



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 16, 2015

Day 17

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)	McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)	McLean, Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND), Deputy Government Whip
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Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)	Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
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Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)	Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND), Premier
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Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W), Official Opposition House Leader	Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)	Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)	Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (Ind)	Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC), Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip	Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)	Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)	Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)	Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND), Government Whip
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)	Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)	Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
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Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)	Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)	Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC), Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader	Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
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Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W), Leader of the Official Opposition	Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)	van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)	Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)	Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)	
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)	
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)	

Party standings:

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

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Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 16, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us reflect. On this memorial day of remembrance for Métis leader Louis Riel let us try and learn from our history. We often speak in this place about a global economy and a global environment. We may also want to think more about our global humanity. Let us think about how the families who lost loved ones in Nairobi, in Beirut, and in Paris might feel today. How and what might we do in this Chamber to create threads of strength for our global humanity? Threads of leadership when bound together may become a rope of strength that reaches over the paper lines we call national boundaries.

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark, and 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 Visitors

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly His Excellency Beat Walter Nobs, ambassador of Switzerland. His Excellency is accompanied today by Mr. Fabian Grass, attaché at the embassy in Ottawa, and Mr. Andreas Bayer, honorary consul of Switzerland in Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta takes great pride in our international relations, and this rings true in our dynamic, strong, and productive relationship with Switzerland. In 2010 and 2014 Alberta's exports to Switzerland averaged approximately \$82 million per year, with our imports averaging approximately \$114 million per year during the same period. And while it's clear that we have strong ties in trade and investment, it is equally important to highlight the fact that our ties with Switzerland extend far beyond this, with many cultural and educational links as well. This visit is a great opportunity to exchange information and identify new areas of mutual interest between Alberta and Switzerland.

The ambassador, the attaché, and honorary consul are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I would now ask our esteemed guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any school groups here today?

Hearing none, I would recognize the hon. Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Dr. Joseph Abraham, vice-president, leadership and education, of the Professional Association of Resident Physicians. Dr. Abraham is here with a group of resident physicians, who've joined us for resident physician day at the Legislature. Dr. Abraham and all of these physician residents have come to this Legislature to meet with elected officials and share their perspectives on health care delivery in Alberta, with a particular focus this year on seniors' care. Please join me in sharing the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly, and I ask our guests to rise and receive it.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of the hon. minister of economic development, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three guests from the Beverly Towne Community Development Society: Colleen Fidler, Kelly Verhegge, and Terry Verhegge. Since 1997 the Beverly Towne Community Development Society has worked with residents and organizations in the neighbourhood of Beverly in Edmonton, and I'm very proud to say that I was around at that time and assisted in that. The Beverly Towne Community Development Society facilitates ongoing programs for local children and youth aged five to 25, and they work jointly with local community leagues and business associations to produce a quarterly community paper that's delivered to all residents in the area. I would ask these guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly four representatives of the Terra Child and Family Support Centre, located in Braemar school in the Ottewell neighbourhood of my constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. Joining us today are Rochelle Bartier and Sarah Hendricks, two moms who have children in the centre; Laura Fulmer, Terra's director of knowledge, learning, and evaluation; and Laura Barry-Johansen, a youth leadership facilitator. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ms Miller: Mr. Speaker, it's my absolute pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly several members of our caucus legislative services team, led by director Tara Ward and joined here by Poushali Mitra, Ben Lemphers, Brent Kelly, and Chris Fulmer. The leg. services team works hard to support the caucus in the daily business of this House and in our committees. They're totally awesome. I'd like to ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly five hard-working constituents of southeast Edmonton working towards a fair, safe, and reliable vehicle-for-hire industry. In the gallery we have with us today Dawinder Deo, Balraj Manhas, Abouzar Aslam, Manjinder Punia, and Husni Al-Khateeb. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

1:40

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly one of my constituents, Ildiko Spisak. Her parents originally immigrated here from Hungary, and of course she was then born here, right in Edmonton, and has lived here ever since. She's been in the riding of Edmonton-Decore for four years and is an avid gardener. I'm very proud to have her as one of my constituents, and she's here today to see the fine work that this Legislature can accomplish. I'd ask her to now please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my amazing wife of 15 years, Tiffany, and our two youngest children, Austin and Chyanne. Tiffany is my high school sweetheart. In about grade 10 I met her at laser tag, of all things . . .

An Hon. Member: Big target.

Mr. Nixon: . . . when a short girl caught my attention mainly because she spent the whole time shooting me over and over with the laser. She, like you guys, said that it was because I was a big target. I like to think she was trying to catch me. As you will see shortly, when she stands up in the gallery, Mr. Speaker, there's a slight height difference. She's about five foot two, and I'm about five foot 20. Maybe she was really targeting me because I was big, but in the end I caught her. I have to say that Tiffany is the perfect partner to go through life with and an incredible mother to our three children.

As for Austin and Chyanne they both are a few weeks shy of their ninth birthday, and as twins they have a unique relationship. Austin is the oldest by about two and a half minutes and rarely misses a chance to tell his sister that fact. He also has an incredible sense of humour and an amazing heart. His sister Chyanne is currently slightly taller, and she rarely misses an opportunity to tell Austin that. She is her daddy's girl and has inherited many of my traits, but thankfully she inherited her mother's beauty.

I thank Tiffany, Austin, and Chyanne for teaching me each day to be loved and to love, and I ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. member, is there any truth to the rumour that, in fact, you made your wife wear an orange suit as you were shooting in the game?

Mr. Nixon: Nice try, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to introduce to you and through you one of Medicine Hat's fine teachers, Sterling Hamilton. I'd like to take this opportunity to commend him for recently receiving the Edwin Parr award for teaching excellence. This award is given to first-year teachers who demonstrate excellent skills in the classroom and who go above and beyond – above and beyond – with involvement in extracurricular activities and professional development. In fact, he's volunteered his time for many years coaching basketball, including my two sons. Sterling has done his family, his community, and Medicine Hat's Crescent Heights high school proud. I'd like to ask that

Sterling rise and accept the traditional warm welcome and congratulations of this House.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other guests to be introduced today?

Welcome to all of you.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: I would remind the House that past precedent is that the hon. Leader of the Opposition may also speak to a ministerial statement, and I would also remind the House that unanimous consent is required by the Assembly for additional speakers.

The hon. Premier.

Global Violence and Syrian Refugees

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to address the House today to speak to two matters, the attacks in Paris and Lebanon and proposals from our new federal government for Canada to accept Syrian refugees. I know that I speak for every member of this House today and for all Albertans when I express our sincere condolences to the innocent victims of these evil attacks and to their families. I want to express Alberta's solidarity with the people of France and Lebanon as they navigate the difficult road to recovery from these deeply shocking events. Mr. Speaker, these events remind us that we must all stand together against violence and against terror.

I also know that I speak for all Albertans when I say that we condemn these despicable, shameful, and evil acts. These are the acts of people who have lost touch with all humanity, including their own. Our deepest sympathies and our solidarity are with the victims. Together as Albertans we say: je suis Paris and I am Beirut. We stand behind you and all victims of terror and violence.

Mr. Speaker, the hundreds of thousands of children, women, and men who are fleeing Syria are fleeing from acts like these. They, too, are innocents, and these children, these families need our help. All people deserve to live in peace and security. These things, which we are so fortunate to enjoy in Alberta, are what we wish for all people, no matter where they live, all over the world.

Mr. Speaker, the history of countries in conflict around the world is very long. Refugees from Syria are only the latest victims of violence who are desperately seeking a safe home for their families. For decades Alberta has provided such safe communities. We have welcomed people from around the world fleeing violence and oppression and seeking a new start. Families have come here from Ukraine, from postwar Europe, from Vietnam, from the Sudan, and from many other parts of the world, and when they arrive in Alberta, they find a place where they can begin a new life, a safe life, a life of promise and opportunity. In return, these families have contributed to our communities, our culture, and our shared prosperity.

For many of us in this House, perhaps most of us, the chance to make a life is what our own families were seeking when they came to Alberta, whether it was months ago or years ago or generations ago. These are qualities of life that each of us holds dear and wishes for our own children. These are qualities of life we wish for others around the world.

Mr. Speaker, bringing refugees to Canada must be done in a safe and secure way that protects Alberta families as well as those fleeing violence abroad. We look to the federal government to assure Canadians that this will be done, and we will then do our part to ensure that these families find sanctuary here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Liberty, equality, fraternity: those are the sentiments of the people of Paris. We stand with the people of France, the people of Lebanon. Those were the sentiments of the people whose lives were forever changed Friday evening. Those were the sentiments of the people who lost their lives in a fight brought to the streets of the city, long home to liberty. I rise today to stand with those people, to stand in solidarity, especially with our French brothers and sisters, in the wake of what can only be described as a savage and cowardly attack on the great city of Paris and other places around the world, an attack especially on our great ally and an attack on western values. We as Albertans, as Canadians stand in solidarity with those victims and the families of those victims and with our ally and great friends. We partake in their national day of mourning in France, and we reflect upon the lives of those lost in an attack so cowardly and barbaric, an attack driven by ideological evil and hatred.

Words fail to describe the heartbreak that we feel in the wake of this tragic situation, but words must be used to denounce this deplorable atrocity. Western civilization is under attack. It is under attack by a radical and evil ideology. Make no mistake. As the French President, François Hollande, frankly put it, the attacks on the city of Paris are an act of war. These attacks echo the very fact that our former Prime Minister Stephen Harper pointed out in the wake of an attack on Paris earlier this year, that this international movement of evil has declared war. They have declared war on the western world. They have declared war on nations that are free, democratic, and tolerant. They have declared war on the notion of tolerance and peace. They have declared war on each and every single one of us in Canada. They have declared war on us. With each such declaration of war and the reinforcement of such made this past Friday, now is the time to fight back. Now is the time to stand strong. Now is the time to unite as one. We must be resolute. We must fight to defeat terrorists that would do such deplorable things to our allies.

1:50

Canada has a long and proud history, a history of standing side by side with our allies. We have always acted in times of need. From fighting evil in the two world wars to defeating terrorists in the wake of the September 11 attacks, Canada has defended freedom and democracy time and time again. We have assisted our allies in these times of need because we know how important the collective values that we share are. Our moral compass has always guided us to do what is right. In the wake of this tragedy Canada must continue to be an ally in this fight. We must avoid any temptation to retreat for we know that as a country dedicated to freedom and the rights of all peoples, we too, here, remain a target. We saw it last year with the cowardly attack on Parliament Hill. Now is not the time to back down.

As a province and as a country, yes, let's remain committed to welcoming the true victims fleeing this evil in Syria and Iraq, but let's remember to be vigilant. As Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall said earlier today, let's not be rushed. Let's not be guided by rushed quotas and deadlines but by ensuring the safety of Canadians as our paramount consideration. Our job as politicians in Canada is the safety and security of the people we represent. We must stand tall with our French allies and must defend the common values that we share. These values are weapons we must use for they are the thing our enemy most despises. Today we are all in mourning, we are all France, and we are all defiant of terrorism. To that I say this. Long

live liberty, equality, and fraternity. Long live the free world, bound by no enemy and by no evil.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

Was there any wish to ask consent for other members to speak? Is there a request to speak? Would you introduce the request for unanimous consent, hon. member.

Mr. McIver: So moved, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hearing a request to have unanimous consent for speakers to speak, is it for the leader of the third party or just for yourself?

Mr. McIver: For additional party leaders.

The Speaker: For the party leaders. Thank you.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, colleagues. On behalf of the PC caucus I extend our heartfelt condolences to everyone who has lost friends and family in the attacks that occurred in Paris and indeed in Beirut and Baghdad. The news is devastating. As the world grieves these losses of life, we pray for comfort and peace for the global community. The basis of Canada is freedom, freedom to move about and carry on our daily lives without fear of attack. Canadians are encouraged to stand together, with open hearts and minds for all people.

Mr. Speaker, at a time like this it can be natural to strike out with angry words and actions, but it's also time for love and compassion towards the victims. I believe it is the intent of the terrorists to divide our society against itself and make us afraid. Because of this, it is important that we stand together as Canadians and as Albertans to reconfirm our belief in equality for all regardless of race, creed, colour, religion, or gender. In this way, we send the message that we reject acts of fear and embrace the freedoms protected in Canada, in France, and in every country who cares about her people.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View and leader of the Liberal Party.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canadians from across the country stand in solidarity with the people of Paris, Kenya, and Lebanon, victims of the terrible and cowardly acts of terrorism over the weekend. The perpetrators of these heinous acts seek to shake us. They seek to undermine our commitment to human rights, to tolerance, freedom, and humanity. They will fail.

In the face of such violence and hate, Mr. Speaker, the people of the world have responded with love and solidarity, with moments of silence, prayer, messages of support, the bright colours of the French flag on bridges, towers, Facebook profiles, and this very building. We know there will be much discussion and debate and division in the aftermath of these attacks. Heartbreakingly, we know that all too well from previous experiences of such violence.

I here state that I reject the rhetoric of a declaration of war. The west has contributed to the violence in the Middle East at least since 2003, when the U.S. illegally invaded Iraq, and the carnage continues in that country. There will be debates about the hundreds of thousands of children, women, and men fleeing the Middle East. We will be reminded that they are fleeing from acts of these types and that they, too, are innocents.

We know that violence begets violence and that the world will be left, as the Bible says, with an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, with everyone toothless and blind. We know that they must be helped in a way that is safe and secure and protects Alberta families as well as those fleeing the violence abroad.

For today, Mr. Speaker, the House stands united. Nous sommes Paris. Nous sommes tous Paris.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow and leader of the Alberta Party.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all of my colleagues. The atrocities in Paris and Lebanon and indeed elsewhere have no place in any society. I stand with you, my Legislature colleagues, and with all Albertans in condemning these vile and cowardly attacks.

I spent a lot of time this weekend talking with my family. We talked first about the victims – those who died in Paris, those who were injured – and the families and friends of those victims. We talked about the first responders, who ran toward danger while others found safety, and we reflected on how truly fortunate we are to live in Canada and how proud we are to be Canadian.

Now, it was difficult to talk with our young daughters, who are only eight and 11, about such a horrible and tragic event, but it allowed us to reflect on the importance of our freedom, how that freedom was won, and how it is maintained. We talked about how important it is to not live in fear in the face of terror and how our society must remain open and accepting.

At times Canada can seem very far away from violence, but we must remain ever vigilant, as the attacks on Parliament Hill just over a year ago show us. But we must not take this to the point of losing our fundamental Canadian values. The moment we close our doors, the moment we close our hearts and our minds, that's when the tyrants win. Like the people of Paris, who welcomed strangers on the night of the attacks – they opened their doors, portes ouvertes – we must keep our doors open and our society open.

Openness can be abused by determined evil people, but it is this very openness that makes our society great. It allows us to chose our own destiny. It makes us strong. Canada has always welcomed immigrants and refugees, and this is a source of strength for our country and a source of great pride, and it must remain so. I support the Premier's commitment to work with the federal government to settle Syrian refugees in Alberta, and in doing so, we must remain vigilant and consider our own security. We can and we must do both. We stand with our Parisian brothers and sisters. Je suis Paris. Nous sommes Paris.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

Job Creation and Retention

Mr. Jean: Albertans are worried. Jobs are vanishing, and investment is disappearing. Sixty-five thousand Albertans have lost their job since the election, and NDP policies are making it much worse. On Friday EnCana announced it's putting a major natural gas project on hold specifically because of this government's royalty and climate reviews. That's hundreds of new jobs no longer available to Albertans. Does the Premier understand that her policies are chasing investment and jobs out of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I understand is that our government is working very hard to inject the kind of

stability into our oil and gas sector which has not existed for many years as a result of the previous government's failure to take responsibility for our need to have a better environmental regime in order to sell our products in new markets. Therefore, hard work has to be done. It hasn't been done for a long time. It does have to be done now. It's being welcomed by many people in the industry, and in the long term it will be better for the industry and for Albertans, whom we are here to represent.

2:00

Mr. Jean: Investors have hit the pause button, but if the Premier is not careful, they will be hitting the stop button. Some analysts are predicting that oil could go down to \$20 a barrel. Companies are trying to stay here, but they're not being encouraged by this NDP government's risky economic policy: higher taxes, more regulations, job-killing royalty reviews, and now a carbon tax. To the Premier: how does her ideological agenda do anything to help Albertans being handed pink slips at the end of every week?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting. We continue to learn new things about the Official Opposition every day. First, they tell us that the way for us to control the price of oil and to increase the price of oil is to fire teachers and nurses. Then they spend weeks telling us that they would rather not get out of bed to work before 10 o'clock in the morning. Last week they said that Alberta should ignore its environmental record and reputation because somehow that had nothing to do with the problems that we've had getting pipeline to markets, and this weekend they voted at their convention in favour of allowing for more private health care. So which is it? None of that is going to help Albertans.

Mr. Jean: Two jokes in one answer: that's pretty good.

The NDP could not be more out of touch with basic economics. When times are tough, they raise people's taxes. When pipeline projects are put forward, the NDP campaign against them. When jobs are bleeding, the Premier talks about shutting down our coal industry. In Hanna local officials are warning that if the NDP don't slow down, the NDP would, and I quote, basically be shutting down our community. Unquote. What does the Premier have to say to Albertans who are worried that their jobs are the next ones on the chopping block?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, as we have discussed a number of times in this House and, of course, in the seven or eight months preceding being here in this House, Alberta is going through tough economic times. That's why our government introduced a budget that will stabilize public services which Albertans rely on, put us on a careful, reasonable path to balancing the budget, and stimulate economic growth and job creation. This is the kind of leadership Albertans are looking for, not the panicked, slash-and-burn response that the Official Opposition ran on and then was rejected by the people of this province.

The Speaker: Second question.

Carbon Tax

Mr. Jean: Higher business taxes, higher personal taxes, higher gas taxes, higher insurance taxes, and now this government is proposing a new tax on everything. While the Premier was campaigning for the hearts and the minds of people in downtown Toronto, she announced that a new carbon tax is on its way. It would have been nice if she'd told Albertans first. Why is the Premier more determined to create another new tax on Albertans rather than working to protect Albertans' jobs?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that will help protect Albertans' jobs is getting a pipeline, that neither the previous provincial government was able to get built or this Official Opposition leader's previous federal government was able to get built. One of the reasons it never got done was because they refused to address the issue of environmental change and the need for our province to act responsibly on that issue and be a responsible energy producer on the national stage. That's what we're going to do, and that's how we're going to make the case for us to be able to get our product to market and ensure that people in markets across this world want our product.

Mr. Jean: Well, you can't get oil anywhere without pipelines.

Quote: we will do what needs to be done. Unquote. No, that wasn't the Premier describing a plan to protect Alberta jobs; it was the Premier defending her promise to implement a carbon tax on all Albertans. The damage of this tax is very obvious. It's a tax on everything and will be the latest blow to Albertans who are already losing their jobs or seeing their take-home pay cut. What does the Premier have to say to the Albertans that are losing work and will now have a lot less money because of her brand new tax on everything?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said, it is really important for this government to move forward on a good, reasonable climate change strategy. That's what we've been talking about. That's what we talked about in our budget speech, and that's what I talked about in my speech in Toronto because that ties into our ability to get our product to market, to build pipelines, and to ensure that people want to buy our product. So this is what we are going to do. This is not new; there are no surprises here. I'm pleased to be able to move forward on the very agenda that we presented to Albertans, that they voted for, that they see as being important for their kids' and the province's future.

Mr. Jean: Let me be clear. Albertans aren't going to receive any new pipelines if the Premier keeps campaigning against them. If the Premier cared about the damage her policies are doing, she would actually listen to the people pleading with her to stop hitting them with even more taxes that they can't afford. She would pick up the phone with the people in Hanna and hear the fear and anxiety those people feel. That's what Wildrose MLAs have been doing. We're here to fight for jobs, fight for a stronger economy, and fight for a strong Alberta. When will the Premier join with the Wildrose and start fighting for Albertans' jobs?

Ms Notley: Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. I will never join with the Wildrose to fight for the kind of slashing, burning, layoffs, rollbacks that they want to bring to this province because that will not help jobs in Alberta one bit. It will undercut the future of children, it will undercut the future of people in postsecondary education, and it will make our seniors more at risk. That is what this government will not do. We will grow Alberta, we'll stabilize our public services, we'll get to balance, we'll stimulate the economy, and we'll do it without ripping everything apart in the process.

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

Public Access to Executive Council Members Premier's Calgary Office Appointment

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. When Albertans are worried about jobs, this government is distracted by its own selfish

interests. The last time we met, we raised the issue of selling access with a fundraiser. The Government House Leader blustered, and then someone got a note, and abject apologies followed. Selling access to cabinet for political fundraisers is wrong. We've heard the apologies, but the event still goes on. Isn't the Premier concerned about the integrity of her government? Will she follow the precedent of Premier Stelmach and cancel this event?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, as has already been indicated, we have consulted with the Ethics Commissioner. We have done exactly what the Ethics Commissioner has told us that we should do, so we are very comfortable that going forward we are handling this very well. I might ask the members opposite if those extra special, more expensive tables for sitting with Wildrose MLAs are still more expensive or if maybe they changed that plan, too.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I've never made a constituent of mine ever pay for access to me.

So far this year an average of 1,500 Albertans have lost their jobs, but this government continues to be distracted by partisan politics. When the Premier was on this side of the aisle, she understood that it was wrong for the governing parties to use the Premier's office as a fundraising tool. Her party has apologized and renamed the event, but everyone knows now that you can get a meeting with the minister if you give \$250 to the NDP. You will get access. This event sullies the integrity of the government. Will the Premier commit . . .

The Speaker: Do you have a question, hon. member? Your question.

Mr. Nixon: This event sullies the integrity of this government. Will the Premier commit that neither she nor her cabinet will attend?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what I did was that I had my office immediately consult with the Ethics Commissioner to ensure that we were doing the right thing both in terms of the letter of the law as well as in terms of her overall advice about what she thought would be good just in general. That's what we did, and we are moving forward based on that advice. I feel perfectly confident that Albertans are getting a tremendous amount of access to this whole caucus as well as the cabinet and as well as myself, and I'm very proud of that. I look forward to continuing that in the future.

2:10

Mr. Nixon: Last week Finning announced 1,100 layoffs, most of them in Alberta, but this government is distracted trying to find jobs for their friends. A few days ago the Premier put out a very rare Saturday morning press release. It announced that even after voters rejected him, the Premier was determined to create at least one job, and the failed NDP candidate from Calgary-Foothills is now landing a \$150,000 patronage appointment. The Premier used to rail against this stuff. Now she puts out stealthy Saturday morning press releases. What does the Premier have to say for herself?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, let me just say that that position at McDougall Centre is a political position, first of all. It's in my office. Secondly, the person who's gotten that position is earning less than the person who was in that position under the previous government and about 30 per cent less than two predecessors ago. So he's earning less. But, most importantly, the person that got that position has sat on city council off and on for about 25 years, has tremendous roots in the city of Calgary, and, I

believe, will be very helpful in ensuring that people can interact with the government in an effective way.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Progressive Conservatives.

Job Creation and Retention

(continued)

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, in the House on June 25 the jobs minister stated that minimum wage increases were not killing jobs. In fact, she said that Telus was investing money to create 1,500 jobs. Earlier this month Telus announced that they would reduce their workforce by 1,500 positions in the fourth quarter. Alberta employment has dropped by 10,800 in October alone. My question to the minister: given that your government was wrong in the spring about job investment in Alberta, wrong about the minimum wage, when will the government put a plan in place where Albertans can actually get good jobs to support their families?

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I completely reject the premise of that question. I still believe, as do many economists, that putting more money into the pockets of low-income Albertans will ultimately generate more economic activity. As the members across were concerned when we heard about the Telus recent announcement of job cuts, I too was concerned. Now, those job cuts are spread across Canada; they are certainly not all in Edmonton or in Alberta. So that should be clarified. But what we are doing is moving forward on our jobs plan, which is a heck of a lot more than the previous government ever suggested doing.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, what I hear the Premier rejecting are the facts. The facts are that minimum wages are causing job layoffs, and the fact is that the increases in taxes and the other policies are killing jobs for Albertans and Alberta families. What Alberta families want to know is: when will the Premier stop rejecting the facts and start accepting the facts that her policies are actually taking jobs and work away from Albertans and scratch things and start putting into place a real policy, a real job-creation plan that will actually help Albertans have jobs that will support their families, not poverty-level jobs but good-paying jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said, I mean, through our job incentive program we will be creating up to 27,000 jobs. Through our addition to the capital plan above and beyond what was previously planned, we will be creating between 8,000 and 10,000 new jobs. We will be creating an unnamed amount of jobs through our making available to entrepreneurs and business owners \$2.1 billion extra in capital that had previously not been available. So actually our government is doing quite a bit to focus on jobs because we understand that that's critical to all Albertans.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the government admitted to putting into place a job policy that will have poverty-level jobs. We've established that in the House. We've established it in estimates. The government has admitted that the minimum wage of \$15 an hour is not a living wage, so there are no good jobs. If they are creating 3,000 jobs for students, good for you; that's a good thing. The question Albertans want to know – thousands of Albertans are losing good-paying jobs, and you're not doing a blessed thing for them. When will you begin?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I continue to find it ironic that the member across, who not only was a minister in the previous government but was the minister of labour in the previous government and so was directly responsible for maintaining the lowest minimum wage in the country, now is complaining that a \$35,000-a-year job is not good enough. I will grant you, you know, that that's not a lot to live on, but it's sure a lot more than what they were living on with \$9.25 an hour, which was what this guy was overseeing. So I find this quite rich. Ultimately, as I've said a number of times, we have a multipronged plan for job creation, and we will continue to work on it on behalf of Albertans.

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

Support for Low-income Albertans

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my riding, as I'm sure is the case for every other riding, my staff and I frequently help some of our constituents who come in to get on programs such as AISH. This is a necessary lifeline for some of our more vulnerable Albertans who are permanently and greatly limited in their ability to earn a living. After reviewing the budget, it appears that AISH recipients did not see an increase in their benefits despite the rising costs of living. To the Minister of Human Services: does this government plan on increasing AISH benefits to some of Alberta's ...

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Our government is committed to providing supports to Albertans in need, and we have not only restored, actually, cuts proposed to Human Services, but we have increased funding for AISH and income support. At this time that funding is not enough to increase the payment, but it will help us address the casework growth and the need of AISH recipients.

Thank you.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: given that AISH recipients receive \$1,588 a month and that some of my constituents have expressed that this isn't enough to make ends meet, what sort of investments is this budget making to help our more vulnerable Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. When looking at AISH benefits, what we need to do is to look at benefits in the context of other benefits available to AISH recipients. For instance, AISH recipients have health benefits available to their partners and their kids. We also announced an Alberta child benefit last week. That's also available to AISH recipients without any clawbacks. Our government will listen to Albertans and will remain responsive to their needs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: could he go into detail on the programming investments that will help Albertans get through this tough economic time?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Taking care of each other during tough economic times is the

Alberta way of doing things, and our government will continue to stabilize the social services under the purview of Human Services. We have restored cuts that were proposed by the previous government to be made to Human Services. We have restored the proposed cuts to health care. We have restored the proposed cuts to education. All of these investments along with our new child tax benefit and job creation plans are there in place to help Albertans during tough economic times.

Thank you.

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

Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents in Wetaskiwin-Camrose are eager to see investments in local roads and regional bridges. These are transport lifelines for several smaller communities in rural and semirural suburban areas. There has been a neglect of spending dollars on needed rural infrastructure for many years. Our municipalities are wanting to know more about the restored strategic transportation infrastructure program, known as STIP. To the Minister of Transportation: what municipalities and projects will be eligible for STIP funding, and how can they access these funds?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I was very pleased to announce last week that we are restoring \$100 million to the strategic transportation infrastructure program, or STIP. This program had remained unfunded for several years. It provides cost-sharing projects to rural and small urban municipalities related to local and regional roads – rural road, bridge, and culvert construction and reconstruction, resource road improvements – and community airports. It's an application-based program, and I urge all municipalities that are interested to apply as soon as possible.

Thank you.

2:20

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that transportation networks are essential to build a successful economy, how will restored STIP funding drive economic growth in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for the question. We need to make sure that municipalities have the infrastructure they need to grow economically. This will help create jobs for construction and engineering firms and workers involved in capital projects, but it allows municipalities to lock in prices on resources and materials at lower prices and low interest rates, maximizing value for their taxpayers. Providing the infrastructure that enables economic growth and good paying jobs is an important part of helping communities to grow and prosper and to create jobs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the STIP promises to fund lifeline transport connections for smaller communities, how will STIP support the entire province's industrial growth? Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. It helps improve local infrastructure and safety, but it also creates a robust, modern transportation network throughout the province of Alberta. It'll go a long way towards improving resource roads, that face heavy demands as a result of large vehicles and wear and tear from industry traffic, and it will also support community airports, which are a vital economic asset of communities that are looking to bolster their tourism and are also eligible for the STIP program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government Advertising

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, while Albertans all over the province are deeply concerned about jobs, this government is more concerned about spin. You can't watch the evening news without being subjected to meaningless and vapid advertisements for this government's unpopular budget. We have now learned that the better part of a million dollars is being spent on this useless, partisan propaganda. With 1,500 Albertans losing their jobs every week this year, is this government proud that the government is wasting tax dollars on patting itself on the back?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Advertising budgets and what's in the budget are a typical, normal part of government action. And it's not the better part of a million dollars; it's \$750,000, which is going to TV and online ads.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Albertans might tolerate this advertising if it explained government programs or provided any factual information. Given that the Premier used to rail against this kind of taxpayer-funded propaganda when they were in opposition and, like so many of the democratic ideals they once held, it seems to be inconvenient now that they hold the perks of power, we're willing to give the Premier a mulligan on this one if she'll now do the right thing. Will the government commit to this Assembly that, moving forward, taxpayers will never again have to pay for advertisements that only serve their narrow, partisan interests?

Mr. Ceci: This is a government of Alberta budget, Mr. Speaker, and we're acting on jobs and diversification. We're acting on a responsible pathway to balance, and we're acting on stabilizing front-line services. We're providing information to Albertans, and I think that's a useful thing.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Meet the new boss, Mr. Speaker: same as the old boss.

Until recently the government of Ontario's advertising had to be approved by the Auditor General to ensure that it was nonpartisan, and the NDP is advertising a government union slogan, likely written by politically connected communications officers from those very government unions. Will the government commit to challenging the law to ensure that taxpayers are not paying for their partisan propaganda?

Mr. Ceci: What we're actually doing, Mr. Speaker, is investing in roads, bridges, and flood protection. We're talking about job creation. We're talking about a pathway to balance. All of that is information Albertans want to know, and we're providing it.

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

Child Care Supports

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two weeks ago I was very proud to vote for Motion 502, presented by the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park. I was happy to vote for this motion because I believed it would begin a very important conversation about child care in Alberta and the need for affordable child care for parents, but there have been no announcements or details yet. To the Minister of Human Services: has the government done anything at all to act on the member's motion, and when can Albertans expect to see some details?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. Our government ran on a campaign that we will move with a \$25-a-day daycare plan when our finances permit. In our budget in the out-years we have allocated funds, and we are exploring our options, how we can best move on that promise.

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, one interesting idea proposed in Motion 502 was opening spaces in new government buildings. However, there is space in a number of our older schools and infrastructure that could be repurposed. To our Minister of Infrastructure: has the government done any work so far in identifying potential child care spaces in either old or new infrastructure, as was called for in Motion 502?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for the question. One of the first things I did upon taking office was to ask my department to take a look at the federal building to see if in fact it was possible to find a child care space there. Apparently, the building is not suitable; hence the importance of the motion that you referenced. It's much easier to do when you're building a building new. I've asked the department to review potential spaces in government buildings that may be suitable for child care, so that's ongoing, hon. member.

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, given that this work is ongoing, it's also important to know that the program is accessible for all Alberta parents that need it. As a mother who worked shift work her entire career, I know the struggle of trying to find child care that works for a career outside of the 9-to-5 workday. To the Minister of Human Services: what specifically will your government do to ensure that these programs fit Alberta parents who need them around the clock?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member. Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, we understand that child care is expensive in this province, and for that reason we ran on a promise that we will make sure that it's quality care and that it's affordable to all Albertans. At this time we do provide child care subsidies. We do provide accreditation, like wage top-ups, to the service providers to make sure that child care is available and affordable to all Albertans, and we have also committed funds in the out-years, and we are exploring options to better address this need.

Thank you.

School Board Associations' Spending

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, the chair of the Edmonton public school board has expressed grave concerns over spending by the Alberta School Boards Association, to the point where he believes his board should leave the association. Instead of hiring schoolteachers and classroom assistants, member school boards are using taxpayers'

dollars to fund extravagant perks like adult Easter-egg hunts and pricey conferences. Will the minister direct member school boards and the ASBA to stop this improper spending at a time when Alberta simply can't afford it?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. Certainly, it's critical at every juncture that education monies be spent in the classroom for our children. Further to that, I have certainly been speaking to all 61 school boards over the last few weeks, and specifically now, with the ASBA revelations, once again I've offered them a level of transparency that we use in the public service, that hopefully they might consider using because certainly their reputation is on the line.

2:30

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Black Gold school division has decided to withdraw from the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta over a special levy directing educational tax dollars towards a court case to limit Catholic education and since the association unanimously agreed to collect 90 cents per student to fight Lakeland Catholic school board's attempt to open a school in Lac La Biche, does the Minister of Education consider this levy a good use of public education funds?

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, from the base principle that we operate from, our government is clearly recognizing the value of Catholic education in this province. Further to that, we certainly do not want to see people using money in an inappropriate way to somehow interfere with that commitment. Further to that, certainly, we will make sure that the process is followed properly. PSBAA is also an independent organization. The bottom line is that the buck stops here. If they're spending money inappropriately, then so be it. We will stop it.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since these two provincial associations are causing division within the educational community and pitting Albertans against each other, we need the Education minister to step up and start making things right. Given that schools are facing overcrowding and funds clearly are being mismanaged, will the minister put an end to out-of-control spending and make sure that educational dollars are providing appropriate resources in the classroom to support our students?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, that is the intention. Each of these organizations are advocacy groups that the school boards make an investment in, and that's the way they operate. That being said, certainly, like I said before, the buck stops here. I make sure that the money is being spent in schools. The message has been clearly sent to each of the 61 school boards that that's what I expect them to do. In regard to divisions it's very important when you're in opposition not to just try to jam those divisions even wider, to cause even more turmoil than is necessary in this province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

PDD Residential Safety Standards

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the former government made it a priority to change the health and safety regulations for

all living spaces assigned to persons with developmental disabilities, or PDD. This action was in order to protect Alberta's most vulnerable people, something the Wildrose supports. This new government has put a stop to such changes thus far. To the Minister of Human Services: does your government actually plan on making changes to health and safety regulations for PDD spaces anytime soon?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. We have heard concerns from care providers, service providers, and PDD individuals that these regulations were brought in without proper consultation. What we have done is extended the compliance deadline for another six months. We are in the process of putting together a consultation plan, which I will have more to say about fairly soon.

Thank you.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government does plan on making changes to health and safety regulations for PDD spaces in the coming months, stakeholders are desperate for more details. Considering that the NDP ran on a platform of transparency, I would assume this government would have no problem sharing these details. To the minister: will you please inform this House about some of the planned changes coming for PDD spaces?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member.

An Hon. Member: It's a good question.

Mr. Sabir: It's a good question. The safety of those individuals is of paramount importance. As I said, we have heard from stakeholders. In fact, in putting together the consultation plan, we have done a preconsultation with stakeholders across the province. We will be launching our consultation plan fairly soon. It's in the final process, so we will have more to say fairly soon.

The Speaker: Might you have another good question?

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government plans on making changes to health and safety regulations for PDD spaces, stakeholders involved in PDD care have been coming to me with grave concerns. They tell me that they have yet to be contacted by this government to discuss upcoming changes. These stakeholders would like to be a part of the conversation. To the minister: will you commit today to inviting all stakeholders to one table in order to find a unified solution to this problem?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member and Mr. Speaker. I just want to reiterate that the safety of these individuals is of paramount importance. We are committed to consulting extensively. If there is anybody who was left out who approached you, I would invite you to bring forward the names of those stakeholders, and I will pass it on to the consultation team so that they can consult more inclusively and more broadly to get it right.

Thank you again to the member.

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

Promotion of Alberta's Energy Industry

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the Premier protesting at anti oil sands and antipipeline rallies, the environment minister

writing for environmental radicals, and the NDP government implementing policies that have shaken the confidence of our oil industry partners, to the minister of environment: how can Albertans take you at your word that you support your statement that the oil industry is now the backbone of Alberta's economy? Frankly, Minister, your government's actions are speaking louder than your words.

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, leaving aside the irrelevant personal attacks for a moment, the fact of the matter is that our actions have spoken loudly across all of the country and across to our international trading partners as well. We have struck a gold-standard panel to examine the matters of the environmental legacy that was left to us by the previous government. They are providing us advice on renewables, on how to phase out coal appropriately, on how to price carbon, and on how to take leadership on energy efficiency. Those are the actions that we have taken in six short months.

Mr. Fraser: To the same minister. Minister, your government has expressed a desire to support innovation and diversification in our energy economy, and given that many oil sands companies are already exploring new and alternative procedures to lower greenhouse gas emissions per barrel, I'm sure you want to encourage companies to accelerate these investments for emissions reduction. If this is the case, will you commit right now to strengthening the climate change and emissions management fund by allowing more direct withdrawal by contributing companies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to hon. member for the question. This matter of technology and innovation is foremost in the panel's minds as they formulate their advice to government. We have consulted widely with industry on this matter as well, and we will have more to say about it in the coming days as we receive the panel's advice and as we make our announcements before Paris.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Paris climate change summit is weeks away, Minister, and you and your government have committed to spending over a million dollars on advertising your plan and attendance to European press, when will Albertans actually get to know your climate change plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. We've been clear that we are going to be making some announcements prior to Paris. Stay tuned on that. We will be putting forward a very fulsome plan that will secure us market access, that will refurbish our international reputation, that will make the appropriate investments in technology and innovation so that we can be global leaders on climate in a carbon-constrained world and so that we can take leadership on carbon competitiveness, hold our heads high, secure market access, and create green jobs for the entire economy.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Bullying Prevention

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday marked the kickoff of Bullying Awareness Week, a grassroots initiative that originated

right here in Alberta. This week raises awareness and increases our understanding of the impacts of bullying, promotes prevention of bullying, and informs Albertans about supports available to them. To the Minister of Human Services: what is our government doing to honour this week?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. We know that bullying in any form anywhere is unacceptable, and we know that everyone has a role to play in promoting healthy relationships and in preventing bullying. Over the next six days we are hosting a cyberbullying webcast, promoting a Post-It Forward campaign, and highlighting events across the province, including the 10th annual GSA Conference, which focuses on inclusion and prevention of bullying. I call on all colleagues in the House to commit to a culture of inclusion and respect in honour of Bullying Awareness Week.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you. Given that bullying has serious and real effects on individuals, families, and communities – and as a father of three young children I am concerned about the effects of bullying – and it can lead to anxiety, depression, impact student achievement, and impact employee production at work, what is our government doing to promote the prevention of bullying and to support victims of bullying generally?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member. Promoting inclusion and ensuring welcoming, caring, and respectful environments is a priority for Albertans and for our government. Human Services has invested over \$2 million in Budget 2015 in promoting healthy relationships and the prevention of bullying. This much-needed funding will support initiatives like the school-based program roots of empathy and many more which focus on the prevention of bullying and the promotion of healthy relationships.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our schools need to be safe and caring places, to the Minister of Education: how is this government going to work to support students, specifically those in the LGBTQ community?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government wants to make it clear to all students looking for safe and caring schools that we stand with them. Recently I have sent letters to public, Catholic, francophone, and private schools directing them to develop coherent policies that ensure that students are free from discrimination. These policies must specifically address the boards' responsibilities as they relate to the School Act. All of our schools need to be welcoming and caring, and we will do whatever is necessary to ensure that that happens.

The Speaker: The Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Highway Safety

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two years ago in my constituency office I sat across from a grieving mother whose son, returning from his high school graduation rehearsal, had been killed

in a preventable accident. He had driven into the back of an improperly marked piece of farm machinery at night. To the Minister of Transportation: is your department considering any regulatory reviews?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to the hon. member for the question. That's a good question. I would be very interested in learning more about the situation that you have described, and perhaps we can sit down. I will take the question under advisement.

Thank you.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that each year 60 to 80 tow truck operators are killed on North American roads and that tow operators are almost as likely as law enforcement officers to be killed on the job, giving this industry the second-highest occupational death rate per capita, Minister, is your department considering any regulatory review to deal with this life-threatening oversight?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will take that question under advisement as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member. Second supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. Given that tow trucks are not designated under the Traffic Safety Act as emergency vehicles, their drivers are at serious risk recovering vehicles on busy highways. To the Minister of Infrastructure and of Transportation: is your department considering a review, as we've discussed, and what might the timeline be for that review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for the question, hon. member. Mr. Speaker, safety is the first priority of our department. Far too many people are killed on our roads in a variety of ways. The hon. member has quite rightly brought forward some serious aspects to that, that deserve careful attention, and I want to assure the hon. member that it will get the attention that it deserves.

We want to make sure that our roads are as safe as possible. The people that work on the roads, whether they're first responders or people operating tow trucks or whether they're driving a truck or driving their family for a long weekend, deserve to have safe roads, and that's our . . .

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

School Construction Schedule

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During the Infrastructure estimates when I asked the minister if it takes three years to build an elementary school and a bit longer for a middle school and high school, the minister said, "I think that's fairly accurate." However, the Minister of Education calls these timelines fictitious and unrealistic. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Minister, given that the Minister of Infrastructure is saying one thing and you are saying another, who are we to believe?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we've been waiting a long time for these new and upgraded schools, and I took some concrete steps to try to get more realistic timelines into place.

We know that there are different circumstances that do take place when you're building on such a large scale, you know, anything from artesian wells to methane gas to land being available and not being available. Taking those vagaries into account is what we're trying to do to ensure that we're getting a fair representation of when the schools will actually get built.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I think that the minister is saying that the other minister is incorrect.

Mr. Speaker, given that school construction funding is allocated over a five-year window, the government wants to spend more of that money now and in the first two years of this five-year plan. To the Minister of Education: Minister, would that not indicate that these schools are moving forward relatively on time because money is being moved forward on the five . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I want to correct the record here because the hon. member has been quoting very selectively from the discussion that we had during my estimates. All things being equal, three years is not unreasonable for an elementary school, but in many cases these projects were announced before land had even been identified. In some cases they still don't. The school boards weren't ready. The municipalities hadn't identified the land. There were multiple problems. What the previous government did was to advance these, whether or not they could be built in the time frame that they were suggesting, for political purposes.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It takes three years from beginning to end to build a school. These schools were announced in 2014; ready by 2017. My question again to the Minister of Education: given that we can't get the timelines straight between the two ministers, how, Minister, do you plan on building these schools with \$315.9 million less?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, all of the schools, the modernizations, the new school projects that we have: we are going to build those schools, and we can only do so when we actually move the money up so that we can pay for the schools to start to be built properly. I mean, unfortunately – I've been staying away from it – but we were left with a lot of empty promises by this previous government. I had to take the hit to say what timelines were realistic. I did so, and now we can move forward with the schools that we need for our children here in the province of Alberta.

Castle Special Management Area

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is home to spectacular natural wonders, with the Castle area being one among many. Albertans know the significance of protecting and conserving our natural heritage, and we're eager to see our government take action to protect the Castle special management area. To the minister of the environment: what is the current status of protection and conservation in the Castle area?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I want to underline that we are bringing the entire Castle area under legislated protection. We are now moving into the development of the parks management plan to encourage Albertans in what they want to see for land use. Of course, we took this action – it was a historic action – because we wanted to protect the headwaters for southern Alberta, for the entire South Saskatchewan regional area, including the drinking water for my own city of Lethbridge.

2:50

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this protection will increase tourism to the area, to the same minister: what are you doing to ensure that the Castle will be protected and its beautiful natural heritage will be enjoyed by future generations?

Ms Phillips: Well, the first thing that we did, Mr. Speaker, was that we eliminated commercial logging from the area because this was an incompatible use with the legislative protection that we are bringing in. The legislative protection was something that had been asked for by ranching groups, by landowners, by municipalities, and others for more than a generation, almost 50 years. We finally made good on that promise. It took us only four months. It took the previous government 40 years, and they still didn't do it.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that logging and mining in the Castle will be stopped, again to the minister: what are you doing to ensure that the protection in this special area does not hurt economic interests, especially of families living in the area?

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things we did was that we are not allowing surface drilling, but there is still directional drilling in the area. We are engaging grazing leaseholders to encourage the lowest impact on the parks and working with those who own the forestry leases or grazing leases in that area. We're incorporating appropriate rules around off-highway vehicle use, and we're engaging on a broad tourism plan for the area. This is something that I'm pleased to work on with the municipalities and with my colleague in Culture and Tourism.

Members' Statements

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

Palliative Care

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Palliative care provides comfort and medical assistance to those facing the final stages of a terminal illness. It's an incredibly important line of work within our health care system. Alberta has some of the finest palliative care doctors, nurses, and caregivers in the world, people who've developed new tools, new systems to assist patients burdened with final-stage illnesses.

Many Albertans when faced with a terminal diagnosis prefer to stay in their own homes for as long as possible. Expert teams like the palliative care community consult team at St. Marguerite health services centre in Mill Woods help Albertans to fulfill that wish. They provide critical support to physicians, and they facilitate the patients' staying in their homes while continuing to receive world-class palliative care.

For those patients who can no longer stay at home, facilities such as the tertiary palliative care unit at the Grey Nuns community hospital exist. This past week I was able to tour unit 43, the tertiary

palliative care unit, and meet with a few of the staff. I had heard from constituents about the heroes employed there, a team that believes that each patient is special, sacred, and deserves to be treated with dignity. On unit 43 they are dedicated to providing compassionate care and making patients as comfortable as possible. They welcome families, friends, and pets, with 24/7 visiting hours. I found their holistic and multidisciplinary approach to palliative care comforting, and I'd like to thank unit 43 for allowing me to come and see the important work that they do.

We must ensure that our government continues to fund and train the next wave of palliative care providers and that we continue to invest in the facilities that allow for this critical end-of-life care through stable health care funding. Albertans deserve nothing less.

Thank you very much.

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

Pipeline Construction

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This NDP government's lack of support for the Northern Gateway and the Keystone means thousands of jobs lost in ridings like my own. Many businesses in Bonnyville-Cold Lake had a major stake in these pipelines, and if we don't secure a major pipeline soon, these businesses and the jobs they provide will soon be gone. Not only were thousands of energy jobs directly affected by the Keystone decision, but a host of other industries and businesses were hurt, too. For every energy job this pipeline would have created, there would have been two nonenergy jobs created. Jobs like grocery providers, hotel clerks, restaurant workers, daycare providers are just a few that either won't be sustained or created.

It is disheartening that the members opposite are not supporting jobs or our provincial economy at a time when we need them the most. While Wildrose is busy fighting for pipelines, they're busy protesting them. While Wildrose is busy spreading a story of success of our environment, they're busy calling our oil industry dirty and labelling Albertans as embarrassing cousins. They don't get it. There will soon be no jobs to sustain the economies in rural ridings like Bonnyville-Cold Lake. Ridings that were once vibrant and alive are now struggling under the weight of this government.

We know that moving energy product via pipeline is a safe and efficient manner and that construction of the new pipeline will create jobs, jobs that Albertans will use to reinvest economically and socially in our great province. We know governments don't build pipelines, but they do influence the opinions of other provinces and federal governments. The NDP government should stand proud for our energy sector and fight for market access in every direction. The future of Alberta depends on it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Seniors' Charter

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I pass my one-year anniversary as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, I am tremendously proud of an initiative that I will soon bring before the House. This initiative honours some of our most treasured citizens, Alberta seniors. I began working on this initiative, which you will come to know as Motion 514, soon after I was elected. The motion asks the House to support the development of a seniors' charter. What is the intention of this charter? Well, it will provide the following guarantees for our seniors: the highest level of dignity, respect, and treatment; access to safe, affordable seniors' housing;

providing seniors with a healthy environment; access to programs to help them remain physically active and participate in their communities; and access to high-quality mental health programs.

Mr. Speaker, it is my view and the view of the PC caucus that we cannot do enough for the seniors who have helped build our communities and made Alberta the proud province it is today. Our former government created a broad foundation of supports for seniors, and we are proud of that base. I am championing the concept of a seniors' charter now to ensure that these programs and services are always available to them. While my motion proposes that the Legislative Assembly adopt the concept and provide the guidelines I outlined above, I also propose that we leave the development of the charter in the very capable hands of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta.

I am hoping that each member of this Assembly will find the concept of a seniors' charter as inspiring as I do. I look forward to speaking in more detail on this motion in the coming weeks, but for now I urge all members to take a few moments to consider the value of this proposal. When reflecting on the creation of a seniors' charter, please think about the seniors you know – your parents, your neighbours, your friends – and the expectations you have for them from Alberta's government and what it would mean for them to have these kinds of guarantees from their province as they age.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would request unanimous consent of the House to extend our time in order to complete the Routine.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Please proceed. The Member for Calgary-East.

Cornerstone Youth Centre

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This last Friday I had the utmost pleasure of being present at the opening of Mayland Heights' first outdoor community basketball court, at the Cornerstone Youth Centre. Despite how cold and windy it was, as soon as the ribbon was cut, the court was filled with young people dribbling, shooting baskets, and making bad dunk attempts.

Cornerstone Youth Centre is an organization in my riding, Calgary-East, that is doing amazing work. They are a free, after school drop-in centre that serves 160 registered youth. They provide a safe and caring place for kids in grades 6 to 9 to go after school. With a small board of directors and a staff of just three Cornerstone is a really amazing place to visit.

3:00

Cornerstone's mission is investing in youth to encourage the discovery of their passion and potential. You can clearly see that mission in their work as soon as you walk in the doors. On my first trip there, upon entering, I heard guitar and drums coming from the music studio and saw groups of kids sitting around tables eating healthy snacks and playing board games. It was really remarkably wholesome considering, you know, our opinions of youth these days.

Cornerstone makes sure that vulnerable youth have what they need to be successful. They have help with homework. They have hot, nutritious food. They have outlets and training opportunities for creativity and opportunities for sport and physical activity. All of these things were absolutely free of charge. One of the ways that you can tell how successful Cornerstone is is by how many of the students come back as volunteers once they've outgrown the program.

I look forward to many more visits to Cornerstone and to its hopeful expansion into Forest Lawn, where programs such as this could be of utmost use and would be a really fantastic asset, and I'm also looking forward to more basketball games in the springtime.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Terra Centre

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to celebrate the achievement of the Terra Child and Family Support Centre in receiving the child development professional award of excellence for 2015 in the program category, awarded by our Human Services ministry this past Monday, the 9th of November.

Terra supports teen moms attending classes at Braemar school by giving their young children a high-quality learning experience delivered by professional, qualified early childhood educators. The centre accommodates up to 67 children between the ages three weeks to three years old. The program is designed to provide a safe environment that stimulates a child's natural curiosity and to enhance a child's development in all areas.

Terra also supports the relationship between moms and children by giving the moms the opportunity to complete their high school diplomas while maintaining their bond with their kids. When you tour the Terra Centre, you will immediately feel the safe and supportive environment they create for both the children and the moms. The toys, some of which are made out of common household items, are designed to enhance children's development. On-site food preparation ensures that the kids get the nutritious food they need through the day to grow up strong and healthy. When it's nap time, the rooms at Terra become dark, quiet places for the kids to rest and restore their energy for the next part of the day.

Our government understands that quality early childhood development helps ensure children have the best opportunities for success. Interactions with these skilled professionals significantly impact children's development and well-being. That's why I'm pleased to congratulate Terra Centre on receiving the child professional development award of excellence. Alberta is a better place with Terra Centre helping hundreds of moms complete high school and hundreds of children get off to a good start in life.

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

Energy Policies

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been over six months since the May election. Since then the economy in the Peace Country and, in fact, in most of Alberta has been in decline. The province is feeling the serious effects of the NDP and their risky agenda. The energy sector has been hurting due in part to low commodity prices. However, there is no need for it to be hurting as much as it is.

The Premier seemed relieved when Keystone XL was cancelled, a pipeline she never truly supported. When the President of the United States cancelled it and told the world that Alberta's oil was dirty, how did our Premier react? She was understanding. On top of that the NDP government is hiring anti-oil activists. People who have been campaigning against Alberta's best interests are being paid hundreds of thousands of Albertan's tax dollars, and to do what? To represent our best interests? Sorry; that doesn't stand to reason. Picking and choosing which pipelines are supported and then only half-heartedly is wrong.

Not one policy this government has introduced has been helpful, and many have just plain hurt the economy. It is high time that this government realized that every job loss is not just a number; each one represents a person that has lost the ability to provide for themselves and their family. My heart goes out to those who are sitting around their kitchen tables trying to figure out how to make ends meet.

We are blessed in this province with a wealth of natural resources. Other jurisdictions would love to have this goose that lays the golden egg. Intelligent people would take these golden eggs and use them to benefit our province. If you want to see increased diversity, take the golden eggs and make them work for you. Don't kill the goose. The NDP government must wake up from their poor policies and listen to the people in the Peace Country who have lost their jobs. Listen to those in the industry who know what it takes to create jobs, people who know how to get investment dollars back into our economy. It doesn't have to be this bad. It really doesn't.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Notices of Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Transportation and Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour I would like to give oral notice of a bill to be introduced tomorrow, that bill being Bill 6, The Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Hoffman, Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors, pursuant to the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta Act the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta annual report 2014-2015.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Ganley, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General and Minister of Aboriginal Relations, the Alberta Human Rights Commission annual report 2014-15, April 1, 2014 to March 31, 2015; Alberta Law Enforcement Review Board 2014 annual report; pursuant to the Northern Alberta Development Council Act the Northern Alberta Development Council annual report 2014-15; pursuant to the Legal Profession Act the Law Society of Alberta 2014 annual report; pursuant to the Legal Profession Act financial statements of the Alberta Law Foundation, year ended March 31, 2015.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Eggen, Minister of Education and Minister of Culture and Tourism, Travel Alberta annual report 2014-2015; pursuant to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Act the Alberta Foundation for the Arts 2014-15 annual report; pursuant to the Alberta Sport Connection Act the Alberta Sport Connection annual report 2014-15; pursuant to the Historical Resources Act the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation 2014-15 annual report; pursuant to the Wild Rose Foundation Act the Wild Rose Foundation annual report 2014-15; pursuant to the Teaching Profession Act Alberta Teachers' Association 2014 annual report.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 7(7) the daily routine is now concluded.

Orders of the Day
Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 203
Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising)
Amendment Act, 2015

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 203. This is a good bill. This legislation would be a monumental step towards making elections in this province fairer. This legislation would ban government from using the money and power of government to try and buy votes during or just before the writ period. This piece of legislation alone would bring more credibility and accountability and transparency to government than any other bill that has been introduced yet.

Albertans are tired of the same old politics that only serve to hurt and diminish our democratic system. How many times in election cycles gone by have we seen the government of the day promise a school or a hospital or a major transportation project in a specific riding for the sole purpose of acquiring votes for the government candidate, in some cases not to be delivered on either? It is a total abuse of government power. The government of this province that I love has to be held to a higher standard of scrutiny. The NDP have previously joined the call for amendments to the Election Act, and we welcome them to join with Wildrose today in a show of support for a more open and accountable government.

3:10

In the provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba governments are banned from making announcements during an election campaign or a by-election. Our provincial neighbours have had the foresight to recognize that interfering in an election by allowing the government of the day to use money and their power to swing votes their way is completely unacceptable. In Manitoba, as it turns out, the legislation banning announcements during an election campaign or a by-election came in under NDP Premier Gary Doer. This particular legislation stems primarily from controversial practices made by its government during last October's by-elections. We needn't get into the specifics of the history, but, suffice it to say, this province's government absolutely needs to see that the practices of the past that have been used to solicit votes come to an end.

This piece of legislation is expected to be sent to committee to be researched and commented on by professionals and Albertans. Now, without wasting this room's time about how and why this piece of legislation is heading to committee, I would like to say categorically that the Wildrose Party campaigned on a more open and transparent government, that would consistently send legislation to committee for expert opinion and opinions from Albertans all over this province. Rather than ram legislation through the House, as has happened in the past in this room and what appears is going to happen this fall before this legislative session is over, the Wildrose would send all important legislation to committee for comment. Using that strategy is a tremendous step in making government transparent and improving overall government accountability in this province.

I urge all members of the House to support this very important bill. By doing so, we'll be letting the taxpayers of this province, the folks that pay the freight in this province, know that the people that

they have sent to this building to create legislation and to run their government on their behalf are listening.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of Bill 203. Bill 203 adds a section to the Election Act that ensures that the government does not use its resources to aid in partisan campaigning during a writ or election period. There are many issues that all members of this House can positively subscribe to, and one of them is strengthening the democratic processes and practices of this House. It is appropriate that we take some time.

Madam Speaker, the Speaker earlier today referred to the threads that tie us together, and I would have us dwell for a few moments on the threads of democracy that tie us to all free liberal democracies, especially in France. We remember that it was the great enlightenment philosophers like Voltaire and Rousseau and Montesquieu that encouraged and enhanced the democracy of France in their day. We remember and we pay tribute to these great men of democracy as we support and as we vote in favour of Bill 203.

It was Montesquieu that championed the separation of powers and the creation of a set of checks and balances, ensuring that the legislative, judicial, and executive powers of government would always be controlled by different groups of people and that a system of checks on each group's power would ensure that good and honest and transparent government would reflect the interests of the people and not simply of those that governed. Never is this idea of transparent and responsible government more important than during the exercise of choosing a government or in choosing a representative that the people support during a by-election.

In this bill we have the chance as a Legislature to ensure that elections and by-elections are fair for all candidates. This bill will ensure that the governing party regardless of political creed, regardless of political stripe, will not be able to use the financial resources of the state to try and sway voters.

This bill will ensure that ministers and other officials are still free to talk to the media about issues but that they will not be able to make partisan, unethical announcements designed to win votes. This bill recognizes that there are times during an emergency or a public health issue or a safety issue or for a pre-existing public awareness campaign for provincial authorities to make announcements.

I see here a bill that has balance and that moves forward the cause of democracy, so I believe that all members of this House should be able to stand and vote in favour of this bill and in the process strengthen the democratic rights and processes that ensure that it is truly the people that will rule this great province of Alberta. The NDP and indeed all parties of this Legislature should be able to support this legislative change. We have in the past co-operated, setting aside partisan politics to pass good legislation. This is such a bill, and it deserves the support of all in this House. It is therefore my pleasure, remembering past and present sacrifices around the world in all of the democratic nations, to say that I on behalf of my constituents wholeheartedly support this bill, and I will proudly vote in favour of this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand and speak to this bill. This bill talks about limiting government's ability to make announcements during election periods. It's a good

bill. I congratulate the member for bringing it forward. It's an issue that needs to be addressed. I think it will help build confidence in Albertans.

One has to be concerned that one doesn't handcuff government's ability to look after emergencies, events that arise, things like that that happen during an election period, but I don't believe this bill in any way does that. I believe it does leave the room for government to act in cases of emergency or emergent events that have to be addressed right now while still protecting the reputation of the province and the government long term.

As I said earlier, I intend to support it. I thank the member for bringing it forward.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak very briefly to Bill 203. Bill 203 conforms very much to the values that drive our government with respect to fairness and transparency in terms of the electoral process. It conforms very much to commitments that we made during the election.

And I'll just note that it's not just a matter of words. Recently we were faced with a fairly tough by-election in Calgary-Foothills, and there were some major announcements that we wished to make with respect to projects and programs relative to the city of Calgary, and we refrained from making those announcements until after the by-election. The Premier's leadership on that, in my view, was principled and consistent. So it is something that we agree on, and I commend the hon. member opposite for this bill because I think it's a very good one.

Now, Madam Speaker, we are wanting to deal with this as part of a broader package of changes. The Assembly has created an all-party committee to deal with these matters, and it's my wish and it's our wish that this bill should be included in that committee's discussions because it's an important aspect of the work of that committee.

I can just indicate to you, Madam Speaker, that we support this bill and urge all members to support the bill. Subsequent to its adoption by the House, which I hope will occur at second reading, which is the approval of the bill in principle, it is our intention to move a referral motion to the special committee dealing with these matters in order that it can be incorporated into the broader package of reform that we hope this committee will bring forward to the House.

Thank you.

3:20

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very proud to stand and speak in support of Bill 203. Albertans I've talked to in the recent past have spoken out in support of Bill 203 as put forward by my colleague. They want transparency in government. They want democracy. Using taxpayers' own money during a writ for a general election or during a by-election serves neither democracy nor transparency. Albertans are tired of being bought off with their own money. They want fair, clear election processes. This bill, if we can get it right, will serve to restore democracy in Alberta.

Important bills such as this one demand open discussion in this House. Indeed all legislation worthy of being brought forth in this House deserves the fair debate from all sides and the input of the Albertans that we represent. Therefore, a lot of these bills should be going to committee such as was suggested by the hon. minister.

I will be supporting Bill 203 and look forward to more discussion on it. Thank you.

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm rising today to speak in favour of Bill 203, put forward by the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler. This is a bill whose principles I've fought for for several years now to restrict the ability of governments to use their resources to directly influence the outcomes of elections and by-elections in particular. Many of us recall, without very much delight, the last series of by-elections from the last Legislature, in which it was quite clear that government used government resources to influence the outcomes of those by-elections. But that is in the past.

This bill is about moving forward with a new set of rules that we can be proud of. The Ethics Commissioner spoke about the actions of the last case I just referred to and said that while it certainly violates the spirit of our ethics rules, there were no rules in place to prevent it. That's what this bill seeks to do.

Mr. Cooper: We should strengthen those rules.

Mr. Fildebrandt: We should be strengthening both our ethics rules and our electoral rules around us.

I'm pleased to see this go to committee because I believe that all bills of this Legislature should be going before committees, not just the odd select private member's bill. This is an opportunity for us to work together across party lines, between the government and the Official Opposition and the smaller parties, to put forward policies that benefit all Albertans. Albertans at their core want a fair electoral system that cannot be gamed by the government in power. While there might be other examples in contradiction of this, I will commend the government for doing the right thing and working across the aisle on this issue despite earlier confusion around the issue.

Madam Speaker, I'll keep my comments brief. On behalf of the members of Strathmore-Brooks I'm honoured to support this bill, and I hope that every member of every party in this Legislature does so as well. Thank you.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Many years ago I had the opportunity of being a teacher in a small three-room school that taught native kids that were from the Blood reserve. When I came in, the principal told me: there are two things you need to know; you need to make sure that you love them and that you treat them fairly. As I applied those principles, I found that I was able to work with the kids, and it was a fantastic experience.

Now, many years later, I find myself in this House and faced with a similar experience. We had an opportunity at the beginning of the sitting to discuss Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta. In that time we made amendments; we talked about being able to send it to committee. The government's response to that was specifically that this wasn't a perfect bill but that it was a bill that was a good start and that it was something that we could move forward on and that they would vote for it in its present condition. I guess the question that I have is: is that a double standard? Yes, we do want all of our bills to go to committee. We think that that's the best approach and the most prudent approach for Albertans. We will get the best results. We'll have good direction from outside witnesses, and that is the best approach.

However, in this situation I can't help but see the double standard here. We are bringing forward a good bill. This is obviously something that has been accepted by the minister, as he said earlier, and he believes that the rest of the House should vote for it. I'm glad to see that there's a change. However, my question still remains. As I asked before, why is it that we are having to take this to committee when it could be voted for and passed in this House? It's a good bill, it's a good start, and if we use the same reasoning that was used before, there should be no double standard in this. This is why I believe it's the right approach and the thing that we can teach our children and throughout Alberta, that we'll be fair here and that we will do things the right way. That's why I'll be voting for this.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Do any other hon. members wish to speak on Bill 203? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I had a rough time during the election with many people at the door who had truly just lost faith in their government. They didn't think that we were the voice of the people that we were elected to represent, and as sort of that grade 6 government nerd in school it broke my heart, truly and honestly. So one of the reasons that I ran was to bring that faith back to the people, that we truly could make a difference here in this House. I think that Bill 203 is a good step in the right direction to allow fairness in election times.

Airdrie was actually promised a really great health care facility during the election. You know, half of us believed it was going to happen, and half knew it was an election promise. So it be told, we're back to zero, and the people of Airdrie are no longer protected with any sort of 24-hour health care facility. That wasn't fair, and I believe this is a really good step.

I am worried that this bill will get lost in committee. One of the hon. members from the government side actually was quoted:

When it comes to the other three acts included in our mandate, we have the ability to determine where we would like to focus our efforts, and I would suggest that this is critical. Given the size of each of these acts and how much opportunity there is, we will need to focus our time.

So will this bill be seriously considered in committee? It's a grave concern that I have.

But, you know, I encourage the members to vote yes on this bill as is. I think it's a great bill. I think it's a great step towards strengthening our system and democracy in the future. I will be supporting Bill 203, and I urge all members of this House to do the same.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler to close debate.

3:30

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It truly is an interesting day in the Chamber, and we always have these adventures in the Chamber here.

When members of the government earlier this session refused to co-operate with the Wildrose opposition at the time on Bill 203, an initiative to restrict inappropriate spending by governments during the 28-day election cycle, I was reminded of the history of the party and the patriarchs of that party. I was reminded of the traditions that members of the government – of this government – ostensibly claim to represent and defend. I'm referring to the traditions that were set

down by the pillars of their party. J.S. Woodsworth, M.J. Coldwell, and Stanley Knowles are names that come to mind.

Woodsworth, the founding president of what is now the New Democratic Party, spoke of the need for co-operation within the Legislative Assembly. What are we to say when his descendants, the children of Woodsworth, refuse to co-operate? Major Coldwell, who followed in Woodsworth's path as president of their party, spoke repeatedly about the need for co-operation, the idea of co-operating with other people. It was even in the name of their party, Madam Speaker. They called it a co-operative federation. MP Stanley Knowles served for almost 40 years as an MP. He was the CCF and NDP House leader. In Parliament he set a standard for co-operation and professional parliamentary decorum that many in the Ottawa region and throughout the country speak about to this day. Do the members of this New Democratic Party across the way follow in the traditions of those men? Do they emulate Woodsworth, Coldwell, and Knowles?

It is interesting to note, Madam Speaker, that by rejecting the clear, nonpartisan provisions of Bill 203, members of this government do not spurn me, nor do they spurn the opposition Wildrose nor even the members of this Assembly. No. It reaches beyond that. They spurn the very traditions they claim in this Chamber to represent. By refusing to co-operate initially, these government members cast aspersions on the patriarchs of their own party. They show themselves as practitioners of high-handedness and procedural manipulation . . .

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

Mr. Strankman: . . . that characterized the PC government of the past eight or 10 years.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, a point of order has been raised.

Mr. Strankman: Absolutely, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member in his closing with a point of order. However, I feel I'm forced to do that, especially in particular under Standing Order 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member," and (j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder."

Madam Speaker, the facts of the history of this bill are well known. The government initially wished to refer it to the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, and at that time an error was made with respect to how that was to be done. It was an error. The government has stood up and admitted the error, corrected it, took corrective action to change the standing orders to allow a referral to the committee without attacking the integrity or the very existence of the bill, and has proceeded to do that. The government has also now stood in this place and indicated that it is prepared to support the bill at second reading.

The hon. member is attacking our party, comparing us unfavourably with the founders of our party and leading parliamentarians on the basis of something that happened some time ago, not what is happening now, not what is the intent of the government. We've corrected the mistake, and he needs to deal with the government's position as it is now and not pretend that it is still the same position that it was at that earlier time. In continuing to pursue

his negative comparison of this government's actions with the founders of our party, he is imputing false and unavowed motives. He is casting aspersions on the party and on our actions, which, in my view, are entirely honourable. The hon. member should know better.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, you wish to respond?

Mr. Strankman: Yes, Madam Speaker, to the point of order. I wish to retract any aspersions that I may have presented awkwardly, and I would like to continue with my member's statement to follow up the end of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I put forward Bill 203 as a measure that would allow all members in this Assembly to lock arms to prevent certain kinds of government spending from occurring during election campaigns. As I have pointed out previously in this Assembly, it is a measure that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, now Premier, called for on November 19 of last year. I have to confess that there was awkwardness and there was misunderstanding in the Chamber, but I still ask: is this government co-operators, or is it not? If the hon. House leader would bear with me as I wrap up my final paragraphs, do the members across the way know how to co-operate? If so, they need to show this to the members and the Speaker.

Madam Speaker, there was a famous newspaper headline that was shown in a movie about Nelson Mandela, where in the morning after his winning the election in South Africa a newspaper headline boldly said: he can win an election, but can he run a country? Rather than being offended by the brash headline, Mr. Mandela responded by saying to a couple of his colleagues: it's a fair question.

I, too, have a fair question, Madam Speaker, and a question in this same fair-minded view. These members across the way won an election, but now can they show the members of this Assembly and the people of Alberta that they can do more than that? Can they show the members of this Assembly that they know how to put down partisanship and co-operate when it is clearly in the public interest to do so? This motion could have been passed in this Assembly easily, and I wish to rest my case.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 203 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I move that Bill 203, Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015, be referred to the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee.

[Motion carried]

Bill 204

Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015

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

Ms Drever: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am honoured to rise today to commence the second reading of the Residential Tenancies

(Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015.

This bill will help bring down some of the barriers for survivors of domestic violence who are fleeing unsafe homes. This small change to the Residential Tenancies Act will have a huge impact on those who feel that they are unable to leave an abusive partner for fear of the financial implications of breaking a lease.

3:40

The month of November marks Family Violence Prevention Month. For us here in the Legislature, we should be reflecting on the barriers facing survivors of domestic violence. How can we remove these barriers to ensure that survivors and their families can live their lives free of fear and uncertainty?

Across Canada over the last few weeks provincial governments have been examining how to better protect survivors of domestic violence. How can we remove these barriers so that they can feel believed when breaking the cycle of domestic violence? I applaud the legislation introduced by the Ontario government amending their Residential Tenancies Act as well as the government of Manitoba, who today during their throne speech promised paid leave for victims of domestic violence, a first in Canada and a much-needed step forward.

Bill 204 was drafted over the last few months after many consultations with stakeholders such as police services, women's shelters, market and nonmarket landlords, housing organizations, and advocacy groups. The stakeholders I worked with all told me that in our province women don't feel safe because it is no longer safe for them to leave their homes.

It happens all the time, Madam Speaker. When women are in situations of family violence, it's messy and complicated, and the logistical challenges can create unneeded barriers. We need a strong structure to empower women by creating safer spaces and dismantling barriers. These women are already victimized and already distrustful thanks to a culture that tells them that no one will believe them.

There is no mention of domestic violence in the Residential Tenancies Act. In order to end domestic violence, we need to take a collaborative approach. In a letter I received from a landlord, the landlord highlighted the need for this legislation, that survivors of domestic violence need to have the freedom and security to seek help, that survivors' interaction with their landlords can be one that promotes change and facilitates a safer dialogue, and as the landlord put it, "It is a no-brainer." Victims of domestic violence should not fear repercussions when leaving a violent situation.

Again, I want to repeat that in our current Residential Tenancies Act there are no mentions of domestic violence, and there are no protections for survivors of domestic violence. These survivors trying to break the cycle of violence face numerous social and financial barriers.

I would now like to read you verbatim some quotes from women currently staying in women's shelters in Calgary. These women had to flee for their safety and understand all too well the challenges that survivors of domestic violence face when trying to change their situation. Quote: my husband didn't want his name on the lease; if the bills were under my name, they were my responsibility. End quote. Quote: I had to leave because my name was not on the lease, and my landlord sided with my partner. End quote. As you can see here, Madam Speaker, these experiences are quite diverse. Quote: I remember a woman who needed an emergency protection order for the police to remove her partner from the apartment; her worry was that he would damage the unit and leave her to pay for it because his name was not on the lease. End quote. Quote: I never wanted

my name on the lease; it makes me nervous; what if I have to leave?
End quote.

We must do better. To put this into perspective, Madam Speaker, in Calgary alone 4 out of 10 people are or have been in relationships that are abusive or showing signs of abuse. If I were to go out with my friends, it might be one of them or one of their friends. This is an issue that affects us all. It crosses all socioeconomic levels in this province. Approximately 200,000 adults in Alberta live with family violence across all ages, income levels, and ethnicities. It has been stated by Andrea Silverstone, co-chair of the Calgary domestic violence committee, that even one incident of family violence is too much. I think we can all agree on that statement.

These survivors have to make a tough decision not only for themselves but also for the safety of their families. We need to support their ability to break the cycle of domestic violence by working with them to break that silence.

According to a 2012 Leger survey 1 in 10 men in Alberta said that it was okay to hit a woman if she made him feel really angry. Madam Speaker, we have a problem in this province when it comes to violence. It is well known that 1 in 3 women will experience violence, but only 1 in 10 of them will actually report it. The Canadian coalition for policy alternatives' annual study on women's equality in Canada remarked that 70 per cent of incidents of domestic violence go unreported. Over the last five years 7.6 per cent of Albertans have reported having experienced domestic violence. Our province can't even begin to support survivors through traditional measures when those who have experienced violence don't even have a way to support themselves to get out.

Women make up 85 per cent of survivors of domestic violence, but let me be clear that this legislation will help all Albertans who are survivors of domestic violence. Since introducing this bill, I have heard from Albertans all across the province. They are hopeful that we as legislators are having this discourse. They are hopeful that this bill will begin an open dialogue as we work towards breaking that stigma around domestic violence. Survivors of domestic violence are hopeful that this bill will help those in similar circumstances. Organizations and advocacy groups who work with survivors of domestic violence on a daily basis are hopeful that this will support options for escaping violence and helping families move towards a healthy life.

We must put partisan politics aside to find solutions. I ask you to take that step with me as we move forward towards an Alberta free of violence. Albertans are ready to bring their voices to the discussion on ending domestic violence, violence against women, and violence against indigenous women. By having this discussion here and acknowledging the barriers in place, we will be sending the message that survivors can step out of the shadows. That is what Albertans want, and we must strive towards it. This bill is a first step. This bill will remove barriers that currently face survivors trying to flee their abusers and will help break that cycle of violence.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I look forward to this important dialogue.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. First of all, I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing forward this bill. I really truly applaud her efforts to help protect women fleeing violence and domestic abuse. Especially in the month of November, that's really fitting. Good timing. The spirit of this legislation is actually really important, and it deserves really thoughtful consideration. I've spoken with many interested parties since the bill was first

introduced and have had really meaningful conversations with many of those. I hope to hear more feedback from Albertans after second reading.

I know this bill will take an important step in removing a barrier to families that are escaping domestic violence. When an individual is trying to escape a terrible situation of violence and domestic abuse, the last thing that should be stopping them is a rental agreement. Sadly, for some victims of domestic violence this situation could literally be life or death. According to Stats Canada in 2013 there were more than 10,000 reported cases of domestic violence in Alberta, a rate of 623 per 100,000 people and more than twice the national rate. Domestic violence is a large problem in Alberta's society, and sadly, as our economy worsens, so too does the domestic violence in our communities. I know that my community is seeing an increase in domestic violence as our economy slows down.

3:50

When women escape a violent situation, they can face difficulties in finding the resources that they need. According to the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters' recent annual report 10,205 women and children found haven at provincial shelters. Sadly, nearly twice that number, 19,251, were turned away for lack of space. A victim is most vulnerable immediately after leaving an abusive relationship and trying to find somewhere new to live. The first 24 hours are crucial. Shelters and social housing must be available to meet the needs of victims of domestic violence and their children that may be fleeing a volatile situation.

In my community of Airdrie a dedicated group of volunteers is working hard to open a women's shelter so that women can stay in our community with their children instead of relocating all the way to Calgary, often away from family and community support, and very often there's no room there either.

I want to take a quick second to applaud this government on its plan to increase space in women's shelters across this province. There is no more important role by a government than to ensure that vulnerable Albertans are protected.

As I said previously, Alberta ranks dead last of all the provinces in Canada when it comes to domestic violence. There is much in Alberta we can be proud of, but we certainly need to improve in this area. The road is long, and the work is hard. However, just because the task is difficult, it doesn't mean we don't start.

Bill 204 would allow a victim of domestic abuse to get a certificate, and after providing notice to their landlord along with their certificate, they must be released from their lease agreement. This change could remove one large financial barrier for someone living in fear and help make the decision to leave easier. I certainly believe in the spirit of this legislation and the work that it is aiming to do to make Alberta safer for victims of domestic violence. Ending the stigma that surrounds domestic violence is so important, and legislation like Bill 204 could be a big part of doing just that.

There are some concerns that I do have surrounding the logistics of the legislation such as from whom a victim of domestic violence can receive a certificate or, perhaps, the unintended consequences that victims may face moving forward and securing housing. However, these questions and clarifications that I have about the legislation will be best served through discussion in Committee of the Whole.

I know that this one bill, Bill 204, will not stop domestic violence; it won't fix the problem overnight. No one bill could hope to achieve that goal. The journey away from domestic violence starts with a step, one brave step, when you finally say: no more. This one bill, Bill 204, will take a step in helping to improve the situation for just one individual. My hope is this, that Bill 204 will remove a

barrier from someone, which will enable them to take that first step away from a violent situation and not be stopped for financial reasons and kept in a cycle of violence. Nobody wants that, Madam Speaker. Domestic violence is the very pitfall in our society, one that we must fight every day to overcome. As I said earlier, no one bill or sweeping proclamation will accomplish just that. However, small steps will make up to a whole, and possibly someday bills such as 204 will not be needed.

I commend the Member for Calgary-Bow for taking the initiative to introduce this legislation. We need to break the silence that surrounds domestic violence in our province and find tangible ways to end the cycle of violence. I believe that Bill 204 is on the right track to do just that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise this afternoon to speak in favour of Bill 204 and commend the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing it forward. In brief, anything we can do in this House to prevent domestic violence and protect victims of domestic violence is a good thing. The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters' most recent annual report showed that just over 10,000 women and children found haven at provincial shelters between April 2014 and March 2015. More disturbingly, nearly twice that number, 19,251, were turned away due to lack of space.

Now, I do want to praise this government for their recent investment in women's shelters. It is an important step. I also think it's important that we acknowledge the work that has gone on in Alberta. In many ways Alberta is a leading jurisdiction not just in this country but around the world in dealing with domestic violence through our court system, through organizations like HomeFront in Calgary, and other similar organizations around the province where domestic violence cases are seen in a specialized court. That's very important. It has greatly reduced the recidivism rate. It's a focus on counselling for those who are victims of domestic violence, for their children, and often for the perpetrators as well to learn that this is not an appropriate way to have a relationship, and it prevents future domestic violence, which is equally important.

A major issue, of course, that this bill deals with in domestic violence is the inability to leave the relationship. Being able to break a lease on reasonable notice would remove the financial and social hurdles to ending that relationship and preventing further abuse.

It's also important to note, Madam Speaker, that this bill is gender neutral, allowing for victims of domestic violence, both male and female, to ensure that they have options, but it is very important to note that the vast – vast – majority of victims of domestic violence are women.

This legislation also is based on other provinces' legislation. Quebec, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia all have similar legislation. Alberta would be the fourth province to have this legislation. It is an opportunity, then, for Alberta to take somewhat of a leadership role. The fact that other provinces beyond those three have not taken this up is certainly not a reason for this Assembly not to act.

I encourage all members to support this bill, and I once again thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing forward this important issue. Thank you.

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to stand in support of Bill 204, the residential tenancies amendment act, and again I thank the member for bringing this forward. I

recently attended a walk for a women's shelter in Lac La Biche. At that time, the previous day, we had just been introduced to Bill 204. I asked the front-line workers and management of that facility to have a look at Bill 204 and provide their input, which I think is very important. They're the ones dealing with these issues on a daily basis, and it is imperative that we have their input to ensure that we get this very important piece of legislation right the first time.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise in support of Bill 204 and say: it is about time. Thank you very much, hon. member, for putting it forward.

Did you read *Insight: Domestic Silence in the Edmonton Journal* on Saturday?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, there is a tradition in this House that we don't allow props.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Okay. Sorry.

On September 5, 1972, five days after I was married, I realized that there was a problem but could not put my finger on it. Words were spoken, and I felt a shiver on my back and a knot in my stomach. I didn't know it then, but the trap was being set, and I was the game.

The trap was released to some degree on Sunday, July 19, 1981, almost nine years later, when my daughters and I got on a Greyhound bus for a very difficult 62-hour journey across the country, ending in Yellowknife. The trap was finally broken in May of 1992 when I learned that my ex-husband was dead, and I could stop looking over my shoulder.

4:00

My support for this bill comes from the middle of this experience in this trap, a trap that was, intentionally or unintentionally, supported by society. Silence, blame, guilt, and little to no support grew this injustice for decades if not centuries.

Three times I left with my kids, twice I went to shelters, and twice I was forced to return or live on the street. Both times I returned, and the violence got worse, and the threats, which he could have carried out at any time, became more frequent and more intimidating. Broken bones, black eyes, sexual assault, and two miscarriages as a result of this abuse were only some of the physical atrocities I had to endure.

I did not have this kind of experience in my life before I was married, so I was not prepared for it nor for how I could protect my children and myself. I prayed. I asked God: "Why is this happening to me? I'm a good person. I've never intentionally hurt anybody or anything in my life." Someone said to me: God helps those who help themselves. I figured I needed to do something, and I did. I finally got away to a women's shelter and tried to figure out what to do and where to go. Suffice to say, this attempt was unsuccessful as the limit at the shelter was two weeks, and I had nowhere to go. At the end of the two weeks I was forced to return.

The next time I left I was a little more prepared. I had contacted a lawyer before I left. I saved some money and then left again when I saw the chance to run. I met with the lawyer, but I couldn't get a court date for a month. The time in the shelter was only three weeks. Again I had to go back. There were no supports left after the shelter. This time the abuse was so bad that I thought I would be killed, especially when I awoke from a very tentative sleep with a gun to the back of my head and the clicking sound of the hammer as the trigger was pulled. There were no bullets in the gun, and he laughed hysterically. He beat me, he raped me, and then he threatened that

the next time there would be bullets and that he would kill our daughters first to hurt me and then kill me. I knew it would be just a matter of time before he followed through on these threats. I called the police as soon as I could, and he was arrested and then released on his own recognizance, and a restraining order was put in place.

I gathered whatever I could, I begged some friends and family for some money to get out of there, and I called the police 16 times in two weeks before he was arrested again, not so much for assaulting me but because he broke the restraining order. This time he was held in remand until the issue was settled in court. In court he was found guilty and sentenced to a year in jail, but this sentence was suspended, all but the days he'd spent in remand. He turned, and as he was leaving the courtroom, he said that he would kill me. I asked the judge how he could let him go. The judge said to me: it's a marital issue; get a divorce, and leave. He proceeded then to give me a lecture on how much it was going to cost to keep him in jail.

When I returned to my house, he was there, holding my children and my mother-in-law at the point of a gun. At the end of a four-hour ordeal his mother rose and asked God to help us, and he ran from the house. We spent a few more days barricaded in the house before we finally had the opportunity to get out and get on that bus and run for our lives.

This should never have happened to me or these situations to anybody else. My children have been scarred for their lives, and I will be horrified if anybody in this Chamber votes against this bill.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, for sharing that very painful experience with us.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for sharing your story with us today. I rise in support of this bill, and I'm honoured to rise in support of this bill. Statistically the most dangerous time in an abusive relationship is the time after the victim leaves the abuser. Leaving an abusive relationship is a difficult process, and we can make it easier by passing legislation that helps remove these barriers to leaving.

The RCMP in Leduc estimate they will respond to around 427 domestic violence calls this year, representing approximately only 20 per cent of those actually affected in our community by family violence. If the reporting rates reflected the rate of incidents, the number would actually be around 2,135 cases. As was said before, one is too many. Families in Leduc-Beaumont can go to the closest women's shelter, which is the Camrose Women's Shelter, but they need the ability to break a lease without penalty in order to move on.

Families leave abusive homes with few possessions and resources, and they need to be able to make this clean break with as little connection to the abuser as possible. Some of the barriers to leaving an abuser are the costs of starting over, legal proceedings, and the fear a victim may have of being around their abuser another time. If this legislation is passed, a victim can break a lease without needing their abuser's consent, so it removes a potential block from them for leaving or another opportunity for violence. This pertains to women and men equally.

In many cases the decision to leave or stay hinges on challenges the victim may face after leaving, which includes providing for themselves or their children, not wanting to raise their children in poverty and fear and escalating violence, and the complexity of their relationship with their abuser. These citizens, already victimized and already distrustful thanks to a culture that tells them that no one will believe them, don't want to break a lease and run

from a landlord. They just want to keep themselves and their children safe. This bill is another step forward following the I Believe You campaign. We as a government need to show survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault that we do believe them and that this government is committed to giving them back their voice. We need to empower people to take that first step in breaking the cycle of violence.

Madam Speaker, it is almost 2016. We as men need to do better, we as a Legislature need to do better, and we as a society need to do better. I urge everyone to support this bill.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. An honour to stand in support of Bill 204, Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015. I want to commend the member for her courageous statement. There's nothing like putting a human face on some of the issues that we're talking about. Having spent the last three months on the mental health and addictions review, I can tell you that there are a lot of stories that are important for us to hear that have to do with people with both mental health issues and addictions not getting the support they need, whether it's in the form of housing or if it's in the form of addictions treatment and mental health treatment, that end up in situations that put partners, spouses, others, children at risk.

This bill proposes to amend the act to make it easier for victims of domestic violence to leave an abusive partner or spouse and to establish a process for them to terminate tenancy early and without a penalty. Clearly, everything we can do to make it easier for women and children and partners of any gender relationship to be freed from danger is good.

4:10

Alberta has historically had one of the highest rates of domestic violence in the country. It has to do, I think, with not only the culture that we've grown out of. To some extent, I guess, we all recognize the unique features of Alberta's history and how it's created sometimes the conditions for abusive relationships. It hasn't challenged the environment of abusive relationships. Bullying, mental illness, and addictions, that contribute to that, have not been addressed as aggressively as one would hope. Also, particularly now with the economic downturn in our province and the shortage of women's shelters in this province, it's my understanding that we turned away 14,000 visits last year. I and others, I think, are grateful that this government has stepped up with more support for women's shelters this year, definitely an important step in reducing this appalling rate of domestic violence.

Many of you may know the former Liberal MLA for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly, Alice Hanson, famous in these areas for her private member's bill, Bill 214, the Victims of Domestic Violence Act, from 1996. That was a groundbreaking piece of legislation that made it possible for a victim to obtain an emergency protection order – in 1996 – granting exclusive occupation of his or her residence for a specified period. Importantly, Hanson's private member's bill acknowledged that perhaps the greatest barrier victims face to escaping an abusive spouse or partner is not wanting to be on the street, such a basic, basic protection and disincentive. This is particularly true in situations with children, of course.

The bill sought at that time to rectify this decades-old injustice by establishing a simplified mechanism whereby a judge could order the abuser to leave and impose additional restrictions. Despite the fact that Hanson's Bill 214 enjoyed widespread support on both

sides of the House, the PC government actually hoisted the bill, effectively killing it. Two years later, in what many viewed as a fairly cynical and petty move, the Klein government introduced and passed Bill 19, the Protection Against Family Violence Act, which was essentially a repackaging of Alice Hanson's legislation as a government bill.

We enthusiastically support this bill on this side of the House in the Alberta Liberal caucus and proudly reference Alice Hanson's legacy in encouraging a new way of addressing domestic violence in the province. Any measures that we can consider that would make it easier for victims of violence to be identified and protected should be considered, and I applaud the proponent of this amendment.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Lethbridge-East for her impassioned speech. It is my pleasure to support the Member for Calgary-Bow's Bill 204. The Member for Calgary-Bow has worked with stakeholders to put together a bill that will have immediate impact for survivors of domestic violence if passed. While this bill is a small change, it's a big step forward to make it easier for survivors of domestic violence to find new housing if needed. This bill would allow survivors to flee an abusive environment without the fear of repercussions for breaking a lease. We have an opportunity to empower people to leave potentially life-threatening situations, to break the cycle of violence. Everything should be done to give power back to the survivors of domestic violence and their families. Anyone leaving a violent situation should not have to pay a financial penalty.

Even today some still ask why people being abused don't leave. If it's a life-or-death choice, why stay? The truth is that it's not as simple as picking up and leaving. For some it's a choice between one volatile situation and another, which is not a choice at all. When survivors leave abusers, the risk that that violence will escalate increases. The abusive partner may control the finances or be the sole source of finances for the family. The abusive partner may have destroyed the survivor's credit or forced joint accounts, so starting over financially is not feasible.

In research done by Statistics Canada it was found that after separation a woman's standard of living decreases by 23 to 29 per cent. The act of leaving an abusive partner or family member is already a difficult decision, with potential legal battles ahead. Survivors may need to file for divorce, divide assets, and fight for custody. The last thing anyone in that position needs is possible legal action from a disgruntled landlord.

A recent Alberta survey showed that 90 per cent of Albertans polled believe that family violence prevention should be an urgent priority for the government of Alberta. As a government we have a responsibility to help and protect people when they are in greatest need. Any small change we can make to help survivors of domestic violence should be made, and our government wants to do just that. We ran on a platform of improving gender equality here in Alberta.

According to a study from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Calgary ranks as the third-worst Canadian city for women. This needs to change, and that change must come from us. That's why I support the Member for Calgary-Bow's bill.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today in support of Bill 204. You know, I've had the privilege of being around the precinct area for the last number of years in one capacity or another, and I can look to a few times in the House that I will never forget. Today is one of those days. The bravery and the courage that were shown today by the Member for Lethbridge-East are hard to even comprehend, not only in the horrific, horrific situation, but the bravery that she displayed again today is absolutely incredible, and I am privileged and honoured to be here and to support in whatever capacity I can moving this bill forward and just being so thankful for your comments and your bravery, both then as well as today. So for that I say thank you.

I'd also like to say thank you to the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing this important piece of legislation forward. As my hon. colleague from Airdrie mentioned, the road to ending domestic abuse is a long, long, horrific road, and it is so disheartening, in a time that we live in today, that we still have to go down that road. It's disheartening to know that even this evening there will be people in their very homes who fear for their lives and for their children's lives. I can't begin to comprehend what that must be like, to walk up to the doorstep of the place that's supposed to be the safest only to find the horrors that wait beyond that door.

It's so, so disappointing that we have to, in a time like today, put into place preventive measures for this. It's my hope that we will get to a place right across this country and in this province where this sort of legislation isn't needed, because we can all treat each other in a manner that we are worthy of being treated in, but unfortunately we're not there, so we need to take the steps that are necessary to do the things that we can do. It's my belief that one of the very most important things that we can do as legislators is to protect the most vulnerable, and that's exactly what I believe the intent of this piece of legislation is, with the goal of ensuring that the most vulnerable Albertans are protected.

4:20

I know that as the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills I will be pleased to support this piece of legislation, as I believe all of my colleagues will support this piece of legislation, that is critically important to taking a first step down that long and painful journey to ending domestic abuse and violence.

Having said that, I look forward to hearing more of the debate. I also look forward to reaching out to some stakeholders. We play a critical role: to make sure that we get the legislation right, just like the hon. member who proposed it, just like the private members on the government side and the private members here, to ensure that we're doing everything that we can to strengthen the legislation, to make sure we're getting it right, to consulting with stakeholders – I know that I've heard from one stakeholder, and I look forward to hearing from others – just to make sure that we continue to do our due diligence. That's not to say that we shouldn't expedite the process but to make sure that we're hearing back and that we do get it right because it's so critically important that we get it right. If this piece of legislation only helps one Albertan fleeing from a horrible, horrible situation, it will have been worth it.

For that I say thank you to the Member for Calgary-Bow and to the members of this House, and I look forward to seeing this important piece of legislation moved through the stages of debate, and hopefully one day we can point back to this day, when the bravery and courage that we saw today and the willingness of the member to propose it will in fact have helped, hopefully, more than just one, but even if it's just one, it's enough.

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

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you, Member for Calgary-Bow, for bringing this bill forward, and thank you, Member for Lethbridge-East, for having the courage this afternoon to rise and speak your story. As a social worker and as an individual I have worked in women's shelters and with women and children and families in the community fleeing domestic violence. Statistically a woman is abused an average of 35 times before she finds the courage to come forward and tell someone. Edmonton-based women's shelter WIN House has stated that 267 women and 365 children reported family violence in 2014-15. A total of 2,022 crisis calls were made during this time. As I have stated before in this Assembly, Edmonton and Calgary rank second- and third-worst respectively as safe Canadian cities for women according to a July 2015 Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives study. This needs to change.

Shelters, police services, advocacy organizations: all have suggested that in our province women don't feel safe because there is no safe way for them to leave their home. These women, already victimized and already distrustful thanks to a culture that tells them that no one will believe them, do not want to break a lease and run from a landlord. They just want to keep themselves and their children safe. This bill will allow survivors of domestic violence to flee from an unsafe environment without the fear of repercussions of breaking a lease. While we are only making a small change with this bill to the Residential Tenancies Act, it can save lives. It can ensure that those who are in unsafe homes can leave without financial penalty. We must put partisan politics aside to act in the greater good of all Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, Member.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In all honesty, there's not that much I can add to the debate that hasn't been said already today, certainly most so with the powerful words we heard from the Member for Lethbridge-East, for which I thank her very much. I do just want to take a moment to say thank you to the Member for Calgary-Bow for introducing this bill. It was only a few short weeks ago that I received an e-mail from my constituency assistant, my caseworker, bringing to my attention a recent case that we had dealt with in our office, where a 64-year-old woman, a senior citizen, had been forced to flee her home to a shelter operated by SAGE here in Edmonton. My caseworker at that point raised this to my attention and indicated her concern with the difficulties with the Residential Tenancies Act. So it was with great pleasure that I saw the introduction of Bill 204 last week and had the opportunity to share that with my caseworker, who was very pleased to see it as well.

I did just want to take a moment today to recognize that this is legislation that's badly needed. I thank the member for bringing it forward, and I look forward to showing my support.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am proud to stand today in support of Bill 204, introduced by the Member for Calgary-Bow, whom I've had the privilege of working alongside with on this bill, because it's necessary. Ending the cycle of poverty is something that we need to take action on, and I think it's been made clear with situations such as casework, with experiences shared here. It takes a co-operative approach to do it. It takes landlords, it takes government, and it takes a system that makes people feel like they are supported when they take that brave step, because it's hard.

It's hard to decide that they are going to leave their home even if they are in that situation. So the solutions that are proposed by this amendment are commendable. They're a fresh perspective, and that's what I hope the young members of this Legislature continue to bring forward.

I've worked continuously throughout my life as an advocate for vulnerable people, and with this amendment we'll see us building a broad scope of skills and tools that are available to the social workers, to the police force, to everyone that helps aid and support the people in this situation. To us it's frustrating. It's frustrating to know that it can be a piece of paper that keeps them there, that keeps the cycle of poverty continuing. It's something as simple as this that starts creating a system that actually supports the empowerment of our people, starts ending the cycle of poverty.

I commend the Member for Calgary-Bow for coming up with this idea, for putting in the work with consultation, and I'm proud to be supporting it today. I know that in Strathcona county there are multiple initiatives, and there is constant talk of how we're going to address the issue of family violence. There are initiatives such as men as allies, where we talk about the role of every single individual, from men to women, addressing that everyone needs to be involved in ending this. Having those conversations that educate men and women on how to create healthy relationships is also part of that conversation because healthy relationships and talking about that are critical to actually developing the end of this goal, because that's when we'll see the end of the cycle.

I know that in moving forward with this, we'll have to debate the details of this bill, and it is with that that I'm looking forward to the Committee of the Whole discussion. I'm looking forward to supporting this bill.

Thank you.

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

Ms Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you, MLA for Lethbridge-East, for sharing your story. It's very near and dear to my heart. I'm rising today in support of Bill 204. This bill is a step towards change. We need to help people take that first step to break the cycle of domestic violence. Domestic violence affects males, females, young, old, wealthy, and poor. We as a government need to show victims that we believe them and support them and that we are committed to giving them back their voice. This is a much-needed step to ending the cycle of violence.

Thank you to the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing it forward.

4:30

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm rising in support of Bill 204. I wanted to discuss it because it's a step towards a larger discourse in this province that needs to happen. Intimate partner violence flourishes in an environment where the misuse of power against the vulnerable or less powerful is tolerated. That environment may be behind closed doors or in the larger community, and we see it with bullying all the time. That's why we need to work to prevent violence and build a society where this is not tolerated anymore.

We've heard from the member herself that one of the most common reasons for a survivor of domestic violence to stay is because they feel they can't leave their home or they haven't been successful getting the abuser to leave. All forms of violence and abuse are serious criminal matters, with a huge impact on society.

Personally, I wanted to talk a little bit about the impact this has on our children and the cycle and the future of what this means. Generally speaking, people aren't abusive unless they've been abused. If we can stop the cycle now, we can stop the next generation of children from growing up in this and stop the next generation of adults from abusing other people. That's so, so important. There are estimates that in 30 to 40 per cent of reported cases where the partner is abused, so are the children. However, there's a growing understanding that simply witnessing intimate partner violence in their home can affect these children the same way that abuse directed at them would affect them. The first step for anyone in or close to an abusive relationship is to get help, and this bill can help with that.

About a year and a half ago in the city of Spruce Grove there was a woman who was killed by her partner. She had five children, and the lives of those children are forever impacted by that. Forever impacted. There is no positive that comes out of intimate partner violence.

We talk about domestic violence survivors; they're all victims first. Things like this bill, tools, can help them become survivors, not just victims.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I hesitate to rise to speak to this bill, but I've been on a journey for the last six, seven years trying to help victimization in families. My wife is a social worker, and she saw the need for providing an opportunity for victims of family violence to escape their situation. For a period of three years we had a facility that we allowed a foundation to operate in our community as a shelter. We learned a lot through that, the committee that was involved, and it's a very complex issue. This is one piece of a very complex puzzle. We can start today by fixing some of the hurdles that are faced by victims of violence. I commend the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing it forward, and I thank her for that.

I also recognize that we have a duty and a responsibility to also work towards being able to more easily provide services to those victims beyond the two weeks, beyond the three weeks to allow the system to operate more freely and efficiently to get these shelters approved and actually operating. I am currently working with a group in Morinville, the Jessica Martel Memorial Foundation, and look forward to trying to help them move forward with a facility that can bring relief in this area and that some of the learnings that my wife and I have been able to experience previously will be able to help them to set up housing that can be more sustainable long term.

I speak in favour, and I find it very refreshing that we can as legislators come together around this issue and recognize the need to try and help as much as possible. This is one piece of the very complicated puzzle of starting to stem and break that cycle of violence in our homes.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any others wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to add a few more elements to this debate. We have already done a number of things because it is a very complex issue. We have formed the Status of Women ministry. It's one of the pieces. We have put \$15 million to annually increase supports as well. We are in the I Believe You campaign. So we are taking all of these steps, and this

is just one more part of that picture. I do want to support this particular motion.

The aspect or perspective that I want to bring is First Nations victims and victims in rural areas, where a women's shelter may not even exist. They do need an option of some place to go. That would mean leaving the community, and leaving it for two weeks or three weeks and coming back is not the solution. So as important as women's shelters are, if there are none there, there does need to be a more permanent option, and this safe place, safe tenancy may offer that option for those people.

Again, I would just like to close very quickly by mentioning that in my constituency Camrose does have a women's shelter. There were many hundreds of women and children in particular who were helped there, but there were more who were not able to even receive that assistance. So it's very important that we continue to support women's shelters and provide the second one. In Camrose they did receive 107 ladies self-identified as aboriginals. I applaud the Camrose Women's Shelter for accepting those ladies, but it points out to me that we need to provide support everywhere throughout Alberta. This may be a motion that would help make that available and possible.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I'd like to start, of course, by thanking the members for Calgary-Bow and Lethbridge-East for the strength and power that they have contributed to this House today. I also want to say that in many ways, after a 33-year career in the area of social work, particularly in the area of family violence, I feel that this is a profound moment for me to be a part of. So thank you both for doing that.

One thing I also want to remind the House is that this is merely a step in a much longer and more profound journey. What we've identified today is simply one structural barrier that women are facing as they flee family violence, and I would like us to continue to recognize that there are multiple other structural problems and barriers that make family violence possible and make resolving family violence difficult. If we're truly against family violence, then we need to ask ourselves about all of those other structural barriers as well. Every time that we see a lack of child care spaces, we should see a structural barrier. Every time that we see a lack of women's voices in our schools or in our hospitals or in our Legislature, we should see a structural barrier. Every time we diminish public services that overwhelmingly support women to achieve success, we create structural barriers.

I want us to continue to have this conversation and continue to identify these structural barriers and stand proud again and again and again to reduce and eliminate each of these structural barriers. Let us not forget that this is one step amongst many.

Thank you.

4:40

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing this bill forward. Having worked in the area of criminal law and criminal defence, also having worked with the Elizabeth Fry Society in Edmonton, in the domestic violence courtroom particularly, one of the issues that I saw come forward regularly would be that the police would charge the abuser, and the victim and abuser would attend court. The victim, being the leaseholder in many situations, however maybe not the income

earner, would find themselves in a situation where they would be wanting to undo their having called the police, not by reason of not having been assaulted, which they typically were, but by reason of concern for their financial well-being and future. Their goal in trying to persuade the police and court services workers that we didn't need to proceed with charges against the abuser was that they were concerned about being able to pay the rent.

I think that this piece of legislation provides an out for women who find themselves in that situation. While it may seem like that is a specific circumstance, it's not unique by any means. This was something that occurred regularly, that we would have women, in particular, coming forward and saying that they were concerned about their ability to pay the rent, so they wanted to be able to undo the process that had begun with respect to charging the abuser and the order of protection that had then been placed and prevented them from returning.

This piece of legislation does some good work with respect to giving power to victims to not have to concern themselves so greatly with the financial repercussions of having taken the bold steps of making a complaint to the police in the first place. I commend the Member for Calgary-Bow. I think that this is an excellent step forward when discussing victims of domestic violence and the peripheral circumstances that affect them.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any others? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to indicate as well my support for this bill, Bill 204, Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015. I think this act by no means deals with all of the issues relative to intimate partner violence and tendencies, but it deals with some very core pieces in a very, very significant way and is a major step forward, as far as I'm concerned, in the objective of all members of the House of making life safer for families and for children.

I want to commend the hon. member for this piece of legislation. This, in my view, is an exemplary piece of legislation as a private member's bill. The hon. member has worked very hard in terms of reaching out and doing the kinds of outreach that is necessary, talking to a wide range of groups – police agencies, people who deal with women and families who are facing domestic violence, including shelters – and a whole range of organizations. I want to commend the hon. member for her work. This is the kind of work as a private member that I think sets a high standard for all of us, and I just want to pay tribute to the hon. member and her hard work in putting this particular piece of legislation forward. I think it's wonderful.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any others wishing to speak to the bill?
Seeing none, the hon. member to close debate.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an honour to close the debate on the second reading of the Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015. I would like to thank the constituents of Calgary-Bow, the stakeholders who helped shape this bill, and my fellow MLAs here for continuing the discourse on ending violence here in this province.

I would also like to specifically thank the Member for Lethbridge-East for sharing her very personal and moving experience with domestic violence. Thank you for showing Albertans that this issue affects us all. You are a role model, and I commend you for your

strength and courage. I believe your story highlights the struggles that women face still to leave an abusive situation.

We all have a role to play when finding solutions to ending violence. Domestic violence does not discriminate and affects all Albertans across all demographics. This bill will help Albertans who are survivors of domestic violence by removing some of the barriers and allowing survivors to be heard. Let me be clear, Madam Speaker. The Residential Tenancies Act makes no mention of domestic violence. This bill proposes a small amendment which will have a great effect on the lives of survivors fleeing domestic violence and on their families. We are talking about everyday Albertans. These are our neighbours, our co-workers, our families, and our seniors. We need to enable them to be able to break the cycle of violence. This bill is a first step. We must take further action as a Legislature to work with stakeholders to come up with solutions to end violence in Alberta.

I have heard from many front-line organizations that deal with domestic violence on a daily basis – and I applaud them for the tireless work that they do; thank you – organizations such as Carya who are devoted to making stronger families and communities, who have shared with me their support.

I think it is admirable that the government is taking steps to increase the level of safety for those citizens experiencing domestic violence. Security of housing is a critical first step for those seeking to rebuild their lives in a violence free environment. This need for safety is . . . more pronounced when children are involved.

Organizations such as HomeFront who work with families in their homes to provide risk assessment, safety planning, and support have expressed their support, stating that Bill 204 will support options for escaping violence and helping families move towards healthier lives. I have received support from organizations such as the Calgary Housing Company who provide safe and affordable housing solutions to the citizens of Calgary. In their letter of support they state that this bill will essentially codify their current practices.

I want to thank the members of this Assembly for their support and their effort to continue the discourse on domestic violence here today. We must ensure that this dialogue acts as a first step as we move forward.

Thank you very much. [Standing ovation]

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a second time]

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, having concluded debate on second reading of Bill 204 and with a view to dealing with the motion that is before us next, being Motion 504, I would request consent of the House to call it 5 o'clock.

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader has moved that we call it 5 o'clock.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: We will continue, then.

Motions Other than Government Motions

Regional Public Transit Service

504. Mr. Kleinsteuber moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to explore the feasibility of regional transit services in the province.

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

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to rise today and bring forward this important motion. The topic of transportation and regional transit is something that I have campaigned on in the past and a topic that I have discussed at the doors. It's my sincere hope that you'll join me today in supporting this motion, and hopefully this will be one step in the direction of better transit options for Albertans.

In a previous life, before becoming an MLA, I was employed in the transportation industry at Calgary airport. Prior to that, I was based in other Canadian cities, including Ottawa, Montreal, and Toronto. I've always supported public transit in cities where I've lived and places where I have travelled. I've witnessed some excellent examples of transportation networks within our own country and in other parts of the world, networks that could be applied to this province. I know my hon. colleague the Minister of Transportation appreciates public transit given his earlier career experience, and I don't think he's alone in the House here. There may be other members as well. I think he also has a true understanding of the value of public transit and the service it provides Albertans in both small and large communities.

When discussing highway congestion on the QE II, the minister suggested that we need to take a look at this as more than just a highway but as a transportation corridor. The objective of that corridor should be to move people and goods and not necessarily just vehicles. I think that visionary perspective is an excellent point for the discussion of this motion today. It is this understanding that has us leading the charge to expand our support for this useful opportunity across Alberta. I also think it would send a strong message to all Albertans that we can apply some of the successful initiatives in other jurisdictions in the world right here in the province of Alberta.

The feasibility of regional transit can come in many forms and areas. First, there are inner-city initiatives, and there's a precedent in Canada for provincially supported regional rail networks. In Montreal the AMT, the Agence métropolitaine de transport, operates from the island of Montreal, with an approximate population of 4 million, providing six lines of train service to cities such as Hudson, Saint-Eustache, and Saint-Philippe. In the city of Toronto, with an approximate population of 6 million, GO Transit provides about seven lines of service to surrounding areas such as Hamilton, Oshawa, and Whitby. Finally, Vancouver, with a population of about 2.3 million, has the West Coast Express service, with regional service to Waterfront Station in Mission, B.C. The service is said to recover about three-quarters of its revenue from its ridership. It should be noted that these regional train services are not high-speed rail, and in many cases they share the same rail lines with freight trains.

Could a similar transit service operate on the Calgary-Edmonton corridor with several stops in between? The city of Calgary has a population of 1.2 million, and Edmonton has about 870,000. That is a combined population of about 2 million people, which would be unique in Canada due to the proximity of these two cities and the amount of people that travel between them.

A regional transportation initiative must encourage development of a robust transportation network throughout Alberta communities large and small. In this spirit, a successful transit support initiative has been the Calgary Regional Partnership. This organization is currently working with communities on a regional bus service from Calgary to Nanton, High River, Okotoks, Black Diamond, and Turner Valley. Service has also been launched in other areas such as Airdrie and Calgary centre, with an Intercity Express, or ICE, bus service between these points. This organization helps municipalities take advantage of the GreenTRIP funding to support surrounding communities that connect to Calgary.

Certainly, there has been funding available for municipalities to develop their own transit initiatives as well. GreenTRIP funding has also been a successful tool in launching the Roam bus service within Banff and, further, helping Canmore get connected to that network. The intercity service there has been so successful that service frequency improvements have been added.

One of the problems with the GreenTRIP funding initiative is that it creates a patchwork of service throughout these communities that choose to be involved in the funding program rather than benefiting all communities that should be part of a regional transportation network. Clearly, we must do more to better connect Albertans who live in smaller communities to those centres within their region and beyond. Rural Alberta is part of the lifeblood that adds strength to this province. Many companies also consider access to transit as an important criterion when deciding where to locate their business for investment opportunities. Regional and local transit being in place provides labour force mobility for these businesses.

The final piece of the transit puzzle is also lending support to municipalities to improve their transportation networks. A transportation strategy should connect existing infrastructure within cities. In the case of Calgary the C-Train network has been linked up to connection hubs at C-Train stations. A good example of this has been, again, the Airdrie Intercity Express Service, that connects to the McKnight LRT station. Through this connection method extensive light rail transit networks within the cities of Calgary and Edmonton provide necessary connection hubs to regional transit services.

As we do this, by supporting new municipal transit initiatives that bring Albertans together, we will be doing more than providing a much-needed public service for Alberta families who need it. Through the various initiatives discussed here in this motion, the goals are consistent. We are hoping to mitigate traffic congestion and the need to perpetually widen highway corridors. Any time highways are widened, a cost is associated with that construction, and those costs should be compared to alternative transportation methods. In addition to cost comparisons, we will be supporting a cleaner environment by providing more people with access to public transportation, so they can choose public transit to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Our government's budget signals a clear commitment to supporting transit in communities throughout Alberta. My colleagues in the Legislature have the opportunity to signal their own support. I hope that the members from all parties in the Legislature agree that we can serve all Alberta families by voting in favour of this motion, which supports investigating the feasibility of regional public transit services.

Thank you.

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

Ms Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today in support of this motion. We are fortunate in Red Deer and area to have this much-needed service. Lacombe and Blackfalds are able to utilize the BOLT regional transit service. Red Deer Transit services the towns of Penhold and Springbrook. This is a good start. We must encourage the development of larger regional transportation networks. There are so many towns, large and small, which would benefit from service. We must do more to better connect Albertans who live in smaller communities to those larger centres within their region.

I urge my colleagues from all parties in the Legislature to vote in favour of this motion so we can better serve all Alberta families.

Mrs. Schreiner: Madam Speaker and fellow colleagues, I support this motion brought forward to us today by the Member for Calgary-Northern Hills. I believe the recent funding on behalf of hon. Mason's green transit initiative in Red Deer underpins the importance of regional transit.

5:00

Red Deer is the third-largest city in Alberta and imparts considerable impact on the communities surrounding it. Currently we have municipal transportation that bridges the distance between Red Deer, Blackfalds, and Lacombe. The announcement to support further funding of our transportation system is geared to encompass Red Deer county. This includes accessibility to Gasoline Alley as well as our regional airport, which is also undergoing expansion.

This transportation initiative will directly impact an additional 20,000 rural Albertans within the surrounding Red Deer county who can easily access Red Deer as the central Alberta hub. To central Albertans this means that they will have better access to available services in Red Deer. It supports rural and urban connectivity and provides opportunities to foster healthy, sustainable communities.

Additionally, we can support environmental sustainability through the utilization of compressed natural gas, thus reducing greenhouse gas emissions. When we invest in transportation, we bridge geographic gaps. For Red Deer this means that we have contributed to the mobility of the lives of fellow Albertans while decreasing traffic congestion. As a result, these enhancements will improve access to jobs, schools, and services not only for those who do not drive but also for those who share our vision of a healthier Alberta.

Our decision to support the enhancement of a robust transportation system from Red Deer to surrounding municipalities has exemplified the commitment that we have promised Albertan families. The importance of this motion today is that it not only eases burdens on our Albertan families but supports a synergy amongst our municipal partners. By investigating the feasibility of regional public transit systems, we are letting Albertans know that we recognize the importance of affordable, reliable, environmentally sustainable transportation. Red Deer has been fortunate to witness first-hand the feasibility of this plan, and I encourage my colleagues from all parties to serve well our Alberta families and vote in favour of this motion.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Motion 504, urging the government to explore the feasibility of regional transit services in the province, and I place the emphasis on the word "explore." It is very good to scope out, examine, study, determine the benefits and the costs, and evaluate the merits of allocating taxpayer dollars to running regional transit services in the province.

In that fashion exploring the feasibility rather than going ahead with an ideological platform is commendable, but the NDP government has allocated \$330 million over the next three years in the capital plan for transit initiatives, so it already looks like the cart is being placed before the horse. Under questioning in estimates the Minister of Transportation indicated this \$330 million was for multiple municipalities to come together to develop regional transit systems. So we have a motion that wants to explore services, and we have a minister set to lay out capital on systems.

We know there are several regional transit services in existence already in the province. More often than not they are owned and/or

operated by the private sector. That in and of itself is an indication that some regional transit services are feasible or at least they are feasible until government decides to start crowding them out with its own tax-funded services. In the constituency of Highwood privately owned and operated Southland operates a commuter motorcoach service for the residents of High River and Okotoks to get into Calgary, and as the member has identified, over in Airdrie the city of Airdrie's own Intercity Express, operated by FirstCanada ULC, runs into Calgary.

But I am also aware of services that were not feasible. In my constituency of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock St. Albert Transit, owned by the city of St. Albert and operated by Pacific Western, began running a transit bus from St. Albert to Morinville. The low ridership and lack of use was indicative that the route was not feasible, and it was discontinued. Down in Cochrane someone had a bright idea to run snazzy double-decker buses along highway 1A into Calgary, and that service also fizzled.

As you can see, Madam Speaker, the market determines the feasibility and viability of the service. Perpetual subsidies would be just throwing good money after bad. No one wants to see an empty bus on the road at great taxpayer expense spewing diesel exhaust. But then we have a minister who gets talking about regional transit systems and laying out capital dollars for it. When I hear the word "system," I hear more than one regional transit service bus interlining and providing connections. Buses are relatively inexpensive, but at \$330 million in the capital plan and the minister talking systems, I cannot help but think that the minister is talking about something far more ambitious.

Now, I'm not talking high-speed rail; I'm talking commuter rail is possible with that. For some time, Madam Speaker, many residents in the Calgary region have talked of running commuter trains to free congestion along highways 1 and 2, from Banff to Cochrane and on into Calgary; from Olds, Crossfield, and Airdrie on into downtown Calgary; even from High River and Okotoks to downtown; maybe even in the Edmonton region from Wabamun to Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, Acheson, and on in.

Madam Speaker, we know for a fact that the government of Alberta bought land in downtown Calgary for a train station at 9th Avenue and 4th Street S.E. We also know that the new Royal Alberta Museum in Edmonton was designed to have a train station added on. After all, the old remand centre across the street is no longer needed, giving up much land that can be repurposed for such a venture.

A \$330 million capital outlay seems to be in line with double and triple tracking, signalling stations and sidings, and park and ride lots. But will commuters ride the rails? On this question I turn to the Canadian Urban Transit Association, who indicated that, yes, people will take transit if it is rapid, limited in stops, and meets the right schedule.

So when the member opposite talks service, we know there is already service and where it is feasible. But when the minister talks systems and has a large capital outlay in his budget, I am unsure what he intends. I do not believe that all of the minister's \$330 million is for buses. At \$500,000 a bus, that's 660 buses. There has to be more going on in this fund than just buying buses.

We also have transit services for the elderly and disabled. They are not transit services per se, as they pick up and drop off at point to point, but they do provide public transportation services. People like the Rocky View handibus cannot replace their buses without charitable assistance or subsidies from the municipality or the province. As the province's population ages, services like the Rocky View handibus will be more important than ever before. Perhaps some of the minister's \$330 million will find its way to Rocky View handibus.

Madam Speaker, there are so many options to explore and consider, and the minister is putting money on the table to invest. We know that there are several regional services in existence already in the province. More often than not they are owned and/or operated by the private sector. That in and of itself is an indication that some regional transit services are feasible. I would hope that this government would be sure that they are providing services that are feasible and that they are careful not to start crowding out the private services with its own tax-funded services.

5:10

I will support this motion calling for feasibility studies, hoping that this government completes a thorough review and does not waste a lot of taxpayer dollars investing in transit schemes that are either not viable or that simply push out private operators providing a good service to Albertans already. I want to see the results of the government's feasibility study of regional transit services in the province before the minister starts investing.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to support Motion 504. I had the great privilege to carpool several times with the Member for Calgary-Northern Hills, where he discussed the motion and the need for regional transit. I certainly hope that it wasn't my driving that provoked him to create this motion.

Some of the things that we talked about on our drives were connecting people in Alberta. One of the best things about Alberta is our wide-open spaces. That's something that we really hold dear as a value for Albertans, but that also presents some challenges, Madam Speaker. It presents some challenges of moving people from place to place for visiting, seniors to medical appointments.

You know, in my riding the member also mentioned the Roam Public Transit regional service between Banff and Canmore. That's something that I'm very proud of, that exists within my riding. It's been extraordinarily successful. It really represents a good model that we can look toward as a success story and something that we can build upon.

I also represent a rural riding, and I think that we can do a better job of connecting Albertans who live in small communities, get them connected to larger centres within their region and beyond. Rural Alberta is part of the lifeblood of what makes this province so special.

I've also managed to speak with some stakeholders in the hospitality sector in my riding, and they've talked about the difficulty of accessing labour. You know, in small centres like Banff and Canmore oftentimes finding enough workers and having a place for them to live represents big challenges for private industry. So providing those opportunities for Albertans to have increased mobility between centres would certainly go toward the labour challenges that are being faced there.

That also goes toward addressing the housing challenges. I know in the Bow Valley, finding housing, especially affordable housing, is a great challenge. So giving Albertans the ability to live in a centre that has more affordable housing but then also giving them access to work in a place like the mountain parks or in Canmore would certainly go toward solving the housing affordability problem as well.

Just in conclusion, I'm proud to stand up and support Motion 504, and I urge this Assembly to support it as well. Thank you.

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to discuss some of the issues around Motion 504. You know, one of the challenges that we face in the House, in my opinion, is around motions. Oftentimes a motion can be so vague that it leaves more questions than answers, and other times there are very positive motions that come before the House.

Traditionally speaking, we haven't seen the government act that readily on motions that are passed in the House. I hope that the new government will see the value of some of those motions and, in fact, act on them. I know that the former Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills passed a motion called 508 that nobody has done anything with yet. I encourage the government to take a look at some of those, as many of them do cover some important issues.

Having said that, they also often are vague and a little bit unclear as to what the entire end goal of the motion is, so I appreciated the comments from the Member for Calgary-Northern Hills when he highlighted some of the things that the motion could accomplish.

In many respects studying things that are going to happen here or in the Legislature can be very positive. One concern that I do have, though, is that we only have a limited amount of time and resources in which to study. So if motions only become an hour of conversation with no follow-through because there aren't the resources, that's a concern.

You know, here we have a motion that perhaps might fall into that category because we have some significant number of studies in this area already. I think of the study by the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future, and I recognize that the Member for Calgary-Northern Hills' comments weren't specific to rail transportation along the highway 2 corridor, but he certainly did mention that that would be one of the things that this motion could encourage some study around.

I'm reminded of or I think back to just last year, in May, when a report was submitted to the House by the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future on the feasibility of establishing a high-speed rail transit system in Alberta, and a number of those recommendations. Even some folks here with us in the House this evening sat on this committee and would be very familiar with a bunch of those recommendations, including first and foremost that "the Government of Alberta should not invest in a high-speed rail transit system in the Edmonton-Calgary corridor at this time because the population of the corridor is not sufficient to support the profitable operation of such a system."

Now, some might say: "Well, that was last year. You know, the population has increased since that particular study was produced." But if one is so inclined to read such a fascinating piece of committee work, the committee went on to say that it would require a population of approximately 10 million Albertans to sustain such a system, and clearly in the last year we haven't seen an influx of nearly that many people.

So I get a little wary or concerned when we talk about doing things that have already been done in this place. While I recognize that the third party takes a lot of blame for things that have happened around here over the last number of years and rightfully so, generally speaking, here's a good study that, in fact, has studied the feasibility of regional transit services in the province. For us to go back down that road and rehash it, you know, I just am not convinced that it's an effective use of our time, of our staff's time, of committee time when we can be doing other things, in particular at a time like this, when the province is struggling to find the resources that it needs for its own operations and when we've seen a need and the government of the day decide that they will borrow for the day-to-day operations of this province.

One of the financial considerations that the committee heard was that high-speed rail would cost between \$5 billion and \$7 billion.

You know, some people in the government will say: it's only a motion; we're just going to study stuff. I think I've heard the hon. Minister of Transportation and of Infrastructure make remarks like that in the past, specifically around motions. But the fact of the day is that lots of this study has been done, so it would concern me if we went back down that road.

Now, having said all of that, the desire of the private member, Calgary-Northern Hills, is to try and ensure that we are doing what's right for Albertans, and if that means studying regional transportation services, I can accept that some good can come of that.

5:20

The challenge, again, is to ensure that we are making the most of our time and that we aren't doing tasks that would in fact be detrimental, similar to what my hon. colleague from Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock spoke about, driving private investment out of these sorts of services. You know, again, the motion isn't specific, but we have seen lots of situations in the past where private service providers do a wonderful job of getting great value for money and we see the government believing that it can do better than people on the front lines, so I am often hesitant when we head down that road.

Even with all of my reservation and hesitation I will support the motion today because I believe that ensuring we get things right is of critical importance.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Motion 504, that the government be asked to "explore the feasibility of regional transit services in the province." I'd like thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills for putting forward this motion. I think it's a worthwhile motion. It is, of necessity, a rather general motion, but I think that it is a useful one nonetheless.

Now, a couple of members opposite have gone to great lengths in terms of speculating what this might mean or what money contained in the budget for new transit services might be put towards, and I would just urge them to restrain their fantasies just a little bit about what it is that we're going to do because there's a great deal of work and consultation and study that has to take place before concrete proposals are brought forward. This kind of speculation is kind of fun, but I'm not sure how useful it is. One hon. member has us building a complete intercity rail system complete with signaling and stations and so on, and the hon. Wildrose House leader thinks we're going down the rabbit hole of building high-speed rail. You know, I think that neither one of them is particularly accurate.

We have allocated \$330 million in this capital plan for new transit initiatives, and I just want to talk a little bit about that because I think the reality is a lot more prosaic than the hon. members opposite have talked about. We will not be having flying cars. We will not be having, you know, teleportation, and the previous government finally got around to selling the government air force, so we won't be flying either.

Mr. Schmidt: What about sending Wildrose MLAs to space?

Mr. Mason: I'm not sure that that would be taken kindly by our friends on Mars, Madam Speaker.

But I think there are a number of things. We're in the process in the Transportation department of developing a 50-year transportation plan, and that requires us to look rather broadly and in a far-reaching way. Of course, technology is changing things all

the time. You know, we've seen the conflict that has been generated about Uber, but there are other technologies. For example, electric cars are here. Driverless cars are just around the corner, Madam Speaker. There are lots of interesting developments in terms of transportation.

One of the things, I think, to bring things down to earth, is that there are a couple of major urban regional centres in the province, of course, being around Edmonton, being in Calgary, and the municipalities there have done a great deal of work in terms of forming collaborations, forming organizations where they can deal with public business in a collaborative and co-operative way.

This is something that, you know, we want to encourage as a government. Certainly, as Transportation minister I want to encourage more working together and collaboration between municipalities. Rather than, for example, the Edmonton area having maybe eight or 12 independent transit systems, some very large, some very small, it would make more sense to deal with this in a co-operative fashion, and that's one of the things that we want to do. It doesn't have to be rail. It can be buses. It can be all different types of transportation.

I've had an opportunity to have some preliminary conversations with the mayor of Calgary and with the mayor of Edmonton and with public officials from the regional areas. They're very interested in this approach. They're very interested in a collaborative approach, and that's something that the government wants to encourage and participate in. We want to improve the transit of people both within the big cities and within the regional areas first of all, and that is really what the objective is.

It's certainly early days, too early to talk about specific proposals and specific technologies, but there are many, many developments. For example, the city of Edmonton is testing electric buses, and they're going to give them a test of a good, old-fashioned Edmonton winter if we can manage to conjure one up. There are experiments, as has already been mentioned, with respect to natural gas buses and so on as well as developments of LRT technology within the cities. Then, intercity rail has been mentioned. That is not something that I see immediately on the horizon but certainly something that people are very interested in planning for as we go forward.

I also want to mention our proposal with respect to rural bus service because, of course, when the previous government deregulated the intercity bus system operating in our province, much service was lost. The members opposite have indicated that here and there private-sector firms have stepped up to fill some of those gaps, but there are still many rural areas that are not served by intercommunity transportation. I've had the opportunity to meet with a couple of private-sector proponents who are very interested, and they have very different ideas about where we might go in terms of this. But there is money set aside in the budget to deal with that. We certainly don't want people who live in small communities to be isolated, to not be able to make medical appointments, to not be able to visit family and friends in other parts of the province. That is something that is also being considered.

All of this is, of course, encompassed by the motion. A motion like this is never designed to set out a specific plan. A motion like this is designed to set the intent of the Assembly, to give the government a bit of a flavour of where the Assembly thinks it ought to go. These are not binding motions, but they are useful for government. I think that it would be very helpful – and it has been helpful for me – to listen to members on both sides of the House about where they think we ought to go with regard to future intercity transit.

I would urge members to support the motion because I think that it sets a positive direction. It's a general direction, but it is still a

direction, and I think that it would be useful for the government to have this motion approved.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll be brief. I rise today to speak in favour of Motion 504. As an MLA for an urban riding I often hear from my constituents about the value of public transit and the impact that it has on their daily lives, connecting them with work, with friends, with their community, and with local businesses and services. Public transit offers a more affordable and environmentally friendly means of transportation, one that reduces greenhouse gas emissions and reduces congestion on Alberta's roads.

We must do more to connect Albertans from smaller communities to the larger centres within their regions. We must encourage the development of a robust public transportation network in Alberta, in communities large and small.

The government's budget contains a clear commitment to supporting transit in communities across Alberta, and I would encourage all of my colleagues in the Legislature to show their own commitment to improving public transit throughout Alberta in communities of all sizes by supporting Motion 504. By supporting public transit and by supporting this motion, we are showing all Albertans that they deserve access to the public transit services that Albertans in our larger urban communities have come to enjoy and that many have come to rely on.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

5:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In 2014 I was commissioned by the county of Newell to do a transportation study, and in that study I found out that people who live in rural areas have no access to any kind of public transit system. If you don't have a car, you can't go to medical appointments, and you can't go to court. People in rural areas really, really need to have a kind of public transportation system.

I'm really delighted about this motion because if there's one thing we need to do in terms of keeping people in rural areas – allowing them to have jobs, allowing them to go to Calgary in that case or Lethbridge or Medicine Hat for necessary treatment, to get passports, to go to court – it is some kind of public transit system to meet their needs. I found out, when I did that study, that if you were low income and you couldn't afford to have a car or you had some kind of health problems and you couldn't drive, you were not only isolated, but you couldn't access any of those services that we provide. So I'm delighted that the Member for Calgary-Northern Hills is suggesting that government should be looking at regional transit services.

I also wanted to support what the Minister of Transportation said. The private systems that exist in many parts of the rural areas have not worked. It's really impossible, for example, as I found out, for someone from Brooks to go to a medical appointment in Calgary or Lethbridge in one given day. So if we do anything, I think we really need to work on trying to find access to a transportation system from communities to the major centres.

And because I live in a suburban area, I should also emphasize that it's not only the rural areas that are deficient in terms of an accessible transit system; it's also the suburban areas. Transit in

suburban areas is rather limited at times. I'm lucky to live in Strathcona county, where we have quite a well-developed transit system.

I do look forward to work being done to make sure that all of the suburban areas can be connected to the major urban areas but especially that the rural areas have access to public services.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak to the motion?

If not, then the hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills to close debate.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It was an absolute pleasure for me to present this motion as a topic of discussion today. As mentioned earlier, I have always been a strong supporter of regional transit initiatives. I'm quite encouraged as well to see a similar passion from many other members of this Assembly.

I'd just like to add a detail to the record. I've been advised that the regional population of Edmonton in its current census, with its catchment areas, is 1.33 million. Sorry if I touched a nerve there.

To the hon. members for Red Deer-South and Red Deer-North: I'd like to thank them for explaining the BOLT network to the Legislature today, which connects Red Deer to its surrounding areas, and, as well, for the GreenTRIP funding to get that local network established. I think it's wonderful to hear about other cities' initiatives, that sometimes aren't directly within where some of us are based.

I'd also like to thank the Member for Banff-Cochrane for his comments. Don't worry; your driving is impeccable. I'd like to thank you, also, for your excellent points. And now that's on the record.

By supporting public transit, we are telling Albertans that they deserve the kind of public transit service that until now has only been available to those larger urban municipalities. Furthermore, by supporting new municipal transit initiatives that bring Albertans together, we're doing more than providing a much-needed public service for Albertan families who need it; we will be supporting a cleaner environment by providing more people with access to public transportation so they can choose public transit to help greenhouse gas emissions as well.

In the end, there were some excellent points made here today. I would encourage members to support the motion and urge the government to explore the feasibility of regional transit services in this province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Well, we have performed our duties with uncustomary efficiency. I would like to thank members on all sides of the House for their valuable contribution and dispatch in dealing with important private members' business.

I would therefore move that we call it 6 o'clock.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:37 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Other inquiries:

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