



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 2, 2015

Day 13

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

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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.

Monday, November 2, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us reflect. As we begin this week's deliberations, let us commit ourselves with renewed resolve to work together with determination but also with compassion and understanding as we carry out our duties to serve Albertans and those who visit us in this great province that we proudly call home.

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark. I would invite all to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my absolute pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly students and teachers from the Two Hills Mennonite school, a total of 53 students and including six parents and teachers. These students are the reason that I have stood up in this House on several occasions to bring to your attention issues regarding their new school. Their parents are frustrated, and these are some of the faces of the Two Hills students, who badly need a solution that works best for their community. May I ask the students and their chaperones to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my absolute honour today to rise before you for the first time in this House to introduce to you and through you 65 members from Edmonton-Castle Downs school, Dunluce elementary. They are here today with their teachers, Mrs. Hines, Mr. Kostiuk, and Mr. Thorne; and their parent volunteers, Mr. Yamac, Mrs. Menard, Mrs. Abdille, Ms Thomas, Mrs. Anderson, and Mr. Lee. I would ask that you rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Are there any other school groups for acknowledgement today?

To the students – and I don't say this often enough on behalf of this House – it's particularly pleasing when students and young people come here. You are very important.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Ms Judy Carter and Ms Margaret Hodgson. Judy Carter is a family friend from my childhood. We both grew up in a small town in northwestern Alberta, in Valleyview. She spent her career teaching in postsecondary programs at Grant MacEwan University and NorQuest College, including English as a second language and English in the workplace. She also taught adult literacy to Canadian-born students and newcomers, and before retiring, Judy's last teaching assignment at NorQuest College was teaching in the language instruction for newcomers to Canada program.

Margaret Hodgson is currently semiretired. She worked for many years as an adult educator in English as a second language at NorQuest College, and she now does occasional work as an examiner at both Grant MacEwan University and NorQuest College. In the 1980s Margaret and her class from Grant MacEwan were guests of the Premier's father, Grant Notley.

I'm pleased that Judy and Margaret were able to join us here today. They're both seated in the members' gallery, and this afternoon I'd ask that you give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a large contingency of forestry stakeholders. Today we have 24 mayors and Reeves from various towns, counties, and municipal districts that have forestry as a major industry that supports the livelihood of thousands of Albertans and their respective local economies. With them are 17 board members and officials of the Alberta Forest Products Association, an industry that's been providing jobs to thousands of our citizens. Alberta's forest sector represents a great story for our province. The industry is a major contributor to the economy, provides excellent opportunities, a sustainable steward of our forests, and a great place to build a career. I would ask them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly six special guests today. As you may know, November is Family Violence Prevention Month in Alberta, and I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge a group of Albertans who have helped individual families and others get the help they need so they can live their lives feeling safe and supported in their communities.

First, Dr. Allen Benson. Dr. Benson is chair of the Alberta Family Violence Death Review Committee and chief executive officer of Native Counselling Services. Dr. Benson has led many groundbreaking programs for Alberta's aboriginal people. Dr. Benson is joined by his wife, Dr. Patti Laboucane-Benson, who also works for Native Counselling Services of Alberta as their director of research, training, and communication.

Also with us are Pat Garrett, the executive director of Wings of Providence, a second-stage women's shelter dedicated to supporting women and children impacted by family violence; Deborah Miller, who established a family law office to help low-income Albertans who experience family law problems, including family violence; and Jackie Foord, CEO of YWCA Edmonton, whose agency offers programs and services that support girls and women and their families in the Edmonton area.

I would like to finish by introducing a very special guest. Gerry Kilgannon, mother of Bill Moore-Kilgannon, my chief of staff, is one of Alberta's early family violence prevention pioneers. Ms Kilgannon started the office for the prevention of family violence well over 30 years ago.

Your presence here today is a reminder to all Albertans that everyone can do something to prevent family violence at any time or in any place. It's my honour to ask my distinguished guests to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure today to introduce to you two close friends of ours that are visiting us from Hollywood beach, Florida. First is Sergeant First Class U.S. Army (Retired) Jim Mahon and his wife, Rosemary Chelick-Mahon, formerly of Fairview. She grew up with my husband, and for more years than I can count now they've been close family friends. We're enjoying them visiting here this week. I'm happy to have them attend my first day back in session. If they would please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House visitors from the Edmonton Down Syndrome Society. Today, November 2, marks the beginning of Down Syndrome Awareness Week across Canada, and our guests are very active in advocating for and motivating members of this community as well as raising awareness of the important contributions that people with Down syndrome make in all of our communities.

I'm pleased to introduce Tanya Ponich and her mother, Rosalind Mosychuk, who also happen to be constituents of mine in Edmonton-Glenora, as well as Adam Faulkner, Gail Faulkner, Matthew Smith, Brandon Smith, Alana Gersky, Diane Gersky, and Marie Nichols. To use Tanya's words: "Use your gifts. Take a risk and create a life that is happy and healthy. By doing so, you and your family and your friends, our community, will become well." What a wonderful message. I now ask that our guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly three individuals that are part of the Rotary youth exchange program. Melissa Gosewinkel is from Minden, Germany. She is 16 and is spending this year in Westlock as the current in-bound Rotary youth exchange student with the Westlock Rotary Club. She is here with no preconceived ideas of Canada and wants to learn the geography, history, and culture of our country first-hand. She is very enthusiastic about all this, has already learned our national anthem, will be experiencing many new ideas and challenges for her, including ice-skating. During her year here she will spend time with host families and has already experienced farm life and riding along in a combine during harvest.

Kathryn Anderson from Rochester, Alberta, is the returning Westlock Rotary Club out-bound exchange student. Kathryn spent time in Curitiba, Brazil, and has learned how to speak Portuguese through this program. She is a grade 12 student at R.F. Staples high school in Westlock.

Les Dunford has been a member of the Westlock Rotary Club for 30 years and is involved in various aspects of the club. He's a lifelong member of the community. Les lives on a family farm near Dapp, near where I live. Les still does a little farming with cattle and has been a writer/photographer with the town and country section of four local newspapers for the past 25 years.

I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome, particularly the international guests from both the United States and Europe who are with us.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three women who are also here to celebrate National Down Syndrome Awareness Week. Cheri Lefebvre is the older, perhaps wiser sister of my good friend Jules. She's an accomplished Special Olympian, having competed on the national stage. She's worked in a variety of capacities in a variety of St. Albert businesses for years. Krysten Pysyk is without a doubt one of the most determined, strong-willed, and supportive women I've ever met. They are both here supported by their staff from the Lo-Se-Ca Foundation in St. Albert, Jasmine Baker. If they're not already standing, I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the other members of the Assembly a wonderful group from the St. Michael's Health Group. St. Michael's Health Group is a health care organization that provides long-term care, supportive housing, and numerous programs and services for the seniors of our community. I have visited St. Michael's Long Term Care Centre as well as the Millennium Pavilion Seniors' Lodge, and I'm proud of the work that they are doing in my riding of Edmonton-Decore. Today I am pleased to introduce Stan Fisher, president and CEO; Kay Willekes, director; Geraldine Journeau, controller; and Charmon Balcom, executive assistant. I would like to ask them to rise, please, of course, and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A busy day today in the Assembly. I'll be brief. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Elena Ryland. Elena is a second-year law student at the University of Alberta, and I wonder if one day she'll be joining us here in a seat on the floor of the Chamber as opposed to up there in the gallery. I'd ask that Elena please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome, one and all.

Members' Statements

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

Suicide and Mental Health

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk about an issue that affects all of us as Albertans but too often is unheard. If the House would indulge me, I'll tell them a little bit of a story, a

story about someone I knew and I wish I had known better, a story about Evan Tran, a student who was well known on the University of Alberta campus, known for his ear-to-ear grin, involved in numerous student groups, and known as a jokester who was always bubbly and happy, helping others whenever they needed it. A week and a half ago I attended a memorial service to commemorate his life. On Tuesday, October 13, Evan took his own life after having struggled with mental health issues since the age of 15. He was only 21 years old.

Mr. Speaker, mental health isn't an issue that only exists in postsecondary institutions, but it is there that it is painfully prevalent. That is why I am proud to support a government which is leading a mental health review, a government which understands the importance of quality mental health services.

Evan was described as someone who put his heart into making things better for other people and was a real giver, and Albertans can learn from him. Albertans deserve better. Albertans deserve a mental health initiative that leaves no one behind. Evan would want us to learn from his tragedy. Whether it's through student or peer support services or providing easy access to counsellors when it's needed, we need to be able to reach out to students and Albertans in a proactive way to bring services to them. We need to build on the work already being done on our campuses and recognize the importance of the work our mental health professionals do every day.

Mr. Speaker, I know Evan would have wanted us to celebrate his life. He would have wanted us to celebrate his life by achieving more, and I'm proud that our government is doing just that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, this last week we were back into the new routine, and I deliberately made the decision to allow preambles to continue, but in our shared desire of the floor, to get as many questions as possible, I want to remind you that there are no preambles to supplemental questions after the first five sets of questions. I wish to inform you with some authority based on previous precedents, I will be more diligent in rising should members have preambles on their first and second supplementaries.

I would recognize Her Majesty's Official Opposition leader.

1:50

Job Creation

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, today the government told everybody it would be releasing some more details on their \$5,000 job subsidy program. What we got were precious few details and promises of more information to come. We know that business groups and economists have serious reservations about the program. They smell a boondoggle in the making. Can the Premier tell Albertans how this program will actually create new jobs and that it won't just waste another \$200 million of taxpayers' money?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said a number of times before, our government believes in supporting Alberta's entrepreneurs, visionaries, and job creators to ensure the right conditions for growth, and this is one of the pieces in that platform that's designed to encourage job growth in the face of an economic downturn. This is a plan that, as I've said before, is modelled a little bit on a plan that the member opposite voted for previously. We know that in the past he's been in favour of supporting government-funded job creation plans, and apparently

it's just a question of who proposes it in order to determine whether he'll support it that time.

Mr. Jean: You cannot compare a program for registered apprentices that is linked to accredited training with this potential boondoggle that you're proposing.

Mr. Speaker, there are still so many questions about this program. In question period last week we heard some disturbing things. Some of these subsidies are going to go to part-time jobs. There are so many details we don't know yet. To the Premier: will this program apply to jobs for temporary foreign workers? Will it apply to companies that contract with the government?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I believe the Minister of Advanced Education and Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour clarified last week, this program will be rolled out in a way to ensure that double-dipping is not allowed because we want to be able to spread out the many, many programs that we're putting into place to create jobs and encourage job creation in Alberta. This is a plan that we hope will create up to 27,000 jobs for Albertans. We are taking this problem seriously as opposed to talking about cutting and slashing the jobs that already exist.

Mr. Jean: So apparently temporary foreign workers are eligible.

Mr. Speaker, there are just so many questions about this program. So far we haven't had any real answers. We know business groups are suspicious. We know that the expert the Premier hired to advise her on this budget doesn't think it will be feasible.

Let me give the Premier another potential problem. Will this program only apply to existing companies, or can companies create spinoffs and then move jobs to rake in half a million dollars in subsidies?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the member says that the minister hasn't provided details, but it appears as though he hasn't actually listened to the details that the minister has provided, because what we've talked about already is a program that would ensure that that kind of thing doesn't happen. You know, I'll tell you this as well. Albertans are concerned about their jobs. They're concerned about the economy. That's why over 70 per cent of Albertans polled about our budget are in favour of this plan.

The Speaker: Second major question.

Mr. Jean: The jobs minister held a press conference on the \$5,000 jobs subsidy program but did not provide any specifics, and I quote your minister: further details on the program, application requirements, and procedures will be made available at a later date. Jobs are being lost right now in Alberta. It's absurd that the government is spending time and resources on photo ops for a program that won't be available until far after the next budget that you bring forward. Can the Premier tell Albertans: when exactly will this program start? Will any part of this program begin in this fiscal year?

Ms Notley: Again, Mr. Speaker, I really wish that the member opposite would listen to the details that have been rolled out so far. He'd probably be able to use his question period a bit more effectively. What we've talked about is comparing the 2015 EI and tax returns with the 2016 EI and tax returns. So what will happen is that the grant will be rolled out. After the fact there will be a rebate that's delivered at the end of next year and for jobs that are created

beginning on January 1, 2016. It's been fairly clearly laid out, and I'm not quite sure why it is that member opposite hasn't . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, it looks like the only extra employment this program will generate for quite a while is when media photographers show up to take pictures of the government's announcements about the program itself.

When you look at all the unanswered questions – and there are many – and all the opportunities for waste and fraud and abuse, frankly, it's scary. Can the Premier assure Albertans that the only good jobs this program will create won't be new bureaucratic jobs needed to police the program?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, just to be clear, I think those media photographers already have jobs. They're photographers. I would suggest that maybe a job they might want to consider creating is researcher or somebody that listens to the press conferences that the minister is delivering, where she gives the details of the plan over and over and over again. That being said, our government is committed to doing a number of different things to create jobs, to incent jobs, to work with our partners in the business community to kick-start this economy, to be the shock absorbers when the economy slows down, unlike the plan that those folks have over there to simply . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: I would agree. Albertans are shocked by your budget.

Speaking of jobs and bad policy, we have been warning about this government's plan to radically raise the minimum wage. We have been told that the government contractors who employ low-wage workers are raising their price because of the minimum wage increases. We hear that the government is actually renegotiating some of these contracts to reduce work requirements and, thus, staff levels. Can the Premier assure us that no Albertans will lose their job because of radical minimum wage increases?

Ms Notley: Well, again, going back to my previous comment about maybe creating some more research jobs, I suggest that the member opposite provide a little bit of paper and perhaps some evidence for the rumours he's hearing because none of that makes any sense, so it's very difficult to even answer the question. To be clear, the issue is very clear that when you raise the amount of money in the pockets of the lowest income people in the society, generally speaking, that creates more jobs, and we know that that's what the evidence will show over time.

The Speaker: Third major question.

Provincial Budget

Mr. Jean: This NDP government seems oblivious to what is happening in Alberta's private sector. Last week we heard about Devon Energy and 200 layoffs; Husky energy and 1,400 jobs lost; Cenovus, 700 more jobs lost on top of the 800 lost earlier this year, and on and on it goes. Bloomberg describes it as: "Money is flooding out of Canada at the fastest pace in the developed world." To the Premier: what, if anything, is her government doing to give any hope at all to our energy industry and to our energy workers?

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, the member opposite is correct in that with the massive drop in the price of oil, over which this government has no control, the energy industry is

suffering and people are losing jobs, and families and communities are suffering as a result as well. We are very, very aware of that. That is why we have come up with a multipronged plan to create jobs and to incent economic activity. Whether it's venture capital, whether it's freeing up access to capital for small- and medium-enterprise businesses, whether it's for a job-creation program, whether it's through our capital plan we are trying on many fronts to deal with this . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Jean: All over Alberta companies and families are making hard decisions, and this is the third-highest revenue year for this government in our history. Across boardroom tables senior managers are trying to adjust to the economic conditions and minimize the impact of layoffs. Across kitchen tables Alberta families are working hard to make do, maybe keep a vehicle a little longer or choose a stay-cation instead of a vacation. Everywhere Albertans are trying to adjust, but so far we've seen no adjustments whatsoever from this government. Can the Premier point to any tangible efforts to economize on the part of her government?

2:00

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we outlined in our budget, what we plan to do is to carefully and cautiously engage in restraint across a number of government departments throughout the province. For instance, many ministries received no funding increase in this year. With Health we've reduced, slowly, the rate at which they can increase their budget, carefully because we don't want to create chaos but at the same time slowly reducing how much they can increase and getting to 2 per cent. So we are carefully reducing expenditures because, at the same time, we don't want to add to chaos with chaos.

Mr. Jean: This NDP government talks about fairness, but in reality they do play favourites. While private-sector workers across Alberta are taking pay cuts or having their work hours reduced or being laid off, times have never been better for public-sector managers. One of this government's first actions was to lift the wage freeze for managers and non-union workers. They got back a 2.25 per cent pay increase, and next year they get another raise. To the Premier: how does she justify this to a private-sector worker who is actually hurting so badly today in Alberta?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to wage freezes, it was this government that introduced a budget wherein we talked about taking to the Members' Services Committee a proposal to freeze MLA salaries, and this Official Opposition raised a point of privilege over it because they didn't want us to do it. You know, they've got to pick a side and stick on it for just – I don't know – half a day. Half a day.

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

Job Creation (continued)

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the labour minister this morning reannounced her below-the-poverty-line job grant. On Thursday the Premier had to admit that a \$3,300 grant translates to a \$33,000-a-year job, which is below the poverty line. The jobs minister now wants to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour and cut off entry-level jobs where Albertans can get the jobs, skills, training, and labour to qualify for a higher paying job. To the labour minister:

what programs are you planning to actually help Albertans get good jobs so that they can support themselves and their families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our job creation incentive grant is there to support business, to support the nonprofit sector, the charitable sector. These are the job creators in Alberta that we're working with to create jobs for Albertans. We're very proud to do that with them.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, in Alberta people start paying taxes at around \$50,000 a year. That means that jobs over that contribute to the provincial coffers more than jobs under and create a good living for Alberta families, yet this minister wants to create \$33,000-a-year jobs, which are below the poverty line. Please. To the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: for Albertans that have lost good jobs in the energy sector due to your government's policies, what can you do to help them stay in Alberta? What are your plans, actually, to help those workers get jobs so that they can continue to support their families in their homes like they have been?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We are investing \$178 million into this program. We are supporting employers to create jobs, and they are determining what salaries there are. We're not saying how much to do. It's up to the creativity of the marketplace. So we're very happy to support them. They can have jobs that are high end if they like. It's really up to the employers.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the jobs minister doesn't know her own programs. She's making it up as she goes along, and it doesn't look good.

Before May 5 the towers in Calgary and Edmonton were a lot fuller, before you were laughing at the job losses, folks. Before then, through down cycles and up cycles, they knew there was a government that would support the energy industry, and they stuck around knowing that support was there. Since this government has come in, they've gone to war with the industry, talking about royalty reviews, corporate tax increases, regulatory changes. When will this minister actually start to reverse those policies and do things that will bring jobs and economic development into this province instead of driving it out?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Of course, the energy industry is at the heart of Alberta's economy, and we care very much about the energy industry. We've created a whole ministry, Economic Development and Trade, because we want to make it easier for business to work with us as a government, a one-stop shop. We're committed. Our job creation plan is another initiative. Other things we're doing. We're very committed to supporting business in this province.

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

Gas Station Leak Site Remediation

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of the members may be aware that the Gas Plus spill occurred in my constituency. About

7,000 litres leaked into the ground. The spill occurred in 2010, five years ago. This is affecting families and businesses in my constituency. Given that the previous government did very little to address this, to the minister of environment: what steps are you taking to ensure that this is being cleaned up in a prompt manner?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question. You know, this has gone on for way too long, and that's why there has been a significant amount of money expended already by Environment and Parks to mitigate this site. We began injections of oxidizing chemicals on the week of October 12. Of course, I've also directed the ministry to have a look through the legislation to ensure that we can at least prevent future Gas Plus incidents. We have contaminated sites across the province, and it's time to get serious on polluter pay.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: given that spills such as these greatly affect Alberta's businesses and Albertan families, what is the government doing to ensure that spills of this nature will be dealt with quickly in the future?

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, unlike the previous government, our government is committed to polluter pay and working to strengthen our government's ability to enforce those laws, which is why I've directed our department to review legislation and regulations and come back with a suite of options to regulate contaminated sites, bring us options with some teeth.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there is some belief that the previous government did not act quickly enough in their response to the spill in Bowness, again to the minister: what sorts of changes with regard to early warnings or incident analysis is the government undertaking?

Ms Phillips: Thank you to the member for the question. As I mentioned, I directed our department to review legislation and regulations. We are going to ensure that we are enacting the polluter-pay principle, that we are working with the city of Calgary and other municipalities across the province, Mr. Speaker, who are left with these legacy contaminated sites. We're going to make sure that we put the right pieces in place to ensure that municipalities and communities and homeowners don't have to live with these going forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Forest Industry Issues

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's forest industry is key to economic growth and diversification in this province. Many families in my constituency rely heavily on the forestry sector for the good jobs it provides and to support their families. Many of these folks would tell you that the mountain pine beetle is one of the biggest issues concerning Alberta's forestry sector. My question to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry is: what is your department doing to combat this serious problem?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

2:10

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Mountain pine beetle remains a very serious threat

to the health of Alberta forests. Infestations threaten social, economic, and environmental values. This year our department is investing \$35 million to combat mountain pine beetle. Through single tree removals of pine infested with beetles and industry harvests of susceptible stands, Alberta is making gains against a serious threat in co-operation with the forestry industry.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Minister, for the answer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the mountain pine beetle can produce so much damage to Alberta's forests, my question to the same minister: what are you doing to protect jobs and support growth in our logging industry?

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, forestry is a critical sector of our economy. Over 15,000 hard-working Albertans work in forestry, and the industry is a key economic driver in at least 70 Alberta communities, including Whitecourt in my own constituency. As we move to diversify our economy, this sustainable industry, based on a renewable resource, becomes even more important. Our government is committed to working closely with industry to improve efficiencies and to support innovation. We are working to expand markets for Alberta's wood products, particularly in Asia. I'm proud to be a champion for Alberta forestry products, and I'm going to work hard every day to support this industry and the hard-working families that depend on it.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Minister, for your answer.

Mr. Speaker, given that Alberta's forests are one of the best renewable resources and given that Albertans want us to move away from reliance on a single resource, to the same minister: what is your department doing to ensure the sustainability of this resource for generations to come?

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, the high amount of value-added processing activity in Alberta's forestry sector is a success story that we need to maintain and support. When done right, forestry is one of the most sustainable industries in our province. We will continue to ensure a thoughtful and sustainable approach to forest management that balances the economic, social, and environmental needs of Albertans.

The Speaker: As I speak to the balance of the questions, I was trying to sort out if there was a preamble in your second supplemental. I'm sure there wasn't. I'm sure I'll hear no more of that in the future.

Resource Revenue Projections

Mr. Fildebrandt: Let's try something a little more difficult, Mr. Speaker. Oil prices are a critical number in crafting Alberta budgets, but this government's numbers are a little bit fuzzy. There are two different sets of numbers presented for the price of oil in the budget, one that is estimated, on page 70, and the other, which is the government's assumptions, on page 52. Will the Minister of Finance tell us which set of numbers he is using for revenue?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The numbers we're using for revenue are WTI. They are \$50 for this fiscal year, \$61 for the next, and \$68 for the next.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, let's try again, Mr. Speaker. Given that in previous years there was a number to the penny that showed a weighted average between the department's calendar estimates and the fiscal year – let's look at page 70 of the budget – it appears that

they just switched from the lower government estimate for this year to higher numbers for years 2 and 3. Is this a typo, a printing error, or is the minister inflating his numbers?

Mr. Ceci: I think I've just told this House what those numbers are. I'll stick with those.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, the number is different between the two pages.

Given that every \$3 swing in the price of oil means a half a billion dollars shift in revenues, this discrepancy means the better part of a billion dollars. This is the equivalent of misplacing the entire Department of Seniors. These are serious issues that have serious consequences, that deserve a serious answer from the minister. Will the minister commit to coming back to the Assembly and showing us his math?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, preparing the budget took months and months and months. We were serious throughout. I commit to producing Budget 2016 with the same rigour. Thank you very much.

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

Tobacco Use Reduction Strategy

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was an honour to help launch Alberta's new tobacco reduction strategy just under a couple of years ago, and it was hailed at that time as a leading approach to reducing smoking and preventing tobacco use in the first place. The path towards a tobacco-free future has also been laid out in previous private members' bills such as the Smoke-free Places Act and government bills such as the Tobacco Reduction Act. Meanwhile, the NDP's Budget 2015 is hiking taxes for tobacco for the second time in a year. To the Minister of Health: what specific plans does the minister have to ensure that tobacco taxes are channelled towards tobacco prevention and cessation programs?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker, and to the hon. member for asking it. Definitely, we have a number of different people in the department who are working on initiatives around wellness, and one of them, of course, is around reducing tobacco consumption. That's one of the reasons why they're using evidence to help drive recommendations, that they bring forward to me, like removing menthol products from the marketplace. It's really clear that of students and minors who are smoking, a large number were smoking menthol products, and that's one of the reasons why we've removed that product from the market.

Mr. Rodney: Again to the Minister of Health. I know Albertans are looking for more specifics than just that. Hopefully, they are still forthcoming.

She did mention wellness, and I really appreciate that. Given that the path to wellness has already been laid out in North America's first robust wellness strategy and given that Alberta enjoys a rich history of leading the way with wellness programs for Alberta students and those in the workplace and our seniors, can the minister please tell us: what specific wellness programs will the minister invest in, utilizing the tax increases, that is, for both tobacco and alcohol?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are absolutely committed to making sure that we have a sustainable health care system. That includes having access to cessation supports like calling 811 and being able to talk to somebody around how you

can access different supports in your own community. That's obviously a really valued investment, and I find a relation because members opposite proposed cutting significantly from the budget . . .

An Hon. Member: Chaos.

Ms Hoffman: . . . and did want to pursue a situation that would result in a great deal of chaos. We're committed to providing stability, and this revenue will help us do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Rodney: Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear any specific wellness programs she'll invest in.

Let's try this for the final question to the Health minister. Given that the ministry is charged with an obligation to help create a healthy environment for Albertans and given the proliferation of e-cigarettes and related products, which are both condemned as public health risks and praised as smoking cessation aids, and given that Albertans, you know, could become subject to a patchwork of e-cigarette legislation, can the minister please tell us: what specific products, locations, and strategies is the minister proposing regarding the restriction of the use of e-cigarettes and products in Alberta?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With regard to the specific line item on wellness and how that'll be used in the upcoming budget, I'd be happy to discuss that and will discuss it with the hon. member when we debate the budget estimates in the coming weeks. In terms specifically of e-cigarettes I'd be really happy to hear recommendations from the hon. member and any members of this House on ways that we can ensure safety and well-being for all Albertans, including youth.

Thank you.

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

Job Creation (continued)

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While Albertans in the private sector are losing tens of thousands of jobs, life in the bureaucracy has never been better: secure employment, comfortable pensions, and fresh off an 8 per cent, three-year pay raise. The spending tap is wide open. The fact is that Alberta has the most expensive bureaucracy in Canada. This is a slap in the face to all hard-working Albertans when bureaucrats and managers get extra perks. To the jobs minister: is that fair to all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. This government is absolutely committed to working with job creators in Alberta, to supporting vulnerable workers' getting a fair wage. We're absolutely committed to making sure that everyone in Alberta is doing well.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

2:20

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that NDP policies are putting jobs at risk. Given that across the province business owners are struggling to hold their heads above water and that bad policies like a dramatic minimum-wage hike, higher taxes, and more red tape are literally handcuffing our job creators and given

that the NDP solution is record debt and higher spending to maintain the most bloated bureaucracy in Canada, Minister, why do you insist on continuing to tax and hurt jobs in the private sector while expanding the size of government?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In our campaign, that we were elected on, we said that we were going to increase the minimum wage, and we increased it moderately. We listened to businesses, and they told us to go gradually, so we've increased it by just under 10 per cent. We know that when we put more money with low-income Albertans, they spend it in the local economy, which, again, stimulates and helps businesses. So we're going ahead with our promises, and we're fulfilling them.

Mr. Hunter: Ten per cent might be palatable, but 50 per cent is going to kill businesses.

Given that Albertans in the real world are facing wage cuts and job losses and are waking up wondering if they're going to be the next person to receive a pink slip, Minister, will you commit to the Wildrose suggestion to begin thinning out the ranks of upper government managers through retirement and attrition so that we can protect jobs and keep money in the pockets of hard-working Albertans?

Ms Sigurdson: Well, as I said earlier, we're happy to work with business, to support the nonprofit sector and the charitable sector with this job creation incentive grant. This is putting \$178 million into the hands of businesses to support them, to create good jobs for Albertans. We're happy to do this, and we're excited to work with business.

The Speaker: I must tell the House that I am being challenged to clarify when preambles exist and when they don't.

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

Public Service Senior Appointments

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans sent a message loud and clear in the last election. They want a government that ends special favours for friends and plays by the rules, but since the election we've seen the NDP fall into the same old bad habits. There's no better example than the appointment of a notorious B.C. NDP staffer and strategist to be in charge of policy co-ordination for the entire nonpartisan civil service. How can the premier justify using these same bad habits barely six months into her first term?

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to say from the outset that I take exception to the torque that the opposition is applying to a very talented and skilled individual. "Notorious" is a very unfair characterization. I think the hon. member should withdraw it. Having said that, the person he's referring to is highly qualified, originally from Alberta, and served with the NDP caucus staff back when we formed the Official Opposition. So he's no stranger to Alberta, and he's highly qualified.

Mr. Nixon: Recently we saw another former NDP communications strategist and senior manager for the AUPE get appointed to head the supposedly nonpartisan Public Affairs Bureau . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think I heard a preamble in that first supplemental. Could you reframe your question?

Mr. Nixon: Well, given that it's just another sad step in the history of the government's communications branch and given that it's become nothing more than a partisan political wing of the Premier's office, can the Premier explain to Albertans if there was even a

competitive job posting, or was this just another purely partisan patronage post?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, in fact, I think the first thing that is important for Albertans to know is that in this budget the Public Affairs Bureau has shrunk significantly in size. The second thing to know is that the person that is leading it now is someone that comes with many, many years of experience working with and around the public sector and somebody with a proven track record of communications: communication skills and corporate communications. Presumably, the idea is to hire people that are good at the job, and that's what we did.

Mr. Nixon: So no competitive posting. Thank you.

Given that I would have liked to believe that the NDP government could have made changes to make their hiring process more open and accountable and given that after 44 years of this previous government you'd think they would change it, why is it that all across this government they are just plopping NDP activists, many from out of province, into supposedly nonpartisan positions . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry. Hon. member, could you reframe the question? What was your question?

Mr. Nixon: Why are you doing it?

Mr. Mason: Well, I did wonder if there was a question there, Mr. Speaker, so I want to thank you very much for prompting it. It's preambles you're not supposed to do, not questions.

Mr. Speaker, this government is choosing competent professionals to fill senior political positions and nonpolitical positions alike, and we're going to continue to do just that.

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

Drug Treatment for Retinal Conditions

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the Health minister announced the retina antivasular endothelial growth factor program for intraocular disease, mercifully shortened to RAPID, for the expanded use of bevacizumab in the treatment of a number of retinal conditions, including wet macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy. While seeking lower cost drug alternatives is a noble objective, there's a problem. Bevacizumab is not approved for intraocular use and carries a Health Canada warning for a higher incidence of infection. To the Health minister: why are you promoting the off-label use of an unapproved drug on Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The drug that we have approved will have no copay. It will make costs much more affordable for the patients as well as for the government, and the member opposite knows that. It's been used for many years by the retinal specialists, who propose that we continue to use it and actually provide coverage for it rather than paying \$1,500 a dose, as we were previously. This one is available, and the government will pick up the cost for less than \$50, and that's good economic sense. In terms of the safety: it is absolutely safe; the retinal specialists say that it's safe. In terms of off-label: it's because the pharmaceutical companies need to apply to put it on the label.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, given that I trust these specialists as well because I've received treatment for bilateral retinal detachments at

the very same office that the Health minister made her announcement and given that I don't trust this government to interfere with the doctor-patient relationship by mandating an 80-20 prescription ratio of unapproved bevacizumab to approved ranibizumab, Minister, why is the government telling retinal specialists what to prescribe?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, we're not. Retinal specialists have the ability to prescribe either. They're required to present the options to their patients. The retinal specialists themselves told us that they believe this is the best ratio to ensure that they have a good sample and that they continue to move forward in maximizing savings and providing safe patient care.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, despite the minister's protestations, off-label drug use is a very big deal. Given that veterinary practitioners make every attempt to avoid off-label drug use in production animals to maintain food quality assurance and in pets to assure patient safety, Minister, if off-label drug use isn't good enough for the pets we keep or the animals we eat, why is it good enough for Albertans?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we are considering case-by-case situations. As the member opposite knows, the way Health Canada regulates what's on label and off label is that the actual drug manufacturers need to apply to have something put on the label. Is it in their best interest economically to push for a \$50 drug when they've got a \$1,500 drug on label? No. We're going to put people first. We're going to put this province first and increase access to safe, effective treatments, and this pilot project is a way to do that.

Tourism Industry

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, from musical festivals and dude ranches to Segway rentals and fly-fishing, tourism has a key role in helping to diversify the economy. Many of these are small businesses looking for the tools and leadership that they need to grow and create good jobs here in Alberta. To the Minister of Culture and Tourism: what is the current impact of the industry on Alberta?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, there's lots of opportunity for our tourism sector to expand during this economic time, especially with a lower Canadian dollar and more people spending time on holidays here in the province of Alberta. We expect to see a lot of growth, and we're willing to make investments to ensure that this service industry will be leading our diversification process here in the province of Alberta.

2:30

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that word about the great culture and tourist attractions in the province continues to spread throughout the country and around the world, to the same minister: what is the potential for growth in this industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, a lot of people across the regions, not just in the traditional tourism areas here in the province but in many corners of the province, are seeing lots of investment in the tourist industry. We've set up an entrepreneurial tourist program, which is training and helping new businesses to get started, and we're expecting robust growth in the next couple of years to exceed \$10 billion in business for the tourism industry.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that growing the economy is how we are supporting jobs that support families, again to the same minister: what is the minister doing to get our tourism industry to the targeted number?

Mr. Eggen: Well, certainly, we have concrete measures by which we will grow this industry to help with diversification. We know that at this juncture this is what Albertans want. Certainly, we are making investments, as I say, not just in the mountain parks but in many centres across the province, and we've seen a lot of success. In this last year I suspect, Mr. Speaker, that we've seen a record year for tourism in many corners of the province, and we will continue to do so for families and for regular people to get the job done right.

Youth Employment

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, one of the demographics hardest hit in this tightening job market is Alberta's young people. Youth unemployment is now at 12 per cent. Typical sources of youth employment are retail, food, and accommodation. For youth this job market is being further tightened by the government's dramatic 50 per cent minimum-wage hike. To the minister: why does this government insist on destroying the job market for Alberta's youth by hiking the minimum wage to unsustainable levels?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We believe as a government that there needs to be fair wages and that people making the lower wages should have a fair minimum wage, so we're moderately raising it this year, just a little under 10 per cent. We know that the majority of people, 64 per cent of adults, are making minimum wage, so they're making minimum wage to be able to put food on the tables of their families, to pay for their education.

Thank you.

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, for the minister. Employers from Lacombe-Ponoka have begged me to ask this government to rethink the minimum wage. They have said that it will lead to fewer hours for their staff and fewer jobs and they will have to increase their prices for consumers. Will the NDP continue to make it harder for Lacombe-Ponoka employers and job seekers, or will they reconsider their decision on the increase to the minimum wage?

Ms Sigurdson: I know, like many Albertans, that I am willing to pay a little bit more to support people to get fair wages so that they can care for their families. We have also created the job creation incentive grant, which absolutely is helping employers hire people that they need to run their businesses. We're absolutely, very seriously listening to businesses, making sure that they can still be viable here in Alberta. We know we still have the lowest business taxes in the west.

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, for the same minister: whereas the energy sector has traditionally provided thousands of high-paying jobs for youth, especially in rural Alberta, which is my concern, why does this government persist in hammering the energy industry with taxes and a royalty review, which will effectively hike unemployment, especially for youth, when thousands of energy jobs have already been lost?

Ms Sigurdson: Absolutely, the energy industry is at the heart of our economy. We care very much about the energy industry, and

we're prudently moving forward. We've made no changes. We're just reviewing things at this point. We made a commitment not to change anything until 2017. We've had a strong economic shock. We are working with industry, working with employers, working with business to make sure that business is supported in Alberta, and we're absolutely pleased to be working with them to make it better.

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

Fentanyl Use Prevention

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Fentanyl is a killer. This terrible drug killed 145 Albertans between January and June of this year, and the numbers keep rising. Alberta Health Services and the Calgary Police Service are both calling fentanyl a public health crisis, and CPS is attributing a rise in crime to the drug's presence on their streets. To the Justice minister: given that police, Alberta Health Services, and communities are all concerned about fentanyl and given that addressing any kind of an emergency needs to include three components – education, prevention, and intervention – why is your ministry doing nothing to address this crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We know how devastating addictions can be to families and to the individuals who are addicted as well, and that's one of the reasons why we've moved forward with the mental health review that's under way right now. Obviously, addressing the root causes is one of the best ways to make sure that we can move forward safely in support of one another.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. We'll try this to the Justice minister again. Given that young Albertans take this drug for a recreational high, never knowing that each tablet could contain a deadly poison that will ultimately end their lives, and given that AHS's specialized triage units deal with the after-effects of fentanyl, overdoses, but do nothing to prevent deaths – you have not even spoken to the chiefs of police about this issue. How long are you going to wait to gather the chiefs together to determine an immediate action plan to create a proactive approach to addressing this crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the hon. member for the question. It is true that addiction issues are absolutely devastating. Certainly, police and my ministry have been working hard in conjunction with the Ministry of Health to come up with solutions to address this problem. You know, in terms of the question, "How long?", well, we're already working to address this problem. We're already working to support families so that we can avoid the underlying drivers of addiction.

Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: Okay. To the same minister, then: given that Albertans, particularly innocent young people, are playing Russian roulette with their lives every time they pop a pill and given that Albertans are looking for leadership from your government to put a halt to the tragic and unnecessary fatalities occurring in every corner of this province, why are you not offering any additional resources to police, who are trying to combat drug dealers distributing fentanyl?

How many more Albertans need to die before you show true leadership in this crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the hon. member for the question. Well, I think that the hon. member is being very unfair to the police services in this province. I think that they're working very hard to address this problem. In addition, as the hon. member is aware since he has seen the budget, in fact, the municipal police grants were increased in accordance with population. I have been in contact with the chiefs of police, and they are quite happy with that situation.

Thank you.

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

Syrian Refugees

Mr. Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, I myself came to Canada from Chile with my family, fleeing violence. Along with many Albertans I've been watching with a heavy heart the tragic affairs occurring in Syria and surrounding countries. This question is directed to the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour. Can the minister please update the House on what supports our Alberta government is providing for these refugees fleeing their war-torn countries?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Certainly, we're very saddened as a government to see the human tragedy that's unfolding before us. We stepped up quickly and contributed \$75,000 to support the Red Cross in their efforts to support them, and that was quickly matched, within days, by Albertans who also were concerned. We've put in an additional \$75,000, so it was \$150,000 plus the \$75,000 Albertans matched. In addition to that, we have contributed a hundred thousand dollars to settlement agencies so that when the refugees come to Canada, we will have supports for them available.

Thank you.

2:40

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: with the possibility that the federal government will bring thousands more refugees to Canada, will Alberta's settlement services have the resources necessary to serve these newcomers?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we do have a new government federally, and we will work with our federal counterparts to be able to support those who do come to Alberta. We had said at the outset that we wanted right away to step forward, but we can revise and work with our federal counterparts to make sure that the refugees who come to Alberta will be supported.

Mr. Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: is our government planning on taking any additional action to support refugees' resettlement to Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely, we're going to be working with the federal government, and we already are developing a plan on how we can help these vulnerable people. I

know Albertans like myself and our government are very concerned about this human tragedy that's unfolding, so we're happy to work with the new federal government to develop a plan here for Alberta.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people of Drayton Valley-Devon are hurting. They're frustrated about the NDP's risky economic policies, higher taxes, and record debt.

About two months ago a constituent congratulated me on my election victory, and as we began to talk, I asked her how her family was doing. Her response was so sad. Her husband was without work, and she said: I never thought that my little income from babysitting out of my house would be my family's main source of income. It nearly broke my heart, and I walked away frustrated knowing that this would not be the last time I would hear a similar tale from one of my constituents.

Just the other day another constituent made an appointment to see me in my office. He explained to me that his business was doing about 20 per cent of the business it had done the year before. He had laid off all of his workers except his two sons. His frustration was written all over his face.

These are the people Wildrose is fighting for. They are clearly frustrated when they listen to the Minister of Finance deliver a budget that will create a \$50 billion debt, increase taxes, and make every Albertan poorer. These constituents are hard-working, creative, entrepreneurial individuals. They have built businesses in communities and created jobs.

Municipal officials in my constituency are also working hard under the dire economic circumstances. The town of Devon is undergoing a visioning process. Drayton Valley, through the Clean Energy Technology Centre, is planning for job training and creation to meet future needs.

My constituents deserve a provincial government that will help them where it can and will not pass the economic burdens of today onto their children. As a Wildrose MLA I get this. Maybe it's time for the NDP to start listening, talk to Albertans, and then get to work. Just a suggestion.

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

Violence against Sikhs in India

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about an event which still haunts all Indians who love peace, justice, and the rule of law as well as Sikhs around the globe. On October 31, 1984, waves of anti-Sikh genocidal violence lasted for days throughout India. Official reports claimed 3,000 Sikhs were murdered while unofficial reports cite the number as being as high as 8,000.

I want to speak of the story of 45-year-old Gurdip Kaur. Gurdip Kaur, a 45-year-old mother, witnessed her three sons and husband being dragged out of their home, beaten, and then set ablaze. However, Gurdip Kaur's agony did not end there, Mr. Speaker, and I quote: they tore my clothes and stripped me naked in front of my son. My son cried: elder brothers, do not do this; she is your mother just as she is my mother. She continues: but they raped me right there in front of my son in my own house; they were young boys, maybe eight of them. After her rape they took her youngest child,

and I quote: they took him to the street corner, hit him with lathis, sprinkled kerosene over him, and burned him alive.

Thirty-one years later, Mr. Speaker, there has been no justice. For those that were paid 500 rupees to kill a Sikh: no one has been brought to justice. It wasn't the first time that there was a price on a Sikh's head, and if you speak to our brothers and sisters in Afghanistan, it won't be the last.

It was Rajiv Gandhi, Mr. Speaker, who said that when a mighty tree falls, it is only natural that the earth around it does shake a little. Well, Mr. Gandhi, thousands of mighty trees have fallen, and 31 years later the entire world shakes. The difference is that we shake for justice; you shook for vengeance.

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

Springbank Reservoir Flood Mitigation Plan

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In June of this year I used my first opportunity for a member's statement in this Assembly to address the urgent need for a flood mitigation strategy for southern Alberta. I'm proud now to rise again to express my gratitude that this government has taken swift, decisive action on this important issue. The plan recently announced by the Minister of Environment and Parks will protect communities sooner and with more certainty than any other course of action. By moving forward in this way, our government has taken concrete steps towards protecting Bragg Creek, Redwood Meadows, and the city of Calgary.

I'm proud, Mr. Speaker, that this decision was taken after the government carefully examined the evidence provided by the expert firm Deltars. That evidence clearly points to the Springbank option. It is the quickest and most cost-effective option and includes \$33 million for local mitigation in Bragg Creek. Springbank will have less impact on the environment and is less susceptible to catastrophic failure during construction. The minister's plan will fully fund local mitigation projects identified for Bragg Creek by Rocky View county.

Mr. Speaker, with this funding announcement this beautiful, vibrant community at the doorstep of Kananaskis Country has a much brighter future in store. Bragg Creek already has an outstanding four-season trail network, restaurants, retail stores, and festivals throughout the year. Area residents are working with the county on a revitalization plan that will make Bragg Creek an even better place to visit and to live. I urge you all to pay us a visit sometime soon.

Thank you very much.

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

Down Syndrome

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Labels. They have the power to segregate, to restrict, and to damage. Thankfully, our society has begun to let go of the many hurtful labels and expressions that divide and exclude. People with Down syndrome have a long, dark history of segregation due to the labels assigned them. Down syndrome is not a disorder, not a defect or a medical condition. Contrary to popular belief, not all people who have this syndrome share the same characteristics. They're as unique and as different as you and I.

I'm proud to be part of a government that understands that inclusion is not simply a trendy policy word, but it's an action that requires vigilance and determination. I'm proud to be part of a government that isn't simply waiting on the powerful but is doing the work that we were sent here to do, which is working towards including all Albertans.

To the national and local Down syndrome associations: thank you for your dedication, your advocacy, and your awareness. When Canadians with disabilities such as Down syndrome are supported to be fully contributing participants in their communities, we all win.

Join with the Down syndrome associations. Work with your schools, your communities, your businesses to open up Alberta so that all of us can share our talents and make this province the best that it can be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

2:50

Hope Christian School

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to rise today to speak about an independent school in my riding. Hope Christian School is located in the village of Champion, Alberta, and offers a variety of different options for learning. Education is offered through online courses, through a home-schooling program, and through their classroom program. While the school is owned and operated by the Evangelical Free church of Champion, it is a nondenominational school in operation, and they accept students from all backgrounds. They are a grade 1 through grade 12 school that is committed to ensuring that their students' academic and spiritual needs are met. Their belief is that they offer a value-based education, which, in turn, tends to empower families. They achieve this by using the accelerated Christian education program and teacher-developed materials that are directly aligned with Alberta Education outcomes as well as facilitated Alberta distance learning courses.

The ACE materials are also supplemented with locally developed materials that are necessary to meet the Alberta Education curriculum requirements. Their home education program supports a large population of home-educated students and their parents. With the home education program the clients may use the resources of their choosing but are required to fulfill the outcomes laid out by the Alberta Education home education regulations.

This program is facilitated by Alberta-certified teachers. Their students participate in regular field trips, and some of the students had an opportunity to be involved in a trip to Costa Rica, where they did volunteer work within a community there. They also compete in sports activities with other schools in the area and belong to the Alberta Schools' Athletics Association.

Mr. Speaker, this school works hard at giving their students a well-rounded education, well supported by parents and teachers alike as many schools across this great province do.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the required number of copies of the Alberta Securities Commission 2015 annual report. As you know, the commission has a mandate to protect and educate investors, foster a fair and efficient capital market in Alberta, and contribute to the success of Canada's securities regulatory system. As the report entitled *Transparent. Unbiased. Accessible.* explains, the commission works to ensure strong capital markets through three important streams of activity: regulation; investigation, which includes enforcement; and education. In tabling this report, I wish to thank the commission for the important work that it does on behalf of government.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings related to last week's questions to the Premier on the tax-deductible contribution to small business. The first article, from *Metro* news, is entitled Alberta Tax Credit for Adding New Employees Simply Not Needed. That's according to the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation.

The second one, from the *Calgary Herald*: Small Business Confidence in Alberta Nearing Historic Low.

The third is from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, indicating that the current level of business optimism is the lowest seen since 2008.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Privilege

Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

The Speaker: I would like to address the issue purporting to be a question of privilege raised by the Official Opposition House Leader concerning obstructing a member in performance of his or her duty.

Hon. members, I would like to issue a ruling concerning the purported question of privilege raised by the Official Opposition House Leader last Wednesday, October 28, 2015, the discussion of which can be found on pages 351 to 355 of the *Hansard* of that day. In a nutshell, the essence of the member's purported question of privilege was that the news release issued by the Minister of Finance's department prior to the delivery of the budget prejudiced a decision by the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services by stating that the ministers and members would take a pay freeze not only until 2017 but until the end of this Legislature.

I would point out to the House that this is the first question of privilege that I have had to address in this Legislature, and it may well be the first one that most members will have witnessed as well. While I do not wish to take more time than is necessary in delivering this ruling, I think it is important to outline some essential elements of privilege for the benefit of new members. I personally did considerable research on this matter and on all the precedents of this Assembly.

Members should be advised that there are some formalities to be followed in raising a purported question of privilege. Under Standing Order 15(2) notice of a question of privilege must be provided to the Speaker's office at least two hours before the opening of the sitting. In this case notice was received in my office at 11:18 a.m. on Wednesday, October 28, so the precondition has been met.

To expand upon the allegations in this case, the Minister of Finance's department issued, according to the Official Opposition House Leader at page 353 of *Hansard* for October 28, 2015, a news release stating as follows:

Budget 2015 takes a careful and responsible approach to managing government finances, steadily phasing out the deficit without reckless cuts to the frontline services Albertans rely on.

This includes:

- A salary freeze for Cabinet ministers, MLAs and political staff for the entire term of this Legislature.

The member further states that this news release was presented while the Minister of Finance was delivering his budget speech in this Assembly on Tuesday, October 27. As the Government House Leader pointed out in speaking to this issue, what was in the news release differed from what the Minister of Finance actually said in this Assembly. At page 333 of *Alberta Hansard* for October 27 the Minister of Finance said:

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.

I draw members' attention to the use of the word "propose" in this statement rather than "implement" or "put into place" or some other phrase that would imply that the government was taking action without respecting the Assembly's jurisdiction.

The question arises as to what law or rule of this Assembly or parliament in general this action allegedly violates. First, while this matter is raised as a question of privilege, it may actually be known as a contempt of the Assembly. The distinction is discussed in the following quotation from the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, page 82, where it is said:

It is important to distinguish between a "breach of privilege" and "contempt of Parliament". Any disregard of or attack on the rights, powers and immunities of the House and its Members, either by an outside person or body, or by a Member of the House, is referred to as a "breach of privilege" and is punishable by the House. There are, however, other affronts against the dignity and authority of Parliament which may not fall within one of the specifically defined privileges. Thus, the House also claims the right to punish, as a contempt, any action which, though not a breach of a specific privilege, tends to obstruct or impede the House in the performance of its functions; obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of the House in the discharge of their duties; or is an offence against the authority or dignity of the House, such as disobedience of its legitimate commands or libels upon itself, its Members, or its officers.

3:00

This was the definition of contempt used by Speaker Zwodzesky in his October 31, 2013, ruling, which can be found at pages 2655 to 2657 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day.

On a somewhat related matter, about which I will say more later, the issue of contempt was relevant to the question of privilege raised in late 2013. The December 2, 2013, ruling by Speaker Zwodzesky, where he found a prima facie question of privilege, was referred to several times during discussion of this matter. In the 2013 case the government of the day had published brochures that went to every home in Alberta which, amongst other things, stated that MLAs' salaries were going to be frozen until 2017 when, in fact, the motion to do so in the appropriate committee was not moved until the brochures had been distributed. I would invite members to review Speaker Zwodzesky's comments in finding a prima facie question of privilege at pages 3231 to 3234 of *Alberta Hansard* for December 2, 2013.

In the case before the Assembly today there was a news release issued at the same time that the minister was presenting his Budget Address in this Assembly. The address gives appropriate respect and deference to the decision-making bodies while the news release arguably does not. In this case there is ambiguity between the minister's statement in the Assembly and the news release. When they are occurring at the same time, can the news release be said to prejudice the actions of a committee of the Assembly when the Budget Address does not? In my view, this possible misstatement in a news release does not give rise to a prima facie question of privilege.

Since being elected Speaker in June this year, I have come to appreciate how context is so very important in understanding what occurs in this Assembly. It is clear from the research I have conducted that the government of the day had been warned about not showing adequate respect for the Assembly in an October 31, 2013, ruling by Speaker Zwodzesky about the release of the contents of the bill involving the then Minister of Transportation. A prima

facie question of privilege was not found, but the Speaker warned the government about advertising bills as if they had passed and about early release of bills on notice. There seems to be a wide gulf of difference between those events and the one under review today. The government of the day appears not to have heeded the warnings and advertised province-wide about wage freezes that were not within the government's jurisdiction and were not before the appropriate committee. I would like to thank the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster for making this point and for adding context to the discussion.

One other point that I reflected upon is that the nonincrease in pay for members and ministers is already in place and will be so until March 31, 2017. What the government is proposing would extend the time period, but technically it has nothing to do with the estimates of this year's fiscal budget or for the next fiscal year. Could this be a relevant question of privilege when the decisions would not take place for 18 months from now? While this is not a prima facie question of privilege, I would caution the government not to prejudge the actions of this Assembly or its committees into the future. It's my hope that this would not arise again, and I would stress to members that this Speaker, on behalf of this Assembly, does not take these matters lightly.

This matter is now concluded for all purposes. In conclusion, I want to remind members that true questions of privilege should arise infrequently. As Joseph Maingot says in his book *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, second edition, page 217, "A genuine question of privilege is therefore a serious matter not to be reckoned with lightly and accordingly ought to be rare, and thus rarely raised in the House of Commons."

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 202 Alberta Local Food Act

[Debate adjourned October 26: Mr. Barnes speaking]

Mr. Barnes: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was done voicing my opposition to Bill 202.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to this motion? Calgary-Bow.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 202, and I thank the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park for bringing forward this bill to the House. There is no doubt that Albertan farmers are producing world-class crops and that the supply is there for Albertans. I don't think any member of this House will disagree that Albertan farmers want to get their produce, crops, and livestock to local markets. It has already been mentioned that 95 per cent of Albertans want to be able to buy and eat locally grown food, and in Alberta the resources are here to support that.

One great example of this is community gardens, a way for a community to come together to grow and harvest local food. Food advocates say that locally grown food decreases a community's reliance on fossil fuels. Community gardens are effective to help relieve some of the effects of climate change and the issue of making fresh produce increasingly unaffordable. Community gardens also encourage an urban community's food security,

allowing citizens to grow their own food or for those to donate what they have grown.

In the riding of Calgary-Bow there are constituents who grow their own produce on an 11-acre parcel of land just west of Canada Olympic Park. Their mission is that all Calgarians should have access to local fresh food. A team of volunteers comes together to grow the produce for the Calgary Inter-faith Food Bank and also develops programs that inspire people to make healthy food choices. My constituency has many community gardens available to the residents. In Calgary-Bow there are four beautiful community gardens that are offered to people of all ages, including two in Bowness, one in West Springs, and one in Valley Ridge. Community gardens are vital as they create community spirit and provide a connection to the environment, and they are also educational.

Albertans recognize that farmers here in Alberta play a key role in our economy and that investing locally creates stronger communities. The reality of the situation, however, is that local grocery stores, the most successful way for Albertans to buy their groceries, lack in locally harvested and produced Albertan food. Farmers' markets are a fantastic way to get the product from farm to table, but we need to find creative and alternative ways to promote and facilitate eating local to a wider audience.

The reason I support this piece of legislation is because I believe it is up to the government to work in partnership with farmers to close that gap and find solutions, and to that point we need to lead by example. We should be investing in Albertans when choosing where our public-sector organizations procure food. That, to me, sounds like common sense.

While I sat here listening to the thoughts and concerns of members on both sides of the House, it seems as though this bill has been painted as black and white. The bill, as I read it, is another tool for farmers to use to promote their products and their way of life. The number of nonindustrial farmers in this province has been declining steadily, and I certainly see that this bill will help empower those farmers to be more engaged in the current system. This bill seeks to show those in the agricultural industry here in Alberta that we support them and we want to invest in them. I urge all of my colleagues to vote in favour of Bill 202.

Thank you.

3:10

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

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise on Bill 202, the Alberta Local Food Act. The bill proposes to establish an advisory committee on food and agriculture to review the current state of local food systems, develop a local food and agriculture strategy, improve and maximize economic return and food security, encourage the purchase of local foods by public-sector organizations, and establish a local food awareness week. It mirrors certain aspects and goals of the Ontario Liberals' food act, 2013, the first legislation of its kind in Canada.

I stand in strong support of this initiative. I think it's long overdue that we encourage the community coming together around something fundamental like food, food production, and food security. There's no question that food and food security are going to be key issues in the coming decades, especially if water is a problem in our province, especially if agricultural land and food production become an increasing challenge, which is a very real possibility with climate warming and water shortages, especially in southern Alberta.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Anything we can do to bring communities together, to learn from each other, to support each other, and to understand the complexities and the opportunities of food and community security is good. We are a divided culture, many divisions for many reasons, including technology that separates us and that limits our capacity to work together as communities to solve local problems. This is an important initiative to do something very fundamental, which is to bring people together to talk about common values.

The second thing, of course, is jobs. Who doesn't want to stimulate jobs? There are local people within the bounds of the municipality or even outside with rental land and potentially community-shared agriculture, a tremendous opportunity to stimulate jobs, a new understanding and new inspiration for young people and others in the community to branch out. Perhaps it could be a secondary job for them, an employment opportunity. It will develop new skills. It will develop a new appreciation for where our food comes from and an understanding of nature and the importance of how we care for our environment.

It, of course, will contribute to food security. If people know how and develop more of their own capacity to grow food, especially if it's organic and less dependent on pesticides and fertilizers and presumably more committed to local provision, so less transportation and less environmental impact, then this is a win-win-win situation for the kind of values that most of us, I think, in Alberta want to see happen.

So I applaud this private member's bill and will support it completely from the Alberta Liberal caucus side. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I also rise today to voice my support for this bill. I do represent an urban riding; however, I do have some close connections with the farming industry. My in-laws run a large dairy farm in Saskatchewan, just northeast of Regina, and I've spent plenty of time in my life milking cows and wrestling bull calves and shovelling all manner of things.

An Hon. Member: Did you say "wrestling"?

Ms Luff: Wrestling. Yeah, that's correct. Sometimes they don't do what you want them to. Bull calves are stubborn. My family is a group of folks who make food. They also grow canola, and they grow wheat. I do want to just take this opportunity to applaud anyone who chooses to become a farmer, because they are responsible for the food that we eat. Quite frankly, it's hard work, the rewards aren't huge, and it's such, such important work, so I really do just want to applaud the people who choose to be farmers in Alberta.

I see this bill as having two main benefits. In the way that I read this bill, sort of the first goal of it is really just data collection. No good policy comes without good data. This bill really seeks to identify amounts, actual amounts of local food production, local food processing, and local food purchased both by individuals and by public entities. I know many of us in this House are fans of good data. I like my charts and graphs, much like anybody else. Really, seeking to collect good data on local food production I think is really, really valuable. Knowing more is always a good thing.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Then the second point that I think is really key with this bill is that it seeks to eliminate barriers to purchasing local food, to increase ease of access. I'm very lucky. I have the privilege that I

can shop locally at one of Calgary's three year-round farmers' markets: the Kingsland market, the Calgary farmers' market, and Crossroads farmers' market. I am a big fan of my Spragg farm pork and my Sylvan "Star" cheese and my Made by Marcus ice cream in all of its forms: bars, sandwiches, and just ice cream in the tub. It's delicious.

I have that privilege. I have that privilege to go to the farmers' market and to talk to the producers and to learn where my food comes from. You know, the lady that I buy my eggs from notices when my children have gotten bigger. I have that privilege. Most Albertans, actually, unfortunately, despite their desire to buy local food, don't necessarily have the privilege to get out and buy it because the local food is concentrated in places like farmers' markets. Our three farmers' markets in Calgary, while wonderful, are not particularly easily accessible by transit and are only open certain days a week, so that limits the access by people who want to be able to access local food.

The way that I see it is that access to local food shouldn't be a matter of privilege in Alberta. For anyone who wants to be able to access local food, those 95 per cent of people – the statistic is that 95 per cent of people either already do or would like to purchase local food – I think you'll find that if you increase the options, more and more people will make those choices. Currently, unfortunately, it's not available to all people. I think that local food and the privilege of that fresh food, that we all love, should be available to everybody.

This bill, I think, could really help working Albertans. Shift workers who are short on time and don't have time to get to the farmers' market could buy more local food in their supermarkets. I think this could really help postsecondary students. I have a friend who has been working for years to make it more accessible to postsecondary students to be able to access local food both because of cost and, again, because often they have to go off campus, have to take transit to get there. To make that local food available to them on their postsecondary campuses would, again, ease that access for more people.

I can envision seniors having access to local food at assisted living facilities. I know that my grandmother, for one, would have very much appreciated some fresh, local salads in her assisted living facility as food was always her main complaint. She was such a fantastic cook herself, so when someone else had to cook it, it didn't always live up to snuff. But I think that having local food at those facilities could really have facilitated that a lot. Because local food is currently limited to people who have time, money, and transportation to access it, it's just not available to everybody. So the second point there is that I really see this as being a way to increase access for people who don't have the access to it.

Like the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, I also see this as a win-win-win situation. We end up with better data, so we know more about our local food, which is hugely important. We are going to have better access for people who don't necessarily have the access now and would like it, and at the same time we're providing better markets for farmers, those folks who are working so hard every day to provide products for us to enjoy at our tables and who really do provide the basics of life for us. It really is a win-win-win situation, and I believe this is something that everyone in this House should support.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for . . .

3:20

Mr. S. Anderson: Leduc-Beaumont. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You'll get it. You'll get it. No problem.

Thank you for allowing me to rise and speak today about the Alberta Local Food Act, brought forward by the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park. Local, sustainable food systems are a hot topic these days all around the world, and Alberta is certainly no stranger to them. As a father with a young family I want to ensure that I'm able to put the best quality food possible on our table. I know that by supporting local food, I'm supporting a great product. That being said, mostly I make Kraft Dinner for my kids because I'm a terrible cook, but that's beside the point.

In my constituency of Leduc-Beaumont we're lucky not only to have great farmers' markets, but we're also home to numerous farms that provide the Edmonton area local, sustainable, delicious products. One such farm is Green Eggs and Ham, whose products you've likely seen in local farmers' markets and tasted in your favourite local restaurants. This bill will help local producers like Green Eggs and Ham expand their market and get their products into the hands and mouths of more Albertans. From farm markets to local grocers to farmers in general, many producers are seeking direct access to markets so consumers can enjoy homegrown products.

There is a huge market opportunity for connecting local food producers with local consumers in Alberta, and this bill will help facilitate access to that market. We all choose homegrown local products for a variety of reasons, be it freshness, quality, taste, or to support our neighbours. But it's also important to remember that by choosing to support our local producers, we're also working to create local food security and improving maximized return on local food infrastructure. This will help attract new generations to farming, hopefully, and will also help local farmers grow, produce, process, and distribute to more buyers than ever before.

As local producers grow the local market, channels continue to grow in value and are a significant source of farm receipts. There are many intricacies involved on this subject, and I am all for having a thorough discussion about local food and its growth in our markets, and I'm glad we've had this opportunity to do that so far in this House. I'm certain this bill will not only help the local producers in my constituency, but it will help all Albertans get better access to local food and the benefits that local food brings to their families.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members of this House to vote in support of this bill, and I thank the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park for bringing this important bill to the floor for us. Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's a pleasure to have the opportunity to rise and speak in support of Bill 202, the Alberta Local Food Act, which was brought forward by the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park and that I'm happy to support. This act would allow our local producers to seek direct access to markets and consumers like my constituents in Edmonton-Decore to enjoy more of those homegrown products.

I've been asked countless numbers of times about when consumers will have the choices that they're looking for when it comes to accessing more local producers. Now, some say that they already have that access, and in part that is true, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, the residents of Edmonton-Decore currently need to travel outside of the constituency to purchase these types of products from farmers' markets.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the 115 minutes of debate have elapsed, and under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private

member's public bill to close debate, I would invite the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park to in fact close debate on Bill 202.

Cortes-Vargas: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to close debate on second reading of the Alberta Local Food Act. My thanks to the members of my constituency of Strathcona-Sherwood Park, who I am privileged to represent in this Assembly, and thanks to my colleagues for the interesting debate that has unfolded here. It's been an honour to bring forward conversations about our stable, sustainable local food system in Alberta. The local food movement has seen incredible growth in the past decade, and the agrifood sector is supporting our farmers, connecting rural and urban communities, and is part of our diversified economy. It's incumbent upon us as consumers to ask ourselves where our food comes from. On this Albertans have led the way; 25 per cent of households choose restaurants because of the Alberta-based ingredients.

In the last 12 months 95 per cent of Alberta households have purchased food grown in Alberta. The distinguishing traits of our local food are the freshness, the quality, the taste, the safety, and the support that it provides for Albertan families. As legislators we need to go further and ask ourselves how the public sector is taking positive steps in their operations, just like Albertans.

As with many of my colleagues, this debate has made me reflect on my own personal experiences with local foods. This past Thanksgiving my family was able to share a turkey dinner, like many other Albertans. I'm proud to say that this turkey was locally grown. Through the implementation of direct marketing on the farmer's end I was able to connect to a product she was delivering. Mr. Speaker, the Alberta-grown turkey we had: it was outstanding. I want to see more locally grown food on our tables, whether those tables are in our homes or in schools.

I'm not done speaking about this turkey yet, Mr. Speaker. See, we noticed that unlike many of the other turkeys we had cooked in previous years, this turkey did not cover the bottom of the pan with oil. I was able to text the farmer and ask her how she raised a turkey that made this difference. Now, this points to a key point about local food. By being connected to the farmer, I was able to develop a greater understanding about where my food comes from and how it was prepared. Engaging with our food providers shapes the way we think about Alberta food. It brings awareness to the level of detail and work that it took for this farmer to raise this turkey differently than the other producers, which is what the Alberta Local Food Act speaks to, developing pathways to raise consumer awareness of our local food market. There is a huge opportunity for market expansion by raising consumers' familiarity with the production chain.

Mr. Speaker, the Strathcona-Sherwood Park constituency is home to farmers and consumers that make conscious decisions when it comes to their food. Farmers are innovative and hard-working when it comes to connecting to markets. They use social media platforms, farmers' markets, and many open up their farms to families. The Berry Farm is a good example. It's a small family farm in the constituency that produces a variety of berries. They are one of the farms open to U-pick. These farmers open up their gates on the weekends for families to experience the fun of being part of the food process. Jackie, one of the owners, translates her expertise into children's books that uniquely relate to Alberta's farms. This puts regional identity in a trusting face and engages with our younger generation.

Innovation can be found in many of the fields in my constituency, Mr. Speaker. I was recently able to tour a farming technology centre that connected vertical farming with aquaculture. By joining fish and farming, they have been able to create sustainable food systems that would create produce year-round. Yet the farmers from my constituency, like several others, face huge challenges in connecting

with the wider market. We need to highlight and support the work that farmers do as they provide products that are vital to our everyday lives, which is why the Alberta Local Food Act would also celebrate the agrifood sector by proclaiming a local food week.

To close, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to acknowledge and thank the members opposite for the issues and concerns they have raised. I am currently exploring amendments to the act to guarantee its viability and to live up to its intended purpose, to ensure that Albertan families are able to access local, healthy food, that the government institutions are doing their part to support Alberta's local food whenever they can, and that Alberta producers are able to grow their market access.

I implore all the members of this Assembly to support this bill, and I'm happy to receive any of the feedback that you have and to continue these conversations. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:30 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Ganley	Nielsen
Babcock	Gray	Payne
Bhullar	Hinkley	Phillips
Bilous	Hoffman	Piquette
Carson	Horne	Renaud
Ceci	Jabbour	Rodney
Clark	Kazim	Rosendahl
Connolly	Kleinstauber	Sabir
Coolahan	Littlewood	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schreiner
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sucha
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Swann
Eggen	McKitrick	Sweet
Ellis	McLean	Turner
Feehan	McPherson	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Miller	

Against the motion:

Aheer	Loewen	Schneider
Barnes	MacIntyre	Smith
Cooper	Nixon	Strankman
Cyr	Orr	Taylor
Hunter	Pitt	Yao

Totals: For – 50 Against – 15

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a second time]

Bill 203

Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015

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

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to the tabled Bill 203, the Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015. For me and for many of my colleagues, particularly on this side of the aisle, democracy is seen

as the bedrock foundation of our society. It is what this nation and our province were founded on.

Allow me for a brief moment to take this House back in time to 1905. It was during that year that Alberta, the province that we know and have come to love today, came into existence as a province within the united Confederation of Canada. Without delving into the details of provincehood for fear of boring my colleagues in this House, it is important to revisit the spirit that motivated Albertans to be in the act of pursuing provincehood. Mr. Speaker, these individuals wanted one thing, democratic representation. With a booming population in centres of the then North-West Territories, these pioneer Albertans believed in having the right to greater representation via population. They wanted democracy to prevail in their livelihood, one free from a large power that would influence decisions for the people. Like these pioneer Albertans who fought for freedom and democracy, I stand here today in this House to fight for the preservation of democracy to ensure that we have an open, responsible, and accountable democratic government.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that no government should have the power to influence the outcome of an election. This type of corrupt practice has been used in nations around the world and has been a practice frowned upon by the international community, including Canada. Yet in our very own country and in our very own province the government has in the past, unfortunately, misused their office and the influence that comes along with it. In the past we have seen the government making announcements in grandiose press conferences while a by-election is happening. The worst of these pertain to funding during the middle of an election, funding for new infrastructure projects, funding for cities and towns. You name it, they fund it.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, government announcements are by their very nature a tool that can be used only by those currently in office. This creates an imbalance during what should be a fair fight. You see, unlike the parties and the candidates running against the party in power, the governing party has the power of the purse. They can choose when, where, and how much money a particular project or place can receive. With a power like this the public purse has the potential to become a bribe machine during elections or by-elections and can be especially abused by the governing party when they are in fear of losing power.

With this current framework, during the middle of an election writ period the government of the day has the power to allocate public funds to a politically sensitive object or make some other policy announcement to the riding or ridings where by-elections may be happening. This not only makes all politicians look bad but puts public servants, who help to organize these press conferences, in a very uncomfortable spot, where their bosses are telling them to use government resources for electoral gain.

Mr. Speaker, when I had the idea of bringing forward this private member's bill, I thought of two situations in my constituency. The first one was tow truck operators. Tow truck operators have not the safety benefits of highway traffic workers or officers of the law, who have special markings on their vehicles. Tow truck operators have the great danger and fear of being struck and injured in the performance of their duty of retrieving vehicles on the side of the road. That type of legislation can be changed through regulation.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I had the unfortunate circumstance to sit across the table in one of my constituency offices from the mother of a son who was killed on the evening prior to his graduation driving into the back of improperly lighted farm machinery. It was extremely moving for me that the mother of this child did not want to seek any vengeance or revenge upon the operator of that farm machinery. She simply wanted to get the regulation changed.

Mr. Speaker, when I was thinking of this legislation coming forward in this Chamber, I thought of something that we can all do. We can all change what we do and manage this Chamber in a better fashion.

With that, Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 attempts to change the way of running government, not to change the way in which government can conduct its normal business but to prohibit the malpractice of siphoning money to areas of political interest; in other words, attempting to buy votes. It prohibits the government from publishing announcements during a writ period. The impetus for this bill was the inappropriate use of government resources that we saw during the by-elections last fall.

The idea of prohibiting the publishing of government announcements during a writ period is not a new one. In fact, our prairie neighbours to the east, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, have already adopted similar legislation and have since passed it into law because they recognize how tempting it is to misuse government powers for electoral gain. Not only has it been viewed as an effective measure in these provinces, but it has been proven to provide a greater sense of democracy by providing an equal playing field for all political parties during an election, including the party in power. The governing party is not allowed to use its power to persuade voters to vote for them based on cynically timed announcements.

Not only is Bill 203 an already existing law in neighbouring jurisdictions; it is also a bill that the current governing party happens to agree with. Manitoba Premier Gary Doer passed a bill almost identical to this one almost a decade ago in a successful attempt to restore democratic practice during election periods in his province. In both his legislation, which we based this idea on, and in Saskatchewan there are exemptions for all kinds of emergencies and employment, health, and safety issues so that the government is by no means at a standstill. Government can still act fully; it just cannot publicize present and future decisions while a writ is dropped.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, it is about respect for voters. In the Wildrose we like to champion ideas that are in the best interests of our constituents regardless of what political party they may come from. Furthermore, the current Premier of this province, who sits daily in this House, once publicly voiced her support for a bill like this. In a press release dated December 9, 2014, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona called for “a series of changes that would effectively protect Albertans from several forms of inappropriate behavior demonstrated by the PCs over the last several years.” This series of changes included a clause that called for “fixing the Elections Act to prohibit MLAs from using government resources during elections or by-elections.” The idea was good then, and I believe it is a good idea now.

We all know that there are a lot of transparency and accountability issues that need to be addressed. There is even a special select committee whose mandate is to start on this monumental task, but as the chair already admitted, they won't be able to get to everything over the next year. So I'd like to take this item off their plate and get this straightened out before there are any by-elections, Mr. Speaker. Let's show the people that this House can work together to get things done.

Bill 203 does exactly what the opposition parties were calling for last fall and is what both Wildrose and the NDP pledged to do in our campaign platforms. Mr. Speaker, I believe that's the beauty of this bill. It is a bill that attempts to be as bipartisan as possible, and it attempts to remove politics and partisanship from legislation in the hope that this piece of legislation can successfully be passed in the interests of all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a moment to remind this House why this bill matters and why it is in the interests of their MLAs and, most importantly, Albertans to support this bill. It is Remembrance Day, a day in our national history that marks the ultimate sacrifice that tens of thousands of Canadians have made or are currently making to keep our true north strong and free. These brave men and women have fought or are currently fighting day in and day out to defend our rights and freedoms, that we take for granted. One of these freedoms includes the ultimate freedom, democracy, the right to choose your government without influence, interference, or manipulation from government. It is this pure democracy that Albertans have come to expect from their government. Sadly, that is not the case.

The Speaker: I recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the member opposite for bringing this issue to the forefront. I agree with the principle behind what the member has brought forward in this bill, and I think that legislation to this effect is absolutely needed. In Alberta in years past we've seen the impact of the government of the day announcing infrastructure spending during elections, and we know that the previous government did play a little fast and loose with their ability to advertise. That's why we're committed to doing something on this. During the recent by-election in Calgary-Foothills our government held off on all funding announcements until after the ballots were counted.

Democratic reform is important. That's why our government's first bill was An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta, and that's why we launched the all-party Ethics and Accountability Committee, of which I am deputy chair, a committee which is meant to further ensure fairness and equality in election financing. Voters deserve to know that dollars are not a significant influence in an election, whether those dollars come from corporations or unions or from the government itself.

The Ethics and Accountability Committee is moving forward with our mandate, and I look forward to presenting this committee's report to this Assembly in due time. The committee is reviewing all aspects of the electoral system, including improvements to further ensure fairness and equality in election financing. Given that this work is currently being undertaken by an all-party committee, it seems hasty and premature to pass a bill limiting the work of this committee, and I will not be supporting this bill at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. House leader for the Official Opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise and speak to Bill 203, Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015, brought forward by my good friend and colleague from Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen over the last number of years a government which hasn't had as much respect for the by-election and the election process as I think Albertans have come to demand and certainly deserve. Members on this side of the House, and not only members on this side of the House but members on the government side of the House, have shown great concern in the past when, perhaps, government resources were used to benefit a particular candidate in a by-election or during a general election. In fact, sir, some of the leg. officers, that function at arm's length from government and, certainly, from this Assembly, have also expressed some concern about the government making funding announcements during elections or by-elections.

Let me be clear, sir. Today is the day to act. We've just heard the deputy chair of a committee express some significant amount of support for such an important piece of legislation, and it's my guess

that there are a number of members on the government side that, too, are sympathetic to this great piece of legislation, that has been crafted to support this important initiative, going forward. I think that Albertans expect us to act. They expect us to act in the best interest of Albertans.

What we have before us is a slam dunk, if you will, when it comes to legislation. I know that all sides of the House have worked together in the past when a piece of legislation has come before the Assembly that is so clearly the right thing to do for Albertans. In fact, I think you'll find that just prior to the last election, sir, a piece of legislation was provided unanimous consent in this Assembly to pass through the Assembly in one day. Now, while, typically speaking, members of the opposition wouldn't support such activities, there are times when agreement can be found to expedite that process. In my opinion, Bill 203 is exactly that.

We have seen members of the government support this in the past. I know that my hon. colleague referred to it earlier, but in a joint press release from the NDP caucus of the day, specifically speaking about making funding announcements during a by-election, they used these words: "to prohibit MLAs from using government resources during elections or by-elections." They were referring, sir, to the fact that the government ought not to be doing that. They've supported this in the past. It's very, very similar to the type of legislation that exists in the other prairie provinces, in the form of Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

If we can expedite this process and act quickly, should there ever be the need for a by-election in the next year – Mr. Speaker, as you know, the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee has been tasked to return to this House in a year with recommendations. While I do recognize that this is in the Election Act, the committee is in that process should there be a by-election.

4:00

Let me commend the government, Mr. Speaker. During the by-election in Calgary-Foothills, where my hon. colleague was elected and the people sent a very strong message, I will commend the government of the day because they did show restraint. But governments have a habit, if you will, that the longer they are in power, the less restraint they seem to be able to show. So if we can expedite this process, we can rest assured that they won't be tempted, should there be circumstances that would require a by-election.

I know that my colleague has referred to the places that have similar legislation. In fact, some would make a case that the legislation in other provinces is even more expanded in that it puts timelines prewritten as well that would prevent a real slew of announcements immediately prior to a writ period. But in this case the hon. member has reviewed the options and decided that the legislation that was passed almost a decade ago by then NDP Premier Gary Doer is the piece of legislation that we ought to model our legislation on here in the province of Alberta.

You know, oftentimes the opposition gets criticized, Mr. Speaker, about not wanting to accept NDP ideas, if you will. Here we have a piece of legislation that, a case could be made, is an NDP idea, and here we are supporting it, reaching our hand out across the aisle to say: some of your colleagues or comrades in Manitoba have passed a piece of legislation and perhaps you might consider that here in the province.

The bill is quite clear in a number of areas, including allowing the government some flexibility to ensure the business of government can continue to take place during a by-election. I think that it is a very reasonable concession. There are times in case of emergencies where the government may need to act, and this bill would continue to allow that to happen.

I think what's important to reiterate is that this is creating a standard that will ensure fairness for all candidates in a by-election. From time to time we have seen the government act in such a way that that fairness isn't respected and, as a result, is not respecting Albertans. We've been sent here to do our best to ensure that their voices are heard, and I can tell you that the people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills have spoken to me at length about the fact that the government shouldn't be making announcements during by-elections. That's exactly what this bill fixes.

I encourage all members of the government not to delay. The Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee is so very busy. There is so much work to do. Here is an opportunity for us to take it off their plate and move forward in an expedient fashion. I encourage the members of the government to consider doing just that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for bringing this matter forward. We've seen the perceived abuse of government powers in this province before under the previous government. One might argue that repeated instances of questionable ethical behaviour were a precursor to the recent election results, that put us all here in our current arrangements. When past government failed to self-regulate, the voters did their job for them. That's why today Albertans have the privilege of having so many legislators in this House who are committed to ensuring ethical governing practices.

Renewing democracy is important to this government. That's why our first bill was Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta, which banned corporate and union donations to political parties. This legislation gave voters back their voices and will ensure elected officials are accountable to the citizens of Alberta, not those with the deepest pockets. This was just the start of our efforts to restore honesty and ethics to government. A special all-party committee was created, the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, to review all aspects of the electoral system, including future improvements to further ensure fairness and equality in election financing.

We welcome any suggestions for accountability in government from the members opposite. Thank you.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support this bill and to thank very much my hon. colleague for bringing it forward. Now, I'm sure you would expect that given that I represent the fine constituents of Calgary-Elbow, where the former Minister of Education promised school portables during the by-election just over a year ago. Now, this may be an uncomfortable topic for my friends or, I see, friend in the PC caucus, but, look: the simple fact is that the former government abused their position for political gain. There's absolutely no doubt about that, and, yes, the people of Calgary-Elbow and the people of Alberta ultimately passed judgment on that.

The Ethics Commissioner when asked about it referred to the actions of the former Education minister as "blatant political opportunism." She went on to say: "This issue was not one of general policy or ongoing work. It was a specific political issue that he used his office to resolve in his favour." So why didn't she find that he broke any rules? Because it wasn't against the rules, my friends. It was not against the strict letter of the law.

Those of us in this House, I would expect all of us, would agree that it ought to be against the rules. It is against the rules in at least two other provinces in the Confederation of Canada. We in this

House have the opportunity to right that wrong and make it against the rules. The Ethics Commissioner herself continued to express her frustration about the current state of the rules, saying that the current Conflicts of Interest Act “does not deal with moral integrity.” I’ll repeat that again. Imagine. The Conflicts of Interest Act does not deal with moral integrity.

What exactly is the point of a Conflicts of Interest Act, of ethics legislation that doesn’t deal with moral integrity? I would hope – and I know Albertans expect all of us to act in the highest ethical standard. That is our job. That is what we ought to do. Unfortunately, sometimes we need rules to tell us what to do and what not to do. Now, I think each of us would agree that that is not right. In other words, the Ethics Commissioner felt that it was wrong but didn’t have the legislative tools to hold the former Minister of Education to account.

So what does wrong look like? What’s the impact? Well, those of you will know that William Reid school, which was promised those portables just a little over a year ago, is, in fact, in Calgary-Elbow. What you don’t know is that my younger daughter goes to William Reid school. So this not only was a blatant political move designed cynically by the former government to win a by-election; this was targeted directly at me personally. What choice do I have in that case? They dragged my daughter’s school into the middle of a political fight, so I have a choice to make. I can make it worse, I can continue to exacerbate the problem, I can drag my family in, or I can sit quietly by and say: I’m not going there. They might go there, but I’m not going to go there. And I didn’t.

We know the outcome of that by-election. Who knows what would’ve happened had they not done this? We all know in this House that it was wrong. We in this House have an opportunity to make it right.

4:10

So this issue is doubly personal for me, and the personalization of the political process is but one of many, many reasons why we must end the practice of government using their position to further their own political and personal interests.

Now, I realize this bill is within the scope of the ongoing review of the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee. I will take this opportunity to note that the ND members of that committee do seem hesitant to actually consult Albertans, having adjourned twice my motion to consult Albertans about topics just like this. That is probably the most comprehensive review of Alberta’s democracy that we’ve undergone in the 110-year history of this fine province, so I would encourage them, please, to stop adjourning debate on that motion and to actively consult Albertans on this issue. If we do, we’re going to find that they want us to address this and they want us to address it quickly.

Now, given this bill is based on legislation that exists in other provinces and given that I think most, if not all, members of this House agree that government shouldn’t be able to use their position to unduly influence the political process and shouldn’t make the political personal and given, especially, that we never know when another by-election may be coming, let’s take this opportunity to put these controls in place now.

I want to remind all of my friends in the House, certainly those of us who are private members, that it is within your right as private members to support this legislation. I look specifically at my friends in the ND caucus, and I ask you that if you were to go back to your constituencies, if you were to ask each of your constituents to read the very brief Bill 203 and ask them: would you like me on your behalf to vote in favour of this bill – ask yourself that question

before you have the opportunity to vote on this bill, and I think you will know what to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other individuals who would like to speak to the bill? The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015. I want to thank very, very much the Member for Drumheller-Stettler for bringing this important bill to our discussion. The underlying premise of this bill is something that our government caucus and the Official Opposition both agree on. It is wholly inappropriate for any governing party to use its position as an advantage by making spending announcements during a campaign period. Any such announcements can be perceived as the government abusing the powers entrusted to it in order to further its own electoral prospects. This Premier and her government, as mentioned, have already demonstrated their strong commitment to proper ethical behaviour when we adhered to a self-imposed spending announcement hiatus during the Calgary-Foothills by-election.

This bill attempts to fill one small part of the rather large ethics and democratic reform gap Albertans have inherited from their previous governments. That is why our hon. Premier made it one of her first priorities to strike an all-party committee on ethics and accountability with a specific mandate to work on democratic reforms. What this bill attempts to achieve is very much in line with the work that this select special committee is undertaking. As I have the distinct pleasure to be the chair of that committee at this point in time, I can assure all members that this is the sort of issue that our committee has been briefed on by the officers of the Legislature and that will be reviewed under our mandate of ethics and accountability.

The members across the aisle have spoken at length and passionately about the value that committee work can bring to potential legislation, and in this case I fully agree. As part of the work of the Ethics and Accountability Committee and with the support of the research and other resources afforded to that committee it makes sense to take a closer look at what other jurisdictions are doing in this area. As well, it would be valuable to discuss the proposed changes with the Chief Electoral Officer, who oversees the implementation of the Election Act, as well as the Ethics Commissioner, who has, as mentioned, been involved in investigations in the past around announcements during an election period. We need to ensure that our made-in-Alberta solution to this problem is one that meets all the ethical criteria while ensuring adequate flexibility to allow any future government to meet its needs with regard to communication with the residents of this great province.

Albertans can take heart and know that our government is fully committed to implementing many long-overdue democratic reforms. That is why our first bill was An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta, which banned corporate and union donations to political parties. Bill 1 was this government’s first step in renewing democracy in Alberta.

This government will enact many important democratic reforms, but we need to examine them, and we need to examine them under one collective umbrella first, with all parties represented in this Legislature present and providing input, with the guidance and support of committee resources, and having received meaningful feedback from Albertans themselves. I encourage all members to thank the Member for Drumheller-Stettler for his work on this issue, but let us now refer this bill to the Select Special Ethics and

Accountability Committee, where it can be part of the larger body of work that the committee has undertaken.

To that end, I would like to present an amendment to Bill 203, and I can pause while the House distributes copies.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has proposed an amendment to Bill 203. We will refer to this amendment as A1.

Ms Gray: I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 203, Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 203, Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015, be not now read a second time but that the order be discharged, the bill withdrawn, and the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee as part of its current review.

My intention with this amendment is for the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee to thoroughly discuss and implement the information that has been presented in Bill 203, to include it in our work, and to bring that back to the Legislature with our report. I hope that all members will support my amendment and send this important work to an all-party committee that is set up to handle the discussion and to take us to a conclusion on this.

Thank you very much.

4:20

The Speaker: Are there any members who wish to speak to amendment A1? The Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to discuss amendment A1. I'm hoping that perhaps you might be able to provide some clarification, just the exact purpose of the amendment.

The heart of my concern, if you will, Mr. Speaker, is around the words, “the bill withdrawn, and the subject matter of the bill be referred.” The way that I read that is that the bill itself won't be sent to committee but just a general discussion around the topics in the bill, particularly, as we've heard this evening, around funding or the government making announcements during a by-election, that topic being covered by the special committee. If, in fact, that is what the amendment does, then I would suggest that many members of the opposition would have grave concern with an amendment such as this.

Having said that, if, in fact, the bill remains in its entirety and is then discussed and a robust conversation – and many people in this House have heard me speak about the need for committees to be used more and to allow Albertans input, allow expert testimony, and allow a much more robust debate, not one where we plow through legislation like we've seen the current government allow, changing some of the rules to allow that to happen. Now, I understand that they've committed to that not happening, but they've certainly set the rules in place or are working on setting the rules in place that would allow that to happen.

So I'm not entirely sure if you're able to provide clarification on exactly whether or not the bill, in fact, would be fully withdrawn, no longer on the Order Paper and, as a result, the general topics discussed at committee. But I'm certain that perhaps that could help provide some clarification, and I'll rest at that.

The Speaker: Hon. member, let me just clarify that the clarity around the amendment and, in fact, all motions rests with the Assembly as a whole, and I think it would be inappropriate for the Speaker, in my capacity, to provide interpretation.

Are there other members who would like to speak to the proposed amendment? Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Loyola: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From my understanding, this does not kill the bill; it's how the amendment needed to be worded so that it could be referred to our committee, the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee.

I want to remind all members of the House that we were given the special task of reviewing four acts: the Election Act, the election financing act, the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act, and then the Conflicts of Interest Act. In this committee we are receiving special presentations by the Ethics Commissioner, the office of public disclosure, and the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, as well, of which we've received more than 80 recommendations that we need to review. So I think it would be appropriate that we then discuss what is brought up in this bill, presented by the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, in relation to all the other acts that are under review by the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee.

I'd like to suggest to all members present here to please support this amendment and stand in favour of it. Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other members who would like to speak to amendment A1? The member for Sylvan Lake . . .

Mr. MacIntyre: Almost. Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. MacIntyre: I understand what the previous member just said that, in that hon. member's opinion, this amendment doesn't kill the bill. However, it specifically says that the order be discharged, the bill withdrawn, and the only thing that's being referred to the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee is the subject matter of the bill but not the bill itself. To me, that clearly states that the bill is killed by this amendment, and the only thing going to the special committee is the subject matter of the bill. In my opinion, that is not what we should be using committees for.

Bills that come to this House, regardless of the source of the bill, should be referred to committee as a bill so that the bill can be debated in the committee, so that the subject matter of the bill and the bill itself can be discussed, witnesses can be brought in, expert testimony can be brought in in the context of the bill that is before the committee. That is the purpose of the structure of these committees in a parliamentary system, and that's not being utilized here. What this amendment simply does is that it kills the bill and says, if I may paraphrase: we'll talk about what the bill's intent was in the committee, but the bill itself will not survive this amendment. It is clearly killed by this, and I believe that is wrong, and it is the wrong thing to do to any bill that is brought to this House, that we intend to have discussed at committee.

There is no reason I can think of why this bill shouldn't be worthy of travelling as a bill to this committee to be discussed within the context of it being a bill. Thank you.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This almost seems like a little bit of déjà vu because, from what I remember about the first session that we sat here, we had Bill 1 before us, and the government said specifically that this isn't a perfect bill. The amendments that we brought forward were to be able to, we thought, make it better. They said: this isn't a perfect bill; let's bring it forward, let's start the process, and let's make sure that it's

something that we can show the people of Alberta that we're doing the right thing.

We are now many weeks past, and the roles have been reversed. It's almost hypocritical – I won't use that word to describe it, but it's almost – to say that we can't bring forward a good bill that should be bipartisan, that should be something that all of the House can support. Just because it came from the opposition side shouldn't be the reason we're defeating this bill.

It is a good bill. It is something that Albertans want, and it's something that I think would represent us well in this House if we pass it. I hope that the members opposite us will see it as maybe not the perfect bill, as you stated first about Bill 1, but as a good start, the right start, and that you would support this. I support it for that reason.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any others? Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak specifically to the member's amendment here, not closing debate on the bill. I think it's important that I read out the amendment word for word or at least the part that I find . . .

4:30

The Speaker: Clarification if I might, hon. member, from the Clerk.

Can the member speak to the amendment? Thank you. Please proceed.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Mr. Clerk. I take particular exception to the part of the amendment that says, "be not now read a second time but that the order be discharged, the bill withdrawn, and the subject matter of the bill referred to the Special Ethics and Accountability Committee as part of its current review."

Now, Mr. Speaker, I've had an opportunity to speak to the mover of this amendment, and I was given assurances that this bill was going to committee. If we specifically are going to move it to committee, I would be in favour of that, but I am not, and I cannot speak to the withdrawal or the discharge of my bill.

Mr. Speaker, I had an opportunity in my constituency a number of years ago, when I was challenged for the particular nomination of my position in the party as a Wildrose representative, and there were several stalwart community members from one prominent community who told me that I would have volunteer challengers to my position. To those members at that time I said: are you afraid of democracy? In this Chamber I see that with the idea of withdrawing this bill that is modelled primarily after legislation that's been passed in two provinces.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on. I find this wording not what the mover has – I believed it to be understood that we had an agreement. I accept with full face value – I did – that we would go. But the wording of this is not what I believe we had agreed to, so I find this somewhat unacceptable in this Chamber here. I think that we need to move ahead.

The Speaker: The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the hon. member who is supporting and who moved this bill. I just want to clarify for the member in speaking to the amendment the reason and logic behind the amendment of referring this to the committee.

First and foremost, the committee was struck in order to look at election financing. I agree with the contents of this bill and what it's intending to do to remove politics from elections or before

elections are called, but I think that there's a role for the committee to play in drafting this type of legislation. I do want to clarify for the member that the only way to send this bill to the committee is, essentially, through this amendment, but it does in fact take this Bill 203 off the Order Paper. However, I can assure the member that the contents of this bill will go to the committee, who will debate it – and all parties are present on that committee – and then bring it back.

At this point in time, you know, my point of this is: if we are truly looking to bring forward the best possible legislation for all Albertans, then it shouldn't matter whose name is on a bill or who put the bill forward. The point is that we're trying to pass legislation that is going to protect Albertans and going to remove politics from elections to ensure that, as we saw – and members in this House have spoken about this. Prior to the four by-elections that occurred earlier, there were announcements made leading up to and during the by-elections. Our government is committed to removing that and ensuring that elections are not a way for the government to make announcements to try to win votes. However, again, the only way that we can bring the contents of this bill to the committee is via this amendment. I appreciate the bill and what this bill is saying; however, this is the course of action that we can ensure that all parties will debate this.

The Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee is already tasked with reviewing this legislation, so it would not make sense to send this to another committee so you have two different committees essentially working on the same piece of legislation. You know, I just want to echo the fact that our government does agree with the contents of this bill, and I do want to thank the hon. member for bringing it forward, but I think that the most prudent thing to do is to send this to the very committee that is looking at reforming our Election Act as one whole and to do it all simultaneously. I will urge all members of this House to vote in favour of this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It shouldn't matter, as the hon. minister says, who came up with a good idea. Good ideas can genuinely and truly come from anywhere. This is a good idea. Bill 1 was also a good idea. Bill 1 took a very small step in a much longer journey to improving Alberta's campaign finances. That is precisely within the scope of the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee. This bill takes one small but very important step to addressing the gap in ethics in this province, and I would sincerely hope that our new government is not simply looking at where the bill came from as reason for not voting in favour of it, which is why I'm rising to speak against the amendment.

You know, these sorts of things, when you – now, many Albertans may not pay as close attention to this Legislative Assembly as I wish they might, but it is exactly these kinds of procedural machinations that really turn Albertans off the democratic process. It allows the government and government members to vote against this bill without actually being on the record of voting against this bill. So, again, that's why I'm speaking against the amendment.

I will just say one thing, Mr. Speaker, as evidence to why I believe this amendment should fail, why we should get back to debate on the main bill, and why ultimately we should pass this bill for second reading. Who else thinks it's a good idea to address this? None other than our Premier, when she was leader of the third party in the last House. "It is not acceptable that this PC government uses the public purse as its own personal campaign fund. This doesn't

pass the smell test and Albertans deserve better.” I urge this House to vote against the amendment because, in fact, Albertans do deserve better.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I remind the House that we are dealing with the amendment on second reading of Bill 203. I’ve identified it as A1.

Are there other hon. members who would wish to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I have to agree with my colleague for Calgary-Elbow that this is not inconsistent with Bill 1, which this House passed even though they knew they were going to set up an ethics and accountability committee. There’s nothing inherently damaging about passing this bill now and then the ethics and accountability committee, with which I am associated, reviewing every aspect of the electoral system.

4:40

I would thank the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, and I think it’s important for all of us to recognize that it doesn’t matter where good ideas come from. It would be a good opportunity to strengthen a sense of collegiality and fly in the face of the previous government, that would never pass anything that came out across the floor, by recognizing this as a good recommendation that can do no harm to what the committee will actually be doing in the next six months or however long it takes to actually go through the whole electoral process review. This could happen within a few months. It could actually enhance the credibility of this government if they vote against this amendment, which would take it out of here and put it into some kind of a longer term process, that may or may not be timely with respect to a by-election. For example, if we have to call a by-election in the next six months, this would be very applicable and give people a sense of confidence that this is a good idea. It should be acted upon. Nothing lost by passing this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any other hon. members wish to speak to the amendment?

Hearing none, I call the question on the amendment to second reading of Bill 203, Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015, as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:41 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Notley
Babcock	Hinkley	Payne
Bilous	Hoffman	Phillips
Carson	Horne	Piquette
Ceci	Jabbour	Renaud
Connolly	Kazim	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Littlewood	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schmidt
Dach	Malkinson	Schreiner
Dang	McCuaig-Boyd	Shepherd
Drever	McKittrick	Sucha
Eggen	McLean	Sweet

Feehan	McPherson	Turner
Fitzpatrick	Miller	Westhead
Ganley	Nielsen	

Against the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Rodney
Barnes	Jean	Schneider
Clark	Loewen	Smith
Cooper	MacIntyre	Starke
Cyr	McIver	Strankman
Drysdale	Nixon	Swann
Ellis	Orr	Taylor
Fildebrandt	Panda	van Dijken
Gotfried	Pitt	Yao

Totals:	For – 44	Against – 27
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[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move a request for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 8(1) and to move directly to Motion 503.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Student Participation on School Boards

503. Mr. Dang moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consult with school boards and youth to encourage senior high school student participation on boards with a view to increasing dialogue, increasing student engagement in board policy and planning, and educating students about democratic governance.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to rise and speak about the importance of student participation in democratic governance at the school board level. It is my privilege today to encourage our government to recognize the important contribution that students make to enhancing their educational experiences and to affirm its commitment to consult with school boards about how student participation can best be encouraged at a local level.

The 2014-15 school year saw over 670,000 students enrolled in Alberta’s education system. Of those, over 160,000 were enrolled between grades 10 and 12. The potential that these students have to make a positive impact in their schools and their communities is tremendous. We are now faced with an opportunity to reach out to students and engage them in meaningful dialogue about their educational experiences.

Students are our province’s next generation of leaders. The experiences that they have while in school help chart the course for both their futures and the future of this province. What better way to ensure our long-term success than by investing in our young people? Students are our future small-business owners, health care professionals, teachers, and entrepreneurs. Providing them with the tools they need to grow and diversify our economy and create good jobs for Albertans in the future will ensure our province’s prosperity.

As future community leaders students are also learning the Alberta way of doing things, how to take care of each other and foster welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments. Students, if given the chance, could play an even greater role in building a safe and caring society. When students become leaders

in their schools and communities, it can have a positive impact on the province as a whole, both now and in the future.

Students should be encouraged to work with leadership at their schools and with local school boards to provide input on local policies and practices. I've met with former EPSB student trustees, I've met with representatives from Student Voice Initiative, and the value of student leadership is clear, Mr. Speaker. I attended a consultation on the proposed Education Act last week and was pleased to see that students were invited to share with their participation and their perspective.

I believe that the government in collaboration with local school boards has an opportunity to build on that gesture and more fully engage students in democratic governance at the local level. This motion will affirm our commitment to giving students a say in their education and will support students who want to make a difference in Alberta and in their futures.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there other members who wish to speak to Motion 503? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak to Motion 503 this afternoon. As a high school social studies teacher introducing students to and engaging them in the democratic process has been a part of my life for 30 years. I think it is critically important to provide real opportunities for students to participate in local politics and to become engaged citizens. Indeed, this is part of the vision of Inspiring Education and one of the pieces that I wholeheartedly support. I often had my students participate in the political process by working for the political parties of their choice.

Schools have debate clubs, student unions, mentorship programs, and other ways of encouraging students to become participatory citizens. This is a key outcome of education and one of the major roles that education must play in society. However, do students have a legitimate role on school boards? Should they participate in budgetary evaluations and contract negotiations? Are teenagers, who may not be old enough to vote in governmental elections or legally purchase cigarettes, equipped to make long-term decisions about education in their school board catchment areas?

5:00

These are issues that policy-makers have battled for decades. It seems that there is a growing recognition that students can and should have a voice on school boards in an advisory role, and we are seeing this begin to happen. For instance, in 2014 high schools in Edmonton public ran a nomination process to select one candidate per school, and the district's Student Advisory Council cast their ballots for the student trustee. This pilot project, aimed to support dialogue between the student body and the board, increases students' engagement in board policy and planning and educates students about democratic governance. It has become a formal part of the board as part of the district legacy course. The student trustee is an elected, nonvoting representative providing student voice to the board.

Alberta is not alone in supporting the notion of students participating on school boards. The first school board in Ontario to enact legislation allowing a nonvoting student member was the former Kenora board of education in 1989. In 1997 the Progressive Conservative government of former Premier Mike Harris introduced the Education Quality Improvement Act as Bill 160. Although this act instigated a labour dispute, within the legislation was the creation of the position of pupil representative. The act allowed individual school boards to draft their own policies, to

allow for flexibility within guidelines. In 1998 every school board had at least one pupil representative.

The key to making this work is to encourage school boards to set up processes that will allow students to participate meaningfully and to ensure that they feel valued as part of the team. I know as a schoolteacher that if I wanted to get my kids engaged in their school work, they needed to see it as being meaningful to their lives. If we want these kids to be engaged in the political process, it must be seen as being meaningful in their lives. I know that I would talk with all of my kids, especially the ones in grade 12, as we looked at the political process, encouraging them to be a part of that process, to be involved in that process, to be engaged in that process. One of the lowest voting groups has been young people, and if we want to engage them in the political process, then this may be a way of starting to encourage that.

A central issue would be to determine how the student trustee would be elected, I think, or even if the student trustee would be elected. You know, a survey was undertaken across the United States in 2009 to summarize this issue. The findings indicate that 25 states do have student trustees while 14 do not. The method of selection for these trustees varied. Some were appointed from local school councils, some states held elections, and some school boards simply appointed a student rep.

One strength, I believe, of this motion is that there is no prescribed implementation process. School boards would be able to determine how best to use this practice to meet their local goals. This practice would provide a vehicle for collaboration between students, school administration, and the board on the issue of civic participation and the rights to participation. Given the range of options in the model of participation school boards that wish to have student representatives may find different ways of meeting that goal that allow for recognition of local concerns. Because of that, this is a motion that I will fully support.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this motion and to the Member for Edmonton-South West for coming up with this idea. It's entirely appropriate that the Member for Edmonton-South West originated this motion. I think that he's a living example of youth engagement who transformed from an activist to, in fact, a Member of the Legislative Assembly and is certainly a perfect example of how one should not judge based on the age of a person, being young, middle aged, or old, for that matter.

I appreciate the comments from the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon. His comments were well positioned, I believe, as well, and curiously I think the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon and myself actually had sort of parallel courses, to some extent, in that we both taught for more than two decades in high school social studies as well and both, I think, engaged in this sense of engagement and the value of engagement for students. Certainly, I'm sure the member experiences the same phenomenon that I do in running into my students years later and still to this day who have taken a certain path of activism and/or leadership in their chosen fields. I could see the kernel or the beginnings of that when they were 15, 16, 17 years old. So certainly on an anecdotal level we know that engagement of students in the political process is extremely valuable.

Mr. Speaker, I just completed a tour over the last few weeks of all 61 school boards and had a specific discussion with all of them in regard to having student membership on their boards. I used the model, actually, that I first saw Edmonton public schools using a couple of years ago and to this day, and they went through a very

interesting process by which they had a student on the board. They took a nomination from each high school and went through the process. I heard it described that each of the candidates then set up sort of what's the equivalent of a science fair poster board. I'm not sure if maybe this is part of our democratic renewal process that we could use here in the Legislature, where you set up your display and have people voting on whether your volcano explodes sufficiently or not and so forth. But, seriously, this is what they did do in regard to their political campaigns to take this historic spot in Edmonton public.

Also, the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta has similarly engaged students on their advisory board. When you go to their zone meetings or their provincial meetings, these students are there from all across the province and provide, I think, sometimes the most insightful comments, that really do contribute to the meetings.

Certainly, our government is very interested in expanding this, and this motion is very welcome. We know that the future of our democracy depends on our engagement of young people to pick up the voting habit. Once they do so at a young age, then they're very likely to continue through the rest of their lives. Democracy depends on participation, Mr. Speaker, and certainly I think this motion goes far to reaffirm this Chamber's and our government's commitment to ensure that we have democracy that is strong and alive here in the province of Alberta.

Thanks very much.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I note that maybe there were some storyboards in the rotunda last week after the budget. I think I saw some.

Are there other members who would like to speak to Motion 503 today?

5:10

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to rise and speak about the importance of student participation in democratic governance at the school board level. It is my privilege today to support the motion by the Member for Edmonton-South West and encourage our government to recognize the important contribution that students can make to enhance their own educational experience.

I have seen first-hand how young people and students can impact school boards and municipal decision-making. I was privileged to serve as a school trustee for three terms. For two of these terms I served alongside two elected school trustees who were in university and had just graduated from our own school system. They brought to the board a practical approach and an intimate knowledge of what students wanted and needed. They were instrumental in engaging with the student leadership in our schools and making sure that the impact of our decision-making on these issues came to the board's attention. One of these young people is now the executive director of the Aga Khan Foundation in Canada, and I think that his experience as an elected school trustee has really helped him a lot in this role. I also helped to set up a youth council for a municipality in which youth councillors would debate and discuss matters brought to them by the municipal council and then have to report back publicly at a council meeting their decisions and recommendations.

I think that the 29th Legislative Assembly demonstrates the role and importance of involving youth in elected office and how an elected body can be enriched by having MLAs from all age groups. School trustees play a crucial role in ensuring that our schools provide the best education to all students and that schools meet local needs and concerns. Having youth and student voices on decision-making bodies will enhance this.

Student councils already play a crucial role in schools, and many school boards already have a leadership program that empowers students to be involved in decision-making. The motion clearly urges that consultation with school boards and youth themselves is required as there may be different ways of involvement and participation.

Students and youth already make a huge, positive impact in their schools and in their communities. During both the last provincial and federal elections in my riding a number of schools had election forums organized and led by students. Other students worked as election workers during the last federal election. Students are already engaged in determining their futures. We are now faced with an opportunity to reach out to students and engage them in meaningful dialogue about their educational experience. Students and youth already have demonstrated their interest and engagement in their future. This motion will affirm our commitment to give students a say in their education and will support students who want to make a difference in Alberta.

The Speaker: Any other members to speak to Motion 503? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today in support of Motion 503, Student Participation on School Boards, as presented by the Member for Edmonton-South West. I'm pleased to lend my voice to encourage consultation between school boards and youth to encourage senior high school student participation on boards. I understand that local school boards are indeed in the best position to recognize what steps need to be taken in order to best engage with students at the local level. I think we can all agree that real student engagement is essential to student-centred learning. What better way to enhance student learning than to consult with students and find out from them how best to enhance their own educational experiences?

As you may know, many school divisions already make space for students to engage with decision-makers through student advisory councils. The Edmonton public school board took a historic step toward student leadership and inclusion by including a student trustee on their board in 2014-15. The Speak Out initiative has since 2008 provided a forum for thousands of Alberta student ideas and experiences.

Perhaps one of the best recent examples of the importance and value of student input and leadership is the role that students played and continue to play in the creation and support of gay-straight alliances. Brave students stood up and spoke out, telling adults in leadership roles that they wanted and needed respectful, safe learning environments. Our youth are our future. They're our next generation of leaders, and they should be included in the most important work of guiding their education. What better way to ensure our long-term success as a province than by investing in our young people and giving students a say in their education. It's my pleasure to support this motion, Motion 503.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will keep my comments very brief this evening. [interjections] I know that can be hard to believe.

I think my hon. colleague laid out a very clear conversation around some of the really great things about Motion 503, and certainly I, too, will be rising in support of the motion, and I thank the hon. member for bringing it forward. A good idea in this place is a good idea no matter who brings it forward.

The fact of the matter is that I often go around the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and from time to time I'll hear people talking about: young people this or young people that; they don't work hard like they used to, or they're not as respectful as they used to be. But I go to a number of events that honour students in the form of awards banquets. I go to leadership classes to have conversations about the future of our province and converse with students, and one thing that I am certain of, Mr. Speaker, is that with the young people in Alberta today the future of our province is very bright.

So I would be remiss if I missed the opportunity – you know, there are some young people in the gallery this evening who, in fact, are also part of the future of our province. They are politically engaged, and they are very keen on the process, not only in the school boards but right here in the Assembly as well. I happen to know them by name. Porter and Paxton and Peyton happen to be my children, but I know that they also would support a motion like this in the name of being active and engaged citizens of the future of our province.

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

Ms McPherson: Thank you. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to rise and speak in support of Motion 503, Mr. Speaker. There are many examples of the success of including student representation on school boards such as the Calgary Board of Education Chief Superintendent's Student Advisory Council, which was established in 2010. The purpose was to meet regularly with the chief superintendent, discuss the issues in the system, and propose solutions.

Nationally there is the Student Voice Initiative, that gives students a voice in their education. It operates with the support of policy-makers, school administrators, academics, and students from across North America and the world and gives students a greater voice in their own education. It was based on the student trustee positions within the Ontario school system.

All of these models foster a student leadership framework that encourages students to encourage more welcoming learning environments that are respectful and enhance the education of both those students who participate directly and the students that attend schools with this kind of framework.

For the more than 160,000 high school students currently in Alberta's schools it's a tremendous opportunity to participate in their school communities and to make a positive contribution, both of which are skills that are invaluable in the wider community. These young people are our future, and this is a chance to give them even more skills to take forward with them throughout their lives, which is a benefit for all of us.

I encourage all members of the Assembly to support this motion. Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other members who would like to speak to Motion 503? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'll be brief also. This is a motion that will stimulate all people in Alberta to get more engaged with their democracy. Whether you're a parent or youth, you want to see more opportunity for engagement in the political process. I don't see any downside to including young people on the boards of education. It's obviously more interaction, more understanding, more learning mutually between board

members and students. I see this as a principled and rather visionary step that perhaps could go across the country.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

5:20

The Speaker: Are there any other members to speak to Motion 503? The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks. I, too, will be brief. I just wanted to say that if I passed up this opportunity to say that it's a dang good idea, I'd never forgive myself.

I also just wanted to acknowledge that Ontario has had student trustees in place for over two decades. They've been a tremendous asset. It was actually somebody that I met in my school board days who brought this idea forward to me, somebody who had just graduated, I think, two months earlier and had met student trustees from Ontario and, when it came to Edmonton public, was really active in bringing it forward. Her name is Claire Edwards, and I know that she's been a big champion for Student Voice Initiative. As one of the trustees who had the honour of serving with a student trustee in the past, I want to say that, like members of both sides of this House have said, the questions were incredibly thoughtful and the connection to the number one stakeholder that we're there to serve, the kids, was evident at every board meeting, not just from the one individual. It also, I think, reminded everyone at the table of the role we play in making good decisions for the kids we serve.

Thank you to the hon. member for bringing this motion forward. I'm proud to support it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West to close debate.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am glad to see support from both sides of the House on this issue. I think it's a clearly nonpartisan issue. It's clearly something that we are doing to increase the education and increase the dialogue we have between our students and elected officials. We know that our local school boards are the ones that are capable of making these decisions to include their students and to include their peers in the decision-making process.

I would also like to mention that I think the Minister of Health has probably been waiting months to make that pun in the House, and I'm very glad that I've been able to give her that opportunity.

As we know, the students play these key roles in fostering welcoming, caring, and respectful learning environments. Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. I urge every single member of this Assembly to support the motion, and I just want to say again how excited I am that we are going to be able to make that change in the lives of these students, that change that will allow them to become the future leaders and the current leaders that they already are.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 carried unanimously]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Seeing that we made very good progress today, I move that we adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:24 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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