it their best shot on the backs of Albertan taxpayers and the Albertan economy.

I mentioned how often the government has asked Albertans to chip in to do their part because we are all in this together. If only they could live by their own rhetoric. What a glorious day it would be if only they, our new government, understood what it means to be a part of an integrated economy. Yes, we truly are all in this together, and it's high time that this government started to respect that. A tax levied on the productive sector is a tax on all.

I understand that there has been a fair bit of an attempt to suggest that some people don't contribute their fair share. I understand that there are political motivations behind who gets targeted by this legislation and publicly castigated, but we're all in this together. Not one of us here is immune to what happens in the Alberta economy. These are tax increases on Albertans, first and foremost Albertan people, Albertans who work earnestly to provide for their families and spur growth in our economy. They are creators, builders. They are employers, entrepreneurs and innovators. They are your friends and neighbours.

While it is important to support small business, why should we put burdensome tax rates on those who wish to grow to become a large business? Why should we discourage their ambition? Don't we want to promote the idea that this is a place where one can do his or her best, strive forward with new ideas, and build something productive for the benefit of Alberta and all Albertans?

Madam Chair, my colleagues across the aisle have perhaps gotten caught up in the rhetoric at times. They appear to have forgotten that the people of this province are the economic engine. Those affected by this tax may very well be your local farmer or successful restaurant owner or locally owned oil-service business. They employ others. They innovate. They reinvest, reinvest the fruits of their labour back into their businesses and our communities.

You know, Medicine Hat is a bit of a long drive from Edmonton, and most of Alberta is farther north still. Every once in a while, as I'm stuck in one of those long drives, I'm amazed by the sheer enormity of our province. More so I am struck by the thought that somebody had to carve what we see today out of this rough, untamed wilderness. What we have now was once built by weathered and work-weary hands. It's an overwhelming testament to the building spirit of Albertans. It's a spirit that has lived on for generations and one that has turned this land into the economic powerhouse it is today. In the past, we have actively tried to encourage that spirit by promoting the Alberta advantage, and what an advantage it was for many years.

As you know, the riding of Cypress-Medicine Hat borders Saskatchewan, and I have always found it fascinating to get to know people who have come here during various points in their lives from different jurisdictions. They came seeking opportunity. They came here seeking prosperity, that we had to offer in abundance. They came here, like us, to build something for their families and for their and for our future. That advantage has resulted in enormous –

enormous – economic benefits for all people. It was John F. Kennedy who said that “a rising tide lifts all boats.” Well, that rising tide, set in action by our competitive and equal tax rate, lifted the prospects of all Albertans.

The governing party has said much about minimum wage increases lately also. I'm sure they mean well, but as we've seen right here in Alberta, the best – the best – way to raise the minimum wage is to actively encourage and sustain the economic conditions that make higher wages possible. When the economy grows, so, too, do the opportunities for workers, entrepreneurs, and job creators alike.

5:40

Now, my hon. colleagues across the aisle will say that our rates will still be competitive after their hike. They'll point out other places that have comparable tax rates. They will say that we're in line with the average. With due respect this has never been an average province. Alberta has always been a remarkable province with remarkable people. I don't want to live in an average province, and, I suspect, neither does anyone else in this House.

If average results were good enough, we just as easily could have continued with business as usual: mediocre performance from the services we pay for, endless expanding budgets with little accountability, and an increasing reliance on Albertans to bail this mismanaged system out. But Albertans expect and deserve better. Alberta should be a place of boundless opportunity, where we are free to pursue our goals and dreams. Alberta should be a place known for its vast wealth, produced by the hard work of all generations since its founding, and shared with those who seek it within our borders and beyond.

The NDP may feel that it has a mandate to scrap the Alberta advantage, but I do not believe that they have a mandate to change the fundamental spirit that has built this great province, the spirit of building, the spirit of creating and innovating. Albertans have never had a problem carrying their share of the load, but it's time we started seeing that from our government. I stand with my colleagues in the Wildrose opposing tax increases to finance the inefficiency and wastefulness of the past when the government, our new government, has expressed no willingness to get this fiscal house in order.

Madam Chair, I will not be voting for Bill 2. I implore my colleagues from all parties to carefully consider the serious impact these proposals will have for all who live and work in our communities and our economy – our community builders, our workers, our producers, and our friends – and ask you all to do the same.

The Chair: Strathmore-Brooks, go ahead.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Is this questions and comments or new?

The Chair: This is on Bill 2.

Mr. Fildebrandt: This is just to Bill 2? It's not questions and comments?

The Chair: No, not in committee.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam Chair, I would like to introduce an amendment to Bill 2. I will not speak long to it, but I will allow a chance here for the pages to distribute it to the members of the House.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A4.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. Since the government has not seen fit to support my first amendment, which was

supported by every single member of the opposition in all parties, from centre right to centre left, we have put forward another amendment. We believed that the effects of Bill 2 are damaging to all businesses and the economy of Alberta, and my first amendment sought to take some of the bite out of that and to relieve the concerns of small businesses to ensure that they are not abandoned by this government. In the past the government has always portrayed itself as against big business. Their voting against my first amendment, I believe, should be seen as being against small business.

Now, the government has said they can't give up the money of \$167 million, so let's see if they can give up \$16.7 million. This amendment proposes to cut the small-business tax rate from 3 per cent to 2.9 per cent. That is a cut of one-tenth of 1 per cent, Madam Chair. I believe that we should show as a House, as a democratic Legislative Assembly, that regardless of the ideological intents of this government, we are not against small business. I believe that by voting for this amendment to cut the small-business tax rate by one-tenth of 1 per cent, this House can give a symbolic gesture to small businesses to know that you are not against them, that you want to work with them as the primary job creators of this province, as the engine of the economy in this province.

Madam Chair, let's show that this government might be against big business but that it's not against small business. Let's vote for this as a symbolic act that will only cost the government \$16.7 million, a sum of money that they can lose beneath the couch in an afternoon. Let's vote for this to show our support for small businesses.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I want to address a couple of things. The hon. member has said that voting against their first amendment and if we vote against this amendment are proof that we're against small business. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the last election, when I was the leader, we put forward a proposal to reduce the small-business tax from 3 to 2 per cent, which was the equivalent of the Wildrose's first amendment. At that time we felt that the province could afford it. We believed that there are benefits to reducing the small-business tax, and if the economic and financial circumstances facing the province were not as severe as they are today, we likely would have supported that particular amendment.

Now, I want to disabuse any members of the notion that we're opposed to small business. I've met, during my time as leader, with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business many times with different people, and we often found areas of common agreement. So I just want to indicate that.

However, we've been left with a very serious situation by the previous government. Of course, their previous leader, Mr. Prentice, went on television to talk about the very serious situation, the very large deficit that was included in their budget, which we have inherited, as well as a number of tax measures that the former government also introduced, which we have replaced. We have cancelled the tax increases and many of the fee increases that the former government had proposed in their budget and would have been imposed had they won the election. We would have been debating their budget and approving their budget at this time, at the same time. We've replaced it with things that are more consistent with the mandate that we believe that we have received.

Which brings me to this particular amendment. I regret to say it, but I think that this is a rather pointless amendment. I think the Wildrose seemingly wants to prove some kind of point, perhaps that we would never entertain any reduction in the small-business tax at

all. That's not the case at all, Madam Chair. We would embrace a much larger reduction than envisaged in this particular motion if we were in different economic and financial circumstances, but we're in a very serious period of time in terms of a loss of revenue relative to falling oil prices. All members are aware of that. So I don't really see what this accomplishes. The hon. member says it'll only cost the government \$67 million. I would put that a little bit . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Sixteen point seven.

5:50

Mr. Mason: Sixteen point seven. Thank you for the correction, hon. member.

I would just phrase that a little differently. It will only add \$16.7 million to the deficit, and that's something that we don't choose to do. Frankly, I don't understand the purpose of an amendment with a fraction of a per cent change in the tax rate. It won't help small business in any significant way, in my view, and will only increase the deficit that the government has to undertake.

With the greatest of respect to the hon. member I urge all members of the House to reject this amendment.

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do appreciate the member opposite's new-found enthusiasm for eliminating the deficit. If he is concerned about adding \$16.7 million to the deficit, perhaps they should bring forward \$16.7 million of spending reductions.

The member opposite said that this was pointless. I couldn't disagree more. I don't believe there's anything pointless about showing confidence and support in small business.

The member opposite talked about different economic circumstances. Well, if I am not mistaken, I do believe that the hon. Premier just a few weeks ago said that the economic circumstances and fiscal outlook of the government were more rosy than she had been led to believe during the election, so perhaps the economic circumstances have changed, and they would make this more affordable.

If we are talking about economic circumstances of 2012 and 2015, the government was running a deficit then, and it's running a deficit now. This amendment would cost \$16.7 million and provide a small stimulus to the economy. We think that it is a common-sense amendment and that the government would be ill advised to vote against it.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment?

If not, we'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A4 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:53 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Fildebrandt	Orr
Barnes	Fraser	Pitt
Clark	Gotfried	Schneider
Cooper	Hunter	Starke
Cyr	Loewen	Stier
Drysdale	McIver	Strankman
Ellis	Nixon	Yao

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Phillips
Babcock	Hoffman	Piquette
Bilous	Horne	Renaud
Carlier	Kazim	Rosendahl
Carson	Kleinsteuber	Sabir
Ceci	Larivee	Schmidt
Connolly	Loyola	Schreiner
Coolahan	Mason	Shepherd
Cortes-Vargas	McCuaig-Boyd	Sigurdson
Dach	McKitrick	Sucha
Dang	McPherson	Swann
Drever	Miller	Sweet

Feehan	Miranda	Turner
Fitzpatrick	Nielsen	Westhead
Ganley	Payne	Woollard
Goehring		
Totals:	For – 21	Against – 46

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: Hon. members, it is now 6 o'clock. Pursuant to Standing Order 4(4) the committee is now recessed till 7:30 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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