



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, October 27, 2015

Day 10

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)	McKitrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
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Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)	Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC), Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader	Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
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Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W), Leader of the Official Opposition	Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)	van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)	Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)	Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)	
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)	
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)	

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, October 27, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us reflect. As we contemplate the matters before us here today, it will be important that we appreciate the impact of our decisions on Albertans from all walks of life, from the most fortunate to the most vulnerable. Let us not allow the sometimes dramatic events of this place to overshadow the importance of our first responsibility, public service and the public good.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to introduce a fine constituent of Calgary-Lougheed, the former MLA for Calgary-Glenmore Linda Johnson. Linda has always worked very hard on behalf of her community in myriad realms, including literacy, and I expect that she always will. But Linda also has her hobbies, and she's pleased to advise this House that in recent months her golf game indeed has greatly improved. Linda is a proud, staunch supporter of the PC Party of Alberta and is looking forward to today's session as well as eagerly anticipating the province's ongoing commitment to the southwest Calgary ring road. At this time I would ask Linda to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you, of course, and through you to all members of this House two individuals. First of all, Mr. Nusrat Akhtar. Mr. Akhtar is a successful entrepreneur who is dedicated to community involvement in Edmonton. Mr. Akhtar is seated in the members' gallery.

I would also like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a former colleague of mine, Mr. Sohail Quadri. Mr. Quadri served as MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods from 2012 to 2015 and was Alberta's first MLA of Pakistani origin. Mr. Quadri is a local small-business owner, with deep roots in Edmonton. Mr. Quadri is seated in the Speaker's gallery.

I would ask both individuals to stand up and receive the traditional warm welcome from this Assembly. Thank you.

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

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to hon. members of this Assembly a man that I'm proud to call a friend. Steve Young, the former MLA for Edmonton-Riverview, served as our whip, served as an honourable Edmonton police officer. He is a dear friend, works hard in the community, and he is an even greater dad and husband. I'd like him to rise and have the House welcome him warmly, please.

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

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Mr. Trent Johnsen, who is a leader in Alberta's technology industry. Mr. Johnsen, if you could stand up and please accept the warm greeting of the Legislature.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly social studies teachers Pawel Romanowski and Don Segberg and his wife, Jessica. I'm not sure if they're in the House. They're here from St. John Paul II Catholic high school. JP II along with other Elk Island Catholic schools in Fort Saskatchewan brought their community together this summer with the refugee on the roof campaign, putting their principal on the roof of their high school for 24 hours. Instead of raising their goal of \$9,000 to bring a refugee family from Myanmar to live in the Fort, they raised \$16,000. They exemplify the spirit of community that is in everything Fort Saskatchewan does. Please join me in extending to them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests. Val Cudmore is the executive director of the Candora Society in Abbotsfield. The Candora Society has been operating in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for over 25 years. Their mandate is people helping people make a difference, and Val has made a huge difference in the lives of many families in our constituency.

Deanna Fuhlendorf is the executive director of the Fort Road and Area Business Association. Her dedication to Fort Road is inspiring. She has been instrumental in the revitalization of the area, championing projects that celebrate the entrepreneurial spirit in Edmonton.

I would ask both of my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Natasha Semeniuk and Emily Bonnell. Natasha is my constituency assistant. She graduated with a social work diploma from Grant MacEwan University and proceeded to complete her bachelor of social work degree at the University of Calgary. Prior to becoming my constituency assistant, Natasha was a child protection caseworker with Human Services. She's doing an amazing job in my constituency office, helping many Edmonton-Riverview citizens get the services they need. With her today is Emily Bonnell. She's a student from the University of Calgary in the social work program, and she's carrying out her field placement in my office. She'll be with us till December 2015, and we are so pleased to have her. I'd ask them both to stand and ask the members here to give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Cyr: Mr. Speaker, today I am especially pleased to introduce you to my wife, Megan, and my mother-in-law, Heather Forbes. Ladies, I thank you. Would you please rise and receive the traditional welcome from this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the House a group of outstanding leaders, who are here today to represent their schools

and student unions and who advocate for fellow peers and work so very hard. I'd ask that you will all remain seated until I've introduced everyone. Seated in the members' gallery, representing the Alberta Students' Executive Council, we have chair Kristen George, VP external for the Grande Prairie Regional College Students' Association; Cameron Dykstra, advocacy co-ordinator; Teresa Currie, executive director.

Seated in the public gallery, representing the Council of Alberta University Students, we have Dylan Hanwell, vice-president external for the University of Alberta Students' Union; Danika McConnell, CAUS member and Students' Association of MacEwan University VP external; and Levi Nilson, CAUS member and president of the University of Calgary Students' Union. We would also like to recognize Brittany Pitruniak, CAUS vice-chair and president of the Students' Association of MacEwan University, who was not able to make it to the introductions but will be coming later for the budget.

1:40

Seated also in the public gallery are my sister and brother-in-law, Clive and Dorothy Switzer. They're both from Wainwright. Dorothy works with the Canadian Forces special operations, Wainwright Garrison, and Clive is a front-line caseworker for Falcon Enterprises.

Last but not least, I'd like to introduce my beautiful wife, Eileen. Thank you to Eileen for all her hard work in putting up with all these things that she's had to get me elected and all the stuff that's gone on during the election and now. Thank you.

I would like to ask you all to rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged today to have three guests. I would like to introduce to you and through you Shawnalee Shwetz and Julie Krahulec from the Anne Chorney public library in Waskatenau as well as Reeve Doris Splane from the county of Athabasca. Would you rise and receive the customary warm welcome of the House.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly two guests seated in the gallery. The first is Mayor Chris Spearman, a truly engaged mayor, whom I am honoured to work with on many, many issues in our city and in my constituency. When one is in the bleachers at a ball game or in the audience at the Yates for a concert, Chris is the person who will speak up and provide a little history and make you feel that you're part of that history. Chris has been an advocate for change throughout his time in Lethbridge and spent a number of years as a school board trustee before being elected as the mayor two years ago. I have found him to be collaborative and forward-thinking and always – always – to have the best interests of the city at the forefront of everything that he does.

My second guest, Randy Smith, is the executive director at Nord-Bridge Seniors Centre. He has been in that role since 1998. He has been a driving force behind the redevelopment of the original Chinook Mall into this very modern and up-to-date activity centre for seniors and seniors' programs, located in north Lethbridge. Under his guidance and an elected volunteer board the centre has grown from 300 to 1,800-plus members today, and I am very happy to say that I'm a member. I can also attest to the achievement of the centre's goal to be the friendly centre, all thanks to the guidance and hard work provided by Randy and his team.

I would ask both Mayor Spearman and Mr. Smith to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly two important guests, Tracy McKinnon and Iris Kirschner. Tracy is the board chair of the Fort McMurray Catholic school district and has been a trustee since 2010. Iris is a past chairperson for the Health Advisory Council as well as a member of the Seniors Resource Committee in Wood Buffalo. She's also a senior adviser for the Golden Years Society. They're here today to listen to question period and to listen to the budget speech later today. I'd ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The newest member of our Legislature, Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, it's a privilege to introduce to you and through you a couple of fine Albertans. I'm very thankful to have had their help to get me here. Robert Such and his family are third-generation elk farmers, and they have freely given so much of their time and effort to the Wildrose Party over the years and to me personally. I'm so glad to see Robert's young son Riaan here as well to watch these proceedings today in the House. His life in politics has started at a young age. He was already the youngest volunteer on my campaign. I ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed. I think you have a second guest.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour for me to introduce today an incredibly inspirational Albertan, Shelley Wegner. Shelley has displayed invaluable commitment to our province with her long-time dedication working with Alberta's First Nations and Métis communities. She's also participated in the development of the northern Alberta development strategies. But there's much more. Shelley's service to the community includes volunteer work with the Edmonton Police Service, Kids with Cancer, Nina Haggerty, and iHuman, and there's a much longer list. But for today I ask her to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you three fine, outstanding citizens from the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. They come to us today in the form of Mayor Lance Colby of my hometown of Carstairs and the CEO of that same fair locale, Carl McDonnell.

Also joining us today is the vice-president of advancement of Olds College, Jordan Cleland, a gentleman who needs little introduction to the Assembly as he spent a lot of time running around the halls of this place a number of years ago.

If these three fine folks would rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and pleasure to introduce to you and through you today a friend, Mr. Len Wolstenholme, senior adviser, external relations, for the Calgary Zoo, one of Alberta's most visited tourism attractions, now featuring, of course, the rather spectacular IlluminAsia until November 1. I'm also honoured to have called the Wolstenholme family friends since 1967, when I met their family in Lagos,

Nigeria. It's a great pleasure for me to introduce you to them today. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you another very good friend, the founder of Matrix Labour Leasing, Shannon Warren. Shannon is very involved in the community, and every dollar that he makes in his business, he shares with those less fortunate. He is a proud Albertan, and I'm proud to call him a friend. I'd like him to rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other guests that you wish to introduce? Proceed.

Mrs. Littlewood: It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to this House Mayor Myron Hayduk and Councillor Taneen Rudyk of Vegreville. I would invite them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Are there any other guests to be introduced?

On behalf of the entire Assembly, welcome to all of the guests that are here today. I know I speak for all sides of the House that they really appreciate the people who are here.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Alberta Health Services Performance Measures

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, just last week Alberta Health Services released its performance report for the first quarter of the year, in October. It's clear why AHS is dragging its feet. Of the 17 performance measures given, AHS has achieved its target in just four. Four. AHS has missed on ER wait times, patient satisfaction, and access to cancer treatment. To the Health minister: how much longer are we going to tolerate waste, inefficiency, and poor performance from this organization?

The Speaker: The hon. Health minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. What the member doesn't point out is the fact that AHS saw growth in every single one of those categories, and I think that that is something to be commended, right? The other thing I want to point out is the fact that the member opposite's party is proposing to cut significant money from front-line services, which obviously would not . . .*

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: The point of order is noted.

Mr. Barnes: AHS underperformance is nothing new, Mr. Speaker. In fact, members of our current government in the past had plenty of perfectly valid criticisms about its inefficiency, lack of accountability, and chronic poor performance. When AHS does not meet its targets, it's allowed to lower its standards. We went from 52 performance standards to just 17. Again to the Health minister: we all know about the mistakes of the past, but will this government

right now commit to restoring complete, transparent, and extensive quarterly reports for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The report is public. It's on the website. That's how the member heard about it. What I want to point out as well is that on the 17 pillars that are there and that we're being benchmarked against – the point is to make progress, and I think that members opposite might want to create some chaos by cutting budgets and by pretending that they can blame certain individuals within the system. What we need to do is provide stability. That's what Albertans voted for, and that's what I'm proud to deliver.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, among the many targets gutted from previous Alberta Health Services public reports are surgical wait times, including hips, knees, and cataracts; the number of seniors waiting for continuing care; staff morale; and department costs. Given how badly AHS was failing, it's no wonder they'd rather not talk about it. Does the minister agree that these standards are crucial for the accountability, transparency, and oversight of our health care system and that Albertans deserve to know?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I will take his recommendation that we expand the number of key pillars moving forward into consideration. What this government is committed to is making sure that we fulfill the commitments that we made in the election. I know that might be a surprise to some members opposite who think that we actually shouldn't be fulfilling our promises from the campaign, but this government is committed to doing that.

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

Linear Property Assessment and Taxation

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the spring session I had asked the then Municipal Affairs minister about municipal funding, which received no clear response. Subsequently, at the AUMA convention this August, when given the opportunity to clarify the government's position, that same Municipal Affairs minister would not commit to maintaining the current linear taxation formula that is critical for rural municipalities. To the new Minister of Economic Development and Trade: will you stand today in the House as the voice of economic reason and commit to maintaining the current formula on linear taxation?

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. As the new Minister of Municipal Affairs I think it most appropriate that I take this question. We are absolutely committed to supporting rural Alberta families with the services that they count on, and as our province grows, it is important to recognize that our communities transcend municipal boundaries. This is a complex question, and I'm really looking forward to discussing it with local municipal leaders as we examine whether the current assessment structure is working for rural Albertans.

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, we need clarity here. Recently at a central Alberta AAMD and C zone meeting attended by local municipalities, the agriculture minister was asked about linear taxation. He said that while he is the voice of agriculture in rural communities, he could not commit to maintaining the current linear taxation formula and also would not speak against the Premier on this subject. To the ag minister: now that you've had the opportunity to

*See page 348, left column, paragraph 15

consult with the Premier, are you now able to commit to being the voice of agriculture and rural communities and stand against changes to linear taxation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, on the subject of linear taxation I'm happy to speak again. Having strong services in rural areas means having municipal taxation systems that work across entire regions. Once again, I am looking forward to discussions with our municipal leaders such as AAMD and C to talk about the current assessment structure and to figure out what will work best for the families in rural Alberta.

Mr. Stier: Okay. Well coached, Minister. Let's try this again, then, okay? To the new Minister of Municipal Affairs. With this past level of uncertainty that this government has been demonstrating with these vague comments and innuendo, rural municipalities deserve to know once and for all whether this government plans on changing the linear taxation formula. Will you commit to keeping our rural communities strong and sustainable and to maintaining the current formula in its current form? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I absolutely will commit to supporting rural Alberta families to have the services that they need.

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

Lake Aeration

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Conservation Association has suspended aeration on numerous lakes across the province this winter based on two legal opinions the organization obtained concerning liability. Concerns relate to section 263 of the Criminal Code and the potential risk of an individual being injured or killed by falling through the thin ice by the aeration. Aeration provides a crucial boost to oxygen levels to ensure the survival of fish through the winter. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: is the minister aware of this time-sensitive issue, and what is the government's plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Our department is most certainly aware of this issue. We are examining it, and we will provide an update to the House when we can in the coming weeks.

Thank you.

Mr. Loewen: Again to the minister. I'm sure that this government shares my concern that there is a real possibility that many of our fisheries across Alberta may collapse without this much-needed aeration. Will the minister recognize the immense strain the Alberta Conservation Association is under and lobby the federal government to change the wording of section 263 to allow the due diligence defence and remove the liability threat to the Alberta Conservation Association?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Of course, the Alberta Conservation Association is a delegated administrative authority of the Department of Environment and Parks. We're aware of the challenges right now

with respect to the federal government. Of course, we await our federal counterparts, and we will update this House once we have had those fulsome discussions with them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, we simply cannot afford to take a gamble with our fisheries. Albertans will be significantly impacted by a serious loss of fish without aeration on the many lakes this winter. There is still time to find a working solution both for this winter and for the long-term. Will the minister and her colleagues work with the opposition and the Alberta Conservation Association to find an appropriate and immediate solution to protect these fragile lakes?

2:00

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the supplemental question. Yes, of course, the province of Alberta is working with a delegated administrative authority of the department on the strength of our fisheries throughout the province, and we will be working with the federal government and working with our own department on the health of fisheries going forward. One of the reasons why we protected the Castle earlier this fall was exactly this, the protection of fisheries in our sensitive headwaters.

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

Oil Sands Development

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no denying that Alberta is facing some difficult economic times. In fact, for 2015 already we've seen more than 35,000 people laid off in this province related to the energy sector. Investors want to hear that we're a stable place to invest in. They are not hearing that right now from our government. To the Premier. When earlier this fall you insinuated that your government did not see the value in a long-term development of the oil sands, you risked damage to one of Alberta's strongest industries. Can the Premier tell us what the strategy is going forward: leave it in the ground or get it to market? Albertans want to know.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not really sure what the member is referring to because I've certainly never stated such a thing. In fact, earlier this fall what I have been doing is meeting with investors across the continent to talk about the fact that that's exactly what we want them to know about Alberta, that we are very committed to continuing to be a stable place to invest in terms of our infrastructure as well as our public services as well as our plan to balance. All of those things in concert with the industry, whom we are working with every day on a number of different files, mean that this will continue to be a good place for everybody to invest.

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, yet during the recent federal campaign this government's federal NDP brothers and sisters suggested that oil sands oil may have to stay in the ground. When they said this, not a word of dispute was said by this government, who, in fact, campaigned for those same brothers and sisters against Alberta's energy sector. Again to the Premier: do you share this belief, or as you see our major oil and gas players put large transaction after large transaction on hold, will you back away from these beliefs and act to protect Alberta jobs?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, with the greatest of respect to the member opposite, I would think twice about attributing things that their federal cousins had said or done to people. Particularly, those more progressive members of that caucus probably don't want to be wearing that particular sign for very long.

That being said, let me make very clear that this government is committed to working as partners with our oil and gas industry to ensure that it is able to recover from the struggles that it's going through right now because of the international drop in the price of oil, and we've been working with them on a number of different files.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On a recent trip to China the Energy minister stated that Alberta needs a pipeline built right now and that they were looking at whatever gets us there the quickest. A great sentiment, but getting our oil to market requires boots to the ground. Industry still sees a government and Premier apologizing for our oil sands. To the Premier: when are you going to change the dial and start selling Alberta and its industries the way we desperately need you to now?

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I think that one of the things, one of the key things, that has impeded the ability of industry from this province to get a pipeline across is that former government, that caucus's record on the environment and their failure – their failure – to take real action so that investors and leaders in other jurisdictions understand that you can develop our oil sands responsibly and in line with larger economic concerns that all people are concerned about. That's what we're going to do because that's how we're going to get our product to market.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Corporate Tax Collection

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The issue of taxes took up much of the summer sitting as we watched this far-left government and the far-right opposition play out their ideological battle over taxes: more taxes, no taxes. Albertans are willing to pay taxes. They expect our system to be fair and their tax dollars to benefit all of Alberta. However, for the second year in a row the Auditor General has found that the government has failed to collect hundreds of millions of dollars in corporate taxes. To the Premier: how can you plan new revenue measures when you cannot collect the taxes already owed to Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, first of all, I think that the fact of the matter is that this issue was fully canvassed, again, in the election last spring. Albertans were asked: should those profitable corporations that are making a good profit contribute just a little bit more, when things get tough, from the profits that they make? Albertans said: yes, they should. They also said the same thing of wealthy Albertans, many of whom, themselves, were quite willing to step up and pay a little bit more because they had done so well. So that is the kind of fairness that we brought into play and that we will continue to bring into play.

In terms of recovering uncollected taxes, we are working on those measures and will have more to say . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Well, given that Alberta is one of only two provinces that administer their own collection of corporate taxes and given that in other provinces the Canada Revenue Agency would have simply given Albertans the funds we are owed and used their experts to go after the corporations, will the Premier ensure that Albertans get their share, avoid the administrative cost of corporate tax collection, and return the administration to the CRA?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will acknowledge that in the absence of my Finance minister I'm not as briefed on this issue. I know that we are looking at that issue, but I also know that we have been given advice that for a number of other reasons we could actually suffer a loss in revenue if we went to that model. So we're exploring it right now, we're giving it due consideration because it's a good point, and once we have a fulsome understanding of what's best for Albertans, that is what we will do.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that Alberta is an outlier in this area. We don't need an Alberta-made solution; there is one already.

The Auditor General found that the government "does not have comprehensive policies and processes to ensure corporations file their returns or to issue a default assessment." Given that returning the administration of our corporate taxes safeguards Alberta's finances and saves on costs, will the Premier commit in this House that she will work to return the administration of corporate tax collection to the CRA? If not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We take very seriously the recommendations and the advice that is given by the Auditor General because he typically knows what he's talking about, so what I can commit to on behalf of the Minister of Finance is that we are looking at how we can best improve our success at collecting corporate taxes. When we find the best way forward, that is what we will do. We don't want to prejudge one solution; we want the best solution. So we're looking for that answer, and we will provide direction on how we're going forward shortly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Support for Agriculture

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year was especially hard for Alberta farmers and producers. In July of this year in my beautiful riding of Leduc-Beaumont a state of agricultural disaster was declared in Leduc county due to the incredibly low soil moisture rating and crop conditions. This was not an isolated case, and throughout the province we saw states of agricultural disaster declared. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. What has the government done to help farmers out in this tough year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our government is committed to supporting jobs that support families, and that's especially true when it comes to farming. This has been a challenging year for farmers. Through the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation's insurance programs we have paid out over \$297 million in direct support to farmers who have had a tough season. We have also identified some targeted, common-sense measures like making

better use of Crown lands for grazing and cutting fees to use our emergency water pumping program in half. We're continuing to monitor the situation to ensure that farmers are getting the support they need when they need it.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

2:10

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the challenges with drought this summer and the importance of farmers receiving support as quickly as possible during these difficult times, can the minister provide any information on how much time it took for producers to receive support from the government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the most wonderful question. We know how important it is to provide support to farmers when they need it. That's why during the height of this summer's challenges AFSC reassigned administrative staff to go out in the field and conduct inspections. This meant that even with the high number of claims this summer, we were able to respond to farmers very quickly. As of August 21, which is the busiest time for claims, we were conducting field inspections on average 12 days after the claim was filed and approving those requests within another six days after inspection. Although it was taking less than three weeks from the time the farmer called us with their claim . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the especially difficult year so far what is the minister doing to help and support Alberta's agriculture sector in the coming year?

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, once again thank you to the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for his questions as well as his commitment to his rural constituents. We're doing a number of things to support agriculture and rural economic development, including identifying opportunities for greater value-added activity in agriculture, going to bat for farmers by fighting country of origin labelling, and fighting to create and access new markets for Alberta's forest products and agriculture output. Our priority is always standing up for hard-working Alberta families by supporting good jobs, and that's why we'll be working hard to provide farmers with the tools and the support they need to succeed.

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

Job Creation

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgaryans are worried about the economy. The energy sector alone has lost 40,000 jobs this year. The total cost of NDP policies is nearly \$800 million on the industry, and this doesn't include the uncertainty that the current royalty review is bringing to the workers hoping to hold onto their jobs every day. To the new minister of economic development: why does the government insist on continuing to hurt Calgaryans while we are down?

Mr. Speaker, since this is my first-ever question, I'm hoping you'll help me get a straight answer, please.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm sure every member of this House would agree that I will make my best efforts to serve you.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the hon. member for his first question in the House. It's my pleasure to rise and respond to it. Albertans elected this government to make sure that our energy industry benefits all Albertans. We especially understand and recognize that the low international price for oil has hurt and continues to hurt Alberta families, which is why our Premier has taken the initiative to create this new ministry that's going to focus on working with our industry and business sector to enhance and improve the Alberta economy through the creation of jobs.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, the people of Calgary-Foothills sent a message loud and clear. They want their leaders to fight for their jobs. Given that the Premier and the Finance minister have already talked about the possibility of raising taxes even more, how does anyone in the government believe that less money in the pockets of Albertans will help create new jobs?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, you know what? I'm quite excited to be appointed lead of this new ministry, and I encourage the member to listen to the budget today when the Finance minister tables it. There are quite a few initiatives that our government is going to be embarking on in order to not only support our existing sectors like energy but looking at enhancing other sectors through diversification and value-added.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, people in my riding have already lost their jobs, are seeing their wages cut. This is about keeping Alberta competitive so the people of my riding will stop having to bear the brunt of the NDP's poor economic policies. Will the minister commit to making sure no extra taxes, regulations, or added costs will be put on Alberta's energy industry?

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find it a little rich coming from the party opposite, who would prefer to cut further by cutting front-line services . . .

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

Mr. Bilous: . . . whether that's through health care or through education. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, our government is committed toward working with job creators to enhance various sectors in our economy. We want to ensure that Albertans, first of all, have access to high-quality services but that we're also encouraging improving our economy and diversification through this ministry.

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

Minimum Wage

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past summer the new government rushed through a decision to increase the minimum wage in Alberta. By 2018 the government plans to increase the minimum wage by approximately 50 per cent, which will get us to the magical number of \$15 an hour. To the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: given that to absorb the minimum wage increase without affecting their customers, many members of the restaurant industry are considering moving to a no-tip policy, how does increasing minimum wage to \$15 per hour, minus taxes but eliminating tips, help restaurant staff?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. When we put forward our platform, we wanted to make sure that workers in Alberta made fair wages so

that when they went home to their families, they could support them and care for them, and that's what we've done. We've raised the minimum wage less than 10 per cent this year, and now people have more money in their pockets, that goes back into local businesses, and that's actually stimulating our economy.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the minimum wage increase may end up affecting in negative ways those it's intended to assist such as being displaced by automated machines, which will eliminate 6,000 jobs in McDonald's across Alberta alone, will you halt your government's ill-conceived wage plan and review the real business evidence that is before you?

Thank you.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We've already met with many stakeholders in this area back in June, and we absolutely want to work with industry when we move forward on that. We will be looking, certainly, at indicators like the youth unemployment rate, labour stats. We're absolutely going to be doing this in a planful way, evidence based.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. I thought you might answer a question similar to that.

Mr. Speaker, given that stakeholders across this province, including Restaurants Canada, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, are saying that this plan is a bad idea – and I will table their submissions this afternoon – will this government slow down, listen to the stakeholders? Minister, are all of these experts wrong, or are you?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the member for the question. All those stakeholders that he identified: we've met with every one of them, and we've met with many more. I want you to know that some are saying not to raise it; others are saying to go to \$15 right now. Our government has chosen a moderate path forward by only increasing it one dollar this year.

Thank you.

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

2:20 Landowner Property Rights

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 36 continues to be an infringement on property rights, giving the government complete control over lease agreements and landowner rights. This is a new government, and Albertans are hoping for the best. Will the Premier commit to repealing all of the offensive sections of Bill 36, that tramples over the rights of all Albertans?

Mr. Mason: Thank you for the question, hon. member. Certainly, when our party was in opposition and before the Wildrose Party had seats in the Legislature, we led the fight on behalf of the rights of property owners in this province against the draconian legislation of the previous government, for which we received great accolades from your former leader, who then was one of their – anyway, I want to assure the hon. member that we are committed to . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Cooper: Well, all that being equal, then, Mr. Speaker, they will know that centralized planning hasn't worked in eastern Europe, and it won't work here. If the Premier doesn't repeal these sections

of bills 24 and 36, which now give this NDP cabinet complete control of land use in the province, limit the rights to compensation for landowners, and block access to courts for citizens, does she actually expect landowners to be satisfied with no action, just like the no answer in the last question?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that question, hon. member. I want to assure the hon. member opposite that our party has always believed in due process, in proper notification, rights of appeal. All of the fundamental rights of property owners are things that we support, and we're going to make sure that in the fullness of time those continue to be protected.

Mr. Cooper: Well, that is good news, Mr. Speaker, but I want to be very clear and allow the minister the opportunity to reiterate his position from 2010, when he stated: you shouldn't have your land impacted by a government decision without the right to challenge it. Now, we've all been elected for over 170 days, sir, and this side of the House is looking for action. Does that statement that the minister made still stand, or will this be another NDP flip-flop and another NDP broken promise?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I don't even know what to say to that. I'll remind the hon. member that this legislation was introduced and passed by the previous government over the objections of our party, and I'm quite sure that you'll find that we'll continue to stand up for the rights of landowners in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Energy Industry Layoffs

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sad to report that many people in my riding of Bonnyville-Cold Lake have lost their jobs. As those in the Chamber are aware, jobs in the energy sector are down 15 per cent since last September. This hits home for me as many of my constituents in the riding make a living in this industry. Here in our province 40,000 have lost their jobs in this last year alone. To the minister of jobs: is there a plan to aid the people affected by these mass layoffs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Believe me, our sympathies do go out to all of those, in both the energy sector and other sectors, who have been affected by this economic downturn. I can tell you that this is exactly the reason why the Premier has chosen to create this new ministry at this point in time, which industry and business have been asking for for many, many years, that they get a one-stop shop where they can work with government as a partner working with industry in order to create more jobs. I can assure the hon. member that that is a priority of mine, of the Premier, and of this government, and we will do just that.

Mr. Cyr: We hear all the time from the government about protection of the front-line workers, but we've heard no specific plan to protect the hard-working families in my riding and across the province who work in the energy sector. These workers may not be politically important to this government, but I know and my colleagues know that they are critical to the vitality of this province. What will the government do to assure Albertans once again that Alberta is the best place to live in this country?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, this government cares about every single Albertan no matter what sector they are in: public sector, private sector. Every job is important to our government, which is why we

are partnering with the different sectors, including working with energy. We're going to continue to work with the energy sector and look at diversifying our economy, so looking at ways that our government can partner with the private sector to create more jobs, to look for value-added jobs to improve the chain, and, of course, looking for markets to increase our exports to.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. We need jobs now, not value-added later.

To the same minister: will the minister take responsibility for the spike of unemployment plaguing the province and look for meaningful solutions to stop the bleeding in our economy?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I think it needs to be clarified that the Alberta NDP isn't responsible for the price of oil internationally. This is where it's unfortunate that Alberta is a price taker, not a price maker, which is, again, why we will do what we can to work with the different sectors across the province to diversify the economy. There are initiatives and a plan already in place. I ask the hon. member and his colleagues to be patient for the budget, that the Finance minister will table, which speaks to this directly.

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

Aboriginal Relations

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has recently staged a number of photo ops in an attempt to build the perception that her government is working towards building a positive relationship with all indigenous peoples in Alberta. Another attempt was made on October 14, when the Premier held another photo op, this time to announce the Premier's Advisory Committee on the Economy. To the Premier: given that this committee is indeed to focus on diversification, sustainability, and resiliency of the Alberta economy, why did you not appoint any members of Alberta's aboriginal communities to this particular advisory committee?

Ms Notley: I want to thank the member for that question, and he certainly raises a very, very good point. A lot of the reason is because we were doing two things at the same time. We'd begun some very substantive consultation processes with indigenous leaders and First Nations leaders across the province while at the same time focusing on our plan to do economic diversification, stimulation, and job creation. But it's absolutely true that once we've had a chance to meet a bit more with First Nations leaders, there should be a role for them on that committee, and I'm taking it under advisement because it's a very good point.

Mr. Rodney: To the Premier again: given that you've publicly stated your support for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report and the UN charter on the rights of indigenous peoples and given that all advisory committees that will provide influential advice to your government have fulsome representation, I thank you in advance for correcting the oversight on this committee. But I'm wondering: in the future on a go-forward basis will you appoint at least one of the many talented aboriginal leaders to other committees?

Ms Notley: Well, indeed, Mr. Speaker, that's again a very good point. One of the things we did once we were talking about the implementation of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples was that I asked our minister of aboriginal affairs, this minister right here, to work with every other ministry to figure out where we can engage more effectively and substantively with

indigenous leaders across the province. So that will be happening. The recently announced health board by the Ministry of Health has also allowed for additional appointments from First Nations, and we will continue to do that.

2:30

Mr. Rodney: Given that I asked the Premier and the minister in charge this question in the spring session – you know, we have seen the photo ops, the questionable progress. I ask again: what specific timelines will your government commit to for evaluating and implementing the TRC report recommendations, and what specific mechanisms and benchmarks will you make available for all Albertans to hold the government accountable for implementing the recommendations? If the answer is, as we've heard, next year, how could it possibly take that long, and should we expect no tangible action in the meantime?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can start by saying that it won't take 44 years. It is correct that my ministers have been tasked to report back to the minister of aboriginal affairs in the new year, in January, to talk about what we need to do to go forward on both the TRC recommendations as well as UNDRIP. At the same time meetings have begun, led by the minister of aboriginal affairs, with the representatives from all of the treaties and other indigenous representatives to talk about how they want to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Child Care Supports

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Approximately 70 per cent of Alberta parents with children under the age of six work outside the home. For many Alberta families child care providers play a critical role in their young children's lives. Research has shown that children thrive in healthy, safe, and caring environments, and early childhood development improves their opportunity for success. The problem is that quality child care can often be hard to come by in rural areas due to a lack of child care facilities close to people's homes in these areas. My question today is for the Minister of Human Services. Can the minister explain if there are plans to improve access to approved day homes in . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for your question on this important issue. We know that it's particularly difficult for families in rural areas to find quality child care. Our government made a commitment during the election that we will work towards more accessible, affordable, and quality child care, and that's what we plan to do. We intend to keep this promise as well.

Mr. Piquette: Mr. Speaker, given that affordability is one of the biggest barriers when it comes to accessing child care, again to the Minister of Human Services: does the minister have any plans for improving the affordability of child care?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you again for the important question. Mr. Speaker, our government ran on a commitment to help make child care more affordable as resources permit. For too many Alberta families child care is not affordable, and if they can't find child care, they can't go back to work, and they can't go back to studies. We will be investing in quality child care, as resources permit, to make it affordable for all Albertans.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister, for the answer. One more question to the Minister of Human Services: given that access to child care is so limited, especially in rural constituencies like my home one of Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, how does your ministry plan to increase the number of spaces and improve families' access to child care across Alberta?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, our government is committed to achieving better access to child care for all Albertans, and that certainly means that we need to create more spaces. But I was very disappointed and shocked to see opposition members vote against Motion 502, which essentially was asking the government to look into the feasibility of creating more spaces in government buildings. That motion was voted against by the opposition. I want to assure Albertans that we will be looking at . . .

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

Municipal Tax Collection

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A resident of Smoky Lake county called me recently with a serious concern about his taxation assessment for this year. He found a new tax category had been added, that he along with other residents of Smoky Lake county must pay, called uncollected tax. Apparently, this levy is to cover taxes that are not collected from other people and businesses that do not or cannot pay their taxes. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: is this a common practice in other municipalities, or is this something specific to Smoky Lake?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. It certainly is an interesting premise. I am actually not familiar with that issue at this point. As you know, I am new to the ministry, less than a week. I'm not up to speed with a hundred per cent of the files that we have, so it wouldn't be responsible for me to comment right now. However, I really do look forward to meeting with you and hearing more details about that so that we can try to identify a solution.

Thank you so much.

Mr. Hanson: Again to the Minister of Municipal Affairs – and I realize you are new. This situation may set a disturbing precedent across the province as municipalities are forced to find new ways of meeting revenue shortfalls. Will the government consider helping municipalities collect outstanding taxes instead of standing by while they are forced to raise taxes on already overtaxed Alberta families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I previously said, I'm not necessarily up to speed on that particular issue. However, overall our government is absolutely committed to supporting municipal governments in being able to provide what they need to the people of their communities and to those rural families. Absolutely, on these issues we are quite committed to talking to municipal leaders, and we'll be happy to talk to them about any concerns or questions that they may have.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you. Unfortunately, this is a three-part question. In our current economic climate many companies are going out of business, and this situation has the potential to get much worse,

especially with our current government. Does this government have a plan to ensure that residential taxpayers won't be on the hook for these uncollected taxes from bankrupted businesses?

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the member who asked the question: absolutely, Alberta is altogether struggling with the fact that oil has gone down, and together we will come up with our own Alberta-made solution to work together – provinces, municipalities, and all the people of Alberta – to find a solution so that we can together move forward.

Resource Industry Policies

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, we all know about the economic downturn in Alberta and, in fact, across the country. Falling oil prices and thousands of job losses have made it especially hard in Alberta, so there's even a greater urgency to ensure that we diversify our economy, ensure that our partnerships will serve Albertans and their interests. This summer the environment minister made an announcement to terminate forestry contracts and other industry operations in the Castle area. These agreements have a direct impact on Alberta families. To the environment minister: how much will these contract terminations cost Alberta families, and will you outline it in the budget?

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I am pleased to update the House on our activities in the Castle area. After 40 years of clear-cutting our government made a commitment to protect the Castle area. That's exactly what we are doing. We are doing it to protect the headwaters for the drinking water in my city and all through the South Saskatchewan River basin. This was a historic first step for Alberta, and I am proud of what we were able to accomplish.

Mr. Fraser: Alberta has a stable plan to phase out coal-fired generation facilities by 2030. Under the former PC government we shut down one plant in 2011 and planned to shut down two more by 2019. In fact, the Keephills 3 plant burns as clean as gas. To the same minister. You've been hinting and creating uncertainty with our industry partners by wanting to phase out coal-fired generation plants at an even faster rate. Again, how much will this cost Alberta families, and will you have it in your budget?

2:40

Ms Phillips: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased to finally rise in this House and discuss climate change seeing as none of the opposition have wanted to discuss that topic so far. We made a commitment to phase out coal-fired electricity. We will honour our commitment to Albertans. We are working with industry on this matter. This is why we appointed our panel of experts to examine the matter and report back to us with their best advice. Our approach will be measured. It will take into account the communities and the companies that will be affected. I note that the previous government had no plan for what would happen once those coal-fired units were to shut down.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Might I remind the minister that Alberta is a leader in environmental policies, particularly our industry? We're the only people that pay tonnage on CO₂.

To the Premier: given that we have partners already invested in greener energy not just in Alberta but across the country and given that the industry has put up to \$14 billion to meet the requirements of the 2030 phase-out, why are you not promoting our industry

partners and what they do well but, rather, calling their investments and hard work embarrassing? Shouldn't you be promoting Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we will be receiving the climate change panel's advice on electricity generation very soon. We have been very clear with Albertans on this matter. Albertans have asked us to ensure that we have more renewables on the grid, that we are greening our economy while we do it. We are ensuring a just transition for those communities who might be affected by this. We are taking very careful steps, and we will receive the climate change panel's advice very soon.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Orange Shirt Day

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. September 30 is Orange Shirt Day. As we are gathered today on Treaty 6 territory, it is important for us to acknowledge the history of First Nations and the government's relationship with them. That is what Orange Shirt Day is intended to do.

Now in its third year, Orange Shirt Day began when one woman shared her experience in a residential school. Her shiny orange shirt was taken away from her and with it her identity. I need not remind this Assembly of the atrocities committed at these schools or the poor conditions many indigenous people face today. Orange Shirt Day is a day to come together against bullying and racism. Most importantly, it is a day for First Nations, local government, schools, and communities to come together in the spirit of reconciliation and hope for future generations.

On that note, I am honoured to serve with our government as we work toward following the recommendations from the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples as well as the federal Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This will not be an easy task, nor will it be a short one. We have also added our voice in calling on the federal government to investigate the epidemic of missing and murdered indigenous women. I take pride in the fact that our government is working to grow the relationship with Alberta's First Nations.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mental Health Services for Postsecondary Students

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to discuss the importance and continued need for mental health funding for our postsecondary students in Alberta. It has come to my attention that there is a huge discrepancy in what individual students receive for mental health funding. The funds received are solely dependent upon the institution which the students attend.

According to one of the student representatives, students that attend SAIT receive \$3.91 per student in funding for mental health initiatives while students attending the University of Lethbridge receive \$146.94 per student. Why should funding for mental health for one group of students be more important than for another group of students? I brought this matter up with the Minister of Advanced Education in a meeting we held earlier this month, and I'm hoping that the minister will take my advice to heart and balance out this obvious discrepancy.

The current mental health framework used to support students at all postsecondary institutions was mandated for three years and is coming to an end in 2016. I hope that this government will agree that it is of the utmost importance that students have a venue where they can turn for help, support in a safe and inclusive environment.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that changes need to be made to the current mental health framework in order to provide fair, equal services to all postsecondary students across the province. It is my hope that all members of this Chamber will work together to come up with a fair and equitable framework for all students.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Energy Policies

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, the city of Lloydminster offers a unique perspective of how government decisions can promote or hinder economic process. For years we watched as the Alberta side prospered while the Saskatchewan side lagged behind. But since May the tables have turned. Businesses that service the heavy oil industry drive the Lloydminster economy. Earlier this year falling oil prices were forcing difficult decisions: layoffs, decreased work schedules, and cancelled contracts. What has been discouraging is how those decisions are being made. Businesses that once did 60 per cent of their business on the Alberta side and 40 per cent in Saskatchewan have now shifted to a ratio that is now 90-10 in favour of Saskatchewan. When I ask why, I'm told: "Uncertainty. We don't know what this government is going to do next to hurt us, but we're sure it won't be good. At least in Saskatchewan we know the rules, we know the rules aren't changing, and we know the government actually wants us there to do business."

Now, last time I checked, the world oil price is the same in Saskatchewan as it is in Alberta. Governments can't change the oil price, but their policy decisions can certainly make challenging economic situations much worse, and Lloydminster proves that.

Alberta is not a test lab, and Albertans did not consent to be the guinea pigs in this government's reckless experiments and socialist fiscal intervention. These theories have been tried elsewhere and have always failed. Many Albertans came here to escape the chaos caused by NDP regimes in other provinces, and now they're wondering if they should move back. Capital investment is drying up as investors look elsewhere to find jurisdictions offering the certainty and consistency that used to be Alberta's hallmark. The economic advantage built by past governments working with Albertans instead of against them is being dismantled by this government at a breathtaking pace.

Nearly every day I am asked: How much damage can they do in four years? Well, Mr. Speaker, we're about to find out.

Team Lethbridge

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to be here today to share with you some important information about a very special entity in Lethbridge. I will start by saying that I love Lethbridge, my city, and I hope that you will love it, too. We have a wonderful, forward-thinking people who want you to know and grow with Lethbridge. Some of these people got together and formed a coalition representing 18 different organizations in our city and called themselves Team Lethbridge.

Team Lethbridge collaborates to offer support to the government of Alberta in building solutions for the future and in showcasing how our city can contribute to provincial priorities. Proactively they communicate with government decision-makers. The city and the province can benefit through these interactions. Team Lethbridge includes groups like the Allied Arts Council, the school boards,

Economic Development Lethbridge, the university, the college, city council, family services, and so on.

On the evening of November 25 here in Edmonton all MLAs are invited to a party, a meet and greet hosted by Team Lethbridge. You will learn about the many strengths and opportunities, including a diversified economy, rich arts and cultural heritage, strong public-sector leadership, and industry strength. The team will highlight the progressive work being done and undertaken in our city, express appreciation for the province's commitments in Lethbridge, and offer our support in building solutions for the future.

I hope I have piqued your interest and that you will accept the invitation that you will receive within the next week. Go Team Lethbridge.

The Speaker: The Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

2:50 Anne Chorney Public Library Renovation

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As MLA Payne mentioned yesterday, October is library month. This gives me a great opportunity to recognize the hard work done by . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I believe it's not in order that you identified a name rather than a member. I'd appreciate you referring to the constituency rather than the name.

Mr. Piquette: Oh, jeez. Okay. This was even vetted, Mr. Speaker. All right.

As the Member for Calgary-Acadia mentioned yesterday, October is national library month. This gives me a great opportunity to recognize the hard work done by two very special community activists, who I'm hoping will be coming back into the gallery here: Shawnalee Shwetz and Julie Krahulec. These two remarkable women spearheaded the efforts to relocate and revitalize the Anne Chorney public library in beautiful Waskatenau. They secured funds, organized community efforts, and found a new home for their library.

The Anne Chorney public library first opened in 1973 and was housed in a classroom in the local school. After a year with its books in storage the library reopened in a one-room schoolhouse that hadn't been in operation for 15 years. This presented both an opportunity and a challenge for the library. The library had found its new home, but after being vacant for 15 years, that schoolhouse needed a lot of work. It speaks to the power of volunteers and community spirit that the renovations needed to house the library were performed by the four members of the library board with the help of local volunteers. As a matter of fact, this afternoon they informed me that they also used their own money to be able to finish this library.

I would like to recognize the importance of libraries across the province but especially in rural areas, where they serve as community hubs and, in cases like the Anne Chorney public library, are also projects where communities can come together. Not only do libraries serve to increase literacy and education, but they also allow for more well-rounded individuals and communities. Librarians and volunteers, your efforts are greatly appreciated.

The Speaker: The Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Official Opposition

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As late as yesterday our colleagues from across the floor said that Wildrose couldn't be trusted to get it right. I couldn't disagree with that more. Wildrose was given the strong mandate to serve as the Official Opposition in

this House, with 22 MLAs from every corner of this province. We value that mandate. They sent us here to focus on the economy, jobs, and restoring the Alberta advantage. Albertans' trust is based on the principles Wildrose stands for: a smaller, more efficient bureaucracy, less government, lower waste, lower taxes, and reasonable policies.

Mr. Speaker, while our political system is an adversarial one, Albertans trust us to work together to take up common-sense suggestions and alternatives from the opposition. We are here to help the government help Albertans. We are here to represent the people that elected us. I hope this government will listen and work alongside us to cut inefficiencies, protect their pocketbooks, all without sacrificing front-line staff. We want a business-friendly Alberta that encourages investment and ensures sustainability of core government services for decades to come.

Trust is something that is earned. Alberta voters placed that trust amongst their most important values. Albertans trust us to make things better for them as a whole. While across party lines we come from different points of view, we do share a common desire to serve. All members are entrusted by those that elected us. Let us strive not to mock those who entrusted us to this Chamber.

Presenting Petitions

Ms McPherson: Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I request leave to present the following petitions, that have been received for private bills under Standing Order 98(2).

One, the petition of Dr. Melanie Humphreys, president of the King's University, and Mr. Bill Diepeveen, chair of the board of governors of the King's University, for the King's University College Amendment Act, 2015.

Two, the petition of Pastor Ron Steinbrenner, president of Bethesda Bible College, for the Bethesda Bible College Amendment Act, 2015.

Three, the petition of Kunal Nand, solicitor for Rosary Hall, Edmonton, for the Rosary Hall, Edmonton Repeal Act.

Four, the petition of Mark Haynal, president of the Canadian University College, for the Canadian University College Amendment Act, 2015.

Five, the petition of Geoffrey Hope, solicitor for Concordia University College of Alberta, for the Concordia University College of Alberta Amendment Act, 2015.

Six, the petition of Audra Reinhardt, member of the board of directors of Covenant Bible College, for the Covenant Bible College Amendment Act, 2015.

Finally, seven, the petition of Pastor Paul Reich, president of the Living Faith Bible College, for the Living Faith Bible College Amendment Act, 2015.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 4

An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 4, an Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to this Assembly.

There are two components to the bill. The first component repeals the Fiscal Management Act and creates a new set of fiscal rules better suited to these challenging economic times while maintaining our commitment to keep debt under control and to present the government's finances in a clear format. This bill will set legislated definitions for government's reporting on the province's fiscal and financial position and prospects. The bill will also amend the personal and corporate income taxes and implement the technical and administrative changes that clarify our tax statutes, correct technical errors in the legislation, repeal expired provisions, and standardize administrative policies across Alberta's tax statutes. More details will be available when I present Budget 2015.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

Mr. Mason: I don't imagine we have very much more business to complete in the Routine, and I would seek unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 7(7) in order to complete the rest of the Routine with the exception of any points of order, which I assume could be dealt with tomorrow.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: We do not have a unanimous vote.

We will now move to points of order. This was raised in response to Mr. Cooper's point of order that the Wildrose was proposing. I would call upon the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills to speak to the matter.

Point of Order Allegations Against a Member

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to the point of order that happened in question period at approximately 2:07 or something like that. I'm rising today and quoting from the Standing Orders in section 23(h) and (i): "makes allegations against another Member" or imputes false motives against another member.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, what we have been seeing over the last couple of days is a deterioration in the House when it comes to decorum. [interjections] While the government might think it's funny, they play a very important role in the decorum in this House, sir. What we see is the Minister of Health, in this case . . .

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, citation please.

Mr. Cooper: I already gave it, sir. You should pay attention. It's 23(h), "makes allegations against another Member."

We're getting to the fact that the government has chosen to play very fast and loose with the truth. They make some accusations about our party and our caucus. Today we saw them say that the Wildrose would cut front-line workers, which is at best fast and loose with the truth. Some would say that that was a lie. I wouldn't say that, sir, because it would be wildly inappropriate, but some would say that that was a lie. I would go as far as to say that they're playing with words that do not accurately reflect what is the truth. The Wildrose campaigned at length, and not a single proposal that we campaigned on, went around this province on, ever suggested that we would touch front-line services, sir.

So we have a government that is making accusations in this House. No worker under our plan would have been fired. In fact, we campaigned extensively on the things that we would do to support front-line workers, which is the exact opposite. And some

would say that they are making allegations that we would do something that we wouldn't, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I very much regret that the Wildrose caucus has decided that they are going to play out this little point of order to defend their reputation, in their own minds, instead of getting on with the important business of the day, which is the budget speech, which the entire province is waiting to hear. I would think that the hon. members opposite ought to be ready, be wanting to hear it as well. Instead, we are playing games.

Now, I would suggest to you that it is the opinion of many on this side of the House and among the general public that a proposal to cut \$2 billion from the provincial budget in one year will result in significant job losses, including losses of front-line workers. That is our view, Mr. Speaker. In any event, it comes down to a disagreement between members over the facts, and that is not a point of order. For us to suggest that that party and that caucus have certain policies is not the same as a member. No one suggested that an individual member otherwise had false or unavowed motives. We can certainly suggest that about the Wildrose Party and not be in contravention of the rules of this House.

So I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that there is absolutely no point of order here. It is merely an opportunity for the Wildrose to try and delay the budget speech.

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

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As reluctant as I am to be accused of delaying the budget speech, I do want to weigh into this debate because it is in some ways a continuation of a debate that occurred during the last Legislature, and it caused us a great deal of loss of time. Consistently we had situations where statements were made by ministers answering questions that in some way offended the Official Opposition, and they immediately leapt to their feet and, you know, went to points of order. In some cases we had three, four, five points of order after every single question period, and this chewed up a lot of time.

Mr. Speaker, the rulings on this by Speaker Zwozdesky were very clear, and they follow *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, on page 510, which states:

The Speaker . . . is not responsible for the quality or content of replies to questions. In most instances, when a point of order or a question of privilege has been raised in regard to a response to an oral question, the Speaker has ruled that the matter is a disagreement among Members over the facts surrounding the issue. As such, these matters are more a question of debate and do not constitute a breach of the rules or of privilege.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a point of order. In question period there will always be disagreements in the case of the facts that are being stated, and there will be disagreements in the positions between various parties. I know that the members of the Official Opposition are particularly aggrieved by the very suggestion that was made by the ministers of the government, but the fact of the matter is that this is not a point of order. This is a disagreement of the facts, and therefore this should be ruled out of order.

The Speaker: Members of the Legislature, from the arguments I've heard, it would be my ruling that there is no point of order on this matter.

In order to allow adequate time to prepare for the budget process by the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance this afternoon, the House is recessed until 3:15.

[The Assembly adjourned from 3:06 p.m. to 3:15 p.m.]

The Speaker: Members, please take your seats.

Orders of the Day Transmittal of Estimates

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I have received certain messages from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! Rise in the gallery.

The Speaker: The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the offices of the Legislative Assembly for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits the estimates of certain sums required by the government for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the 2015-16 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates as well as the 2015-16 government estimates. Further, I also wish to table the Budget 2015-18 strategic plan and the Budget 2015 ministry business plans.

Government Motions

Mr. Ceci: I now wish to table the government's Budget 2015 fiscal plan. Mr. Speaker, earlier today I introduced Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, which will set legislative definitions for government reporting on the province's fiscal and financial positions and prospects. The form and contents of the government's fiscal plan anticipate this new legislation.

Budget Address

13. Mr. Ceci moved:
Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, let me begin by thanking the thousands of Albertans who have spoken to me about their priorities and ideas for this first budget presented by Alberta's new government, led by Alberta's new Premier. The values of the people of Alberta came through loud and clear during our consultations. We're a hopeful and optimistic people. We're entrepreneurial and enterprising. We're community minded. We care about our neighbours. What we desire for ourselves, we wish for all. That is the Alberta way, and those are the values that drive this budget.

This government is working towards a vision of a province that is more prosperous and whose prosperity is much more widely and fairly shared. We're working towards a vision of a province with Canada's healthiest and best educated people, and we're working towards a vision of a province that is the world's most environmentally progressive energy producer, a sustainable, diversified engine of the Canadian economy that all Canadians will be proud to support as well as to benefit from, as we've all done for many years.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, this summer Albertans told us they want their families' health care and education to be protected while ensuring that every public dollar is well spent and that the rate of growth in

budgets is brought under control. Albertans told us that they want to see a plan to return to balanced budgets. Albertans know that lower oil prices mean deficits for the government of Alberta since we are currently so dependent on oil revenues to pay for public services. The citizens of this province want to see a plan to balance the budget within a reasonable amount of time without reckless cutbacks, that will only have to be repaired later.

Albertans told us that they want us to look for ways to diversify. Energy is going to be Alberta's business and the heart of our economy and our economic development for many decades to come, but jobs and diversification must also be at the top of our agenda this year and every year from now on. Albertans are well aware that the recent drop in the price of oil is presenting our province with a serious challenge.

Albertans also know that by making better decisions, we can and we will get through our current challenges to better days. We'll do it the Alberta way, by encouraging a vigorous and successful private sector, by building on our strengths and gifts, and by making better decisions about our future together. We will do it by looking after each other, while looking after our seniors, while looking after our children, while giving those who have been hit hard a hand up, just as neighbours have always done for each other in this province.

Mr. Speaker, this Legislature is going to lead by example. Our government will propose that members of this House agree to freeze the salaries of the members of cabinet, MLAs, and political staff positions for the entire term of this Legislature; in other words, until after the next election, in four years.

Further, the Premier has asked me to lead a comprehensive review of Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions. I want to emphasize that many good people have and continue to contribute long hours of excellent public service on these boards, often for very modest compensation. But it is time to take a look at this sector. We are looking to reduce the number of these entities. We will set clear objectives and accountability for results for the entities that remain, and we will rationalize and standardize the compensation of the people appointed to sit on them.

Finally, our government will take a careful, responsible approach to implementing its platform of commitments. Our plans will be phased in as finances permit, just as we said they would be during the election and just as responsible stewards of Alberta's treasury should.

Mr. Speaker, our province is facing yet another downturn in the international price of oil. It's not like Alberta hasn't seen this before, and it's not like we don't know what to do. Alberta needs to reduce our vulnerability to price shocks over which we have no control. We must do this by saving for a rainy day, by diversifying our economy, and by getting the maximum possible value out of the development of our energy resources, resources that belong to the people of Alberta.

That was the right strategy in 1971, and it is the right strategy now. Unfortunately, Premier Lougheed's successors lost their way. For far too many years they squandered our resource revenues instead of saving them. They failed to diversify our economy, and they focused on a model of development for our energy resources that led us, exactly as you would expect, to where we are today.

Norway studied the Alberta way, adopted it, and has built up \$1.1 trillion in that country's investment fund. The government of Alberta set up the Alberta way and then threw it away. Our province has the third-largest oil reserves in the world. Between 1971 and 2015 Albertan companies exported \$1.3 trillion in oil and gas resources around the world. Our predecessors in office saved only a tiny fraction of this incredible bounty. We must do better.

Mr. Speaker, we won't solve all of the challenges in one budget. Getting back to that original vision will take more than one term of

this Legislature. But it is time to begin, and to begin, we need to make better decisions and set better priorities. This is what we are going to do in this budget.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta is pursuing three priorities in this budget. First, we will stabilize public services. We will reverse a number of bad decisions made in recent years, and we will continue to implement the commitments we made to the people of Alberta in the recent election.

Second, we will set out a plan to balance the budget, a balanced budget plan that will reflect the values and priorities of the people of Alberta and will strike the right balance between Alberta's fiscal priorities and our economic and social ones.

Third, we will act on jobs and diversification. We will act within our means and as resources permit to be good partners with the private sector as it creates jobs. We will do what we reasonably can to help diversify our economy.

Let me begin with the cleanup work we have had to address and the commitments we are getting to work on to stabilize key public services. For a generation now Alberta has been conducting a unique and failed experiment with regressive, flat income taxes. Rich, middle income, or poor, in Alberta under Conservative government you paid a 10 per cent income tax rate. No jurisdiction in Canada at any level and under any party, including the recently defeated Conservative government in Ottawa, followed this income tax model because it is wrong-headed, grossly regressive, and unfair. As we detailed in Bill 2 in the spring sitting of this Legislature and we confirm today, we're abolishing this flat income tax model. We're replacing flat taxes with a normal, fair, progressive income tax system.

Alberta has also been conducting a failed experiment in undercharging our largest and most profitable corporations. Our predecessors believed that ordinary Alberta families should pay ever-increasing fees, levies as well as regressive income taxes while the largest, most profitable corporations needed tax breaks even in their best years. In this budget we confirm that we will do our part to end the race to the bottom on corporate taxes in Canada.

As detailed in Bill 2, we are implementing a 12 per cent corporate tax rate, in the mid-range of rates across Canada. A great deal of nonsense has been said about this measure. Corporate income taxes are only paid when companies are profitable. In tough years corporate taxes go down, not up, including at this new rate. In the years to come, as profits recover, our largest companies will make a normal, fair contribution to balancing the budget and to building our province. Mr. Speaker, we're not faulting the companies. They were only paying the taxes the government required them to pay. What we are doing is making better decisions by asking those who can afford to contribute a little more to do so.

3:30

Then with the benefit of these tax reforms we will act to restore stability to our schools and hospitals. Proposals were put before this House by the previous government to cut funding to Alberta's elementary, secondary, and postsecondary school systems even though education is the single most important investment our province can make in the welfare of our children and the success of our future economy. In this budget we confirm we are restoring funding to the Education and Advanced Education budgets that were cut by the former government. This reinvestment means a great deal to the education system at every level. It means that school boards right across this province do not have to make significant cuts to services this year, next year, or the one after that. It means that the new students who showed up for class this fall have teachers in their classrooms, and it means that university and college students are able to resume their studies benefiting from a

two-year tuition freeze, a big relief from the planned increases that would have made postsecondary education even harder for ordinary families to afford.

Mr. Speaker, last March proposals were also put before this House to deeply cut Alberta's health care system. These cuts were proposed without any plan to implement them. They were simply targets, in truth a formula for chaos and the layoff of thousands of health care workers. In this budget we are restoring Health funding so we won't have chaos in our health care system and we won't be losing thousands of front-line health care providers. Instead, we will continue to build a universal public health care system that is one of this country's rights of citizenship and one of this country's great contributions to the world.

Mr. Speaker, for far too long those who needed the most help have been last in line for the support they need. That is also going to change under this government. Let me highlight some of the initiatives that will set better priorities for the most vulnerable among us. First, as I know all too well, the call for increased family and community support services funding, FCSS, was ignored by previous governments. We will invest \$101 million in FCSS this year, a \$25 million increase. These funds give a helping hand to children and families most in need of help.

Our government will also act on its commitment to address the issue of family violence. Those seeking escape from violence must have a safe place to go. Therefore, as we committed to do in the election, we will enhance supports available to women and children affected by family violence. This year we will invest \$15 million in new annual funding to support women's shelters.

Mr. Speaker, with these repairs and reforms done, we need to address the fiscal consequences of the current drop in oil prices. This year we are projecting a \$6.1 billion deficit. As Albertans know, this is primarily the consequence of lower royalty, corporate, and other tax revenues caused by the drop in the price of oil. Last year the government of Alberta collected \$8.9 billion from resource royalties. This year we are expecting to collect \$2.8 billion, a \$6.1 billion drop in resource revenues in one year.

To make matters worse, we had a hot and dry summer. We will not leave our farmers and rural communities without support. We therefore funded an additional \$525 million beyond what was budgeted to provide \$725 million to manage drought and wildfires. This was an early warning to all of us of the direct price we'll end up paying if we and our trading partners around the world don't get our collective act together on environmental issues.

Albertans expect a prudent, careful plan to get this budget back into balance. The plan that we are presenting today will do exactly that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are those who believe that when the price of oil comes down, it's time to fire teachers and nurses. They believe that the answer to job losses in the private sector is to make things even worse for our economy by firing thousands more in communities right across this province. They would respond to the market behaviour of other major oil producers by targeting people in our communities whose calling it is to teach our children, look after the sick, and care for our elderly. Proposals for reckless cutbacks to front-line public services to balance the budget immediately are out of touch with the people of Alberta. Those are the priorities that the people of Alberta have rejected. Albertans told us during our budget consultations that they fundamentally disagree with this talk about multibillion-dollar cuts to their health care and their children's education. You don't answer an economic challenge by making it worse.

Albertans also told us that they want to see a plan to steadily phase out the deficit and they want us to stick to that plan until it's done. That is what we are going to do, Mr. Speaker. In this budget

we set out a plan to return to a balanced budget within the term of this Legislature. We are projecting a \$6.1 billion deficit in 2015-16. The deficit projection is \$5.4 billion in 2016-17. This will drop to \$4.4 billion in 2017-18, to \$2.1 billion in 2018-19, and we will balance the budget in 2019-2020.

Mr. Speaker, a number of tough decisions are required to get there. To begin, we will get Alberta's budget back into balance by getting the rate of increase in our Health budget under control. Over the past 10 years the Health budget has increased by an average of 6 per cent each and every year. We need to manage that rate of growth. In 2016-17 we plan to manage the Health budget within a 4 per cent increase and in 2017-18 within a 3 per cent increase. Thereafter, we aim to hold the Health budget to 2 per cent growth. In other words, we intend to stabilize the Health budget and then bend the curve of its growth in steps over three years.

Some will argue that these are modest goals, and they will try to persuade Albertans that we can save billions of dollars overnight by cutting the salaries of a handful of administrators. The reality is that we need to manage a far more complex challenge. We need to better manage significant annual spending pressures from the cost of compensating our province's world-class and dedicated doctors, from the rising costs of pharmaceuticals, from the rising costs of operating a very large network of hospitals and other facilities, and from the rising costs of having gotten it so tragically wrong on long-term care and mental health care, driving people into our hospitals who would be better helped in more appropriate facilities or through community services.

In the face of these issues abruptly cutting these budgets would simply cause chaos and run up costs we'd have to pay later. We need to phase in reform with a steady hand, system-wide, in a way that preserves a universal public health care system funded through a sustainable Health budget. That's what we're going to do. My colleague the Minister of Health will be working in close cooperation with all of the dedicated Albertans involved in our health system to plan and manage it more effectively and to get better health outcomes within what will remain the second-largest per capita investment in health care of any province in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, there is more we need to do to get to a balanced budget during the term of this Legislature. We need to manage the rate of growth in this budget overall with the same creative, determined approach we will bring to health care. The plan we are tabling today holds overall spending growth in government to an average of 2 per cent per year.

3:40

Finally, we'll be raising some levies, which will benefit the health and well-being of Albertans. In this budget we'll increase provincial taxes on tobacco by \$5 per carton, and we'll increase the alcohol markup by 5 per cent. These measures will contribute \$122 million to the revenue.

Mr. Speaker, this plan is based on the best private-sector estimates of commodity prices, but as every Albertan knows, oil prices are hard to predict even two months in advance. If oil prices recover more quickly, we will use the additional revenues to get to a balanced budget more quickly. If oil prices recover more slowly, then we will have to revisit all these issues in future budgets. One way or another, once the budget is in balance, we will present a debt repayment plan as part of an overall reassessment of our fiscal priorities.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has an economic shock to manage. The provincial government plays an important role as a shock absorber, but we need to ensure we don't overplay that role. On average, Canadian governments are managing debt equivalent to 30 per cent of their GDP in pursuit of their objectives. Today our government

introduced a new Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act that will set the tightest limits on borrowing anywhere in Canada. This act will limit Alberta government borrowing to 15 per cent of GDP, half the average of other provinces. That will provide enough room to allow our government to play its economic role without tipping into overdependence on debt. As I said a moment ago, debt reduction will be one of our province's fiscal priorities once we are back in balance.

Let me now outline some important first steps we will take to promote jobs and economic recovery. A Canadian provincial government does not directly create jobs in the private sector. That is the work of our entrepreneurs, visionaries, and job creators. What we can do is time our work as government to be as helpful as possible. We can be good partners. We can create the right conditions, and we can open the right doors. Throughout the summer I travelled across Alberta listening to Albertans and consulting with industry and businesses of all sizes. I met amazing, creative individuals with bright ideas who, if given the right tools and the right opportunities to connect and collaborate, will create successful new enterprises. They told me about the challenges of working with government, about limited capital availability and the lack of trade support. There is so much opportunity in Alberta, but diversification and business development has been on the back burner for too long.

We have incredible value-added petrochemical industries, agriculture and agrifood, tourism, software and technology, light and heavy manufacturing, creative industries, and small business. They are all important latent strengths of our province and should be pillars of the much more diversified, shock-resistant, and prosperous economy we need to build.

To this end, we will take the following first steps. First, we will increase access to capital for small and medium-sized businesses in every community in Alberta. We will increase the capital available to ATB Financial by \$1.5 billion, with the goal of steadily increasing capital available to loan on commercial terms but with a clear commitment to building Alberta to help our province's entrepreneurs and job creators across the province. ATB is an important institution that our province equipped itself with to build prosperity and to help handle economic challenges. It is and will remain independently and professionally governed and operated. Lending decisions will be made and administered on the basis of sound banking practice by professionals, not by politicians. We are equipping ATB Financial with more resources to renew and reinvigorate its mission, helping to support and capitalize small and medium-sized businesses in every community in this province.

Second, we'll take steps to promote greater access to venture capital. Supporting small and medium-sized businesses isn't just about making it easier for them to borrow. Entrepreneurs and job creators need access to equity capital on reasonable commercial terms to get start-ups launched, to become bankable, and to finance growth and innovation. As a first step to address this gap, the government of Alberta is today announcing that we will invest \$50 million over the next two years into the Alberta Enterprise Corporation. This will help support the development of a vibrant venture capital market as well as innovation and entrepreneurship across our province.

Mr. Speaker, our heritage fund is unique and special to Albertans. It was created to support future generations and to invest in our future. While continuing the mandate of the fund to maximize returns for future generations of Albertans, we are announcing today that we have mandated the Alberta Investment Management Corporation to focus a prudent but significant portion of our province's heritage fund to directly invest in Alberta's growth.

Three per cent of the heritage fund, \$540 million, will be targeted to growth-oriented companies in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, these measures, mobilizing almost \$2.1 billion through ATB, AEC, and AIMCo to support job creation and diversification in this province, are important steps to help make Alberta Canada's best place to launch and grow a business. Professionals with expertise in business development and investment, not politicians, will make decisions in the best interest of Albertans, with a focus on growth, diversification, and jobs. By taking these steps, we can be Canada's best jurisdiction for entrepreneurs, job creators, innovators, and new ideas in every part of the economy.

With our world-class universities, manufacturing base, smart, young population, and an obvious need to diversity our economy, we have what it takes. With access to a little more capital there are remarkable opportunities for growth and diversification right across this province. There are opportunities in the towers in Calgary and Edmonton and in our great universities and colleges and in mid-size and rural communities, north and south, and among the rising generation of bright, eager, and entrepreneurial young aboriginal people on and off reserve right across Alberta. If you are a young person or just a plain energetic person with good ideas, you want to be in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, as we committed to do in the spring election campaign, we will invest \$178 million to introduce a new job creation incentive, that will reward eligible job creators with grants of up to \$5,000 for each new job created. This is a measure specifically designed to encourage job creators to lean on the side of hiring when planning their businesses during the current downturn. This grant will be available to eligible Alberta employers, nonprofits, and charities. It will support up to 27,000 new jobs each year through 2017.

3:50

Next, acting on the advice of former Bank of Canada governor David Dodge, we will accelerate the province of Alberta's capital construction plan. Overall, we will increase investment in capital spending by 15 per cent compared to the previous plan, an additional \$4.5 billion in new investments over five years. We will increase capital investment by \$500 million in the current fiscal year, by \$1.3 billion in 2016-17, by \$1.7 billion in 2017-18, by \$600 million in 2018-19, and \$400 million in 2019-20. Over the next three years this supplementary capital spending will increase employment by 8,000 to 10,000 jobs and real GDP by about .5 per cent.

Our capital plan provides for construction of a new cancer hospital in Calgary, a flood control solution in Calgary, significant improvements to health facilities in Edmonton, significant improvements to public transit in both Calgary and Edmonton, expansion of Red Deer's obstetric facilities, replacing the High River government building damaged by the 2013 flood, expanding the Lethbridge College trades and technology renewal and innovation project, and a major increase in water and roads projects in communities across Alberta, detailed in Alberta's new capital plan.

Mr. Speaker, earlier this fall my colleague the Minister of Education was obliged to report to the public that half of the schools slated to open across Alberta would miss their announced completion dates because of poor planning and rushed announcements by the previous government. That is a serious mistake that we are not going to repeat. We will therefore carefully review proposals and plans for additional infrastructure projects on the basis of more transparent and accountable criteria before we issue any press releases. We will have a number of important additional announcements to make in the coming months addressing roads and transit,

water projects, long-term care facilities, educational institutions, and a number of other priority areas when plans for these investments are ready.

Last week the Premier announced the creation of the new Alberta Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, to focus our business and trade support programs and services. Always with the goal of being a better partner for entrepreneurs and job creators, we have reorganized several departments to create this one-stop shop for all job creation and promotion work in the government of Alberta. Services that were scattered among four departments have been put under the leadership of this new department, with the aim to be a world-class economic development agency: lean, smart, user-friendly, and fast.

The Minister of Economic Development and Trade will focus on enhancing Alberta's trade development and promotion in markets all around the world. As a trading province we need to aggressively build and diversify our markets. Through this department we will reinforce and build our network of trade missions, and we will enhance our promotion and marketing efforts to help Albertan exporters expand their markets overseas, with a particular emphasis on the Asia Pacific. Next we will partner with economic development agencies, business improvement zones, revitalization districts, and local associations to enhance opportunities for businesses throughout Alberta. We will invest \$10 million in community economic development initiatives to support local economic development associations and help them make their full contribution to job creation and economic renewal in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we will make some important strategic decisions about the foundation of our economy, our energy industry. Our government will soon present a set of reforms to Alberta's energy royalty structure. We are pursuing three aims in this review.

First, this package of reforms will modernize and update our royalty regime to stay up to date with the developments in the industry and to provide the necessary certainty about our royalty system for investors and all Albertans until it is next appropriate to review it.

Second, we are considering whether the royalty system can be rebalanced to encourage and reward value-added processing and diversification.

Third, Alberta's royalty system will provide that as prices for our energy resources recover, the people of Alberta will share appropriately in better times.

Last but far from least, Mr. Speaker, we are going to work to recover our good name among our key energy markets by doing our part to address climate change. Our government will soon present a set of reforms to Alberta's environmental policies. Getting control of pollution is good for the health of every Albertan. Reducing carbon emissions is the right thing to do as our contribution to one of the world's biggest problems. Systematically modernizing our electricity supply to phase out coal will create a significant opportunity for new investment. Promoting energy efficiency will pay off in lower costs and greater competitiveness in our energy sector and throughout our economy. Promoting the use of renewable energy will diversify our supply and cut down on our carbon emissions, and acting on these issues will restore our international reputation, the necessary prerequisite to getting access to more markets for our energy products.

Getting our environmental policies right will create jobs and promote economic efficiency, competitiveness, and growth, which, as you can see, Mr. Speaker, is what this government will be working on, on many fronts.

Mr. Speaker, with this budget we are achieving three important things. First, we are getting it right on health care, education, and human services. Stabilizing public services by providing long-term,

sustainable, and predictable funding is what Albertans asked of us and what we will deliver to them. To do this, we are repairing some serious mistakes and misjudgments in our province's tax system and in its investments in key public services. Second, we are setting out a balanced-budget plan. Our plan balances our budget in a reasonable time frame without radical cuts or front-line service layoffs. Third, we are getting to work on a plan to diversify our economy and to create jobs.

We have set out some important steps to ensure the government of Alberta is a good partner in our province with our province's entrepreneurs and job creators, the keys to diversifying our economy, and we have given the Legislature notice that our government will shortly be tabling the results of its royalty and climate change reviews, further adding to the building blocks of a modern, diversified, energy-efficient, and growing Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, with this budget we will support jobs and we will support families the Alberta way.

The Speaker: The House leader for Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll move that we adjourn for the day.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Managing Editor
Alberta Hansard
3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St.
EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7
Telephone: 780.427.1875