



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature  
First Session

# Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 17, 2015

Day 18

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

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)	Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)	Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND), Government House Leader
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)	McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret, Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
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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
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND), Deputy Government House Leader	McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND)	Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)	Miranda, Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)	Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)	Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W), Official Opposition Whip
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)	Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND), Premier
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)	Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W), Official Opposition House Leader	Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND)	Payne, Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W), Official Opposition Deputy Whip	Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND), Deputy Government House Leader
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)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)	Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)	Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
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)
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)	Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
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Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)	Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)	Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)	Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
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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Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education, Minister of Culture and Tourism
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Sarah Hoffman	Minister of Health, Minister of Seniors
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Brian Mason	Minister of Transportation, Minister of Infrastructure
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Human Services
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Advanced Education, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour

**STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA**

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McKitrick	Turner
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Coolahan	Piquette
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**Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee**

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Clark	Nielsen
Cortes-Vargas	Nixon
Cyr	Renaud
Jansen	Starke
Loyola	Swann
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Jansen	Rodney
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**Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

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Kazim	

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 17, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Let us reflect and contemplate. Let us contemplate, each of us in our minds and hearts, about leadership and the examples of leaders around us. Some of us are leaders by position, others because of chance. But the true leaders are those in this Assembly who demonstrate bravery and courage and say words that cause others to change minds so minds can cause change. At least one of our members yesterday served as an example of leadership for all of us.

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Ceci:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The embodiment of leadership is in no greater way portrayed than by six people who are in the gallery. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly six public servants seated in the members' gallery who are taking part in the Alberta public service leadership program. If they can stand up, please: their mentor, Mr. Steve Tyson, director of information security, Justice/Sol Gen; Ms Leanne Connell, legislative co-ordinator, Environment and Parks; Ms Andrea Rohlehr, services co-ordinator, ASCC; Mrs. Diane Duplessis, regional soil and contaminated site specialist with Environment and Parks; Mrs. Wendy Mingo, land management specialist, Environment and Parks; and Ms Sally Greenhill, audit manager, corporate internal audit services, Treasury Board and Finance.

Mr. Speaker, it's wonderful to see members of the public service taking part in programs to build leadership capacity. I can share with this House from personal experience, as can my cabinet colleagues, that the public service is fortunate to have such talented women and men among them. I'd like to ask these guests – they've already risen – to please receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

**The Speaker:** Hon. minister, it's been my experience that the public servants are usually ahead of the politicians most of the time.

**Mr. Hinkley:** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all of our colleagues in the Assembly a grade 6 class from Griffiths-Scott school, which is in the fine community of Millet, which is in the constituency of Wetaskiwin-Camrose. The Millet school has been designated a UNESCO school, which means there's an emphasis on global awareness and inclusion. We also had a great discussion on decorum in the Assembly, so they're watching very diligently. Their teachers are Mrs. Nancy Killen, Ms Teagan DeSousa and the assistant, Mrs. Randi Williams. If you would please rise and accept the warm traditional greeting of the Assembly.

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

**Ms Sigurdson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you a group of 37 Malmo elementary school students. They're here today with their teacher, Mrs. Theresa Bonar, and parent helpers Brandon Bosma and Leila

Saleh. They're from the beautiful community of Malmo in my riding. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**Ms McKittrick:** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a group from St. Theresa school. St. Theresa has a special place in my heart as I got to experience first-hand how interested the students and their teachers are in politics. If you could please rise to be introduced to the Assembly. They are here with their teachers, Mike Miskiw, Adriana Porter, Nicole Richard, and Joyce Chronik-Rudiak. Please give them the customary warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there any other school group introductions today?

It's my privilege that the Deputy Speaker, the hon. Member for Peace River, has an acknowledgement on my behalf.

**Ms Jabbour:** Thank you. It is truly an honour today to rise and introduce on your behalf, Mr. Speaker, three guests that are seated in your gallery: your cousin Ms Penny Stone; your aunt Ms Margaret Dashney; and, of course, your lovely wife, Mrs. Joan Emard-Wanner. As I understand it, Penny and Margaret are here today to watch you in action in your new role as Speaker. I'm sure they'll be greatly entertained. Ms Stone resides in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar and Ms Dashney in the constituency of Leduc-Beaumont, and I must add that Ms Dashney is an amazingly youthful 101 years old. [Standing ovation]

**The Speaker:** Thank you, hon. members. Very much appreciated. I'm going to claim the prize, until corrected, that she's the oldest lady that's ever been in this Assembly.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General and Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of very special employees of the Alberta civil service. Over the summer and this fall nine enthusiastic individuals were hired to work in six different ministries. They are the very first interns in the brand new Alberta aboriginal intern program. In addition to working within their ministries, these bright interns will also spend nine months working with the community organizations that deliver services to indigenous people. Seven of the nine interns are with us today. I'm pleased to introduce Mathew Morgan, Danielle Belland, Adrienne Larocque, Shaleigh Raine, Camina Weasel Moccasin, Sharlene Alook, Brett McKenna, and the two interns who could not be here today, Colleen Chalifoux and Tiana Shea. I would like you to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a wonderful group from the Excel Resources Society. The Excel society is a nonprofit organization servicing people with various disabilities, including developmental, brain injury, and early-onset dementia. I have visited the Balwin Villa in my constituency of Edmonton-Decore, and I'm very impressed with the work that they're capable of doing there. With us today in the gallery are Sharon Read, president and CEO; Colleen Scott, board chair; and Brad Perkins, board member. I would ask all of them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Clark:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a tremendous honour to introduce to you and through you Rob Laird. Rob is currently with 1835 House, Recovery Acres Society. Rob has long been a dedicated advocate and champion for those struggling with addiction and homelessness. He's here in Edmonton today meeting with representatives from the ministries of Human Services and Health. As you know from my question last week, Recovery Acres' 1835 House is an addiction treatment facility located in the wonderful constituency of Calgary-Elbow. Rob is working very hard to expand the services offered by Recovery Acres to include women's addiction treatment. I'd ask Rob to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**1:40**

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Ms Shauna McHarg. Shauna has been a tireless advocate for years for families who believe they've been unfairly barred from Alberta Health Services facilities and currently have no process for appeal. Shauna is here today to request a meeting with the Minister of Health to explain her situation, restore access for her family, and to establish a fair process for citizens barred from certain sites. Shauna is joined by Mr. Dennis Dupuis, also banned from Alberta Health Services facilities, here to support her. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks and Status of Women.

**Ms Phillips:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you a number of representatives from the Cumulative Environmental Management Association in the lower Athabasca region. There are quite a number of them. I would ask them to rise as I call their names: Bill Loutitt, Fort McMurray Métis local 1935; Arsene Bernaille, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation; Lena McCallum, Conklin Métis local 193; Alice Martin, Nistawoyou Friendship Centre; Mavis Desjarlais, elected council for Elizabeth Métis settlement; Darrin Bourque, Willow Lake Métis local 780; Diane Scoville, president, Métis Nation of Alberta, region 1; Bryan Fayant, aboriginal liaison, Aboriginal Coordinating Committee for CEMA; Nestor Manalo, program administrator, aboriginal initiatives, CEMA; and Karen Collins, Métis Nation of Alberta, region 2. I ask the Assembly to extend to them the traditional warm welcome.

### Members' Statements

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

#### Gateway Association 40th Anniversary

**Mr. Carson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to discuss some of the important work taking place within the Edmonton-Meadowlark constituency. This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Gateway Association and their original vision, a gateway to a better life. This organization has produced many success stories, helping those with disabilities find meaningful employment. This is not always an easy task, but the Gateway Association has built relationships with employers who are willing to help and be helped by those with disabilities.

It was my privilege to join the Minister of Human Services recently to announce that the Gateway Association would receive a grant from the employment first innovation fund. I know that this money means a lot to associations like Gateway, and I'm proud to be a part of a government who recognizes the potential in those with disabilities. I look forward to hearing of more Gateway Association success stories that were able to happen because of this funding.

Thank you.

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

#### Water Supply in Milk River and Coutts

**Mr. Hunter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to rise and talk about a potential five-alarm fire that could affect two important communities in my riding. As of right now the town of Milk River has two and a half to three months of water supply in their reserve. This water is used to supply both the towns of Milk River and Coutts. Due to low water levels this year residents have been put on rations for months now. To make things worse, if the water freezes or if either of these towns have to fight fires, they will be completely out of water within days. To truck in enough water for these communities, they would need 22 trucks per day. Of course, they would not be able to handle that expense themselves, nor would they be able to find enough water trucks to facilitate such an endeavour.

This issue was brought before the previous government, and a request for funding for an air compressor to assist with the water processing system was requested and granted but never delivered.

The water in the Milk River is shared with the United States. The communities of Milk River developed the storage and canal capacity to capture and divert just 7 per cent of its entitlement, while the U.S. receives well beyond theirs.

To determine ways of how to fix this issue, there have been a plethora of studies performed over the years. It was studied in 1954, '78, '80, '81, '85, '86, '87, 2003, 2006, and 2012. As you can see, we are not lacking information on this issue. These residents need action, not another study. They need immediate solutions to their short-term problems, and they need more than a Band-Aid to the long-term problem.

This government has talked much about diversification. Well, expanding the water storage capacity is a great start. It would allow for the expansion of irrigation in an area that sees some of the best heat units for growing in the province. If you are bound and determined to diversify, then I recommend starting in the agricultural sector, that has been this province's Steady Eddie from the beginning.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Calgary-North West.

#### Status of Women Ministry Estimates Debate

**Ms Jansen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Domestic violence and the mistreatment of women and girls for any reason at any time is unacceptable. I was so encouraged yesterday by the courageous speech from the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East recounting her harrowing personal experience of domestic violence. These are hugely important issues that transcend party lines. Thank you.

That's why it was so concerning this morning during estimates for the Status of Women ministry to hear the minister resort to name-calling and finger pointing. During my tenure as associate minister of family and community safety I was the first minister to have women's issues as part of my mandate letter. I took this responsibility very seriously.

I proudly launched our province's first family violence framework, put together with the aid of such notable stakeholders as Sue Tomney, CEO of the Calgary YWCA, and Lana Wells, the Brenda Strafford chair in the prevention of domestic violence at the U of C. We also completed Alberta's first sexual violence framework, again with such notable Alberta experts as Dr. Kristopher Wells of the Institute for Sexual Minorities Studies and Services and Sheldon Kennedy, whose work in this area is internationally recognized. It was a shock to me, Mr. Speaker, to have the minister refer to these framework documents as disgusting and deplorable. The opinions of these stakeholders framed this very important work. Describing their contributions as disgusting and deplorable is disappointing and unprofessional.

Mr. Speaker, many of us who have worked in this area care deeply about these issues and were hopeful that this new government would be a collaborative and willing partner to move forward on some excellent work that's already been done in this province. What we're met with at the table is hostility and scorn, and it does a disservice to every single person who has suffered in the area of family violence or sexual violence in this province. Today's behaviour by the Minister of Status of Women has done nothing to move us forward.

#### Varsity Community Association

**Ms McLean:** Mr. Speaker, as you know, I have the distinct pleasure of representing the constituency of Calgary-Varsity. Nestled within my constituency is the Varsity Community Association, of which my husband and I are proud members. This past October marks the 50th anniversary of the Varsity Community Association. The mission of the association is "to enhance and enrich the quality of community for Varsity residents." Over the last 50 years it is clear that this particular community has met that call.

In October we celebrated this golden anniversary with a gala at the Varsity community hall. The gala featured memorabilia from the past 50 years, the sealing of a 2015 time capsule as well as awards and recognition of highly dedicated, long-time volunteers. The event also included a top-notch dinner and bar, which were catered in-house and which, I'll add, is open for rental year-round.

Led by their first president, Ken Brown, the Varsity Community Association began in a bilevel house in 1965, and Varsity represented the edge of the city. Now the neighbourhood is a vibrant and diverse urban community. From seniors' yoga to shinny hockey for ages 6 to 12 the VCA provides essential and innovative programming and space that truly enriches our community.

1:50

Today Varsity has a strong, dedicated board of directors, who operate under the capable leadership of long-time Varsity resident president Bob Benson and past and longest serving president Jay Pritchard, who served the community as president from 2001 to 2013.

Congratulations to Varsity residents, volunteers, past and present committee members, and board members for creating one of Calgary's most desirable neighbourhoods. I truly enjoyed being a part of the 50th anniversary celebrations of the VCA and look forward to the 100th.

Thank you.

#### Oral Question Period

**The Speaker:** A very brief comment. I wish to advise the House that again I am studying and thinking about and experiencing the

practice of preambles in questions, and I may or may not be having some additional comments for the House with respect to that matter.

I also wish to advise the House that Her Majesty's Official Opposition leader has asked for some leniency with respect to a question today, one question, which I have agreed to, and we were exchanging some communications about that.

**Mr. Jean:** I just wanted to take the opportunity to thank the Premier for our collegial question-and-answer period this morning. I really appreciated that.

#### Job Creation and Retention

**Mr. Jean:** Yesterday another 250 men and women lost their jobs at Enbridge. That's another 250 added to the more than 65,000 Albertans we know are out of work this year. It's the same story every single day. It's why Wildrose stands up in the Legislature to fight for policies that will benefit all Albertans, to fight for a competitive economy, and to make sure that every single Alberta family that is able has a good, paying job. Is the Premier aware of the damage her policies are doing to Alberta's economy?

**The Speaker:** Thank you for that, hon. member.

The hon. Premier.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I am aware of is that families and communities and Albertans across this province are suffering from the inevitable consequences of the dramatic downturn in the price of oil. I'm aware that that means that many, many people have lost their jobs, and I am very concerned about it, and I share the concern that the member opposite outlines. That is why our government has introduced a budget which is focused on stability, securing public services, finding a path to balance, but also using a number of different mechanisms to try and stimulate job growth because we know – we know – that it is not good for families and for Albertans to lose these jobs, and we're working as hard as we can to make it better.

**Mr. Jean:** I'm glad to see the Premier recognizes that her budget is not good for Albertans.

For weeks I've been asking the Premier to recognize the damage her policies are having on Alberta jobs. She doesn't seem to believe me, so let's have someone else do the talking. Here's a direct quote from the head of Canadian Pacific on the damage of the NDP tax increases: there is no doubt that, compounded with the government's other announced tax increases, this tax will negatively impact future investment and jobs. Will the Premier now recognize that her high-tax agenda is hurting Alberta's economy?

**Ms Notley:** Mr. Speaker, what I will recognize is that what will not help our economy is laying off a bunch of public-sector workers, laying off teachers, laying off nurses, pulling back public services that our communities rely on. What we are doing is promoting stability, and we are investing in job creation, and we are investing in economic stimulation, and we are investing in a capital project, all of which will contribute to job creation. We know it's not good times out there. There's not a simple answer. Slashing and burning, laying off teachers to raise the price of oil is not the answer.

**Mr. Jean:** Wildrose agrees that laying off workers is not the answer, but the question is: what is this Alberta government doing to make sure that they keep their jobs? Sixty-seven thousand men, women, and children in Alberta rely on food banks. This number increased almost 25 per cent in just one year. Times in Alberta have only gotten worse, and Albertans are very, very worried. High

taxes, big government, and an antibusiness agenda: this is the NDP record, that is putting everyone's quality of life at risk in Alberta. When will the Premier back down from her risky agenda so that Alberta families can get back to work and have the great quality of life that they deserve?

**Ms Notley:** Mr. Speaker, what we are going to continue to do is the work that we have done, which is that we are going to stabilize those public services, we're going to provide a predictable path forward, and we're going to invest where we can. We are acting as a shock absorber to the significant downturn that is being experienced in the Alberta economy. The billions and billions of dollars that that Official Opposition over there campaigned on cutting would make the situation much, much worse. [interjection] That is not fearmongering. That's just the reality. We are not going down that path because Albertans told us not to.

**The Speaker:** Second major question.

### Refugee Resettlement

**Mr. Jean:** Yesterday we had a ministerial statement and responses about terrorism and refugees. Everyone in this Assembly wants to protect people whose lives are at risk because of the evil actions of ISIS. In the last few days a mass grave of Yazidi children and women was found. This is horrific. Albertans also worry the proper security checks are not being done. Will the Premier tell this Assembly what assurances she has been given by the Prime Minister that proper security checks on these refugees will be conducted?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Ms Notley:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said yesterday in my statement, our deepest sympathies and our solidarity are with the victims of the recent attack. We condemn these evil acts, and we must all stand together, and we also need to understand that all people deserve to live in peace and security. People fleeing Syria are fleeing from acts like these. As an open society that is relatively privileged, we can reach out to them. We need to do it cautiously and carefully. We need to make sure that the security of all Albertans and all Canadians is front and centre, and I am quite sure that that is the approach that our federal government will be taking.

**Mr. Jean:** Yesterday the Premier told the media we expect to take 2,500 to 3,000 refugees in Alberta. Settling up to 3,000 refugees in the next 45 days is a massive, massive task. We know that there are community- and faith-based groups that will do their best to help. Indications are that these folks might be settled into two or even only one community in Alberta. What steps has the Premier taken to make sure that our health services, social services, education system are all able to handle the arrival of 3,000 new people by the end of next month?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Ms Notley:** Well, thank you very much. Those are all very good questions. First of all, we are still in discussions with the federal government about the number of refugees that would ultimately settle in Alberta as well as the funding scheme around that. I will say, though, that we have set up an interministerial group that is working on that issue, led by the deputy minister for Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour. Those very important questions asked by the member are being considered, as are issues around housing and

other social supports. We will be sure that we are well placed to ensure that integration happens in a functional and helpful way that promotes and strengthens all communities.

**Mr. Jean:** Mr. Speaker, Albertans are a very generous people. They want to help. They know that in Syria and Iraq people are being murdered just because they are Christian or Kurdish or because they follow a different sect of Islam. Albertans have so many important questions. They need to be reassured that the Premier takes their concerns very seriously. Albertans want information on security screening, on where these vulnerable families will go, and on how the government will provide these necessary services. Will the Premier provide any answers to these questions for Albertans?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Ms Notley:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think that I already have provided some answers, but truly we're in a situation where we are working very closely with the federal government. The federal government is the lead on this. Final decisions have not yet been made. So going out with information about decisions that haven't been made yet is not helpful. We will absolutely be clear and open and transparent with Albertans about how this will unfold once we understand exactly what it is the federal government's plans are, and I undertake to ensure that this information is provided as quickly as possible to the members of this House.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Little Bow.

### Infrastructure Priorities and Municipal Funding

**Mr. Schneider:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to creating an infrastructure priority list, this government can't seem to help themselves. During the campaign the Premier said, "it's time to end the political games" and create a list. Then in July with a smile on his face the Infrastructure minister told us: the list is coming this fall. Less than two weeks ago I was told the list would be coming sometime before Christmas. Now we're told it may never come at all. To the minister: can you show us some backbone and tell your officials to stop backpedalling and deliver the infrastructure priority lists?

2:00

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Certainly, making sure that there are not games played with infrastructure during elections, by-elections, and so on is something that motivates us, and I know it's very much of interest on the other side as well. It's important that we get the infrastructure list right. We need to make sure the criteria that are utilized are transparent and available to the public, and we need to avoid as well, I think, setting up competitions between different municipalities over infrastructure. Those are considerations.

**Mr. Schneider:** Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry, but that explanation just isn't good enough. Just this fall the Infrastructure minister himself called for an objective criteria to be used to establish an infrastructure priority list that should be made public. Now that the NDP are in power, they seem to be enjoying the comforts and influence a bit too much. Why won't the minister commit to a list that will only serve to bring Albertans more openness and transparency to their government?



**The Speaker:** I'm not sure if "I'm sorry" fits into the preamble or not.

The hon. minister.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the fact of the matter is, to the hon. member, that we are going to do that. It is important to us, and we will be bringing forward transparency, transparency in terms of what the criteria is. Of course, they're different between different types. You don't judge a road by the same criteria as a hospital or by a school. All of those things need to be sorted out. It's a little more complex than the opposition would like us to believe, frankly.

**Mr. Schneider:** Mr. Speaker, without an infrastructure priority list municipalities in Alberta are going to have to make their own tough decisions about funding key infrastructure projects in their communities. This seems to be something that the Infrastructure minister has completely turned his back on. To the Minister of Infrastructure: are you intending to keep the linear taxation model in place, that municipalities are relying on, or are you going to backtrack on that, too?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm happy to talk about infrastructure. I'm happy to talk about our plans to move forward, the additional commitments that we've made. I spoke to the AAMD and C this morning, and I was very well received in terms of the reintroduction of the STIP program in particular. So there's lots of goodwill out there. But in terms of the linear assessment, he simply asked the wrong minister.

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

### Energy Industry Environmental Issues

**Dr. Starke:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was recently acknowledged that our province will continue to have for the foreseeable future an energy economy and that this government intends to build on the backbone of that economy, which continues to reel from the combined effects of low prices and policy uncertainty. Now, this government steadfastly refuses to acknowledge its role in making the current situation worse while investment flees to places like B.C., Saskatchewan, and Quebec, where the oil price is the same but government policy is not. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: if we're an energy economy for the foreseeable future, why do you persist in attacking that economy here and now?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Ms Phillips:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we have undertaken this work of our climate change review because Albertans want us to get serious about climate change. That's exactly what we're doing. Climate change is a serious challenge, and we intend to take it seriously. We've already taken it much more seriously than the previous government ever did by appointing an excellent panel to provide us with advice on matters related to renewables, energy efficiency, our current carbon pricing system and whether there are some changes we can make to it, and, of course, ensuring that we are phasing out coal in an orderly manner for the health of our children.

**Dr. Starke:** Well, Mr. Speaker, quite frankly it's hard to take this minister seriously when the job losses in the sector have been well documented: Enbridge cutting 500 jobs, 250 in Alberta; Cenovus, 1,500 jobs; Husky, 1,000 jobs; and the list goes on. Now, depending

on how calculations are made, we're somewhere in the 40,000 to 65,000 jobs range. Again to the Minister of Environment and Parks. Your caucus did nothing during the course of the federal election campaign to defend our industry against attacks from candidates in the federal election, mostly from your party. Why not, Minister? Whose side are you on?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Ms Phillips:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we could rewind the clock a few months and discuss that, or we can discuss what this government is actually doing to get serious on climate change, to ensure market access, and to ensure that we can have a conversation with our trading partners that is real and substantive on the leadership that we are showing on issues related to carbon price, renewables, efficiency, and how we effectively phase out coal to ensure the right health outcomes for ourselves and for our children.

**Dr. Starke:** Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are waiting with nervous anticipation as to what the Premier and the environment minister will be saying after they board their eco-friendly hovercraft powered by the laughter of children and travel to the Paris climate change conference. Now, I understand that there will be a meeting on Friday with the NDP caucus to share information regarding our climate change strategy. Minister, why are you not sharing this information with Albertans?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Ms Phillips:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a good question on timing. Right now we are considering the advice in an ongoing way from the panel, and some of that is continuing to be ongoing. We are having cabinet discussions. We are having caucus discussions, of course, because it is our government's approach that we involve caucus in these matters unlike the previous government, where there was just, you know, a whole bunch of sandbox politics happening between caucus members. We are a government that is going to bring forward a cohesive plan to protect jobs, ensure market access, and ensure we can turn the page on 44 years of lack of leadership on climate change.

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

### Emergency Medical Services

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish I could get that kind of a rise out of my questions. I'll practise. Now I've only got 30 seconds.

A common-sense solution to reducing the pressure on our emergency rooms is to allow EMS workers to practise to their full scope, treat patients on-site where appropriate, and make alternate arrangements rather than bringing every patient to the ER. To facilitate this, EMS workers need to be brought under the protection of the medical professions act, delayed by the past government. To the minister: when can we expect action on this much-needed change?

**The Speaker:** I must say that you're so much nicer when you play in the sandbox when you're laughing with each other.

The hon. Minister of Health.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We are certainly working with the College of Paramedics in bringing them under the act, and I thank the hon. member and members of the third party as well for talking

about how important that is. In terms of what's happening today, under the current scope I'm really proud of the fact that we have the community paramedic program, which was launched in Calgary in 2013 as well as in Edmonton in 2015. By having that program, we've saved 8,200 patients from having to be transported to emergency rooms by having paramedics using their expertise in making that call.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:10

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you. What progress has been made in using alternate transportation for nonemergency patients and reducing the demand on ambulances and trained paramedics?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Last night in estimates we talked a little bit about some of the initiatives under Alberta Health Services. There are transport vans for patients that aren't in as acute situations, rather than transporting somebody from a long-term care facility to an emergency room when they might just need to be transported safely in a safe vehicle like a transport van. That's certainly one of the initiatives. I'd be happy to send more information to the hon. member about that program and others that Alberta Health Services will be launching in the years to come.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When individuals are not able to get into their family doctors in primary care networks, they will inevitably turn to emergency rooms, yet the minister has cut \$41 million from PCNs, money they were planning to use for emerging community needs. How does this make sense?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've been in constant dialogue with the primary care networks since prior to the last election. There was an announcement made by the last government that they were going to be rolling back significantly more of their surpluses. What we've done is that when money is in the bank, we've asked PCNs to offset some of their allocations by using some of the money that they have in the bank. That's not what the provincial treasury grants money for, for it to sit in the bank; it's to actually meet patient needs. So we're working with the PCNs in tandem to make sure that that can continue to be the focus, but we do need them to spend some of the money that they're sitting on because that's not in the best use for the taxpayer.

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

#### Small-business Assistance

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Edmonton-Decore has sometimes been referred to as Edmonton's shopping district. We are home to some of Edmonton's biggest business communities: auto sales shops, three major shopping malls, retail chains, and family-run businesses. Over the last few days during constituency week I met with several of my constituents from the business community. They're curious as to how the government is planning to support them. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: what are you doing to support small businesses in Alberta through this economic downturn?

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the hon. member for his very pertinent question. We are definitely facing

challenging times, and that's why right now we need to show leadership, which is exactly what our government is doing. There are several initiatives that we've already launched. The job creation incentive plan: \$178 million for the next two years. We've increased capital rates or lending available by ATB by \$1.5 billion. One initiative that really excites me is the STEP program, the fact that not only have we reintroduced it; we've increased it by \$3 million and opened it up to small businesses to access those dollars.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the new job creation incentive program will support employers in creating as many as 27,000 new jobs and given that we want to ensure that we're growing and diversifying our economy, to the same minister: what types of organizations will be eligible for these grants?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the hon. member again for his question and for standing up for small and medium-sized enterprises in his constituency. This program is one of the most extensive of its kind in Canada. It's going to be supporting organizations of all sizes, available to all nonpublic sectors. We're talking about supporting small to medium-sized enterprises, corporations, registered charities, and not-for-profit entities. This program will be available as of January 1, and we are forecasting that this will create up to 27,000 jobs over the next two years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Second supplemental.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's businesses also need to be able to be competitive in these tough economic times and given that additional training can greatly benefit all workplaces, again to the same minister: what are you doing to support these businesses with current and new employees who may be looking for this additional training?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, the budget that we tabled a few weeks ago is going to stabilize our public services, which is one of the ways that we are ensuring that there aren't further job losses.

The opposition would cut our public-sector front-line workers by thousands of jobs, and these reckless cuts would further exacerbate the problem and make it even more challenging for Alberta families. That's why our government is taking the initiative, showing leadership through investments in a few different programs, as I've mentioned, the job creation incentive program, increasing ATB's lending rate, which is going to help small to medium-sized enterprises grow and move to the next step.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### Carbon Tax

**Mr. MacIntyre:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue to hear about pricing carbon from this government as though industry doesn't already pay a steep carbon levy. The NDP never campaigned on it. They have no mandate to bring it in, but they're bulldozing ahead anyway to introduce a massive new carbon tax to be laid on the back of every single Albertan across this province. Does the environment minister understand the inflationary impact

on every Alberta family of any increase to the carbon tax we all already pay?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Ms Phillips:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. You know, we have a situation where we have an intensity-based calculation on our large final emitters as it stands right now. The panel is considering whether that is the most rational and efficient way to organize carbon pricing for an economy such as ours. We are awaiting the advice of the panel, and we're moving forward with a balanced approach to climate change that will keep our economy moving using the best of advice from economists, from industry, with whom we have consulted widely on this matter, from the hundreds of Albertans who engaged in the climate change process, and from all of the technical engagement sessions we undertook.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

**Mr. MacIntyre:** Albertans who are losing their jobs and seeing their wages cut are justifiably worried about how another tax increase is going to bite into their ever-shrinking family budget, and given that 66 per cent of this province's electrical consumer base is industrial and knowing that a carbon tax will flow through to impact prices on almost everything we buy, will the environment minister admit that this new tax will be downloaded onto every Alberta family from every corner of this province?

**Ms Phillips:** Well, you know, one of the things that we asked the panel to examine, Mr. Speaker, was the current structure of our carbon pricing system as it currently exists because we do have a carbon pricing system. They are going to be providing us advice on this matter. The fact of the matter is that the Official Opposition has offered zero solutions to address climate change. Either they don't believe in the science, or they don't believe it's Alberta's responsibility to do its part.

**Mr. MacIntyre:** Given that everyone knows that a carbon tax is going to make food, clothes, electricity, running a business, running a farm, owning a house, putting our kids in sports, driving a car, practically everything short of breathing, Mr. Speaker, more expensive, I will ask this minister one more time: does this minister understand that any increases in the price of carbon will be downloaded . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, can I again ask – the preamble is coming in here – what is your question? Please proceed with the question.

**Mr. MacIntyre:** I was into it.

**The Speaker:** Please proceed with the question.

**Mr. MacIntyre:** Does this minister understand that any increases in the price of carbon will be downloaded onto all Albertans and that the ones that will feel it the most are the 1,500 people a week losing their jobs as a result of this government's destabilizing, socialist agenda?

**Ms Phillips:** Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, we have heard from a variety of industry groups and others on this matter of pricing carbon, and they have a number of different pieces of advice for us. What they did tell us was that the climate change review and the royalty review should be linked as they are being implemented, that industry should be consulted meaningfully about our plans, and that

we need to proceed without undue delay. We have taken that advice, which is, as it happens, also the advice of the many, many Albertans who have engaged in this process of the climate change review. I will note that the Official Opposition did not bother to provide us a written submission at all. They had no thoughts on this matter.

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

2:20

### Fentanyl Use

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The prevalence of fentanyl in our province has created a public health crisis that is on track to kill 300 Albertans this year. According to police, organized crime and drug dealers are the reason this toxic drug is wreaking havoc in Alberta communities. To the Justice minister: given that controlling illegal drugs falls under the purview of your ministry and given that the prevalence of fentanyl is killing Albertans at a shocking rate, what are Alberta's chiefs of police suggesting you do, since you kindly followed my recommendation to meet with them, to help enforcement agencies gain control over this deadly drug?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Of course, this is a critical question at this moment in time. We have been working in concert with the Association of Chiefs of Police. Now, it is our government's view that increasing public awareness and ensuring that naloxone is available in all circumstances are critical pieces of this. We also are working with our partners to reduce supply and trafficking in drugs. In fact, I have been in contact with the federal minister just this morning to discuss some issues that the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police has brought forward to my attention, and we are moving forward on that.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** First supplemental.

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Justice minister: as I have previously stated, given that every moment's delay in creating a proactive plan to curb the distribution of fentanyl may mean yet another life lost and given that the nation is looking to Alberta to display leadership on this issue because our province is the hot spot for fentanyl deaths in Canada, what is your proactive plan for addressing the illegal production, importation, and distribution of this drug?

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. Well, of course, it's critical that we act fast on fentanyl because it is an incredibly dangerous drug. It is having a huge impact on the lives of Albertans. We are moving forward with our plan, which, again, includes three parts, as I've said: to increase public awareness about the unpredictability of this incredibly potent drug; to make sure that the antidote, naloxone, is widely available in all sorts of community agencies; and to reduce the supply and drug trafficking. In fact, school resource officers and schools are working with Alberta Health Services to help educate students to make sure that they are alerted to the dangers of this drug.

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that police, addictions specialists, and health professionals are all raising an alarm about fentanyl and given that

we cannot rely on drug dealers to adhere to Health Canada's laboratory standards when they are producing the drug that they are supplying to their victims, what measures have you put in place to ensure that police have the tools today – and I mean today, Minister – to combat and eradicate this public health crisis?

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. Well, of course, in this current budget this government funds policing to the tune of half a billion dollars. We are working with our partners to ensure that we are acting quickly on cutting off this supply, and we have been talking to our federal counterparts on measures that we think we could take in order to cut off this supply. But I think it's critical to recognize that drug addiction is a problem which is best solved through information and through health resources, and that's what we're working to do.

Thank you.

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

### Seniors' Housing for Couples

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health. Couples entering into long-term care are being torn apart and placed in facilities sometimes hundreds of kilometres away. Divorce by nursing home is something that should not be happening in our province. It's doing damage to loved ones and their families as they pay the emotional toll of separation, the anxiety of wondering when they'll see each other and whether it'll be the last time. Our seniors deserve better. What is your plan to ensure that Alberta seniors can live close by their loved ones, with dignity and respect, in their golden years?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. One of the things I'm really proud of is our party's commitment during the provincial election to build 2,000 new long-term care spaces. We are well on our way to making sure that we have an effective plan to carry that goal out. Of course, having access to the right beds in the right communities so that people can stay together is a big piece of the problem. So we'll be moving forward on that plan, and I'll be updating the House on specific communities in the days to come as well.

Thank you for the question.

**Mr. Yao:** Mr. Speaker, I'm tired of the NDP taking care of the high-paid bureaucrats when they're not taking care of seniors and cutting support grants for long-term care and low-income seniors. Given that the ASLI grants were cut to zero in the budget and new policies are apparently coming soon, how exactly will the minister support an aging-in-place philosophy ensuring that our seniors can live out their final years with the partners they love?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I'm sure it isn't a surprise that we're not keen on carrying on some of the policies that were in place with the last government as we move forward. We are going to be honouring the announcements that we made two weeks ago around the ASLI projects. Whether or not ASLI will be the mechanism to deliver long-term care in the future we haven't landed on yet. We will be

building long-term care beds, but it doesn't necessarily need to be according to one specific platform that was there previously.

**Mr. Yao:** Mr. Speaker, there are year-long waits for long-term care space in all Alberta jurisdictions. Not only are we splitting up these couples; we're also driving up the health care costs by taking up bed spaces in the hospitals. Can the minister clarify exactly what infrastructure investments the government will make to alleviate the pressure on our health care system, on our primary care hospitals, and to address the issues of our most vulnerable population?

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of our commitment to build 2,000 long-term care beds. These will help people who are currently in the community in unsupportive environments be in the right place as well as those who are in the hospital. While the Official Opposition proposed cutting \$9 billion from the infrastructure plan, we know how important it is to invest in infrastructure, including long-term care. I look forward to members opposite supporting that.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

### Springbank Reservoir Flood Mitigation Project

**Mrs. Aheer:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP is rushing ahead with a plan to build a dam at Springbank even though they campaigned against this project during the last election. If you can believe it, before the Member for Banff-Cochrane sang the Springbank dam's praises, he was one of its loudest critics. To the environment minister: we know your party has no problem breaking election promises, but did you really have to pile on and break this promise, too?

**Ms Phillips:** Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that when we assumed office, we did a careful inventory of the relative merits of the two projects. Our priority as government is moving forward to provide strong protection for the city of Calgary and other communities. We took this decision based on the evidence, the evidence based on the cost to taxpayers, the evidence based on the amount of flood protection it would provide for the city of Calgary and for others, the evidence based on the type of project that it was and the larger catchment area that it would protect. This decision took us three or four months to make, and the reason for that is because we are an evidence-based government.

**Mrs. Aheer:** Mr. Speaker, this government is growing far too comfortable with breaking their promises to Albertans, including the ones they campaigned on and were elected on. Given that the land valuation for this project is in excess of \$175 million, contrary to the \$40 million that the NDP is using as their valuation, can the minister explain why she is committed to rushing ahead on a project that's based on numbers that do not add up for Albertans?

**Ms Phillips:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the decision that we took was to move forward with the environmental impact assessment, and we are not about to litigate these matters in public. What we are going to do is take an evidence-based decision based on three factors for the protection of the city of Calgary, which are cost, effectiveness of the project, and environmental impacts. Now, the fact of the matter is that the Wildrose cannot be trusted to get it right on flood mitigation. They would have cut \$9.4 billion for infrastructure. That would have left Calgary with zero flood protection for years.

**Mrs. Aheer:** Mr. Speaker, an NDP action a day keeps common sense away.

Given that a dam at Springbank would sacrifice thousands of acres of pristine and historic Alberta ranchland and since the broken cost-benefit analysis of this project isn't even enough to help her to do the right thing, does the minister truly care about the environment, and will she put the brakes on this project, that will destroy thousands of acres of beautiful Alberta ranchland?

**Ms Phillips:** Well, you know, the fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that the project that the hon. member across the way is advocating for would possibly never get built because it is a run-of-the-river hydro project. The competing project, McLean Creek: the fact of the matter is that it would come with significant environmental impacts, and it ran the very real risk of catastrophic failure during the construction phase, leaving Calgary with nothing. Between that approach and the cuts to infrastructure the Official Opposition's approach is to leave Calgary at the mercy of another 2013 event. That is not the approach of this government.

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

### 2:30 Coal-fired Electric Power Plant Retirement

**Mr. Gotfried:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is planning to accelerate the phase-out of coal-fired electricity generation. Albertans agree, even those in industry, that coal is carbon intensive and needs to be phased out over time. However, we do not need rash, ideologically driven decisions that lack proper consultation, thorough research, and responsible action. To the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: given that there are 5,600 jobs directly related to coal extraction and electricity generation, do you, Minister, believe that an accelerated phase-out of coal respects the livelihoods of Albertans, the best interests of thousands of hard-working Albertans, and the communities they live in?

**Ms Phillips:** Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, we've heard loud and clear from many of the folks both in the health care community and within the coal community, and that is advice that we are taking along with the advice of the panel on how we undertake an orderly transition away from coal-fired electricity. This was an undertaking of the previous government as well, but I do note that they had no plan in place for a transition for workers and a just transition for all Albertans.

**The Speaker:** First supplemental.

**Mr. Gotfried:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the environment minister now: given that an accelerated phase-out of coal is likely to limit supply, reduce stability, and compromise the reliability of our electric system and given that this is also likely to drive up the price of electricity as industry struggles to attract investment to build noncoal electricity generation, compromising our competitiveness for industrial users while also reaching further into the wallets of hard-working Albertans, who are already feeling the pinch of the economy you seem so intent on destroying, why, Minister . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, again, could we please have the question? I'm hearing preambles over and over again.

The hon. minister.

**Ms Phillips:** Well, sure, and thank you to the member for the question, Mr. Speaker. As we move forward with these plans, we are going to encourage lower carbon and renewable options in the place of coal-fired electricity right now. We will make sure that this

transition occurs in a balanced and measured way, working with the energy industry and Albertans. We will have a clear plan in the coming days and weeks on this matter of coal-fired electricity as we receive the panel's advice.

I might add that there are a number of very carefully thought-out plans contained within the climate leadership consultation piece that are online for any hon. members to read, in which we have a number of companies that have shared with us their thoughts . . .

**The Speaker:** Second supplemental.

**Mr. Gotfried:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that an accelerated phase-out of coal raises the issue of fair compensation for stranded capital assets and given that your rejection of a dial-down, dial-up strategy could put Albertans on the hook in the billions of dollars for any fairly negotiated settlements, what is the estimated value of this fair compensation? Who will be negotiating this settlement, and where will this money come from?

**Ms Phillips:** Well, you know, I thank the hon. member for his observations on what we have and have not rejected. The fact of the matter is that we are considering all of the advice of the panel and the advice that has been given to us by many of the coal-fired power incumbents and other industry players in this space, Mr. Speaker, while we also have conversations with the Electric System Operator and others to ensure an orderly plan that is balanced and measured, that protects the pocketbook, and that takes climate leadership seriously.

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

### Energy Resource Trade with China

**Ms McPherson:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, as someone who worked in the oil and gas industry for more than 20 years, I know how many jobs are associated with the industry and how important it is that this government is focused on increasing access to diverse world markets for Alberta's energy products. My office and I also hear from constituents employed in the industry who want the government to diversify the economy and reduce our reliance on a single commodity with limited markets. To the Minister of Energy: why did you . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, could you please state the question.

**Ms McPherson:** What was accomplished to increase markets for Alberta's energy products?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Ms McCuaig-Boyd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We went to China, first of all, because, next to the U.S., China is our next important trading partner. So we went, and basically we're going to allow them to get to know us. We wanted to let them know that Alberta certainly is open for business, and we want the world to know it. China represents for us a great opportunity to grow our economy, to diversify both in the energy and the environment fields. Competition, as you know, for markets is fierce, so we need to be active and not stand still.

**The Speaker:** First supplemental.

**Ms McPherson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this trip included not just the minister but also representatives from Alberta energy companies, Minister, can you explain why these companies were there and what they got out of the trip?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Ms McCuaig-Boyd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, our trip was a mission. We went with representatives from Suncor, EnCana, Enbridge, MEG Energy, and EBW, which is a financial group. It certainly was a great value to go as a team. We were able to have critical discussions with Chinese officials and industry, talk to the Chinese about what their needs are, how we can work as a group and continue the Chinese investment, which currently is \$35 billion in Alberta. We want to grow that.

**The Speaker:** Second supplemental.

**Ms McPherson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta has a long-standing agreement to work with China on energy projects, can the Minister tell us what the status is of that relationship and what plans, if any, she has to improve or strengthen that relationship?

**Ms McCuaig-Boyd:** Thank you for that question. Mr. Speaker, certainly, it's a long-standing relationship with China, and we continue to strengthen that. The discussions we had related to strengthening and modernizing. We actually worked to strengthen the China Alberta Petroleum Centre. We looked at enhancing that centre, increasing the number of companies we deal with, placing a heightened emphasis on promoting market access, promoting sustainable development respective of natural resources, and strengthening governance in all those areas.

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

#### Minimum Wage Increase

**Mr. Cooper:** Thank you. I recently sent a survey regarding minimum wage increases to every business in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. Mr. Speaker, the results were shocking. Ninety-two per cent of respondents said that their business would be directly impacted, while 77 per cent said that it would hurt their small business's ability to compete against large corporations. This is just another example of this NDP government basing their policies on ideology, not what is best for Albertans. To the minister of trade: how can you possibly say that this policy will help diversify our economy?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our government promised in the election that we were going to make work fair in Alberta, and that's what we're doing. We're raising the minimum wage and making it more fair for Albertans. We're working with small business. We still are a great place for small business to run in Alberta. We have some of the lowest tax rates here in Alberta, and it's a great place to grow a business.

**Mr. Cooper:** Mr. Speaker, given that as part of the survey I asked business owners how they will adapt to the minimum wage increase and 77 per cent said that they're considering limiting hours and 42 per cent are considering layoffs, is that fair?

Given that I've heard from business owners who are reconsidering their participation in the RAP program, how does the minister of jobs think that increasing the minimum wage will in fact create jobs?

2:40

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for the question. I'd love to see how many businesses were

actually interviewed in his survey, but I will say that we have been speaking with small to medium-sized enterprises throughout the province.

Our government has initiated a few different programs from the job creation incentive program to help businesses. We as well have announced the STEP program and increased it by \$3 million, so it's a \$10 million program, that small businesses for the first time in our province will have access to. Again, Mr. Speaker, it's important to look at the whole context of the fact that Alberta still has some of the lowest taxes in the country. We are the best place to start and grow a business.

Thank you.

**Mr. Cooper:** Mr. Speaker, given that we're doing real consultation with real businesses and we're hearing from all sorts of folks, including the nonprofit sector, and given that a local nursing home in Linden wrote to me and said that the minimum wage increase will kill us; we will have to up our prices on seniors, which would be horrible for pensioners with limited income. To the Minister of Health: will you acknowledge that your government's policies are having unanticipated social consequences?

[Two members rose]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you very much. We're both very equally excited to answer this question, Mr. Speaker.

I'll thank the member for the question. Again, Mr. Speaker, there's quite a difference between what the opposition would do, which is that they would lay off thousands of nurses, teachers, and front-line service sector jobs. That in and of itself would cause the very closure of the centres that these members ...

**The Speaker:** Please sit down.

### Members' Statements

(continued)

#### Diabetes Awareness

**Mr. Westhead:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize November as Diabetes Awareness Month. Members in this House today are wearing the blue circle pins in recognition, and I thank them for taking the time to bring attention and support to this important issue.

Mr. Speaker, diabetes touches thousands of people. In fact, in 2010 it was estimated that 217,000 people were affected, and that number is expected to rise to 363,000 by 2020. We also know that many Albertans are living with undiagnosed type 2 diabetes, and this can have devastating effects on their personal health. We know that these Albertans are deeply affected by this condition, and we're proud to have a number of programs in place to support them and their families.

A few of the best practices and developments in Alberta are our insulin pump therapy program, a mobile diabetes screening initiative for aboriginal communities, and health promotion programs for youth at risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Individuals needing assistance and coverage for diabetes medication and testing supplies are provided with assistance through the Alberta adult health benefit, Alberta child health benefit, Alberta seniors' benefit program, and some subsidized coverage of Alberta Blue Cross, and the aforementioned insulin pump therapy program.

We're proud to provide so many programs which support Albertans living with diabetes, and we know that strong access to

preventative and primary care is necessary to ensure that Albertans are living healthy and productive lifestyles. We will continue to promote wellness to lower the number of Albertans living with diabetes and ensure that the necessary supports are there for those that need them.

To all Albertans living with diabetes, we are proud to say that you have our support, and we hope to enable you to continue to live healthy, productive, fulfilling lives.

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

### Education Concerns

**Mr. Hanson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've been hearing a lot about provincial education organizations using or misusing vast amounts of money on things like school boards suing each other to stop schools from opening and overpriced adult Easter egg hunts and staff perks. I'd like to bring a new perspective to all of this by looking at the conditions that some of our teachers and school administrators are having to deal with.

A constituent of mine is a teacher and brought forward the following concerns. A new school in the area is already overcrowded, and they are in need of portables to ease the pressure on the students and teachers. The recommended class size for division 2 is 23 students, and this school is consistently 30 per cent over that.

Mr. Speaker, while teachers and school administrators are struggling to meet ever-widening student learning needs in overcrowded schools, trustees, school boards, and provincial organizations are using education dollars to bully each other and are using funds for 'egg-citing' events. They may end up with egg on their face. I would like to urge this government to ensure that every penny of every education dollar is used for our students and not for adult power plays and perks.

I would also like to urge this government to work alongside the Wildrose caucus to implement policies that will provide tangible results for students in the classroom. In fact, Mr. Speaker, back in September Wildrose introduced our standing up for students initiative. This initiative includes policies that would focus on real results for students, that would return Alberta to a world-class education system.

I know the hon. Minister of Education agrees with us. I know that he would like to improve the state of our education system. That is why I ask him along with the rest of this NDP government to come together and join Wildrose in working in the interests of all Alberta students.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### Introduction of Bills

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

#### Bill 6

#### Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act

**Ms Sigurdson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and introduce Bill 6, the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act.

This omnibus bill proposes to amend workplace legislation so Alberta's farm and ranch workers will enjoy the same basic rights and protections as workers in other industries. Proposed changes would remove the exemption of the farm and ranch industry from occupational health and safety, employment standards, and labour

relations legislation. Bill 6 also proposes to make workers' compensation insurance mandatory for all farm and ranch workers. If passed, Alberta would join every other jurisdiction in Canada in applying workplace legislation to Alberta's farms and ranches.

This is a historic day for Alberta. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

### 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. Mr. Carlier, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, pursuant to the Agriculture Financial Services Act the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation annual report 2014-15; pursuant to the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act the Livestock Identification Services Ltd. report to the minister and summary of activities April 1, 2014, to March 31, 2015; pursuant to the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act the Alberta Agricultural Products Marketing Council annual report 2014-15.

### 2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** Mr. Clerk, I think there was an hon. member who had a tabling of return or report. Is that correct?

**Ms Jansen:** Yes.

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, could you proceed?

**Ms Jansen:** Absolutely. I'm rising, Mr. Speaker, to table five copies, first of all, of the family violence framework and, specifically, five additional copies of the section referring to gender and sexual diversity, to correct the assertion of the Minister of the Status of Women, who claimed that those areas were not covered in the framework. That is categorically false. I have five copies, of course, of the specific area and five copies of the framework.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I have to table the required copies of a letter from some home-schoolers in Calgary-North West concerning the proposed home education regulations, and I have five copies of those for you, as well.

Thank you.

### Orders of the Day

#### Government Bills and Orders

#### Second Reading

#### Bill 4

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

[Adjourned debate October 29: Mr. Ceci]

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

**Mr. Fildebrandt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to say that this is the first time I've spoken to a bill that will water down the budgetary rules in this province, that will raise the debt ceiling in this province, that will allow for more fiscal irresponsibility, but this is not the first time I've spoken to it. Instead, I've spoken to nearly identical bills from governments past, beginning in 2012, bills that bury the true financial details of our budget into three separate piles, bills that allow the government to hide how much debt it is taking on. It is, unfortunately, something that we've seen before. I'd like to say that this government, despite its significant

philosophical differences with our party, would be doing something different on accountability, but it's not.

The primary difference between this bill and the previous government's financial management act is that it is removing nearly all limits to the debt. The government, on a piece of paper, is now allowing our debt to exceed over \$50 billion and for it to do so at a moment's notice. It is a proposal to increase our so-called debt ceiling by 15 per cent at the whims of politicians. Now, this is an important debate, and I'm not allowed to refer to the absence of a member here, according to the rules, but I think it would be important for the minister who is responsible for tabling this legislation to be participating in the debate.

This bill has no checks or balances being put into place to ensure that we do not exceed a debt limit of 15 per cent. There are no consequences whatsoever for exceeding the proposed 15 per cent debt ceiling. There is nothing to stop the minister from ordering his staff to exceed that debt ceiling.

Once upon a time this province was debt free, and we can remember the Premier of the day hoisting a sign over his head saying: paid in full. Then we began taking on small, reasonable portions of debt, and then larger and larger unreasonable portions until today, when our debt stands at over \$14 billion and is projected to exceed \$47.4 billion before the next election under the best-case economic scenario.

This proposes to further increase our debt ceiling. Where have we heard of debt ceilings before? The U.S. Congress increases its so-called debt ceiling nearly twice a year. It is merely an argument for politicians about how deep they should dig the hole that they're standing in.

What is the point of creating any law when there are no punishments for breaking that law? There are punishments in law, that we create as lawmakers, for people who do not wear their seat belts, but there's no punishment when members of this Legislature exceed the debt limits that we place on ourselves. Members of this House can vote for a budget that will exceed our proposed debt limit of 15 per cent, and there will be no legal consequences whatsoever. We've passed laws that make it illegal to not wear a bike helmet, which only hurts the person riding the bike if they don't, but unlike a bicycle helmet, we're passing laws now that hurt everybody but have no consequence on ourselves if we break them. Other jurisdictions with debt ceilings have put in place punishments for politicians that exceed those limits, punishments as mild as cutting salaries for elected officials or also as harsh as shutting down the entire government, as happened in 2013 in the United States. That is not what we're proposing, but what we should consider are reasonable penalties placed on governments and politicians that break their own laws.

Perhaps there is no punishment listed in this bill for politicians breaking their 15 per cent debt ceiling because they intend to break that debt ceiling. What happens if our debt stands at 14 per cent of GDP and we face a recession and we exceed 15 per cent? Are there any consequences whatsoever? What happens if the lofty GDP growths in the NDP's budget plan do not come to bear to the degree to which they projected? What if oil does not bounce back to the high \$70, as the Minister of Finance has said that it would? All of these are recipes for our debt to exceed 15 per cent of GDP. What if the NDP have another \$4 billion rounding error? What if their revenue projections are unrealistic?

Now, the budget is also before this House at the same time, and in years 4 and 5 of the fiscal plan the government has provided zero details about how they get to their revenue projections, how they get to their expenditure projections. In years 1, 2, and 3 the government shows us their math, but in years 4 and 5 they pull it out of thin air. During the estimates process I repeatedly asked the

Minister of Finance, however much I wish he was participating in this debate, to provide the math. What is the price that he expects oil to be at to get to years 4 and 5 revenue projections? What does he expect income taxes to be? What does he expect corporate taxes to be?

Now, Mr. Speaker, I assure you this is not a prop. This is merely a document. I've concluded a friendly wager with a member on the government side for \$100 to be payable before the next election if the government does not meet its revenue projections. I think this is the easiest money I've ever made.

**An Hon. Member:** On paper.

**Mr. Fildebrandt:** It is, unfortunately, paper money, but fortunately for us the NDP don't control the banks yet.

The likelihood of us exceeding the proposed 15 per cent debt to GDP debt ceiling is very realistic, but there are no consequences whatsoever for exceeding it. This would mean the debt servicing costs would spiral out of control, as they are already projected to hit \$1.3 billion, the equivalent of six entire departments of the government. That is money that we will not spend building schools, hospitals, roads, training doctors, nurses, or teachers. It is money that will be sent straight to the bankers. I never thought I'd see the day where the NDP are the party that wants to fund the banks. Debt servicing costs will be burning cash. Debt interest payments are already approaching a billion dollars, and they will climb higher still. We will throw billions away on debt servicing costs instead of providing services.

However much the government across refuses to acknowledge it, we have a spending problem. We should be focusing on spending taxpayers' dollars more efficiently and cutting excessive expenditures rather than simply increasing the size of our line of credit. We should be cutting waste and not cutting more cheques. The bill will not address our spending problem; it will only make it worse. It will merely whet the government's appetite. We cannot spend and borrow our way into prosperity. We need a plan to save Alberta, not spend Alberta. We need a plan to pay back the debt. Rather than put forward a plan to increase our debt limit, this government should put forward a plan to pay down the debt.

3:00

British Columbia spends \$3,000 per capita less than the government of Alberta, and they receive on almost every measure better services. If B.C., that bastion of right-wing conservatism, can spend \$3,000 per capita less and deliver better services, why can't we? We should be spending more efficiently, not just more.

Now, not everything in Bill 4 is bad. There are important measures to crack down on tax evasion. There are measures to restore some of the quarterly reporting, which was gutted in 2012. For these measures the government has my thanks, but these small positive measures are greatly outweighed.

There are measures to improve the lot of small brewers in the province, to do away with the retrogressive taxation of breweries not relevant to their size. This will help brewers in the province grow. But at the same time we have seen an increase of nearly 500 per cent on some small brewers as they import into Alberta. Many small brewers from Ontario, Nova Scotia, and Quebec will simply see their products vanish from our shelves. This is not something that is good for consumers in Alberta. Protectionism is unbecoming of a country with a free economy.

This budget and this bill are a test for us. Are we willing to grant the government another blank cheque? Are we willing to give this government more powers to borrow and to spend? Virtually anyone who looks at the government's budget knows that without a major



change in the geopolitical, world economic situation there is virtually no way that they will meet a balanced budget by fiscal year 2019-2020. That means that the NDP plan to borrow or simply borrow to the maximum, and the government will likely be here in four years again asking to borrow more.

Our party will be putting forward amendments to this bill which will require that there be penalties for politicians that break their own laws. This is what is expected of us, Mr. Speaker. When we make laws for other people outside of this place, we put in place penalties for those people if they don't follow them. But what about ourselves? If we cannot keep to our own budget rules in this place, if we continue to exceed our debt ceilings year after year after year, should there be no consequence for our actions? I would think that our children would want better, that future generations would want us to behave more responsibly with the money that we expect them to pay back.

I look forward to continuing this debate. I certainly hope that the Minister of Finance, who introduced the bill, will be available for questions so that we can get to the bottom of some of this bill's details.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there other members that would speak to this item?

**Mr. Hanson:** Are we not allowed to question the speaker under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

**The Speaker:** I'm told that 29(2)(a) does not apply in this situation. It will to the next speaker, I'm advised, but not to the second speaker.

The hon. Member for Little Bow.

**Mr. Schneider:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, or, as we like to call it inside Wildrose, the Tax Hike, Debt, and More Taxes Act.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta was spending in excess of revenue even when oil was \$100 a barrel. Now with oil around \$40 a barrel the government's spending situation is even worse in spite of revenues being the third highest in history this year and headed back up. In fact, spending is so out of control that the government wants to borrow debt to spend money on day-to-day operations. These operational deficits have been illegal for decades in Alberta. Eliminating operational deficits was the first step in Alberta eliminating its debt. This was part of our Alberta advantage, that allowed for low taxes and smaller government. The approach has resulted in a far more diversified economy now than when the Alberta advantage policy was first brought out.

The bill proposes to raise the debt limit to 15 per cent of GDP and plans to take us up to 10 per cent in two years. What will happen when our borrowing hits 15 per cent or more of GDP? The international bankers who hold Alberta's debt will declare Alberta to be a riskier place to invest. They will lower our credit rating. When your credit score drops, the interest rates on your debts go up. Try it yourself. Rack up a credit card, and don't pay it for a while. Then ask for another loan. Good luck.

A 1 per cent interest rate on \$1 billion of debt is \$10 million. Mr. Speaker, that is the equivalent of one brand new elementary school not being built. The NDP plan to rack up the debt to \$50 billion in less than five years. If the interest rate is 1 per cent, that is \$500 million in interest charges every year. Now we're up to 50 brand new elementary schools not being built, all denied by the NDP. But interest rates won't be 1 per cent. The bond markets want a strong, steady, and stable rate of return. Alberta will likely pay between 3

per cent and 5 per cent for its borrowing. That works out to \$1.5 billion and \$2.5 billion in annual interest on that \$50 billion debt. Now, we are talking about the equivalent of a Calgary cancer centre or a Misericordia hospital replacement not being affordable anymore because the NDP have put Alberta in a position where we have to use that \$2 billion every year just to carry our massive debt.

Jurisdictions that rack up huge debts are less likely to attract private-sector investment to diversify the economy. Isn't that what the NDP wants to do to get us off the oil and gas economic dependency and diversify into other industries?

Alberta runs an expensive government. I don't know if it is envy for their private-sector counterparts, national arrogance and hubris, or just poor management that has led the government of Alberta to be so expensive. Alberta already spends \$2,000 per capita more than British Columbia just on operations. You would almost think it would be the reverse. British Columbia is a bastion of fiscal stability and prudent spending compared to Alberta. Who would have thought it? When it comes to capital, B.C. is spending \$10.7 billion on capital over the next three years while Alberta is spending \$24.6 billion over the next three years. That's right. We're spending more than double what a bigger, growing, expensive province is doing. It's also another \$1,000 per capita that's going into debt every year. I don't get it, Mr. Speaker. B.C. has all the mountains and needs to do blasting to build highways. Pacific Rim investment and geography have made real estate extremely expensive in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland. Yet here we are with lots of flat and plentiful land, but our capital costs are astronomical.

Now, I'll be the first to admit that our public facilities are in disrepair and need to be fixed and that we had a lot of people move to Alberta over the last decade, who did not bring public infrastructure with them, but the costs have to be driven down. We heard the siren song of innovation to drive the costs down, but when construction companies go to bid on the contracts, they're not allowed to innovate. Picking the shades of paint for a new school is not innovation, Mr. Speaker.

Private-sector employees are experiencing pain in this time of restraint. Why can't the public sector, too? By not even asking the public-sector unions to consider something as simple as forgoing a pay raise while the rest of Alberta is reeling, this government is being irresponsible. It is just kicking the can down the road and delaying the inevitable until a champion of the free market is elected to government again. That inevitable is to trim the bloat and the fat among the management class of the government and its agencies, boards, and commissions. Managers managing managers managing other managers is unacceptable. Managers are not front-line workers. Managers are not unionized front-line workers.

**3:10**

Let me speak for a moment to the myth those on the other side like to tell Albertans. Not once has Wildrose threatened front-line workers. Teachers, doctors, nurses, professors, medical science technicians, psychologists, game wardens, prison guards, social workers: these are all front-line workers, and Wildrose knows we can't afford to lose any of them. The NDP scare tactic that we will eliminate front-line workers will not work.

Mr. Speaker, I will conclude by saying that this fiscal regime is heading in the wrong direction and needs to be halted before serious damage is done to Alberta and the economy during this downturn. I oppose this bill because it is enabling legislation for a government that refuses to see it has a spending problem. I encourage everyone in this House to tell the government to stop taxing and to rein in our bloated spending while protecting the front lines. It can be done, but first you have to want to try.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) applies with respect to the last presentation, by the Member for Little Bow. Are there any questions to the member?

Hearing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

**Mr. Clark:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have several concerns about this bill. I'll start with the discussion on section 7(1), that reinstates the 1 per cent spending cap. That is a result, of course, of having to repeal the original Fiscal Management Act, and we're simply putting back section 7. However, as the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks has noted, there are no teeth here whatsoever. There's nothing that prevents the government from simply repealing this act or amending this act or deciding that they don't like the 1 per cent spending limit in this act.

But more than that, there's a lot that can be done within the bounds of this act should it be passed into law. There are several loopholes, two of which I will point out. Section 7(2)(c), as we know, reads that an exclusion to the 1 per cent spending limit is "commitments made in connection with collective bargaining or other negotiations or settlements relating to remuneration." Now, that doesn't speak about just past commitments; it could in fact apply to future commitments. The government could decide that, in fact, it needs to increase spending far greater than 1 per cent simply by entering into a new agreement with any number of government workers. I won't pass judgment on whether or not that is a wise thing to do in terms of entering into those agreements. I'll simply say that it creates a huge loophole because fully half of Alberta government spending is spent on salaries; \$25 billion of \$50 billion spent in this government is wages and salaries. So that's a huge and significant loophole. But that was there before. It existed before. It doesn't mean it wasn't a loophole, but it existed before.

What is new in this act from the Fiscal Management Act is section 7(2)(e) with respect to entities referred to in the Financial Administration Act or the Regional Health Authorities Act. They are able to increase "expenses funded from the unbudgeted drawdown of operating reserves or accumulated surpluses or from unbudgeted additional revenue." What is unbudgeted additional revenue? Is that limited only to revenues generated by those entities, or could it in fact include windfall resource revenues from outside those particular entities? That's an important question to answer, and that's a question that this bill does not answer. It creates a significant concern, frankly, about the overall integrity of the bill itself.

I do want to talk for a moment about increased revenues, also known as tax increases. They're raising sin taxes on beer and tobacco. Generally, in fact, that's something I'm in favour of. I actually don't have a huge concern with it. At some point it gets so high that we create a situation where we may have a black market. There is no evidence that I'm aware of yet that that's a problem here in Alberta, but it's certainly something that this government needs to pay attention to.

Having said that, something that came up at a health discussion I had this morning, the Health Coalition, is that perhaps we should think about targeting some of these sin tax revenues to preventative health care, create a tie. The problems that are caused by alcohol and tobacco consumption should be targeted by specific measures within preventative health care.

The other issue I have a real concern about, one that I raised with the minister in estimates and one that I've raised in this House during question period, is whether or not the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board has done a sensitivity analysis on what will happen if, in fact, our credit rating is downgraded. This bill limits debt to GDP to 15 per cent, but it does not guarantee by itself that we will not see a credit rating downgrade in this province. That's a

huge concern, and we're taking on hundreds of millions of dollars, billions, in debt in this province. The impact of even a half percent increase in our borrowing costs would be potentially exponential, and that becomes a huge and significant problem. I would encourage the minister again and I would encourage his department again to conduct that work, to do the analysis of what the impact would be of a credit rating downgrade.

We look at fuel taxes as well. The increase to fuel taxes is substantial, makes a big difference to the cost of transporting Alberta goods and services, especially the locomotive tax increase. I note that that will have a significant impact on the cost of transporting Alberta's bitumen by rail at a time when we are having a significant problem getting pipelines approved in this province. I note the government, in my opinion, has not done enough to encourage the development of pipelines in all directions. I'm disappointed with our government's lack of support for Keystone XL. I'm disappointed with our government's lack of support for Northern Gateway. I think there's significant risk in putting all of our eggs in the Energy East basket. Much as I support Energy East and I think it's a tremendous, nation-building project and something this House should all get behind, I worry very much when we focus only on one project.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments and welcome any questions my colleagues may have. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Are there any questions for the Member for Calgary-Elbow?

**Mr. Schneider:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talked about a sensitivity analysis of debt to GDP. I wonder if he could expand on that. That's a term that maybe isn't used enough, that we could stand to understand a little better.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Clark:** Sure. Thank you very much for the question. Really what it says is that this bill and all actions of the government assume that we will not face a credit rating downgrade. The question is: what if? A sensitivity analysis says: what if? What if our borrowing costs go up .25 per cent, .5 per cent, 1 per cent? What if? What is that going to cost us? As you know, interest compounds itself and becomes exponentially worse. I have a feeling that within the department that work probably has been done. Given the number of capable financial analysts that we have within our Treasury Board and Finance department, I would imagine that if we dig deep enough, we may find a spreadsheet that has that analysis. I think this government, if they don't know the information, should know the information, and I do wonder if, in fact, they do because those numbers are – my budget analyst spent 20 minutes and did his own assessment, and he found that a 1 per cent increase in Alberta's borrowing rate two years out from now will cost us \$700 million a year in debt-servicing costs. Those numbers add up from there over time, so it is a significant risk to this province.

I want to say that I am in favour, broadly speaking, of well-managed borrowing to build infrastructure. We're well behind in this province, and it's important that we do that. It's important that we create jobs at a time of economic uncertainty, but we need to do that in a managed way, and we need to make sure that that debt doesn't get out of control, and we need to know what those debt-servicing costs are going to be. If you can't measure it, you can't manage it, so I think it's very important that we understand what those numbers are.

3:20

**The Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a).

**Mr. Taylor:** I was going to ask, Mr. Speaker: how many infrastructure projects does he think would be lost as a result of \$700 million having to be spent on this debt that he was referring to?

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Clark:** That's a great question. I won't be able to give you a specific answer. It's something that perhaps our Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation may be able to give you a better indication of. Gosh. You know, \$700 million: that's two and a half Springbank flood mitigation projects. That's the better part of the Calgary cancer centre. That's significant. Significant. And that's every single year. When we're in a situation where the government is going to borrow for operational spending, borrow for pens and pencils and paper and paper clips, that's a huge amount of money. That's a substantial risk to this province, and you can't overstate that risk.

So while this bill attempts to address that, if the only thing we're doing is limiting our debt to GDP to 15 per cent, that's not enough, I think, to maintain our triple-A credit rating. Different credit rating agencies have different measures. Debt to GDP is but one of those measures. We're already on negative credit watch from all of the rating agencies. Although that one step to limit our debt to GDP is important, it is by no means enough. I have some significant concerns that future infrastructure projects and future operational spending are at risk if we let our debt get out of control.

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

**Mr. MacIntyre:** Thank you, sir. To the hon. member: given that Alberta's GDP per person is about double that of Ontario and they have a 30 per cent—correct me if I'm wrong—debt ceiling, in your calculations is it true that a 15 per cent debt ceiling to us is equivalent to the same impact as a 30 per cent debt ceiling to someone with half the GDP per person?

**Mr. Clark:** I guess by that simple math it probably is. You know, a 15 per cent debt to GDP in Alberta is a substantial amount of money. I don't have the calculations in front of me, but I believe it to be well in excess of \$50 billion in debt. That's a significant amount. And at that level debt service costs get to be a significant portion of the budget, your second or third line item in terms of budget, and that money only going to debt service.

Again, I'm okay with well-managed debt. I'm not convinced that allowing our debt ceiling to get up to 15 per cent of debt to GDP is, in fact, a prudent thing to do. It creates trade-offs that I think we do not want to make in this province.

**Mr. MacIntyre:** Great. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Are there any other questions under 29(2)(a)?  
The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

**Mr. Orr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I truly need to speak to this bill. This government's philosophically and economically flawed fiscal plan bases its justification upon comparisons drawn from the very worst provinces in our Confederation. Who you compare yourself to actually does matter. Comparison to the worst financial managers in the country is, in fact, a very poor standard of measure. Ontario has the dubious and shameful reputation, as reported in the *Financial Post* and other papers, as being the most indebted

subsovereign jurisdiction in the world. Why do we want to compare ourselves to the worst?

Every teenager knows that peer pressure is often bad for you, especially when it comes from those who are failing their grade. Telling me that the worst performing student in the class of provincial economics is the one I should look up to and emulate is just not acceptable. Telling yourself that a 15 per cent debt ceiling is acceptable for resource-rich Alberta is self-delusion or maybe just teenage justification, but the truth is that Albertans really do not want this. Mr. Speaker, Bill 4 reflects the fundamental problem with this government's plan. The NDP refuses to cut fat. They want to increase Alberta's debt load and continue to pay for the most expensive provincial government in the country.

Now, Albertans know that throwing money at a problem is never a solution, and borrowing for bloated operational costs is doing exactly that. Setting a high debt ceiling that this government can arbitrarily change on a whim while they continue to push back the date of a balanced budget does not restore confidence in our marketplace. Instead, it just pushes the province deeper and deeper in debt, making it very hard for investors and business owners to properly plan for the future.

Now, don't get me wrong. I do applaud the effort to increase the financial transparency in this province. That's particularly true with the clarity of 6(1) on revised quarterly projection updates. I'm glad to see that, but I am seriously concerned about the abandonment of offsetting deficit spending with draws from reserve funds. Of course, the problem is that there are no reserve funds or at least very soon won't be. Yes, I admit that those across the floor from us here have been handed a somewhat difficult hand to play because there are no reserves, which is even more reason, actually, to play it well. Beginning to build the Alberta heritage debt fund is not the way to build Alberta.

To make a comparison, condo associations in this province are required by law to plan for, fund, and maintain reserve funds. That's a fiduciary duty of condo association directors. Does the Alberta government consider itself somehow above and beyond the law in this regard? Should the government not lead by example? Is the government creating a double standard where citizens of condo associations must act and invest according to the rule of law but the government does not have to be constrained by it? The condo reserve fund is a prudent requirement for the protection of the people of Alberta. How do the NDP consider that it is not a prudent and protective requirement for the government to also be required to maintain and rely on reserves rather than debt for its operations?

I ask the government to examine the principles that led to legislated condo reserve funds and understand that what is good for condo owners managing millions of dollars is far more important for a government managing billions of dollars. Mr. Speaker, how is it that this government is so comfortable with debt anyway? Who do they think they're borrowing from? I'm speaking about a government that generally views big corporations as the enemy. The NDP believe that corporations are the ones who make their wealth off the backs of the laboring poor, that they control the so-called evil strings of capitalism, and that they are the ones who are the sole cause of income inequality. This government's mantra believes that no one wants to be enslaved to them. [interjection]

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, do you have a point of order?

**Mr. Mason:** I have a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

### Point of Order Imputing Motives

**Mr. Mason:** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member with respect to this, but 23(i), “imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member,” applies here, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is sketching what could charitably be called a caricature of the views of members on this side. It’s misrepresenting what the views of members on this side of the House actually are, and I would suggest that he rephrase his comments accordingly.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The point of order is noted. I’m looking for procedural direction.

The hon. member.

**Mr. Fildebrandt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We’ve been through this particular point of order many times. The Government House Leader has made the point that I’m going to make here, that this is a matter of perception and interpretation. We have regularly risen on points of order on mischaracterizations of policies and priorities of the Wildrose. The government accusing the Official Opposition of wanting to lay off mass thousands of workers: that is not true, but you have ruled that that is merely a political interpretation. The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka is speaking with what is a political interpretation of the government’s policies and views, and due to your past rulings on this issue, I think that the Government House Leader’s point of order is not valid.

3:30

**The Speaker:** My recollection is that the item that you’re referring to, in fact, was a point of privilege. Nonetheless, your point is taken.

Hon. member, would you like in any way to reconsider your comments? If not, I will make a note of the point of order made.

**Mr. Orr:** Yeah. I don’t intend any offence. I guess I am confused, actually, that this policy comes forward. Maybe I’m a little too strong, but I’m just expressing what I think I’ve heard before. No offence intended, and I’ll move on if I may.

**The Speaker:** Proceed.

### Debate Continued

**Mr. Orr:** My question really boils down to – and I get the values of the NDP in terms of corporations and big government. What really, really confuses me in this, then, which is where I’m going, is that it seems to me that the government is betraying its own values and its own people by going hat in hand right back to the very foundations of capitalism, back to the greatest controllers of capitalism, the big banks and the international financiers, to borrow money from them. Why does the NDP government give so much power to those that control so much of our world?

It doesn’t matter who it is: families, businesses, governments. You enslave yourself in the worst possible way by taking on debt, and setting up Albertans and their tax dollars for higher lending rates and higher debt is not going to be benefiting our province. When it’s all said and done, we will have dug ourselves a \$50 billion hole, that really betrays the values of most Albertans on this side of the House and, if they really think about it, I truly believe, on that side of the House. Why do we want to give the big international financiers control over our lives? Every dollar we borrow comes with a chain, and you will not be released until every last cent is repaid.

Mr. Speaker, this government continues to demonstrate, I think, a lack of financial knowledge and a contempt for the Alberta marketplace, and I just ask: when will this government admit that the debt ceiling is a Band-Aid solution and that what it really needs to do is to stop bleeding our dollars away?

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Under 29(2)(a) are there any questions for the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka?

**Mr. Hanson:** Yes. I have a question. Hon. member, just if you could, you know, kind of clarify to us: if we go into debt to the tune of spending \$1.3 billion to \$2 billion a year simply on interest, how is that going to affect your riding and projects that people are putting forward in your riding?

**Mr. Orr:** Well, one of the most important things in my riding is a major shared infrastructure project between a group of municipalities. That has not been completed yet, and the inability to fund important water for life projects, both freshwater and sewer water, would be a major disaster in my riding. So that would be one very important way.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Any other questions for the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka under 29(2)(a)?

Hearing none, are there other parties who wish to speak to Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

**Mrs. Aheer:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the House today to address the assembled members with my grave concerns over Bill 4. I fear for the future of this province under the guidance of a government that does not seem to understand the very real and negative consequences of debt. This bill, which allows operational borrowing, will take Alberta in an entirely incorrect direction.

Alberta is an incredibly blessed province. We have immense mineral wealth and an industrious population. The hard work and entrepreneurial spirit of Albertans have generated an incredible amount of wealth, affording the residents of this province a high quality of life. The government has done a lot of work in the last six months to dismantle the remnants of the Alberta advantage. They want Albertans to forget that low tax rates cultivated and encouraged the industrious and entrepreneurial spirit of this province. They want Albertans to forget that these low taxes encouraged our job creators to thrive. They want Albertans to forget that low taxes allowed our economy to grow to a point where we never had to choose between low taxes and a high level of services. I want to implore all of you to not forget what made this province a beautiful place to work and to raise a family.

Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, Albertans and industry have long been taxed at a level that has consistently generated a high level of tax revenue. Even this year our level of revenues is the third highest that it’s ever been, a fact that the current government seems highly motivated to have Albertans forget. Let me be clear. This budget will remain unbalanced under the NDP due to high expenditure, not low revenue.

When I look at Bill 4 and this government’s plans for the next few fiscal years more broadly, I’m deeply concerned, and I’m incredibly dismayed. The government plans to debt finance program spending, and this bill will let them do that. The government is refusing to accept the extremely real and negative repercussions on everyday Albertans from this level of irresponsible spending. Instead of paying these debt-servicing costs, we would be paying

for something that we thought was important to this government: schools, roads, hospitals. Soon the government will pay \$1.2 billion to debt-servicing costs, and the new government refuses to take steps to move us away from this direction. The \$1.2 billion could be used, actually, towards the salaries of numerous teachers, nurses, and doctors, and to add insult to injury, they're doing nothing to change the province's trajectory to end the downward economic debt spiral. This is just bad fiscal management.

As your government debt finances program spending, you are choosing to saddle future generations with the cost of program operations from which they will never derive any benefit. You fearmongered about our policies when actually it's your policy of driving this province's economy into the ground that's seeing us borrowing billions at the expense of my children's money and your children's money and all of your great-grandchildren. This is a terrible legacy for our generation to be burdening the next generation and the next generation and the next generation.

It is this government's inability to manage its swollen bureaucracy which is hurting our children, a bureaucracy that has become so large. It is dysfunctional as a result of our high-priced services that are underperforming. In fact, just last week a former Alberta Finance minister clarified that the NDP could indeed maintain a front-line service and cut spending. This former minister noted that this is not about protecting health care, education, or social services but rather the salaries of public-sector unions that deliver these services.

There is plenty of revenue to maintain front-line services. We are borrowing and raising taxes for the increased salaries and benefits for the bureaucrats. This is about being stewards of our economy and acting on sound fiscal planning rather than raises for the bureaucrats and the public-sector unions. We already spend per capita \$2,000 more than B.C. on operations. This government is disinterested in spending money efficiently.

Alberta's population, like the rest of Canada's, is aging rapidly, and we continue to see lower economic growth, a problem that this government seems endlessly continuing to perpetuate. An aging population has profound implications both economically and socially. Interest rates are going to go back up, and with every year it becomes more and more difficult to remove our province from this downward spiral it is currently on. This government's only commitment is pushing us further into a deficit-debt spiral.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there any questions for the member under 29(2)(a)?

Are there any other members? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

3:40

**Mr. Stier:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 4. It's a pleasure to speak this afternoon to the House regarding this matter. I certainly have listened with interest to some of the comments made by some of the various members, especially from this side, which I think are very appropriate and to the point. I think I'm going to take the opportunity, as I usually do, to hammer the point home a little further if I may.

Anyway, you know, it's known as the act to implement various tax measures and to enact the fiscal planning and the transparency of this whole situation, Mr. Speaker. Let's be clear, though. This bill is about enabling higher taxes and more debt because this government ideologically rejects any reduction to our bloated spending habits that we've had over the past many decades. It allows the government to run operational deficits, which for decades have been illegal. What this means is that the province is

borrowing money to pay for basic services. This is the definition of unsustainable.

Most of my fellow members across the aisle remember the early '90s with loathing, or some of them may not if they were not in politics at that time. Actually, many of my fellow members may not remember the '90s at all, but be that as it may, the challenging years we went through in the early '90s were necessary to eliminate the high debt we had, and it resulted in the Alberta advantage. I'm not sure if anybody remembers the Alberta advantage anymore because it seems as if it's disappeared for years now.

Because of the prudent fiscal management of former Premier Ralph Klein, though, Alberta became the envy of the nation. We experienced massive levels of investment; our services across the board were top of the class, Alberta was debt free, and Albertans were . . . [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, is it the intent of the Speaker to allow heckling during these debates? Just a question for clarification if I may. Just a question, sir, if I may.

**The Speaker:** Please proceed.

**Mr. Stier:** Thank you. Since the late 2000s that has been changing. Continuous governments began to increase spending beyond inflation plus population. We came to rely on our oil and gas revenues to pay for basic services. This resulted in deficits and the taking on of debt.

Instead of changing course and working towards getting our province back on stable financing footing, this government has doubled down on the deficits. "Why should we care?" you ask. "Interest rates are low," you say. "This is a perfect time to borrow," they say. "Get in while the getting's good," they say. Well, along with debt comes debt-servicing costs, ladies and gentlemen. Debt-servicing costs are the money we spend to cover the repayment of interest and principal on our debt. Under this government's leadership we will soon be facing \$1 billion in debt-servicing costs, and by 2019 it will balloon to \$2 billion just in debt-servicing costs. That is taxpayers' money, ladies and gentleman, that this government is just tossing away without a concern in the world. This is taxpayers' money that this government is simply throwing away because of their bad economic policies. It was wrong under the previous government, and it's still wrong under this government.

Let's take a moment to consider what \$2 billion would have got us: 400 water treatment plants, 340 fire halls, 339 full water pump stations for municipal needs, 330 community halls, 300 ambulance facilities – I can tell you that we need more ambulance facilities; I've mentioned this in the House several times in the past three and a half years – 286 police stations, 263 intersection improvements all over Alberta. We're talking about doing that all over Alberta because there is such a deficit on that. I could go on, Mr. Speaker, but I think everyone gets the point. Instead of all these critically needed items we are lining the pockets of big banks.

The legislation calls for a debt ceiling of 15 per cent of GDP, but if the government is willing to change the law and says that operational deficits are now legal, what is stopping them from changing this law once they reach 15 per cent? Are there no provisions for punishment if the government exceeds 15 per cent of GDP? What is the point of having a law without any consequences for breaking it? What would be done to civil servants if they were told by the government to borrow illegally? Why are there no protections in place? GDP could drop with cyclical economic changes and unexpectedly take our debt beyond the 15 per cent GDP mark. What then? Fifteen per cent is approximately \$50 billion of debt that future generations would maybe have to pay back if possible. This government is forcing future Albertans to pay

for its bad economic policies, and instead of focusing on spending taxpayers' dollars effectively and efficiently, they're hiking dozens of taxes and fees and running up the credit card every minute of every day.

This government has a serious spending problem. There's no question. This bill will just enable this government to put off addressing the problem. With our massive royalty revenues and economic spinoffs there's no excuse to be running billions in debt every year. Instead of changing the legislation to run deficits, we should be creating legislation that determines how we will save our surpluses and secure our financial future instead of risking it with debt.

This government was elected because they promised to be different. I hope that they will be different; I hope that they will be better than the previous government. Instead, we're getting a government that is much worse, a government that is increasing debt, raising taxes, and destroying what was left of our Alberta advantage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there any questions of the member? Please proceed.

**Mr. Hanson:** To the member: I'm not questioning your age, sir, but you obviously lived through the downturns of the '80s and the '90s and must recall how the effects of the high interest rates affected homeowners and businesses. We're justifying borrowing right now because the interest rates are low. Can you give us some idea of what even a 2 per cent increase in interest rates, as opposed to the 23 per cent that we saw in the '80s, would do to our economy if we were sitting on this much debt?

**Mr. Stier:** Mr. Speaker, if I may. Thank you. Thanks to the hon. member for the question. That's interesting. It's kind of hard to calculate a 2 per cent increase in debt. I don't have a calculator in front of me. I can tell you right now that, yes, I have lived for many years through different cycles and different interest rates, and I can remember the difficulties that we all experienced during the late '70s and early '80s, when interest rates were going up to 18 to 20 to 23 per cent. It was amazing to me how many people were in very difficult times in those days. We suddenly had all kinds of very serious problems. We had people that were losing their homes. We had people who were involved in the construction business, whether from the supply side or the building side or whatever, losing their jobs because construction came to a grinding halt. No one could afford to borrow for homes. No one could make the payments. Property values decreased immensely. Assessments went down. As we all know, our very net worth is based on assessments. Yes, this kind of an increase, even at 2 per cent, province-wide will have devastating effects. We're already seeing the effects and the negative impacts of these kinds of policies that are coming out even before the legislation is passed.

Thank you for the question. I think it's a good one to keep in mind, that experience of the past should be able to guide us for the future.

**The Speaker:** Are there any other questions for the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod?

Are there other members who wish to speak? The Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

**Mr. Taylor:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise to speak on Bill 4. I oppose Bill 4. I'd like to start off by saying that no government has ever taxed its way to prosperity or, put another way, to a surplus. We only have to look across the pond to Greece

to see what will happen if we continue down the lines of this way of thinking.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Alberta runs the most expensive government in all of Canada. Raising taxes and asking people to hand over their hard-earned money does not make Alberta more efficient or give us our Alberta advantage. In fact, I believe it does the opposite. Albertans expect their government to be good stewards of their money. That's something I've been told time and time again, so I would just expect the government to be good stewards of the money.

Let's be clear. This bill is about enabling higher taxes and more debt. That's what we're going to see from this. More debt means more debt-servicing costs, so that means fewer schools, fewer hospitals. It's going to be a compounded problem.

**3:50**

You know, by 2020 we'll be somewhere around \$50 billion in debt, and it will cost in the neighbourhood of \$1 billion to \$2 billion anyway to service that debt. The cost of the Wainwright hospital, a hospital I've been advocating for in this House before, is about \$241 million. That's the government's number. You're looking at taking four to eight of those hospitals off the market every year, year after year, as long as we have that debt. As long as we have to service that debt, those hospitals will not be able to be built along with all the other aforementioned projects that will not be able to be built. When do you reach the debt ceiling? What provisions do you have in place if you get right to that 15 per cent or exceed that 15 per cent of GDP?

I have another question for you, and I think there's an unintended consequence that comes along with this one. You know, I've never been a smoker, and I appreciate that the sin tax that you're putting on there is a voluntary tax; it's just there for the people that want to do this. But on page 49 of Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, it goes on to say:

(a) On every cigarette or tobacco stick purchased by that consumer, \$0.25.

That goes from 20 cents to 25 cents.

(b) On every cigar purchased by that consumer, 129% of the taxable price of the cigar, with the tax payable on each cigar being not less than \$0.25 per cigar nor more than \$7.83 per cigar.

That was 103 per cent before; now it's 129 per cent. That's fairly significant.

(c) On every gram ... of any tobacco, other than cigarettes, tobacco sticks or cigars, purchased by that consumer, \$0.375.

It goes from 30 cents to 37 and a half cents.

I guess the point that I'm getting at is that I'm looking at the unintended consequences that could happen, the unintended consequences that cigarettes, tobacco, all these products become so expensive that we end up with a policing problem because of illegal sales on cigarettes or perhaps smuggling in our province. That's something that I certainly don't want to see, more criminal activity, and these I think are the unintended consequences that could happen as a result of these taxes that keep getting piled on.

So I'm opposed to this bill. I don't believe that we need to keep raising the debt ceiling, and I think that we need to get our spending under control and look at other measures to get that spending under control.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Under 29(2)(a)?

**Mr. Fildebrandt:** Yes, Madam Speaker. The Member for Battle River-Wainwright spoke about the unintended consequences of raising tobacco taxes now. I think it's likely that every member of this House recognizes that higher tobacco taxes can discourage tobacco use, which is an important social good, and we can use tobacco taxes to pay for the accompanying health care costs that come with tobacco use. However, that does come to a limit. We can see what's happening in Ontario and Quebec right now, where contraband tobacco makes up between 33 per cent and 50 per cent of all tobacco sales in those provinces largely because high tobacco taxes have gotten to such a level that they incentivize a massive black market. Perhaps the member could elaborate on his points around contraband tobacco and how raising tobacco taxes beyond a particular point could in fact reduce the revenue the government intends to collect from tobacco taxes.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you for that. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Raising the tobacco tax will have unintended consequences, certainly could, and have the opposite effect of what was intended. If it was intended that we're going to just stop people from smoking or slow it down, that would be a fantastic thing. However, I don't believe that's going to happen in all cases. What's going to happen is what happened in Ontario. With the rise in the tax you'll end up with potentially more contraband cigarettes coming across the border and creating more problems. Where the tax becomes quite problematic is that we have to spend more on policing just to be able to have this. So if we spend more money on policing, are we actually gaining any money from this raise in these tobacco taxes? I don't think so. I think that it's going to be counterintuitive to what you're intending. I think that all of these taxes that we've been putting in here have the potential for future problems.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wish to question or comment under 29(2)(a)?

The next member to speak to the bill, then. Please go ahead, Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

**Mr. MacIntyre:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. Given the recent warnings that this government has received from bond-rating agencies like Moody's, who already have given this province, you know, almost in writing a warning, "You are on the watch" – they are watching our debt-to-GDP ratio; they are watching the policies of this government because they are considering, you know, lowering our rating – it's a surprise to me that the government would then bring along a bill like this to, well, first of all, increase the cap to 15 per cent and then also change the law which used to make it illegal to borrow for operation. Now it's going to be legal to borrow for operation. These kinds of signals that are sent to the bond-rating agencies are not signals that they particularly like because it means, then, that for the money that we do have to borrow, we are going to be paying more interest.

Now, we're going to be borrowing – well, yeah, we, all Albertans, are going to be on the hook for a few billion dollars more this year. Then a year from now, when another budget cycle comes around and this government still can't rein in its spending, we're going to be borrowing more. Those same bond-rating companies are then going to reassess our bond rating and downgrade us again. Although I have heard a lot of members talking about a \$50 billion debt load by the end of the four-year term of this government, no one seems to have touched on the reality that every quarter between

now and the end of that four-year term those bond-rating agencies may have been dropping our bond rating and increasing our interest rate quarter by quarter by quarter. Our projection of a \$2 billion debt-servicing cost could be substantially low. At the end of the four-year term we could be paying substantially more for the debt that we have simply because we are playing into the hands of the debt cycle. It's like a circus you can't get away from. You cannot borrow your way to prosperity.

Now, as MLA for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake the issues that are outlined in Bill 4 put forward by this NDP government are some of the hottest hot-button issues in my riding. My riding is predominantly agricultural. I do have some urban. There are 14 communities in total. It doesn't matter whether I'm talking to a farmer down in Innisfail or out in Spruce View or whether I'm talking to a young family in Sylvan Lake – we have a lot of laid-off people from the patch in Sylvan Lake, my own hometown – or whether it's a nonprofit group relying on the generous donations from people. Let's be clear; out-of-work people don't have the money to donate to nonprofits. It doesn't matter who I'm talking to. Everyone is concerned about the direction this government is taking. The Alberta advantage is pretty much done, and this blind ideology of tax and spend and tax and spend is putting the last nail in the coffin.

4:00

Madam Speaker, they are concerned about bills like Bill 4 and what it means for our current situation, but more importantly they are worried about the consequences to our children and our grandchildren because of this government's push with bills like this that attempt to spend our way out of trouble.

The good people of my riding know without a doubt that you cannot spend your way to prosperity, so as I travel around my riding and I talk to people that are frightened about losing their jobs – and some of them already have – they are troubled. They are confused. They don't understand what has happened to their Alberta. They don't understand an ideology from a government that higher taxes and increased spending during a downturn in the economy are somehow good for this province, a government who continues to push this kind of ideology while over 65,000 of our fellow Albertans have lost their jobs.

Let's be clear about this 65,000 number that we keep hearing. This does not take into account subcontractors and contractors who are self-employed people, who do not show up on the unemployment rolls. These are people who are not getting contracts for work, but they are self-employed, one-owner operators, little mom-and-pop businesses here and there that are not getting the fab jobs, not getting the welding jobs, not getting the supply jobs, and they don't show up in the unemployment statistics. I would venture to suggest to this House that this number of 65,000 Albertans having lost their jobs is only half of the true picture when you take into account how many small businesses and contractors in this province also rely on our resource industry for work. They are not working. Those welding trucks are parked at home.

With that in mind, Madam Speaker, let's be clear. This bill is about one thing only, and that's enabling a government to raise taxes even higher. It's about more debt, more borrowing against our children's future, and it shows that this government is refusing to deal with bloated spending, refusing to take a look at efficiencies within government, refusing to do what every family across this province knows, that you cannot spend more than you make. Instead of getting our fiscal house in order, this government has chosen to go the other direction and put forward a bill that will allow this government to run operational deficits, which for decades have been illegal in this province. It's going to allow for high debt

loads, and we're chasing this \$50 billion debt load by the next election. Given that there appear to be serious doubts with the rosy revenue projections put forward by the Finance minister, it is, sadly, looking to me at least like it could be a whole lot more.

This Bill 4 pretty much kills the Alberta advantage, destroying the hard work and sacrifice of Albertans when we together in this province eliminated the high debt load of this province that we had back in 1992. In 2004 we watched as former Premier Klein announced Alberta's debt paid in full. It was a crowning achievement that made all of us in this province able to hold our heads high. I was involved in international business at the time, and even countries in the Middle East knew where Alberta was. They had heard about us. They'd heard about our province all the way overseas and in Europe. They knew who we were, and they even knew who Premier Klein was. They thought this was the greatest thing ever, that a country or a place, a jurisdiction, could be debt free. We were the envy of the planet.

All this hard work that paved the way for lower taxes, increased spending on services from the savings from the elimination of the costs of debt servicing, all of this: now a decade later the NDP is throwing it away, and they're choosing higher taxes and high costs that come with debt servicing because they're borrowing tens of millions of dollars instead of looking for ways to save money. It's terrible. Instead of spending money on badly needed schools and roads, Alberta is going to be spending significant amounts of money on nothing more than debt servicing. It is a shame.

Now, Madam Speaker, the government would like us to believe that paper debt ceilings will keep them from going further than 15 per cent of GDP into debt. I submit to this House and to all Albertans that a paper ceiling of 15 per cent is just a piece of paper that can be broken, just like every other law can be broken in this province. Remember the election that we just had? We had a piece of paper that said that the election was going to take place in June 2016, and look what happened. A piece of paper that tells the government, "You cannot exceed 15 per cent of GDP" is, frankly, not worth the paper it's written on if a majority government can come back and just say, "Well, actually, we need to change that to 18 and then next month to 19 and then the next quarter to 20," and on and on it goes, using the 30 per cent example of Ontario as something to achieve instead of something to avoid.

An examination of this makes it clear that these so-called debt ceilings are just paper promises with no credibility whatsoever, Madam Speaker. If there is no provision for a serious consequence in breaking this 15 per cent of GDP, then I repeat: that document isn't worth the paper it's written on.

Let's be clear. There are no provisions for punishment if the government exceeds it, so really this provision is quite useless. What's the point in writing a law where there are no consequences for breaking it? And what about the civil servants? If they're told by the government to borrow and it happens to be illegal at the moment, there's no protection for them either. All these questions this government has not answered, and clearly, Madam Speaker, the government sees no need to ensure that this law is enforced. The debt ceiling is an empty, unenforceable promise, and this government, in reality, can continue to run amok with our future generations' money. It's shameful.

If, of course, the GDP projections happen to be off – not being a betting man, I might just take that bet – I would bet that they are not going to make the GDP projections that they have in this rosy budget. Then, of course, the 15 per cent of GDP mark is blown to smithereens right there. The government has no answer to this question.

Let's be clear on what 15 per cent is. It's somewhere between \$50 billion and \$60 billion debt that future generations are going to

have to pay back, that my children, my grandchildren are going to have to pay back, all of us. It's alarming, especially when you realize that we already spend more per capita than almost anywhere else, \$2,000 more than B.C. just on operations.

When you look at capital spending, our neighbour to the west is spending \$11.7 billion on capital over the next three years, and Alberta is spending \$24.6 billion over that same period of time, more than double our neighbour, which is a bigger and growing, expensive province. That's another \$1,000 per capita per year going to debt. I believe that Alberta needs to focus on spending hard-working Albertans taxpayers' dollars much more efficiently than we are, looking for places to save rather than more places to tax us. Let's be very clear about money here. A dollar in the hands of an Albertan is a better-spent dollar than in the hands of the government or in the hands of a bank.

I believe Alberta needs to focus on saving. If I go home and find out that I've had to take out a loan to buy groceries, then I know that I have a spending problem, and Albertans know that if you're borrowing to do things like that, you have a spending problem. This government hasn't figured that part out yet. They're still borrowing for groceries, and they're making it much worse with this bill, that enables them to put off addressing the problem. You know, part of being a grown-up is facing the problems head-on, and this bill does not do it. It just puts the problem out there for another day, for another generation to have to deal with.

Madam Speaker, with our massive royalty revenues and economic spinoffs, we really don't have any excuse to be running these kinds of billion-dollar debts. We have not got a revenue problem; we have a spending problem.

#### 4:10

We should be creating legislation, Madam Speaker, that secures our financial future, not jeopardizes it, but sadly this government is creating legislation that risks our future even further with a debt prison that comes along with any kind of debt like this. Our revenues are the third highest in history this year and according to this government are supposed to be going up. I think the projections of increased income are highly suspect, and in recent days we've already seen the indication, both from the World Bank and Moody's, that the government is not going to be recognizing their projections, especially based on the oil price trends.

But given the third-highest-in-history number, why is this government finding it necessary to handcuff us with so much debt? If we cannot pay our bills during our third-best year, how are we ever going to get our fiscal house in order? How is this government going to get Alberta's spending back under control? We don't see a bill doing that. Instead, we want to increase the ceiling? We want to be able to borrow for operational? It just makes it worse, with no effort to address the spending problems we have in this province. Alberta's taxes were the lowest in Canada. We were the first and only jurisdiction in our country to be debt free. This bill, taken together with an ill-advised royalty review, increased carbon taxes, and all these other tax and fee increases mean the Alberta advantage is fading away. [Mr. MacIntyre's speaking time expired] And I am done.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a). Go ahead, hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

**Mr. Fildebrandt:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake for his comments. A lot of that hit home with me. In Brooks we've got a lot of oil patch workers who were laid off. Many of the industries around it are hurting as



well. We've got oil service providers who are moving to Saskatchewan. There's been a lot of noise from the government benches. Unfortunately, not a single member on that side has taken the time to speak to a bill which will leave us indebted for generations to come. Members on this side of the House, the Official Opposition, are standing up for Albertans, asking questions, and we can't even get the minister who introduced the bill to stand up and debate it here. We get a lot of static from the members over there, but not one of them is willing to stand up and defend this bill.

I'd like the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake to perhaps elaborate on some of his thoughts. Tell us, in particular, perhaps why we need teeth in this legislation. The politicians over there are willing to quack, make a lot of noise, but they're not willing to actually debate the issue because they intend to come back here in four years to raise our debt ceiling again. We need real teeth in this legislation to prevent us from raising the debt ceiling again.

To the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake: I'd like to hear his thoughts on why we need teeth in this legislation.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacIntyre:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. As with anything where you're going to put a limit on something, any parent knows that there have to be consequences when the children break the house rules. It doesn't matter what the rules are. There are some things you just don't get away with without consequences. When we have a government, any government – not just this current government but any government – and we're going to say, "All right; we're going to have a debt ceiling, and that debt ceiling is going to be 15 per cent," that has to come with consequences. Otherwise, as time goes by, people are going to try to find ways, when backed into a corner, to break the rules. There is always going to be the temptation on the part of any government – it doesn't matter if it's this one or any other government – when backed against the wall, when things are looking bad and the government wants to spend money and has already borrowed to its limit, to change this debt ceiling and increase it, even incrementally by 1 per cent or 2 per cent.

You know, 1 per cent and 2 per cent, Madam Speaker, may not sound like a lot of money, but 1 per cent of GDP to an economy as big as ours is a significant amount of money. Even an incremental increase of 1 per cent is billions more dollars that a government can borrow, and without any kind of consequence to that government, there's going to be that temptation.

I'm afraid, Madam Speaker, given the lack of restraint that we have seen – I'm talking about the lack of spending restraint that we have seen on the government side of this House – that not having something in there with teeth is going to leave us wide open to more excesses and more debt, more debt-servicing costs. So I would beg the House to consider putting teeth in this bill if it is, you know, the will of this House to pass what I think is this very bad piece of legislation.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, are you still on 29(2)(a), or are you speaking to the bill?

**Dr. Swann:** No. Speaking to the bill.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Do any other members have questions or comments on 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

**Mr. Taylor:** Yes. I heard the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake talking about these important institutions, the bond agencies,

I should say, like the World Bank and Moody's. Could you explain to me and to the members here how important these bond agencies are globally to our rating here in Alberta?

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacIntyre:** Thank you. Whether we like it or not, bond-rating agencies carry a significant amount of sway in the world of large finance, and the reason for that is that they do what are called risk assessments. They have a certain metric that they use when they assess risk, whether it be a really large corporation, whether it be a nation, whether it be a provincial government or a state.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. A pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. The bill proposes to repeal the Fiscal Management Act and, in its place, enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. In the simplest terms this means that operational deficits will no longer be illegal and that government debt will now be capped at a maximum of 15 per cent of the province's GDP.

The bill also amends the Alberta Corporate Tax Act, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, the Fuel Tax Act, the Tobacco Tax Act, the Tourism Levy Act, and the Perpetuities Act to implement budgeted tax measures, in fact, increases, and to make consequential changes. To provide some perspective on this new proposal, I'll start with the plan to cap government debt at a maximum of 15 per cent of the province's GDP. At 15 per cent that roughly equates to \$55 billion today.

Budget 2015 estimates that the province's total debt will increase by \$36.6 billion, at 10 per cent of the GDP, by fiscal 2017-18 and could grow as high as \$47 billion by the end of 2019-20. For the sake of comparison, Alberta's debt under the PCs peaked at \$23 billion in 1993. This is potentially twice what the maximum PC debt was in 1993, in the so-called Klein revolution and the massive cuts to government spending that occurred at that time, that we're still recovering from, might I add, in terms of infrastructure, in terms of delayed schools, in terms of delayed important public services.

The Fiscal Management Act, which the NDP is repealing and replacing with the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, does set specific limits on government borrowing by limiting the annual capital debt-servicing costs to a maximum of 3 per cent of actual operational revenue for the fiscal year and the previous two fiscal years. The one glaring deficiency in the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act is the lack of a legislated debt repayment plan. Rather, in the October 27, 2015, budget speech the Finance minister commented: "Once the budget is in balance we will present a debt repayment plan as part of an overall re-assessment of our fiscal priorities." The obvious concern here is that if the price of oil doesn't recover, the NDP does not meet its target of balancing the budget in 2019 or even beyond. The province could potentially go on for years without a debt repayment plan. I don't think most Albertans would manage their finances that way.

4:20

Other than continuing to inflation-proof the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, this new act does not commit the government to save any nonrenewable resource revenues. By contrast, the old Fiscal Management Act committed the government to save a portion of nonrenewable resource revenue annually and by 2017-18 to be retaining a hundred per cent of the Alberta heritage savings fund's net income in the fund.

With respect to operational deficits, unlike the Fiscal Management Act again, the new act does not prohibit operational deficits. In fact, the NDP plans to borrow \$712 million in 2016-17 and almost \$4 billion by 2018-19 to cover operating expenses, resulting in the province's first operational deficit since 1993, again raising questions about repayment.

Bill 4 repeals the Fiscal Management Act and creates a new set of fiscal rules. I would argue that it does suit these challenging economic times, other than the concerns I've expressed, and still maintains our commitment to keep debt under control, subject to the provisions I've indicated.

The legacy of the Fiscal Management Act is really about the PCs deliberately clouding the province's finances for political gain. For that reason alone, Albertans should celebrate its repeal. Had the NDP not been elected, we know that Mr. Prentice was already planning to repeal parts of the Fiscal Management Act due to expected deficits and the unlikelihood that the province would have been able to stay within the rules set out in that act anyway. I give him credit for that intention.

What differentiates the NDP's first budget from those of recent PC governments is that there was consensus about the \$6.1 billion deficit figure. As large and concerning as that is, the NDP has to be commended for presenting the province's finances in a clear, consolidated format. The Auditor General has been critical of the province's budget presentation since 2013. It needed to change. However, in today's challenging economic times Alberta Liberals support a flexible government borrowing and boosting infrastructure to repair the schools, hospitals, roads, bridges, and wastewater facilities as well as affordable housing and light rail transit. The infrastructure spending can and should be debt financed at this time, and long-term interest rates that are favourable will be beneficial to our employment and to our children and to our future.

However, we insist that such large-scale borrowing has to be undertaken in accordance with a legislated debt repayment plan, and we will be offering that up in terms of amendments. It's simply not good enough for the NDP to say that a debt repayment plan will be developed after the budget is balanced because, quite frankly, we don't really know if or when that's going to happen.

In his budget address the Finance minister suggested that capping government debt at a maximum of 15 per cent of the province's GDP was sufficient to keep borrowing from getting out of hand. The minister would do well to remember that the maximum we've ever had in this province was in 1993, at \$23 billion.

With respect to the heritage fund, as a province we need to decide what we want the heritage fund to be. If it is to be a future fund, we need to stop pilfering from it. It has to be an investment for our future, for our children.

There are opportunities today to develop an alternate economy and be less dependent on oil and gas and coal as resources. There's a war on carbon on the planet. We need to be getting on with it and not dragging our feet. Clean technology, alternate energy, renewables: these are the future. They're not the sole future, and we need to transition through gas and combined heat and power innovation. That will create more jobs than the current oil and gas industry alone, and we need to therefore invest in postsecondary and innovation.

We need to see a graduated, thoughtful carbon levy that incents all of us to change our use and be more conservative, in small "c" terms, of fossil fuels. That graduated carbon levy should be revenue neutral, should be given back to Albertans in terms of a tax benefit, especially at this time. It will soften the important shift that we're making to a lighter carbon future.

With respect to the alcohol and tobacco taxes: all to the good. The question is: where are they going to go? If we're ever going to start shifting this health care system to more prevention, we have to

give that money to the health care system in terms of prevention and early intervention programs. Our hospitals are overwhelmed because we're not investing appropriately in injury prevention as well as disease prevention, that we know will make a fantastic difference to long-term morbidity and mortality.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

**Mr. Fildebrandt:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for his contribution to the debate. He might be coming at things from a bit different angle, but he certainly brings a lot of experience and perspective to the House.

I'll focus my comments, especially my questions to him, around changes in accounting. There were improvements made, in my view, to some of the transparency in this bill, and that had to do exclusively with quarterly reporting. Quarterly reporting under the Fiscal Management Act – the previous government repealed the Fiscal Responsibility Act and the Government Accountability Act – allowed the government to produce quarterly reports really on the back of a napkin, without any requirement about what details would be in those quarterly reports. I remember sharing his righteous anger about some quarterly reports that did not contain sufficient information to hold the government accountable. This bill does address that.

But I'm a bit confused by the member's comments around providing the books in a clear and consolidated fashion. I've looked at a lot of budgets in this province, studied them in a lot of detail, and the way these books are presented for the consolidated fiscal plan is no different than it was for the budget produced in March and the budget produced the year before that. The only difference in the consolidated fiscal plan is for years 4 and 5, where even less detail is provided than the previous government. The previous government may have provided phony-baloney numbers for the consolidated primary deficit or primary surplus numbers, but it at least showed its math for years 4 and 5.

This year's budget is pulling numbers out of thin air. They don't know where they're getting their numbers for revenues. They don't know where they're getting them for expenditures. They can't even tell us what debt servicing will be in the fourth and fifth years. It's very concerning.

I'll just allow the member to perhaps discuss it in a bit more detail, but it is around how we're presenting the primary deficit and debt number in this. This is not changing presentation of that figure at all. It still does not count capital grants towards the primary debt. Even if we believe we should be borrowing for capital, we should probably still be counting it in our deficits. In fact, our real deficit, calculated the way we used to do things in this province, is \$9.7 billion. That is our net change in financial assets. That is the real deficit that this province faces. The net change in financial assets is effectively the change in our financial worth as a province, a \$9.7 billion shortfall in our financial worth this year. That is by far the largest shortfall in the history of this province. It is twice as large as the shortfall in 1992 under Getty.

I think I share with the Member for Calgary-Mountain View a wish to avoid the pain that came in 1993. No member in this House wants to repeat that. My fear is that we will if we continue down this path. At the end of the day when the banks force you to do something, your politics and your ideology are checked at the door.

I'll ask the Member for Calgary-Mountain View to perhaps elaborate on his comments around clarity of the primary accounting deficit and the way those numbers are presented.

Thank you.

4:30

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, thanks for the questions, hon. member. I share with you the concern about debt servicing. I've said a number of times that we need to have a more clear indication from the government where they're going on debt servicing. I dare say that projecting out two and three years is a mug's game by any government, so I don't fault anybody for not knowing exactly what the budget is going to look like in '18 and '19.

With respect to your comments about the consolidated budget I'll take that under advisement and look more carefully at the numbers.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

If not, I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Oh, I apologize. You have a question under 29(2)(a)?

**Mr. Hanson:** I'll rise next time to speak to the bill.

**The Deputy Speaker:** We're out of time. That's all right.

We'll continue with Calgary-Currie.

**Mr. Malkinson:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to speak in support of this bill because, as the Member for Strathmore-Brooks mentioned earlier, we did have a friendly bet as that particular member is on the Public Accounts Committee with me. That bet basically comes down to a difference of opinion on where we're going.

When I go out into my constituency, I listen to my constituents. We talk about things like the importance of health care, schools, the need for capital projects, and the need to protect the services that Albertans hold dear. That, at the end of the day, was what the last election was about. Members often talk about debt and the need to reduce the amount of debt. Well, in times of an economic downturn what cost would not going into debt provide?

Previously, the last time a government tried to cut back a downturn, we were left with a massive infrastructure deficit, which we are trying to fix with this bill by investing in what Albertans care about, things like roads, things like schools, things like the cancer centre in Calgary. That's important to invest in. I think of the tradesmen and -women I worked with on the shop floor not that long ago, and I might give you a quote from Scott Matheson of the Alberta Construction Association. He says: definitely we believe that if 15 per cent is a sustainable and repayable number, we think that it's the right thing to do in our economy right now; it's a great time to buy construction in Alberta.

So if in a downturn we're going to act as a shock absorber, now is the time to do it, as it puts tradesmen and -women back to work and keeps our economy going. At the end of the day that's what Albertans want. They do not want us to make the situation worse by laying off public-sector workers on whom we rely.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Fildebrandt:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the chance to speak again to the bill. You'd almost think I get to be the minister with how much I'm speaking to the bill relative to the minister who actually introduced it. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Currie for his comments. I'm not sure if there's been a day where he's not worn an orange tie to the Legislature, so we can always know exactly where he is.

He said that we have a difference of opinion and not just on our choice of ties. We have a difference of opinion on the economic assumptions here. As I stated earlier, this is not a prop. This is a document. It would be difficult to table. We have a wager before us right now. I have bet the Member for Calgary-Currie \$100 that the government will not meet its revenue projections in year 5, before we go to an election. I'll be able to collect \$100 from the Member for Calgary-Currie to put towards my re-election in Strathmore-Brooks, hopefully right in time.

It's not just a difference of opinion. It's about a difference of facts. The Parliamentary Budget Officer in Ottawa has come out and said that our revenue projections are nowhere close to realistic. For every \$3 difference in the price of oil it costs the treasury of this province nearly half a billion dollars. If the PBO's numbers are right and the government's numbers are wrong, we are talking about a shortfall of not just \$9.7 billion that we're facing right now but significantly larger than that in years going forward.

The member said that we should not be cutting spending in tough times, that we should be borrowing in bad times. It is classic Keynesian economic theory. I suppose Keynesianism is an improvement for the NDP's theories. Let's just assume that we'll approve of the assumptions of Keynesian economic theory for a minute and say that we should be borrowing in bad times. That means in theory that we should be paying back debt in good times. But in years 4 and 5 of the NDP's budget they are predicting a massive boom, yet they still borrow \$8 billion a year during good times. If we cannot cut spending and stop borrowing in bad times, when are we going to do it?

We have already run eight consecutive deficits in our province. We haven't balanced the budget once in eight years. That is why our sustainability fund is gone. That is why we have \$14 billion of debt today before we even pass this budget. We've been borrowing and spending our savings in good times, and now that our rainy-day fund is gone, the rainy day is finally here. I ask the member in all seriousness: if we cannot control expenditures in bad times, if we're going to borrow in bad times, why does his government's budget still propose to borrow \$8 billion a year when they project a massive economic boom in years 4 and 5?

**The Deputy Speaker:** Calgary-Currie, do you wish to comment?

**Mr. Malkinson:** Sure. Part of the reason why I made the bet with the hon. member is that I believe that our government does have a sound plan going into the future. As the Member for Calgary-Mountain View pointed out earlier, hitting an exact number in five years for what's going on with the economy is a bit of a hit-or-miss proposition.

You also mentioned that in the last eight consecutive budgets that were presented in this province, not a single one of them was balanced. I'd like to point out that those budgets were not from this government and that we have what is a clear plan to get back to balance. That is what we campaigned on, and that is what we intend to do. That's what Albertans voted for, and that is what my constituents want us to do in this House.

[The Speaker in the chair]

**The Speaker:** Any questions for the member?

Any other individuals who would like to speak? Proceed.

**Mr. Hanson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You just about caught me. I almost called you Madam Speaker. I had changed it on my list. Thank you. It's with real concern that I rise today to speak to Bill 4. As an Albertan, as a father and, hopefully, soon a grandfather I

am horrified at the implications of this bill and the impact on our society. I find it very interesting that the members opposite appear to find long-term debt almost as amusing as private-sector job losses. This bill endorses massive debt. It includes tax hikes for Albertans in a flawed attempt to manage that debt. It's everything Wildrose stands against.

To put this into an understandable framework, it is as though my wife and I are spending like crazy on all sorts of extravagances and run ourselves into large debt. That isn't wise, but it's not so much of a problem as long as we stay within our means. Borrowing for extravagances is not living within your means. What happens if we lose our income? Well, obviously, we still have to pay off our debts. So what do we do? Well, any responsible person would cut down on spending and live within a reduced budget. A completely bad idea would be to continue increasing spending and just borrow against your equity, with the idea that we may have to pay it all back at some point in the future.

We can borrow against our children's education plans or get payday loans or increase our mortgages beyond any reasonable expectation of paying the loans back, and the rate of debt increases dramatically as the interest that accrues on the debt makes any chance of paying everything off and coming out even, to say nothing coming out ahead, unattainable. In effect, we would be borrowing against the opportunities to help our children and our grandchildren in the future. We are leaving a legacy of debt.

#### 4:40

Keep in mind that the Wildrose criticized the last government for borrowing in order to save because it's irresponsible for a resource-rich province to have to take out any debt. But this government isn't even saving, just borrowing. A reminder: we have the third-highest revenue in our province's history, and we still have to borrow in order to cover our promises.

Not only are they burning through nonrenewable resources at a record rate while leaving nothing in our heritage fund for future generations; they are running up a massive debt burden to hand off to future generations. It's outrageous. Well, that's just what this government is doing and what this bill explicitly does. This bill enables more debt and increases taxes to try to meet just the interest payments, with no plan to pay off any of the debts.

Another sign of how bad things are is that this government now has to borrow money and raise taxes just to pay off the daily operations. All of this could be changed if the government simply started to scale back the outrageous level of spending in the public sector. Our government spending is so much higher than other provinces. According to Stats Canada the government spending in Alberta on operations is almost \$11,000 per person. Compare that to Ontario, where they are able to manage government with just over \$8,500 per person, and B.C., where they spend under \$9,000 per person. Add capital spending, and we top B.C. by a whopping \$3,000 per person, or \$12 billion. That's a lot of money. This government outspends everyone except occasionally Newfoundland, depending on their capital program in a given year.

I would like to know why this government cannot make a move towards balancing the budget by reducing spending. There's never been one instance of reducing spending. This government inherited a bloated bureaucracy and a culture of government entitlement and overspending. However, the NDP government has been in the driver's seat now for more than six months, and what have they done? Instead of showing leadership and strong fiscal management, they have decided instead to maintain or increase spending, thereby increasing the debt and levying more taxes to try to pay for it all. Instead of looking critically at the levels of spending and making decisions about how to cut the outrageous spending on the

bureaucracy, part 2 of this bill is all about increasing taxes on already overtaxed Albertans.

Here are some of the new ways that Albertans are going to be using their hard-earned wages to support the overspending of this government. Accident, sickness, and life insurance are going up 2 to 3 per cent. Any other insurance premium is going from a 3 to 4 per cent increase. The PC fuel tax increase is being implemented, with rail now included. That'll add a cost to everything that we ship. Gasoline, diesel, and other prescribed fuels are going from 9 cents to 13 cents. Liquefied petroleum gas is increasing from 6 cents to 9.094 cents. Locomotive fuel tax is increasing from 1 cent to 5 and a half cents.

Cigarette or tobacco sticks tax is going from 20 cents to 25 cents. Cigar tax is increasing by 103 per cent, to 129 per cent, with the minimum of 20 cents per cigar increasing to 25 cents and the maximum raised to \$7.83. Every gram or part of a gram of any tobacco other than cigarettes and tobacco sticks is increasing from 30 cents to 30 and a half cents. These are double what the previous government proposed in March. Now, I can tell you that I know people already that are supplementing their trips down into the States by buying tobacco products even if they don't smoke, because they know that a tin of chewing tobacco that sells for \$3.60 down in the States sells for over \$30 here in Alberta, and there's no control over that. You don't get any tax on that.

That's just one side of the lopsided approach to fiscal management. When you add the first part of Bill 4 to the equation, this becomes a recipe for disaster in line with the NDP approach to economic planning and management. The first part of the bill actually serves to remove some of the constraints that typically would place limits on accumulating debt. Increasing the debt ceiling to 15 per cent of our GDP is not the thing to be doing right now. This bill allows the government to run operational deficits, a practice which has been illegal. Now by increasing the debt ceiling, they are basically writing themselves a blank cheque that each of us taxpayers will have to pay for along with our children and grandchildren.

I really wonder about the use of passing a bill, making a law if there is no consequence for breaking it. There is no provision for accountability in Bill 4. What is to stop the government from increasing it to 18 or 20 per cent when they reach and exceed this limit? The worst part of all is that this is the interest that accrues on debt increases. Interest payments is money gone out the window to pay for uncontrolled spending. The interest owing soon will be over a billion dollars, and borrowing and spending are just increasing. The interest that Alberta taxpayers will pay on this debt could be used instead to build schools and hospitals that are very much needed in every sector of our society.

The really frightening part of this bill is that when we put it all together, we are looking at \$50 billion in debt in 2020. In 2008 we had no debt and \$17 billion in the bank for a rainy day in the sustainability fund, not the heritage fund but an extra savings fund, now called the contingency account. This government's plan, if you can call it a plan, is to go from a positive \$17 billion to a negative \$50 billion in 12 short years. It is staggering.

Mr. Speaker, I am joining with every other horrified Albertan to oppose this bill, and we encourage the government instead to address the overspending that is plaguing our economy. We should be looking at ways to use taxpayers' dollars more efficiently and effectively instead of simply going back to the well to support outrageous spending habits. With effective economic policies we should be debating ways to save our surpluses instead of having to spend and borrow ourselves further into debt. I would never consider spending my family into debt that will last for generations,

and I urge the government to reconsider doing exactly that through this ill-advised bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there any questions of the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills? The House leader.

**Mr. Cooper:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments of my hon. colleague. I wondered if he might just spend a couple of moments on if he's had the opportunity to consult with members in his community of Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills around some of these debt-related issues. I'm particularly interested to hear what the people of that region of the province are saying when it comes to running up large amounts of debt, changing laws to be able to run operational deficits, and the overall direction that the government is taking the province when it comes to no plan on repayment of that debt. If people in that constituency have provided any feedback, it's interesting to hear. I certainly have a sense of what the people in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills are saying, but I just might be curious to know what the good folks in Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills are saying.

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

**Mr. Hanson:** Yeah. Thank you for the question. The folks that I've talked to in my constituency understand the government's need to borrow money to build infrastructure and, hopefully, you know, stimulate the economy in that way and based on the low interest rates at the time. Their concern is two years down the road, five years down the road, when we're trying to repay this debt and our interest rates are, instead of 2.3 per cent, maybe 5.6 per cent or higher. At the current rate we're going to be losing about one and a half billion dollars a year by 2019-2020 just to service debt. Now, if our interest rate doubles and we're suddenly paying \$3 billion a year or even \$6 billion a year into servicing debt, that's a lot of money that can't go into infrastructure. Their feeling is that we should curb our spending, stop our borrowing, get our spending under control, and only build infrastructure as we can afford it with trying not to increase taxes to people that are already burdened by the downturn in our economy.

Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills is very dependent on the oil economy, and a very, very high percentage of our people have lost their jobs already, and there is more to come. As projects become finished and people get laid off, there are no new projects to replace them, so there's a big concern there about job losses. Everybody is looking for work, but they don't think our province should be borrowing money at this time. Rather, they should be looking at ways to save on spending and put that money into infrastructure rather than borrowing against our future.

Thank you.

4:50

**The Speaker:** Are there any other questions of the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

**Dr. Turner:** I'd like to ask the member a few questions. I'm fascinated by your statement that this government has not produced any cost savings. Just today in this Legislature I heard of cutting several tens of millions of dollars from PCN funding. The RAPID program we heard about a couple of days ago is going to save Albertans in the range of \$45 million at the same time as producing a better outcome for the most frequent cause of blindness in the elderly, macular degeneration. Our government is also committed

to bending the cost curve in medicine, and that means that the rate of increase in the expenditures in the Health department are going to go down from 6 to 7 per cent under the previous government to what the minister called a flat line of 2 per cent in years 4 and 5. So I'd actually like to hear your comments on that.

I'm also concerned about the tenor of the comments coming that the member had as well as his associates, that when we spend on infrastructure, we're not gaining assets. Those schools and roads and dialysis centres . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, time has been allocated.

Are there other members who wish to speak to motion? The hon. Opposition House Leader.

**Mr. Cooper:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 4. I know that we've had the opportunity to hear from a number of my colleagues on the bill. I know it's hard to believe that I haven't spoken to something in the House, but in fact this is my first opportunity to speak to what really is an important piece of legislation. While there is very little about this important piece of legislation that I or the people in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills that I've spoken to about Bill 4 support, that's not to say that it isn't an important piece of legislation. What Bill 4 does in many respects is lay the groundwork and the structure of what's going to take place in our province over the next number of years.

I think that the Albertans should be very concerned about what the future of our province looks like under a new government. That's not because the new government means mal-intent or malice towards any Albertan or this House or generally towards the province but that fundamentally the government is taking some significant steps away from many of the core values that a lot of Albertans hold. Well, the government will say: "Hey. Listen. We consulted with people, and on the 5th of May we were elected to put that mandate forward." Certainly, no one can argue with that. They were elected.

However, there's still an overwhelming majority of Albertans that voted for two parties that some would say share some similar principles, and those principles are the principles of living within their means. I think that the government would be well served to consider the fact that there are a lot of Albertans that still hold to those key, core principles of living within their means, of not spending every dollar possible at all times possible. These are core conservative principles that lots of people in this province share, and certainly many of the members of the Wildrose share these principles of wanting to ensure that the government is getting best value for dollar.

What we've seen, as we see in Bill 4 is this rush towards \$50 billion in debt and this commitment on behalf of the government to continue to spend at all costs. What we've seen is this desire to move away from many of those core conservative principles that in many ways have set up our province for success.

We saw through a period of pain in the mid-90s that there was some significant cutting that took place, and while the government of the day would like to liken this organization to the mid-90s and spread fear and make all sorts of allegations about how horrible we are and the things that we would do to the province to be more fiscally responsible, nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. The Wildrose has laid out some of our core principles that do include finding efficiencies in government, shrinking the size of middle management and the bloated bureaucracy that we saw come out of the last administration of this province. We certainly have made some of those commitments. As I said, the government of the day likes to say and make accusations that we would hack, slash, cut, and burn. Of course, that couldn't be any further from the truth.

The truth is, Mr. Speaker, that the government – I know this is going to be hard to believe – actually spends money on good things. The problem is that the new government of the day believes that every dollar that the government spends is well spent. The challenge that we all face is that in a time when revenue is at a premium, the government continues to be committed to spending every dollar and not looking to efficiencies within that spending envelope. The net result of that, that we see in Bill 4, is this massive increase in debt, up to \$50 billion. One of the questions that I hear a lot in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills is: what is the plan when it comes to repayment? They're concerned about the future of the province and for their children or their grandchildren as the province over a period of time will continue to feel that pressure of a \$50 billion debt.

5:00

If the government of the day doesn't take appropriate steps to first of all stop the overspending and then take steps to repayment, at one point in time or another, Mr. Speaker, that debt will become crippling, and the weight of that debt will be possibly unbearable.

You know, we see in year 3 of the plan that the government has put forward, the spending plan, \$1.3 billion in debt-servicing costs. It's a wonder to think of what that \$1.3 billion could do, the number of schools that it could build, the number of hospital facilities that it could renovate or build. We run this great risk, Mr. Speaker, of putting the challenges of tomorrow down the road without real thought and consideration for them.

I know that every member in this House came to this place because they wanted to leave the province better than they found it. The question begs to be asked: are we going to leave our children and our grandchildren this debt, where the problems of tomorrow are so great that we create this weight that's so challenging for the legislators of tomorrow that it makes the future unclear? I don't think that that is what we came here to do, and I hope that's not the case on the other side, but these are the types of things, sir, that we need to consider.

When it comes to that repayment plan, we see in years 4 and 5 that there is zero plan. There are no numbers when it comes to what that looks like. It is a major challenge that faces our province, and while we've seen many, many, many politicians just try to kick the can down the road, that is certainly not what this side of the House wants to do because the road to fiscal accountability and responsibility is going to be a long one, and the first step has to be today. That's certainly not what Bill 4 is doing.

What Bill 4 is doing is creating new debt limits. We've seen, all over jurisdictions across North America, when they set a debt limit and say: "Trust us this time. We're not going to raise it ever again." It's a big, big risk as we continue to just raise the debt limit. As we move towards that, it's a big challenge because there's no plan. There's no plan to stop raising the debt limit in the future either.

And now this year, for the first time in recent memory, the government has taken steps to do things that at one point in time were illegal; that is, find ways to borrow for operations. It's a shame to see that that is where we're at, Mr. Speaker, particularly when we're doing so little on the spending side, when, in fact, we've seen ministerial offices' budgets increased, some to the tune of 15 per cent, all at a time when we're raising the debt limit in Bill 4. Obviously, it's concerning, and people in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills are bringing it up to me on a number of occasions: what is the plan, and how are we going to work out of this hole?

Many of those people believe that there will be a different government. You know, that remains to be seen. But whether it's the current government that is rewarded with another term or it's this side of the House – who knows what the political landscape in

four years looks like? – one way or another it is a big, big hole to dig our way out of. We encourage the government to start today because it's going to be a long road, and it starts with the first step. I hope that the government will consider some of the amendments that we'll be making later should the bill pass, because we need to find ways to start some of this challenge.

In the time remaining, I'll just briefly mention, Mr. Speaker, that one of the challenges with this piece of legislation is that all of these pieces of legislation are so very complex. You know, you could go to any section of the bill, and there are a lot of questions there. For example, on page 43 of the bill:

(5) An authorization granted under this section in respect of a person must be served on the person by the Minister within 72 hours after it is granted, except

(a) where the judge orders the authorization to be served at some other time . . .

And it continues.

The point is, Mr. Speaker, that these types of bills are extremely complex. It's detailed tax legislation. The Wildrose has been committed to the need to be able to receive input from all sorts of people when it comes to stakeholders, perhaps experts on tax law. I know that my colleague from Strathmore-Brooks has a better grasp on this particular issue than I, but the point is that we really haven't had that chance to hear from experts, which is why I would like to propose an amendment to the bill.

Do you want me to continue with the amendment?

**The Speaker:** Do you have a copy?

**Mr. Cooper:** Yes, I do have copies here for everyone in the House. It's a notice of amendment that I'm proposing. Do you mind if I read it and then wait for it to be passed around, Mr. Speaker?

**The Speaker:** You may read it while it is being distributed.

**Mr. Cooper:** Continue while it's being distributed?

I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, be amended by deleting the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member has proposed an amendment to second reading of Bill 4, to implement various tax measures, which we will refer to as amendment A1. Is there anyone who would like to speak to the amendment? Are there any members? The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

**Mr. Hunter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise to talk to the House about this amendment and share my acceptance of it and that I will support it. I think the premise behind this motion is that we need to slow down, that we need to take a look at this bill. We need to commit it to committee so that it can be studied and we can make sure that it is the right bill, that will support Albertans and help Albertans.

5:10

I guess the concern I have is that in the past, as I've talked to different ministers and asked them if there's been an economic impact study done on certain measures that they're bringing forward, it seems that the preliminary work that should be done on bills to make sure that they are good bills is not being done and that

there is a need by this government to pass these bills without proper consultation with expert witnesses, without proper consultation from those people who will be affected by it.

I find this alarming and concerning, and I'm not the only one. As I've talked to different members of my constituency and as I've traveled throughout the province talking to other Albertans, they are concerned at the speed with which these bills are being put forward and passed. They're concerned by the lack of consultation that should be there by this House and by this government for passing these bills. I think that it goes against the understanding of how this House should work. This should be a place where we have proper, sober thought, where we're not rushed on issues, where we're not forced to make rash and quick decisions. I've always found in my life that when we do that, when I've done that, the outcome has not been good, and it is my concern that if we rush forward rather than actually putting it to committee and allowing the committee to properly look at this bill and look at the ramifications, the consequences of this bill, we will be in a situation that we don't want to be in.

We are the voice of Albertans. We represent them. We've stepped forward – each of us has stepped forward – with the intent of being able to represent Albertans to the best of our ability, and I think it's wrong for us to be able to go forward with this, and it's not properly representing fellow Albertans if we move this through the House as quickly as it is being moved.

I strongly urge this House to accept this amendment. I urge the members opposite to consider again the consequences of a rash and a quick decision. We have seen in times past where members opposite have made quick decisions, where they have gone forward and made decisions where maybe they should have taken longer to think about these issues and then been in a situation where they've had to come back and say: "You know what? Oops. We made a mistake. We need to do better."

This is a great opportunity for that. We are bringing forward an amendment that I think is in the best interests of all people in this House, and I would urge, strongly urge all members to consider it. It's a short amendment, but the intent is good. The intent is, again: let's slow down. Let's think this stuff through. Let's make sure that we have the right approach for all Albertans, and let's make sure that Bill 4 is the kind of bill that Albertans will be accepting of.

With that, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak on this amendment, and once again I urge the members of the House to consider it. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there any questions or comments to the Member for Strathmore-Brooks? No?

Are there any questions or comments to the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner under 29(2)(a)?

Hearing none, the Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

**Mr. Fildebrandt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to speak to the amendment to move this bill to committee. The members of this House recently voted to move Bill 203 from the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, an act that would prohibit government announcements and advertising during by-election and election periods. Members across deemed that that bill, however small and modest that bill was – and that bill was crafted nearly word for word from an NDP bill in Manitoba that the NDP here had campaigned on. We had already agreed on that bill, but the members across decided that a bill even of that nature should still be going to a committee. That is a small bill. That is a private member's bill.

This, by contrast, is a monstrosity of a bill, not a monstrosity just for its content but for its size and its effect on the people and finances of Alberta. A bill of this nature and of this importance

deserves proper study. It deserves to hear from experts in their fields. It deserves to hear expert testimony from academics, from economists, from accountants, from third-party interest groups. It deserves to hear the kinds of inputs that are necessary for crafting all good legislation. Instead, this government is trying to ram this through the House right now.

Now, members here might want to wax eloquent about the contents of this bill, why we support it or why we don't support it, but it's important for us to consult. The members across felt that it was important to consult on the issue of 203, a bill that every member of this House supports. Well, this is one that not every member of this House supports. In fact, I dare say that every member of the Official Opposition and, quite possibly, some of the smaller parties do not support it as well.

This is a budget that is not just going to change policy, but it's going to change the rules of the game. It is going to allow the government to change the accounting of the province, to present the books in a different way yet again. It is going to allow the government to put forward five-year fiscal plans without a shred of detail for the fourth and fifth years. It allows the government to make things up as it goes along. It allows the government to make projections for balanced budgets into the future without any plan to actually get there. That is changing not just policy, Mr. Speaker, but it is changing the very rules of the game. When you're changing the rules of the game, we should probably take the time to consider it carefully and move it to committee.

It is also changing policy itself, though. It is increasing our debt ceiling from its already high level right now to a whopping 15 per cent of GDP. In a province that has by far the highest GDP per capita in the country, that is not a small sum of money. We deserve the chance to debate this issue around debt financing, about what the appropriate level of debt is, if we should be borrowing for just capital or also for operational expenditures. That is a fundamental debate, and it deserves to have expert testimony hearing it. If the government feels that it is necessary to send a bill consulting about how ethically proper it is to make government announcements and spending announcements during by-elections, then certainly a bill that does not share consensus in the House and that is of this kind of magnitude deserves to go to committee.

This bill will also raise a raft of taxes. We already had a long list of taxes increased by the former government. We then had another long list of taxes increased by the new government in June, that saw income taxes go up, saw business taxes go up, excise taxes go up, taxes on insurance, taxes on birth, taxes on death, taxes on just about everything in between. That bill did not go to committee. This bill proposes to further increase taxes. It proposes to tax insurance. We have sin taxes in the province. For some reason or another we want to tax our sins, our vices like alcohol, tobacco, and gasoline. I understand the point of taxing some things that we want to discourage, but insurance is a social good. This is something we should be trying to encourage as a province, not something we should be trying to discourage. But for some reason we have decided to put a tax on this, for reasons I don't understand.

**5:20**

The government has not consulted anybody in the insurance industry. The Insurance Bureau of Canada has spoken about this. They've said that they were not consulted and that the costs will be passed on to consumers. We should be listening to the Insurance Bureau of Canada. We should be listening to consumers. We should be listening to underwriters. We should be allowing that kind of expert testimony to come before us as this goes to committee.

We're seeing fees go up: fees on courts, on camping, as I said, on birth, on death, fees on a long list of services that Albertans rely on.

It might be justified, or it might not be. But we're not going to get a chance to hear from a single stakeholder. Alberta's Legislature, Alberta's democracy, belongs not just to the politicians that occupy it; it belongs to the people who send us here. That's why it's important that we have a committee that this goes to so that we can listen to Albertans themselves, the people being impacted by this.

The bill will also have an effect on quarterly financial updates for the government, on the kind of data that is to be provided. There's been an improvement on this front. But, again, we're not going to have the chance to listen to a single accountant, a single economist, a single academic or expert who knows about the topic. This is an opportunity for us to invite expert testimony, to listen to people who know what they're talking about and hear what they have to say. If the government believes that small bills, just because they're proposed by the opposition, should go to committees for study, then surely they believe that their own bills that do not enjoy consensus in this House and that are of monumental importance to the governance and future of this province should be going to committee for study.

Mr. Speaker, I'll close by saying that I know members across know that this is right. Their government whip or House leader might tell them to do something different, but they know that this is right. They know that bills should be going to committee. When the four members who make up the governing party sat in opposition, they demanded a committee system for all bills to go through. Those four members know that I'm right. The government's private members know that that I'm right. I beseech them to listen to their own conscience, to listen to their own democratic ideals, to do what they know is right, and to send this bill to committee for proper study.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there any questions or comments for the Member for Strathmore-Brooks under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

**Mr. Hanson:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Hon. member, do you think that Albertans have been well represented in the debate on this bill or this amendment? If no one from the opposite side is willing to stand up and put their name on the record supporting or opposing the bill, are Albertans actually being represented fairly in this House?

**Mr. Fildebrandt:** Thank you to the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills for his question. I think the answer is obvious to anyone who has watched this rather invigorating and exciting debate on the changes to the accounting rules of our province. Every member of the Official Opposition in this House has risen to speak about Bill 4, to express our concerns for taxpayers, to express our concerns for young Albertans, who will pay for this. By contrast, the Minister of Finance has not risen once today to debate or defend his own bill.

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

**The Speaker:** A point of order is noted.

#### Point of Order Speaking Twice in a Debate

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The minister has spoken to the bill. The hon. member ought to know that each member is only allowed to speak once to each bill. So the minister is not eligible to speak again to this bill except to close debate. The hon. member should remember those rules of this House before he,

in a misinformed way, uses them to attack members who aren't here.

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, do you have any comments?

**Mr. Hanson:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. Just to clarify, the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks did not name the minister absent. He only said that he didn't speak to it today. He didn't say that he hadn't spoken to it at all. I don't think that this constitutes a point of order, sir.

**The Speaker:** The point of clarification on the point of order has been accepted. I think all members ought to be more clear about those kinds of comments in the future.

Could you proceed.

**Mr. Fildebrandt:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I was not referring to the minister's original introductory comments to the bill. I was referring to his lack of participation in the debate today under 29(2)(a) or responding to other members, which the minister has every right to participate in.

#### Debate Continued

**Mr. Fildebrandt:** Moving beyond that, the members of the Official Opposition have spoken to this. We've spoken about issues passionate to us, about why this is important for taxpayers, why it's important for Albertans, but we have heard only a single private member from the government side speak to this. I thank him for his comments and contribution to debate. We've heard a member of the Alberta Party speak to this. We have heard a member of the Liberal Party speak to our debate today.

We have not heard anything warranting their numbers from government members, which is one reason I feel passionately that we should be sending this bill to committee for discussion, for consultation from Albertans. This bill has not had proper input from Albertans. It hasn't had consultation. It hasn't listened to a single expert. It was merely produced in the Department of Finance and dropped on our desks. The government members seem intent on not actually debating the contents of it, which is one reason why we should send this bill to committee and listen to Albertans directly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) for the Member for Strathmore-Brooks?

Seeing none, I recognize the Government House Leader.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'd like to address the amendment that's been put forward by the hon. Official Opposition House Leader to refer the subject matter of Bill 4 to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2. Now, in the discussion that has occurred, one might conclude from listening to the Official Opposition that there will be no opportunity for further discussion of the details of this bill or to provide any amendments, and that, of course, is simply not the case.

This bill is essential for the financial supply of the province. This, in addition to the Appropriation Act, forms the cornerstone of the provincial budget. Now, as members in the House know, in the spring session the government passed a supplementary supply bill, which provided funding to continue the operations of the government till the end of this November, which is now, I think, slightly less than two weeks away. As the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship is dealing with estimates, it's clearly unable to do what



the Official Opposition is suggesting; to wit, hearings, listening to evidence from experts, and so on.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, we know that this bill will be considered in Committee of the Whole. There will be an opportunity for further debate, and members can bring forward and represent through writing or through their speeches comments of any experts that they may wish to engage with respect to this. But, clearly, if this bill was referred, as the Official Opposition wishes, to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, it would be unable to do the things that the opposition wants and have the bill back in the House so that it could be considered for third reading in time to meet the deadline of November 30. So it's really rather irresponsible, in my view, to go down this direction.

What the Official Opposition is suggesting essentially would lead to the government being unable to pass its budget because this bill is necessary for the Appropriation Act. The two go hand in hand. Therefore, what the opposition is essentially proposing is that the government operations would grind to a halt at the end of this month, and government employees would no longer be paid. We could not continue with the services that the government provides. So I would urge all members to oppose this particular amendment.

We will, when second reading is concluded on the bill, of course be moving to the Committee of the Whole, and the opposition will have ample opportunity to introduce any detailed discussion they wish, any expert opinions that they have been able to solicit. They can represent their constituents' concerns very effectively, I have no doubt, and they can introduce any amendments that they wish. That is, in this case, the most appropriate direction to go. In other cases I might agree with the Official Opposition that a bill might be directed to one of the standing policy committees. In this case, Mr. Speaker, it's, frankly, impossible, and I would have expected the Official Opposition to have realized it.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Under 29(2)(a) you have a question for the Government House Leader, Strathmore-Brooks?

**Mr. Fildebrandt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Government House Leader well knows that this isn't about games. This is about the need for committee, a need that he spoke about very well and eloquently for over a decade in opposition. He knows very well that the Committee of the Whole does not allow us to bring in outside experts and testimony. It restricts our ability to putting forward amendments, which the government will promptly shut down. It doesn't allow us to bring forward people who might know better than the people in this House, accountants, economists.

The Government House Leader said that they cannot put this to committee now because there's not enough time to pass it before their interim supply runs out. Well, perhaps they shouldn't have waited until after the federal election to give us these bills to begin with, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps they should have called us back in the summer to give us a bill to pass. Perhaps they should have brought this forward in September. Instead, the government has been playing political games, holding back a budget from Albertans to help out their federal NDP cousins. Some good that did. The government has been playing political games with the timing of the budget. That is why they are now saying that they must pass it in the next two weeks.

Well, guess what, Mr. Speaker? It's not our responsibility to pay for what the government has done with its own political games in the timing of the budget. There is enough time to send this to committee, and it is my assurance to the Government House Leader

that if this does go to a proper committee, we will not be playing games to hold it up. We will put forward legitimate witnesses to hear from about what we should be doing with this bill. It doesn't even have to be the Resource Stewardship Committee. We could put it forward to any committee. I'm happy to do it. I'm happy to work as long or as late as is necessary to get this done.

Mr. Speaker, it is the government who is afraid of criticism, who is afraid of expert testimony from people who are likely to tell them that this bill is hogwash, that it waters down our accounting rules, that it is dangerous fiscal policy to allow us to go to a 15 per cent debt to GDP. They know this because Albertans are against this budget. The minister knows this, and that is why they are shooting down our recommendation to do what he himself has stood and advocated for for over a decade in this very Chamber, to go to committee. I don't buy the Government House Leader's excuse that they need to get this done because they could have given us this bill three months ago.

**The Speaker:** The Government House Leader.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, nothing could be further from the truth. While the opposition was making claims that the government was holding back the fall budget, this government was working day and night trying to get the budget ready for the date that we had set. If this party, God forbid, should ever form a government, they will realize – they will realize – just how much work government is and how much work a budget is.

When they were saying in the summer that we should be bringing forward the budget now, that we were deliberately delaying it for the federal election, they were just talking through their hats because we were working very hard to try and meet the deadline that we had set for ourselves. Making a budget, especially for a new government, especially after 44 years of an old government, is a very, very difficult and daunting task, and it is an enormous amount of work. For the people on this side to constantly chirp and repeat that some games were being played relative to the federal election is just the crass political speculation of a desperate opposition party, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't support the amendment, and I rise to speak against it. Bill 4 is a commendable piece of legislation which deserves to be passed.

**The Speaker:** Excuse me, hon. member. We're still on 29(2)(a).

**Mr. Dach:** Certainly.

**The Speaker:** Do you have a question of the Government House Leader?

**Mr. Dach:** Yes. I could ask the Government House Leader, sir, if he feels it is the intent of the opposition, from his view, to slow down passage of the bill by their amendment or whether it seems to be their intent to grind passage to a halt. [A timer sounded]

**The Speaker:** We are dealing with the amendment identified as A1. Are there other members of the House? The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

**Mr. Hanson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to stand and speak to the amendment to Bill 4. My concern with Bill 4, as I stated to the member . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, you're speaking to the amendment. Is that correct?

**Mr. Hanson:** Sorry. Yes. Yes, I'm speaking to the amendment. My concern is that Albertans have not been consulted on this bill. It's a very important bill, and it needs to go to committee so that Albertans can be consulted. I don't believe that a lot of the members have had the opportunity to go to their constituents and get their opinions because if they did, they'd be standing up in the House and either speaking for the bill or against the bill.

Our members have all risen and spoken to this, to the bill, and now we'll speak to the amendment because we've actually gone out and talked to our constituents. They understand that this is going to affect them, their future, their children's future, and their grandchildren's future: \$50 billion of debt, unknown interest rates going forward. It's a bad bill. It needs to be considered by professionals. Albertans need to be consulted, and I would suggest to all of you members opposite that you go and speak to your people in your constituencies and actually get their opinions.

Thank you very much, sir.

**The Speaker:** Are there any questions of the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

5:40

**Mrs. Aheer:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just would like to speak a bit about the need for committee. The whole point of having committee is to consult, so I would like to direct my question to the minister.

**The Speaker:** Excuse me, hon. member, you can only address your questions to the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

**Mrs. Aheer:** Thank you. Sorry.

Regarding the committee and the aspects of committee, the point is to talk about how this is going to impact Albertans and how we feel that they haven't been consulted. As the minister had mentioned previously, this task is daunting. It requires a committee of people to come together to discuss how to take on this daunting task. Over and over again we've heard that they've inherited these issues, that they've inherited what they're dealing with right now. We would love the opportunity to be able to discuss this in a committee situation on behalf of all Albertans, to sit down and make sure that this is actually the direction that the government should be going.

In relation to that, this should be a situation of going across partisan lines to discuss how to move forward, so I would just like to say in regard to this comment that that would be the reason for needing to go to committee. The whole point is to consult. The entire point is to be able to discuss this at length, to make sure that we're making accurate decisions with regard to the budget, with regard to the future. I'm not sure about how the timing would work, but the need for committee is to consult.

Thank you.

**Mr. Hanson:** Thanks very much for your comments on the question. I don't personally believe that Albertans in Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills are any different from Albertans in southern Alberta, Edmonton, or Calgary. Indeed, I've spent the last couple of weeks in Edmonton. I've been talking to people that actually live in the city here about some of the bills that have gone through and some of the comments and the length of time we get to discuss them, and I can assure you that if you actually go out and speak to people in Edmonton and Calgary in your ridings, you're going to

hear the same thing. These bills need to have more time, they need to be put to committee, and Albertans need to have their say. There are experts out there. We're not all experts in economics. Passing a bill like this, that's going to affect future generations of Alberta, needs to be considered in depth and put to committee.

Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Games are exactly what we're playing here. The opposition is engaging in what they're actually supposed to do as an opposition, I would imagine, but we're rejecting the games they're playing because we believe the intent is not to forward debate in the House. What it is intended to do is to actually halt progress on debate. The Legislative Assembly of Alberta, this body, is the supreme committee to which legislation can be presented and debated. If the Official Opposition, the Wildrose opposition, would have spent the time debating this bill that they have in attempting to amend the bill by sending it to committee, we might have produced something . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, I want to clarify. Are you speaking to 29(2)(a), or are you speaking to the amendment itself?

**Mr. Dach:** To 29(2)(a), I was hoping.

**The Speaker:** Thank you. Great. Keep going.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Therefore, the bill is necessary for appropriations, and the intent of the government, of course, is to have it debated in this House without sidetracking it and to ensure that it receives the full and complete attention of the Assembly rather than trying to obstruct its progress by sending it to committee. That's what we intend to do.

**Mr. Hanson:** I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-McClung. I believe . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, you're speaking to his question?

**Mr. Hanson:** Yes. Thank you.

I thank the Member for Edmonton-McClung for his statements, I guess, and for playing along with us. I really appreciate that. My question would be: could he possibly stand up when he has the opportunity and tell us what his constituents are saying? I don't believe that he's actually talked to his constituents about Bill 4; otherwise, perhaps he would stand up in the House and go on the record and tell us what his constituents think of this preposterous bill, that's going to affect them and their grandchildren and their mortgages in the future.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** I don't believe you will get a second opportunity under 29(2)(a).

Is there anyone wishing to speak to the amendment itself? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

**Mr. Orr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just do want to say that I believe it is important that we send this bill to committee. Schedules can be arranged. If we have to stay at night, I guess that's what we have to do. I don't know. I don't really want to do that personally, but this is an extremely important bill, and we do have to address this thing in a way that doesn't just push it through in a hurry.

Maybe I could just try to emphasize the reality of it a little bit for the hon. members across the floor. A little bit of sober self-reflection here would be extremely important because when you go

to vote for this bill, each and every one of you will be voting a billion dollars of debt on the Alberta people. Your vote is a personal vote for a billion dollars of debt. I wonder how many of you would be prepared to sign a personal loan guarantee on that. There is a need for sober self-reflection here, which is the whole point of committees. We need to think about that, and therefore I am voting in favour of the motion.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Just for clarification, the table reminded me that, in fact, contrary to my first opinion, you can speak twice under 29(2)(a), so my apologies to the member.

Are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka?

Is there anyone else who would like to speak to amendment A1? The member for Fort Macleod.

**Mr. Stier:** Livingstone-Macleod, sir, but that's quite fine. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** I'm getting close.

**Mr. Stier:** Well, good afternoon. I see that the hour is approaching where we're all looking forward to taking a break, but I have to say that I have some comments to make on this amendment, Mr. Speaker, and it is to the amendment that I am speaking. I'd just like to say that this is one of the most important bills that has come before us in this Legislature for this session. This is one of those bills that talks an awful lot about debt and going into debt, and it is something where we're not only talking about going into debt to finance large capital projects and all that kind of thing, but this bill talks about having us actually go ahead and look at borrowing money to do our operations.

If we look at the simple homeowner, who usually and typically in our society today borrows money for capital expenditures like their home and their car and so on, we're actually with this bill going to exceed that idea and go to borrow on, say, credit cards or any other lending mechanism to buy the groceries, to buy the gas, to pay for the babysitter, to pay all of those normal expenses. That's what this bill includes, ladies and gentlemen.

This amendment is actually, I think, a great idea. This amendment speaks to taking such a serious situation and moving it to a larger group; that is, a committee. The committees in this legislative process are vital, and they're important to us. They provide an opportunity for various parties and participants in this House to look at something in more detail. It also provides, Mr. Speaker, an opportunity for these meetings to include the public and have some great, proper consultation.

When I look at some of the things that we are talking about today and some of the comments we've made earlier, I think it's something we have to be very conscious of. I mean, let's be clear. This bill is about enabling higher taxes and more debt because this government continues to want to spend. It allows the government to run operational deficits for decades, putting debt onto future generations. It's absolutely hard to imagine, having been here for the past three and a half, four years, seeing where we are now and what we're faced with. This is something that needs proper scrutiny, and I think that a committee would be the exact place where this should go, Mr. Speaker.

5:50

More debt means more servicing costs. These servicing costs could be used for so many things. In my earlier comments today on this bill I talked about what all these kinds of monies could be used for, vital components to today's society. When we're looking at all

of these things now in such a small manner today, why shouldn't we look at going and sending this bill to committee? I cannot find a valid reason yet from all I've heard here this afternoon.

We should focus on spending taxpayers' dollars more efficiently. We should look at how we're running up our credit limits every day. We should look at what some of the lending institutions around the world are saying about us now as compared to the past. We had what was talked about the other day; I think someone coined the term "gold standard." We had the gold standard in our society as far as our credibility in the world today in terms of the world markets. We do not necessarily have that any longer. The policies of this government have now suddenly tainted our reputation around the world. Just think about that: tarnished our reputation from what we had for years and years and years.

I think we should be creating legislation that's beneficial to us, Mr. Speaker, not detrimental, and I'm looking at this opportunity that we have tonight of going to committee with this very important bill and scrutinizing it in detail and looking at it on a page-by-page, section-by-section basis and ensuring it's the right thing to do.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, I'm very much in favour of this amendment, and I will be voting in support of this amendment. Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** Are there any questions for the hon. member under 29(2)(a)?

**Mr. Fildebrandt:** Just very briefly, Mr. Speaker. I remember that the Member for Livingstone-Macleod was on a committee that travelled the province to study bills that the NDP in particular, roughly two years ago, found controversial. The former government brought forward bills to reform government-sector pensions, and the NDP in particular found it extremely objectionable. I remember that the NDP fought for those bills, which were also considered urgent by the government of the day, to go to a committee and travel the province. I remember that the Member for Livingstone-Macleod was there at that rather excited meeting where I had a chance to testify as, may I say, an expert witness. Perhaps the Member for Livingstone-Macleod could talk about that experience and why the NDP's demand for that bill to go to committee was equally as important.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Stier:** Well, thank you for the opportunity, and thanks to the Member for Strathmore-Brooks for the question. Yes, I did commit a lot of time over the past few years to some of these committee meetings. In fact, that one actually took me across the province. I remember spending one day on those ventures where I had to fly from Calgary and then I had to fly up to Fort McMurray, in fact, and later on I had to fly back to Calgary the next day so that I could get a hop up to Grande Prairie because we were offering . . .

**Mr. Connolly:** Do you have a biography that I can buy?

**Mr. Stier:** Yeah. I'll give you a biography if you want, sir, any time. I'll send it to you.

Mr. Speaker, sorry. Back to the point on the question that was posed to me. We spent an awful lot of time allowing the public to come to every one of those meetings and raise their concerns on a couple of very, very, very important issues to do with the pensions. I think it is important, in that same example that the Member for Strathmore-Brooks has raised, to understand that that is what this Assembly is about. It's about ensuring that we make the right decisions on behalf of Albertans. During that time many speakers came from the public and, yes, from the Canadian Taxpayers

Federation to ensure that the members of the committee had the most important, crucial, and detailed information they could have before they came back and made recommendations to the House on that matter.

With respect to what we're talking about today, the committee suggestion in this amendment is an important suggestion. It is something that should be seriously considered not only just for ourselves in this House, Mr. Speaker, but for all of the people that we represent in Alberta.

Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** Any other questions or comments to the Member for Livingstone-Macleod under 29(2)(a)?

Are there any other hon. members who would wish to speak to the amendment known as A1?

Hearing none, I will call the question on amendment A1 on Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act.

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 4 lost]

**The Speaker:** We are back to the original motion. Are there any other speakers to the original motion?

I hear none.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That being good progress today – the House has done very good work today – I'll move that we adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]





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