



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 23, 2015

Day 21

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)	McKitrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)	Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (Ind)	Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
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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)	
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Party standings:

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

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Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 23, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us reflect. Each of us reflects in a different manner, some of us with a prayer based on our faith belief, others in a manner of self-contemplation. In whatever manner you choose, please remember the victims of the horrendous events in Mali and the incidents in the vacant streets of Brussels. Please continue to consider how we in this little corner of our globe might make this world a safer place and one not controlled by fear.

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

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade and Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly His Excellency Pavel Hrnčíř, ambassador of the Czech Republic. His Excellency is accompanied today by Mr. Jerry Jelínek, the Czech Republic's honorary consul in Calgary. I'm pleased to say that there is great potential to build on the Czech Republic and Alberta's strong relationship, which includes ties in trade and investment, education and culture. Albertans value our relationship with the Czech Republic, and this visit is a great opportunity to explore new areas of collaboration in energy, renewable energy, agriculture, information and communications technologies, and other innovative industries. We will continue to work together to strengthen our existing ties and foster new ones to ensure continued growth and success for both of our jurisdictions.

His Excellency Mr. Hrnčíř and Mr. Jelínek are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. I would now ask our esteemed guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly MLA Jane Shin, who is an ND member visiting us today from the B.C. Legislature to see the great work that we can accomplish here with an ND government in Alberta. I had the pleasure of being introduced by her in beautiful British Columbia, and I'm honoured to return the favour. Jane was first elected as the MLA for Burnaby-Lougheed in May 2013 and currently serves as the opposition

spokesperson for small business and deputy spokesperson for trade and multiculturalism. Prior to her election, she was actively involved in community service organizations such as the Canadian Red Cross and the Multicultural Society of B.C. She is the first Canadian of Korean descent elected to the Legislature of B.C. I kindly ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Are there any school groups to mention today? The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of home-schoolers and their parents and chaperones from my constituency of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. As I say their names, I would ask them to rise and please stand: Ina Hofstede, Felicia Wierenga, Rianne Viersen, Andrew Viersen, Sharon VanAssen, Kevin Tiemstra, Beatrice Tiemstra, Fettje Viersen, Helena Kruidhof, Eric Kruidhof, Rebecca Hofstede, Esther Hofstede, Mark Wierenga, Leanne Wierenga, Rachel Wierenga, Kelvin Viersen, Thomas Viersen, Daphne VanderZyl, Doug VanderZyl, Wesley VanderZyl, Ian VanAssen, Andrea VanAssen, Esther VanAssen, Saralyn VanAssen, Jayden Tiemstra, and Graham Tiemstra. I would ask that they please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Good job with the pronunciation, hon. member.

Are there any other school groups? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly three family members of one of our current pages, Erin de Kleer. Joining us today in the Speaker's gallery are her father, Rob de Kleer, and her oma and opa, Tina and Pete Meyer. While Rob and Erin reside in the constituency of Spruce Grove-St. Albert, Tina and Pete reside in my constituency of Airdrie. This year actually marks their 60th wedding anniversary. They're here to observe Erin in her role as a page at the Legislature. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of delegates from Japan being hosted by Alberta Innovates: Health Solutions. They are here sharing ideas about a variety of subjects related to health research, training, and innovation. They include Dr. Suematsu, president of the Japan Agency for Medical Research and Development; Dr. Saya, professor in the Institute for Advanced Medical Research at Keio University; Mr. Noda, managing director, department of international affairs, AMED; Dr. Michalak; as well as Dr. Valentine, who is the interim CEO of Alberta Innovates: Health Solutions. I ask that my honoured guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very honoured to introduce Jackie Manthorne, president and CEO of the Canadian Cancer Survivor Network. This is a national organization of patients, families, survivors, friends, community partners, and sponsors. Its mission is to promote the very best standard of care, support, follow-up, and quality of life for patients and survivors of

cancer. Prior to joining the Canadian Cancer Survivor Network, Ms Manthorne was, for 12 years, the CEO of a national health care charity working in the area of breast cancer. She currently resides in Ottawa with her husband. Good luck to the Redblacks. They have an adult daughter and are foster parents to teenagers.

The Cancer Survivor Network is in Alberta this week to talk about survivorship and the challenges that cancer survivors face after treatment ends. Jackie is in the public gallery. At this time I'd ask her to stand and receive the hearty welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure indeed to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three outstanding members of our incredible caucus operations team led ably by director of operations Kelly Bickford, joined today by Caitlin Pettifor and Saira Wagner. The operations team supports our caucus and staff to ensure the smooth functioning of the day-to-day actions and tasks that are so important to our success here as a team. They do a fantastic job. I'd ask that they stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a second introduction for you today. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly several guests joining us from the Edmonton Korean Canadian Association. I'm pleased to note that we have a large contingent representing the association today who are excited to watch the proceedings this afternoon. I'd ask them to rise as a group and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my distinct pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some of the members of our caucus communications team. Led by Director Murray Langdon and ably supported by Reakash Walters, Eric Rice, and Leah Orr, the communications team works hard to support our caucus in media engagement and overall communications work. It is work that is near and dear to my heart, and I appreciate what they do for us. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the family of the late Rolf Reiner Albert. Mr. Albert first came to Alberta in 1953 with his wife, Elisabeth, and their first child, Sigrid, who join us today in the gallery. For just over 30 years, 1957 to 1987, Mr. Albert served our province as a photographer for the Public Affairs Bureau. Over this long and dedicated career he photographed visiting dignitaries, local culture, important events, and the beautiful landscape of Alberta. Specifically, he was the official photographer for several of the royal visits from England and several of our Premiers and their cabinets during that time. Several thousand of his pictures are actually preserved in the Alberta archives, and some are on the walls of the Legislature buildings. It is my honour and privilege to introduce to you Mr. Albert's wife, Elisabeth Albert – they were happily married 39 years – his son Reverend Fred Albert and his wife, Gina; his daughter Ms Sigrid Albert; and a friend, Bruce Mohacsy. I ask our guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House a home-schooling family from my constituency of Stony Plain. As part of their curriculum focusing on government this year, Gaylene Layden brought her two children to my office. The questions they asked me were thoughtful and provoked good discussion. Gaylene, Kayla, and Adam, please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my incredible constituency staff. Since joining my office shortly after the election in May, Maria Vicente and Denis Sidlin have proven invaluable not only to me but also to my constituents in Edmonton-Decore. Also joining us today are the proud parents of Maria, Cosima and José Vicente. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. member, aren't you fortunate that you don't have to wear a certain coloured shirt here today in the House?

Are there any other guests for introductions today? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to the Assembly my constituency assistants, Emily Springer and Colette Fluet-Howrith. Emily joined my office in June and Colette joined in September, and since that time they have become an indispensable part of my life as MLA for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Whether it's preparing for a budget consultation session, accommodating my completely outrageous demands, helping someone with their AISH or WCB files, or patiently explaining why we can't personally pay out of pocket for a constituent's eyeglasses, they provide dedicated service to the constituents that I represent every day. They do it all with smiles on their faces, or if they absolutely can't smile, they at least grit their teeth so it looks like a smile. I ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some friends of mine and absolute leaders in the sector of disability services, Paul Fujishige and Jamie Post. If you would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of guests to introduce today. First, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly several stakeholders from harm reduction based organizations, who are here to witness the debate in the House later this afternoon. Joining us today are Jennifer Vanderschaeghe, Karen Turner, Tia Smith, Sue Belcourt, Maggie McGinn, and Jessica Daniels. Could you please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Jackie Loewen and John McDonald. Jackie is a constituent of Red Deer-

South and was born with congenital cataracts and developed glaucoma at the age of 13. She is an active volunteer, dedicating her time recently as a CNIB champion, one of the many advocates throughout the province advocating on behalf of those living with vision loss. John is the executive director and regional vice-president for CNIB, who is launching a new campaign today that encourages Albertans to share their wish for a better future for those living with vision loss. I'd like to ask both of them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Leduc No. 1 Energy Discovery Centre

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is a province rich in history and represents the cultures of many working together to build a prosperous future. My beautiful constituency of Leduc-Beaumont is no different. Currently there are many groups working hard to preserve this history. Today I'd like to just recognize one of those places, the birthplace of the modern-day oil industry, Leduc No. 1 Energy Discovery Centre. It's not over in your riding; it's in mine. It's situated on the corner of highways 19 and 60 among some of the most beautiful farmland in the county.

Leduc No. 1 offers the opportunity to learn about the history of oil and energy exploration in Alberta. This history began in 1947, when Imperial Oil, after many failed attempts, successfully drilled for crude oil in Leduc, and this discovery undoubtedly changed all of our lives. The discovery centre has exhibits, including the world's largest drill bit, displays on the oil sands, pipelines, and the Canadian Petroleum Hall of Fame, and is one of the only sites in the world where visitors and tourists can safely explore an operational oil rig. Visitors will find incredible pictures from the original exploration – I suggest that you guys go because it's quite incredible – and an art exhibit showcasing perspectives on the industry from some of the finest artists in Alberta. There's even a belt buckle display, donated by the hon. Minister of Energy's late uncle Gordon McCuaig, which is quite a thing to see.

1:50

It's not just about history there, however. The interpretive centre has become a place to learn about alternative energy sources, including solar arrays, interactive kinetic energy displays, and some exciting, upcoming new green energy projects. The site is a fantastic example of how to honour and showcase our history and still look to the future to learn new ways of doing things.

Not along ago our government announced that it would increase funding support for tourism, heritage, the arts, and nonprofit organizations. This is fantastic news for organizations like Leduc No. 1 and the other hard-working heritage and cultural societies in the constituency.

I encourage you all to visit it because it's an incredible place.

Oral Question Period

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

Carbon Tax

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are worried about their jobs. More of them are hurting than ever before, and now this NDP government has broken trust with them. At no time during the election did the NDP tell Albertans that they would introduce a \$3

billion-a-year carbon tax on everything made in Alberta. That's on top of the \$1.5 billion in tax increases that the NDP did campaign on. To the Premier: why should Albertans trust her government on anything when she is saddling them with billions of dollars in new taxes when they can least afford it?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. During the election our platform said that we will phase out coal-fired electricity generation to reduce smog and air pollution, and this is exactly what we're doing. We're moving forward, and we've done so with workers. We also have a job-creation strategy. When we've been working with workers and employers, they told us that it was really important that we address our international reputation. That's why CNRL, Suncor, Shell, Cenovus, CAPP, TransAlta, and Capital Power are all coming and saying that this is good for Alberta and good for Alberta jobs.

Mr. Jean: Yes, they did, but I don't work for big oil; I work for Albertans.

This new tax on everything will hurt Alberta's economy and put more Albertans out of work. By the way, it won't actually reduce any emissions. Every product that is exported from Alberta requires electricity or fuel. This new tax will make everything we export much more expensive and less competitive. This tax on everything will hurt the export of energy products, forestry products, agricultural products, and manufactured products. Why is this government trying to cripple our export sectors, which create most Alberta jobs?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, just to continue with the list: Grand Chief Alexis, the Calgary Chamber of commerce, the leader of the Alberta Liberal Party. Employers are telling us that they need to have a better international reputation so we can actually get the pipelines built that the member opposite failed to do when he was in Ottawa. This government has got a plan to address the environment, address climate change, and create jobs, and the member opposite knows it.

Mr. Jean: The NDP should stop sticking up for big business. [laughter] This carbon tax will be a job killer. Exporting industries will lose out and employ fewer people. But this tax will also take money out of the pockets of every Albertan, and you should stop laughing about that. Every single one of us will pay more to drive vehicles, heat our homes, turn on the lights. Every Albertan will pay more for products produced in Alberta or goods transported to Alberta. The Premier never campaigned on any of this. What makes the Premier think she has a mandate to kill jobs and raise the prices of everything for normal, everyday Albertans?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We did campaign on taking leadership on the climate change strategy, and that's what we're doing. Leadership is bringing forward a variety of different stakeholders, including environmental NGOs as well as job creators, industry, and coming up with a plan that's going to help build Alberta jobs and build pipelines because we need to make sure that we've got an opportunity to invest, to be leaders. The world is looking to us for that, and so are stakeholders from throughout Alberta. They've come forward. They've said that this a strategy they can get fully behind and that it will create jobs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jean: The media release on the carbon tax says that it is "revenue neutral." Not only is the NDP hurting our economy, but

now they have decided to change the meaning of words. A new tax which brings in new money and which takes more money out of Alberta's economy is not revenue neutral. Albertans will pay \$3 billion in new taxes thanks to this NDP government. The government will spend the new money. No one will have any of their existing taxes go down. Can anyone over there explain how this is revenue neutral?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Our government is working with leaders throughout Alberta to come up with a reasonable way to move forward, and this has been seen as being very moderate. Albertans want to be able to pay their bills, and they will be able to pay their bills if they have jobs, and they will only have jobs if they have a strong international reputation. We're really proud of the fact that we're moving forward with this plan. Albertans are proud, and we're going to move forward, and we're going to have a reputation that can make us all hold our heads high.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, revenue neutral means that the increases in the new taxes are offset by decreases in other taxes. The whole point is that you use people's inclination to avoid taxes as an incentive for them to reduce their emissions. Good idea. That is not happening here. This is a new, added tax. Nothing is getting reduced. The government is taxing more and spending more. Albertans will lose jobs, and they will become poorer. Will the Premier admit that this is nothing more than a tax grab on the backs of Alberta's hard-working people?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our plan is fully focused on making sure that we support Albertans and that we take leadership on the climate. To make that happen, the revenue that we collect will be put to work here in Alberta. We're not going to wait for Ottawa to tell us what to do. We came up with and built an Alberta strategy that will invest money back into Alberta businesses and the economy. People who are emitting at a higher rate will be discouraged from doing so by having a price on that carbon. We're also going to be making adjustments to how families make ends meet and in support of small businesses, First Nations, and people working in the coal industry, and we're really proud of that.

Mr. Jean: British Columbia has a revenue-neutral carbon tax. In B.C. the government is required by law to prove that carbon tax revenues are offset by other tax reductions. When they created their carbon tax, they reduced other taxes to keep government revenues at the same levels. Business taxes went down; personal taxes went down. None of that is happening here in Alberta. In fact, taxes under the Alberta NDP only go one way: way, way up. Why is the government telling Albertans that this new tax on everything is revenue neutral when it is clearly not?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, we're taking the revenue that's being generated from this and investing it back into Alberta's economy. When the member opposite was asked this morning if he was proposing a plan like B.C.'s, he said that he wouldn't introduce a carbon plan. He would wait three and a half years until the next election before he came up with a solution. We're working to protect our environment and protect our jobs today.

The Speaker: Third question.

Mr. Jean: Three billion dollars in new taxes is not the solution Albertans want. Mr. Speaker, the rollout of this new tax on everything was a rushed affair, and it has to lead to questions. Some of what the Premier said yesterday doesn't match what is in the actual climate change report. Yesterday, after telling us the whopper that this tax is revenue neutral, the Premier said that in the future the carbon tax could be used to pay down debt, but the word "debt" does not appear anywhere in the climate change report. How exactly will a revenue-neutral tax ever generate extra money to pay down debt?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, this strategy has been endorsed by a variety of stakeholders, including Brian Ferguson from Cenovus: "We fully support the Government's new climate policy," Lorraine Mitchelmore from Shell: "Today's announcement sets Canadian oil on the path to becoming the most ..." [interjections] – would you like to hear the answer? – "... environmentally and economically ..." [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. minister, could you please finish your statement?

2:00

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. "Today's announcement sets Canadian oil on the path to becoming the most environmentally and economically competitive in the world." We need to make sure that we have a strong international reputation. To make that possible, we need to take action in Alberta, and we're doing just that.

Mr. Jean: Standing up for big oil. What a shock.

It isn't a surprise that the Premier's spin doesn't agree with the report. In fact, the report doesn't actually agree with the report. In one place the report says that the carbon tax will cost families \$500 a year more for fuel, electricity, and natural gas. Our calculations using the numbers from the report suggest that tax increases just for fuel and natural gas are over \$590 a year. Can the Premier tell us exactly how much more the average Alberta family, not corporations, will pay for fuel for heating their homes and for electricity under this new NDP carbon tax?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, we're absolutely open to hearing feedback from Albertans on how we can continue to invest the money that's generated through this fund, but it's important that we have a strong reputation. Part of that is having a realistic price on carbon, and the heads of CNRL, Shell, Cenovus – members opposite say that people endorsing this are extremists. Would he say that those members are extremists? I don't think so. They're employers that create jobs in Alberta, and we're proud to move forward in partnership.

Mr. Jean: I mentioned that the word "debt" isn't in the climate change report. Another important topic that isn't mentioned is oil pipelines and market access. This carbon tax will take at least \$45 billion away from Albertans by 2030, not Alberta corporations but Albertans. It will kill jobs and make every product we buy more expensive. Everyone will feel it. But maybe, just maybe there's some good news here somewhere. Can the Premier name any opponents of Alberta's pipelines who will now support our efforts at market access because of this great, new, NDP carbon tax?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. I am really proud of the fact that we had environmental NGOs join industry and say that they're in support of this. For example, the former vice-president of the United States Al Gore came out publicly in support

of this, and we know that he was one of the people that . . . [interjections] You asked for an environmentalist. He was absolutely not keen on moving the pipelines forward under the previous model. He thinks this is a balanced, fair model moving forward and . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: I was having some difficulty hearing the minister. Could you please proceed? [interjections] Hon. members. Could you start again, Madam Minister?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to hear people who often refer to climate change denial in a way that acknowledges the environmental role that environmental NGOs play in our nation and in our industry. In Alberta we're really excited to work in partnership with environmental organizations as well as industry to move forward with having the strongest reputation we possibly can because a strong reputation is going to mean good results for the climate and good results for jobs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Climate Change Strategy

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, just yesterday the NDP government unmasked their climate tax policy. If other energy producers in large economies are not subject to the same standards that Alberta is, it will put Alberta workers at a huge disadvantage, and it won't help the climate. You know what? Albertans want to do their fair share. In this light, what assurances can the government give Albertans that China, India, the U.S., and other oil-producing countries will adopt the same standards so we're not at a disadvantage?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We're really proud of having a built-in-Alberta strategy that's going to absolutely help our international reputation. Obviously, today the first ministers are meeting in Ottawa. It's really important that Alberta be a leader instead of being the one that everyone looks to for blame. We're really proud to be moving forward to Ottawa with a made-in-Alberta strategy that will also be brought forward to the international table in France later this month. We're absolutely willing to do our part. I know Albertans are. We do want the rest of the world to do their part as well.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear any assurances there.

Given that the Premier has said before that she's not picking winners and losers, this policy shows otherwise. The losers are anyone involved in the coal industry. We've been told that we're transitioning out of coal, but there's no news about what we will transition into. Can you tell those people in Drumheller, Wabamun, Hanna, and Wainwright that you are taking their jobs away? When will you replace them with new jobs, and what will those new jobs be?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The local MLAs have absolutely wanted to make sure that everyone's understanding what an important industry it is in their communities, but we also know how important our air is. Every single Albertan breathes our air, and we need to make sure that we're doing everything we can to keep it clean. We're working with communities and the businesses that they rely on to develop adjustment plans that make sense for each individual

community. Absolutely, it's important to us to make sure that we have new jobs created, and we're working in partnership with those industries to make sure that we can help transition away from coal.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, given that the NDP job losses are now and for sure and the job gains are later and completely uncertain, Albertans deserve to know before this Premier takes away their livelihoods, especially those who are losing jobs where coal plants are shut down: when are the plants shutting, what will the compensation be for the employees, and what liability will the taxpayers have for closing things down that are operating legally today?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There was a plan to phase out coal under the previous government, and as the member opposite just asked the question, I'm sure he's well aware that it's important to have negotiations with the communities, with the employees, and with the employers to make sure that we have a fair system. Here, for example, is what TransAlta said. "The Premier has committed to an orderly transition that ensures system reliability and price stability for our customers, given that it is now certain that coal-fired generation will be phased out by 2030." It's going to be a transition. It's going to be a 15-year strategy, and they want to make sure that they can continue to move forward with a reputation they're all proud of, and so do we.

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

Seniors' Housing

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During some of my meetings with my constituents many seniors in my community have expressed concerns over housing. Many of these constituents are on fixed incomes and cannot cope with higher housing costs. I have constituents who are well into their 70s who are working full-time, living paycheque to paycheque. Their housing costs equate to 60 per cent of their income. To the Minister of Seniors: what programs are available to seniors to assist them with independent living?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. All Albertans deserve to live in a safe and secure home no matter what their income, and this year our investment will add more than 800 new social housing and seniors' lodge units across Alberta, something we can all be very proud of. We also provide an Alberta seniors' benefit to 150,000 low-income seniors every month, which means that more money is in their pockets to ensure that they can have their finances meet their needs.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: given that your performance measures for the budget state a target of lowering the percentage of housing facilities in poor condition in order to raise the percentage of those in good condition, why has the percentage of housing facilities in fair condition, 62 per cent, remained stagnant?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We are making investments in affordable housing, but we have inherited over a billion dollars in

deferred maintenance costs from the previous government's failing to maintain their current stock. This is an important problem, and it's going to require significant investment, but it won't be solved overnight, and it certainly wouldn't be solved by cutting \$9 billion in infrastructure spending, as proposed by the Official Opposition.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Drever: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta is forecast to reach 1 million seniors by year 2030, which will represent 20 per cent of our population, what infrastructure investments is this government making in order to meet that forecast? What investments are being made in long-term care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We are absolutely committed to ensuring that we build 2,000 long-term care beds. This was a commitment we made in the election and that we're thrilled to be moving forward on. It's really important to us that everyone has the right care in the right place at the right time, and that includes long-term care in a variety of communities as close as possible to where seniors currently live. The opposition parties want to allow for cuts in the budget; instead, we're absolutely committed towards moving forward in a reasonable way, increasing investment in infrastructure, and ensuring that seniors can live with dignity and respect.

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

2:10 Pipeline Development

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's energy industry supports the government's plan to address climate change, but it knows we need to increase market access, and pipelines are a safer path to achieve this. No new pipelines were created under previous governments here or in Ottawa, leaving the industry without the infrastructure they need. To the Minister of Energy: what are you doing to support new energy market access, creating much-needed new jobs?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, our climate leadership plan is a good first step. We've engaged industry and environmental groups to move forward to get that new market access that we need to tidewater, both east and west.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that pipeline safety continues to be a concern for many Albertans, to the same minister: what are you doing to address concerns around pipeline safety and spills to ensure that these pipelines are safe?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, Alberta enjoys some of the toughest regulations, not just in Canada but in North America, with the AER. We are continually working with them to make sure our pipelines are safe. We also have been looking, when there are spills, at what we can do to make things better and get a great environmental record moving forward.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government has committed to consulting with and learning from indigenous

people, again to the Minister of Energy: what are you doing to ensure proper First Nations consultation around pipeline projects?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, in all our departments we are working under the Premier's direction to look at our processes in working with First Nations groups. In my case our department is looking through policies to see where we can strengthen processes, and we're also working with the AER in their part to see how we can strengthen processes in working with our aboriginal partners.

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

Energy Policies

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quote: we can't wait for others to act; we can't wait for others to determine Albertans' future. End quote. Does this sound familiar? That was a former Premier. He put a price on industrial emissions. He started the building of government-subsidized carbon storage facilities, but it wasn't enough for radical activists. Greenpeace is still demanding that the oil sands be shut down, and politicians in America still call our oil dirty. How does a new \$3 billion tax on everything do anything else besides make every Albertan poorer?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. You know, Albertans are not followers. Albertans expect us to lead. This is a made-in-Alberta plan that takes action before plans are imposed on us. That is why this plan led to such historic co-operation between oil sands and environmental groups. It is time for Alberta to lead again.

Mr. Loewen: No answer there.

Given that NDP MLAs themselves have called our oil dirty and given that now the same people who contributed to our image problem are now saying that they're going to fix it and since the NDP strategy is to tax everyone and everything, raise power bills, and keep more of our oil in the ground and since the NDP bragged that this \$3 billion tax will help us get our product to market, will the Premier now start advocating for the Northern Gateway pipeline? Will she start advocating for the Keystone XL pipeline? Or does she prefer that the oil stay in the ground?

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, this climate leadership plan will be put to work right here in Alberta, making sure that all revenue builds our economy and creates jobs and reduces pollution, promoting greater energy efficiency. Let's just go through a little tour of the validators on this matter, shall we? Steve Williams of Suncor:

Today we reach a milestone in ensuring Alberta's valuable resource is accompanied by leading carbon policy. It's time that Alberta is seen as a climate, energy and innovation leader. This plan will make one of the world's largest oil-producing regions a leader in addressing the climate change challenge.

This from one of the largest employers in the Leader of the Official Opposition's riding.

The Speaker: I hope the hon. member doesn't take us on too wide a tour next time because time is very valuable.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Loewen: Again no answer. No surprise.

Mr. Speaker, Wildrose cares about the environment and our economy. Given that this new carbon tax will be nothing short of a

massive experiment with Alberta's economy, with no guarantees that it will reduce emissions, does the Premier know what the total cost of these climate change initiatives and creating a massive new bureaucracy will be to government, to consumers, and to the industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. You know, the Official Opposition is really the only voice speaking out against the leadership that Alberta is taking on climate. The Official Opposition is out on an island alone, and I would suggest that without action on climate change, the sea levels are going to start to rise around that island.

You know, the chairman of CNRL shared with Alberta his thoughts on this matter: Alberta wins with today's announcement. "The announcement is a significant step forward for Alberta" and for the industry. It was a historic display of co-operation yesterday.

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

Air Quality in Alberta

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's climate change strategy was announced yesterday, and I want to acknowledge the government's effort to move Alberta forward on this critical file, that touches many ministries. Now, your focus on methane raises concern amongst Alberta farmers. Cattle, sheep, goats, elk, and bison are all ruminants, and they produce methane. Now, the only way to reduce these emissions would be to legislate reduced livestock production or to legislate a change in ruminants' digestive physiology. To the agriculture minister: are either of these measures being contemplated by your government?

Ms Phillips: I would like to thank the hon. member for the question, Mr. Speaker. Of course, this climate change plan does come with a methane reduction program within the oil and gas sector. It is a product of collaboration, again, between environmental groups and industry. The fact of the matter is that, yes, in agriculture we have certain inputs, certain outputs. Moving forward, we will work together with the agriculture sector on this matter, but this plan contains within it a robust approach to methane reduction in the oil and gas sector.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that improved air quality is one of the stated objectives of the climate change strategy and given that the Health minister today trumpeted how the measures announced would improve Alberta's air quality and respiratory health, to the Health minister: is it your position that breathing Alberta air is hazardous to the health of Albertans?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Of course, I have jobs to make sure that people who have asthma, which about 10 per cent of Albertans do, have resources available to help them access supports when they need them. There's nothing scarier than not being able to breathe. It's also our responsibility to make sure that we have a plan to make our air cleaner moving forward, and that's why I'm so proud that we're moving to a phase-out of coal within 15 years.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that questions over air quality have been raised by both the environment minister and the Health minister, suggesting that breathing could be a health hazard, and given that Travel Alberta's award winning tourism brand slogan is

Remember to Breathe, is the Culture and Tourism minister working with Travel Alberta on a new slogan?

Mr. Eggen: No, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question as well. In fact, we are using Remember to Breathe. It works very well in places around the world that have serious air pollution issues, and certainly it's one of the most successful advertisement plans that we've had in the history of Travel Alberta. We're expecting another record year for tourism internationally and locally here in the province of Alberta, and they're going to come to see our wonderful new climate change plan, too.

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

2:20

Carbon Tax (continued)

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has introduced a \$3 billion carbon tax grab under the pretense of reducing carbon and mitigating climate change. There are jurisdictions around the world that are 30 to 40 years ahead of us on carbon reduction and energy efficiency. To the minister of environment: where's the empirical evidence, the statistical evidence, or case studies showing that these kinds of measures introduced this fast and this extensively do indeed demonstrate an effect of reducing carbon emissions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, this climate leadership plan will ensure that all revenue is recycled back into the economy for purposes of adjustment to support small businesses, making sure that families have the supports they need to make ends meet, and to invest in First Nations communities with municipalities and others. We know that these efforts taken together will bend the curve on emissions, which is exactly what our trading partners have been asking for.

Mr. MacIntyre: Mr. Speaker, it should concern us all that they do not have the evidence to back up their plan. This is a \$3 billion carbon tax grab and nothing more, being levied against a tiny population of only 4 million people. For this tax to be truly revenue neutral, we should be seeing it coincide with a proportionate decrease in income tax. When is the minister going to admit that the government has no intentions of implementing a truly revenue-neutral tax? This is nothing more than a tax grab.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for the question. You know, there are really two ways to deny the science of climate change. One can do it outright as the Official Opposition has done in the past. That didn't work out so well, so the new, more clever way to deny the science is to suggest that we should do nothing at all.

Mr. MacIntyre: Mr. Speaker, I asked for empirical evidence so that the people of Alberta could have confidence in what this government is proposing, and given that we do not have this empirical evidence, I can only assume that this increase is going to hit the price of every good, every service in the same manner as a PST. Will this government admit that this is their way around the referendum required for a PST, a referendum this government hasn't got the political capital to pass?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the message from Alberta's job creators yesterday was loud and clear. It couldn't have been more clear. For example, the Calgary Chamber of commerce: "Pleased to see our provincial government take a strong stance on climate leadership today. Important for business." Is the hon. member of the Official Opposition seriously suggesting that Alberta's job creators got it wrong in their support for our climate leadership plan?

Mr. Fildebrandt: I've been asking the Minister of Finance for weeks now where he is going to get a 16 per cent boom in revenues for years 4 and 5 of their budget. Yesterday we finally got an answer: the equivalent of a 3 per cent PST on Albertans in the form of a carbon tax. If this tax was truly about the environment and not a cash grab, the government wouldn't have announced it during church and Sunday morning football. Is this a carbon tax intended to protect the environment, or is this a backdoor PST intended to fill their budget hole?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. We are absolutely proud of the plan we brought forth. It has support from industry throughout Alberta and environmentalists as well. In terms of the timing of the announcement, we planned on making the announcement today, and then the first ministers were called to Ottawa today. We wanted to go to Ottawa with everyone knowing what our plan was, not with Ottawa telling Alberta what their plan is, so the made-in-Alberta strategy was announced yesterday.

Mr. Fildebrandt: The same mindless talking points over and over. This carbon tax was advertised as revenue neutral, but it is clearly just a backdoor cash grab from a government with an insatiable appetite for more taxes and more spending. This government has already raised dozens of taxes on Albertans, and this carbon tax will raise the price of virtually everything in the province, an ND PST, if you will. Does this government believe that families really have another \$900 a year to feed their insatiable spending addiction?

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. Our government is focused on protecting Alberta's economy, creating good jobs, and stabilizing our core services. What the opposition fails to recognize is what the previous government failed to do. If we do not address climate change, if we do not improve our environmental standards in this province, we are hurting ourselves, and we aren't going to gain that market access. So I'll tell you what we are doing. We're taking leadership; we're showing leadership. We've come out with a most strong environmental climate change strategy, and through our initiatives we are going to be enhancing our economy and creating jobs.

Mr. Fildebrandt: They're not taking leadership; they're taking Albertans' money.

Given that B.C.'s carbon tax was revenue neutral because they actually lowered business and personal income taxes to compensate taxpayers, if this was truly about the environment, this carbon tax would be revenue neutral so that taxpayers would break even, but it's not. This is a greedy tax grab in the guise of helping the environment. Will the government scrap its ND PST and come back

to this House with a plan for a revenue-neutral reduction in greenhouse gas emissions?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's nice to see the hon. member is allowed up from the Fildebentch every now and then.

Now, we know that members opposite don't want to talk about a plan. They don't want to talk about a plan for at least three and half years, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Point of order.

The Speaker: Do you have a point of order? Noted. Keep going, please.

Ms Hoffman: We know members opposite don't want to talk about a climate change plan for at least three and a half years. They said that they wouldn't talk about it until the election because they don't want to get out of bed in the morning, Mr. Speaker. But Albertans want to get out of bed, and they want to go to work, and the way they're going to make that happen is by having a good reputation and making sure that they can afford to pay their bills. That's exactly what this plan will do.

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

Forest Industry Issues

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government says that it's committed to economic diversification. This diversification is supposed to support industries outside of oil and gas; however, this is not seeming to be the case as another forestry company has been negatively affected. Millar Western just announced that they'll be closing the Boyle lumber mill by February 2017 and that another 91 Alberta workers will lose their jobs. My questions are to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: what is this government doing to protect forest industry jobs in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for his very pertinent question. Obviously, our government takes very seriously any job loss that occurs in any sector in our province. We recognize that forestry is a critical sector, with over 15,000 hard-working Albertans in forestry, and that the industry is a key economic driver in at least 70 communities. This is exactly why we are moving to diversify our economy, to support our forestry sector, looking for opportunities to add value to our existing sector and partnering with industry to do that.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Spray Lake Sawmills and the Boyle Millar Western operations have suffered from this government's decisions and given that this government has not even placed the member from this industry on its economic advisory panel, can the minister explain what they are doing to include forestry in the economic diversification conversations to enable success for the forest industry in Alberta?

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member again for his question. First and foremost, there isn't a greater champion of the agriculture and forestry sectors than the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. I can tell you right now that he is heading to Japan next week to look at opportunities to increase our exports,

to improve our market access and continue to build on our very healthy and robust relationship with Japan. The high amount of value-added processing activity in Alberta's forestry sector is a success that we need to maintain and build on, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

2:30

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government just increased the tax on fuel by 4 cents and will increase that tax by an additional 7 cents with their climate change rollout and given that lumber mills such as the one in Boyle rely on competitive fuel prices to transport their fibre supply, can the minister explain how an 11-cent increase on fuel is helping forest companies like this in Alberta to sustain and diversify their business?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for the question. First and foremost, our climate leadership plan is focused, again, on supporting Albertans and also on being a leader when it comes to climate. All revenue collected will be reinvested to work here in Alberta, building our economy, creating jobs, reducing pollution, and promoting even greater energy efficiency. I can tell the hon. member that we have an adjustment fund that will help families make ends meet, that will support small businesses, First Nations, and people working in the coal industry.

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

Public Transit

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of the opposition's questions today have been enough to turn a cow's stomach into knots. Hopefully, my question will illuminate rather than ruminate the province's climate leadership initiatives.

Alberta has launched exciting plans to reduce our impact on the environment. Public transit in our cities will support these endeavours. Alberta has grown by 785,000 people in the last 10 years, and the mayors of Edmonton and Calgary promote transit's importance in helping our cities address growing populations. To the Minister of Transportation: what funding is currently . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think you're going to have to be a lot quicker or shorter on your preamble, more on the question. Does the minister wish to respond?

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just heard, before the member trailed off, about public transit. Public transit is a major priority for the government. It's going to continue to be so. We've got some money leftover in GreenTRIP, about \$415 million – \$130 million is left for the Calgary region and \$285 million for other municipalities other than the two biggest cities in the province – so we'll be announcing a third call for applications for GreenTRIP shortly.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that my constituents want to know about LRT in our neighbourhoods, to the Minister of Transportation: what updates do you have on LRT funding in Edmonton?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, I had a very productive meeting with the mayor of Edmonton this

morning, and LRT was very prominent among the items that we discussed. So far we've allocated \$274 million of GreenTRIP funding to the valley line LRT project in Edmonton. This is in addition to a \$200 million interest-free loan and \$150 million in funds to match the federal government's contribution to the project. We know that moving people in the big cities is critical, and our government is here to support those cities.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we have a new federal government, to the same minister: how is your ministry communicating with your new federal counterparts about the transportation infrastructure needs and priorities of Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, as the hon. member may know and some members on the other side of the House may know as well, there's a new federal government, and I'm very much looking forward to continuing my ongoing dialogue with my counterpart, Minister Sohi, the infrastructure minister in the federal government. We know that the Liberal government in Ottawa has promised \$60 billion over 10 years for infrastructure, and we're going to look very closely at how we can co-operate to leverage as much of that money as possible to improve the . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Carbon Tax (continued)

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents in Bonnyville-Cold Lake are joining thousands of Albertans who are worried about the government's reckless announcement of a carbon tax. One thing is clear. This is a carbon tax that is taxing everything. Prices on goods and services are bound to increase while families in my ridings are losing their jobs. It will hurt seniors on fixed incomes, it will hurt families, and it will hurt our most vulnerable. How is this government going to offset the pain felt by this new carbon tax at a time when they are already hurting?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. As the Premier said yesterday, every penny raised through the carbon price will be put to work here in Alberta to build our economy, create jobs, and reduce pollution through research and technology. We will ensure that we are helping families and others make ends meet through an adjustment fund. We'll support small business, indigenous peoples, municipalities, and others to make this adjustment. We will ensure that families will not have trouble making ends meet as a result of these policies.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, no answers from over there.

The fact remains that the cost of living is bound to skyrocket thanks to the NDP carbon tax. Given that it is a fact that cost of transportation of goods is going to continue increasing because of this NDP policy, through the increase in the carbon tax, which will in turn result in a cost of hundreds of dollars each year for each and every family, to the minister: how will implementing a carbon tax on Albertan

families to pay for corporate welfare programs help Albertans who are out of work?

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again I'll remind the member, as we've stated before, that there is an adjustment fund that's intended to help small businesses, First Nations, people working in the coal industry, and families make ends meet. I'll remind the member as well that that's exactly why the Premier created this ministry, and through it we have increased ATB's capacity to lend to help small businesses. We have a job-creation incentive program, which will create up to 27,000 jobs over the next two years, and we've invested \$50 million in the Alberta Enterprise Corporation. Our government is taking action and showing leadership.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again the answer is more corporate welfare.

But let's talk about revenue neutral. That's what the government is promising. That is what they're selling as this new carbon tax to the public. Given that we know this isn't true, that this is a new tax on everything that's going to nickel and dime Albertans at every corner and since there is no reduction in taxes, why is this government deceiving Albertans by saying that this tax on everything is revenue neutral while attacking our most vulnerable Albertans?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I'll say it again and hope that the hon. member and his colleagues listen. All revenue collected will be reinvested into the Alberta economy to ensure that we're creating jobs and reducing pollution. Our climate change plan will invest in new technologies and help to diversify the economy, something the previous government failed at doing and something that the Official Opposition would have us do nothing about and instead hope and pray that a pipeline will get built when instead what's needed is action. We are taking action, and through our climate change leadership strategy we will work with . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the election the NDP promised that it would not impose a provincial sales tax. It did refer to developing an energy efficiency strategy and a renewable energy strategy, but it never even hinted at a province-wide carbon tax. To the Premier: 6 out of 10 Albertans did not vote for your government, and those who did believed you when you told them that you would not be introducing a PST, so how can you now blindsides the people of Alberta with a carbon tax that will pick their pockets in the same fashion as a provincial sales tax?

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. Right from the get-go we were the only party during the election to have a climate change strategy, and I applaud the Premier and this government for implementing that strategy within six months. Our climate leadership strategy is actually going to help diversify the economy and gain us access to markets that previous governments failed to do.

Mr. Rodney: Since we didn't get an answer there, let's try the environment minister.

Given that one of the goals of imposing a carbon tax is to encourage Albertans to actually change their lifestyles and become more emission conscious and given that hundreds of thousands of Albertans are already adhering to a green lifestyle by driving fuel-efficient vehicles and retrofitting their homes to increase energy efficiency and using public transportation and more and given that Albertans will suffer under the same tax regime as those whose behaviour you're really targeting, how is it fair to impose a punitive tax measure on Albertans who are already doing their best to address climate change?

2:40

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for the question. With this plan we will ensure that low- and middle-income families and households do not have trouble making ends meet as a result of these policies through the adjustment fund. You know, the fact of the matter is that we will also have approaches to energy efficiency and so on so that families can reduce their own price on carbon expenditures. Over time that is exactly what will happen as we implement the policies right here in Alberta with our made-in-Alberta plan.

Mr. Rodney: Let's try this a different way. Given that Alberta's environmentally responsible citizens will feel the same financial pain as those whose behaviour you want to modify through this carbon tax on fuel and electricity and natural gas and given that these environmentally responsible Albertans deserve credit, not punishment, are these citizens just part of the collateral damage of your new tax, or will you provide them with compensation for the fuel efficiencies that they've incorporated into their daily lives? And, oh, by the way, while you're at it, Minister, where do we find this in your budget, exactly?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, the hon. member read the climate change panel and our response to it and read the whole report. I'm sure the hon. member took the time to do that before asking the questions, so he will know that the price on carbon is to be phased in as of January 1, 2017, and with it will come with an adjustment for families in order to make ends meet.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Climate Change Strategy

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we have a climate action tax plan now, so let me share with you what I taught my students at NAIT in energy management master planning, which I'm sorry the opposite members didn't attend. It's a discipline with over 30 years of proven strategy, and the single most important pillar of success in energy management requires a plan that reduces energy consumption, reduces energy cost, increases productivity, and increases product quality. Any plan that fails on any three of these is actually a threat, and this plan is a threat to our quality of life and does not achieve our shared goal of encouraging sustainable

energy development. Let me be clear. That pillar is not achieved in their plan.

Punishing every Albertan for turning the heat on in the winter is not an acceptable solution to climate change. The NDP carbon tax compromises our competitiveness as a jurisdiction, it threatens jobs, it undermines the financial security of every Albertan, and by their own admission the plan is going to cost Alberta families \$900 a year by 2030, and that does not include the added cost to every single good and service consumed by our citizens from this flow-through carbon tax.

This plan strives to replace, apparently, two thirds of our province's 44,000 gigawatt hours of coal generation with renewables. Let me give you a visual. Think nine times our existing wind capacity to be built within the short span of 15 years, or with solar we're talking about tens of millions of solar panels installed in just 15 years. Now, what happens when the wind doesn't blow and the sun doesn't shine, Mr. Speaker? There is no energy storage plan in this entire strategy. We will have to overbuild with natural gas to compensate for the inevitable off times of renewable energy sources or face even more costly and pervasive power outages. Let's be clear. I'm a renewables guy. This is my field, and I love renewables, but I also know their limitations. The secret to success for any energy strategy is to go slow, but instead this government has a plan that is massive, disruptive, and costly, and it hits Albertans the hardest.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Climate Change Strategy

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the NDP government announced its climate tax policy. We're looking forward to reviewing the entire plan in detail and talking with people, industry, and communities before we make our final comment. At first glance there are a couple of positive aspects. However, there are some things we are concerned about. Number one, we know the government only received the climate change panel's report in the past few days. The government's policy seems to have been developed well in advance of that report, so we're concerned that the panel's work is only window dressing for the changes the government wanted to make anyway.

Number two, we disagree with the economy-wide carbon tax. Alberta was the only and first jurisdiction in North America to put a price on carbon and then only paid by high emitters. We are concerned that this carbon tax is going to hit low-income Albertans at a time when many are already losing their jobs and struggling to make ends meet. This tax is estimated to take more than \$3 billion a year out of Alberta's pockets and into an expensive government economic intervention. Alberta households will pay over \$500 per year for their heating, electrical, and gasoline bills.

Number three, goodbye Alberta advantage. We believe the Premier broke her promise to Albertans before the budget that there would be no provincial sales tax. A tax this broad by any other name is still a tax. This carbon tax will affect every Albertan, not just higher income earners.

Number four, we have not seen any plan for transitioning communities and Alberta families who will be affected by the early phase-out of coal. We're concerned that Albertans continue to lose their jobs, and this government is still without a plan to address this. A mediator will not bring those jobs back. Albertans want to do their part for the environment. They always have.

Here is the bottom line, Mr. Speaker. The NDP job losses are now, and they are certain. The NDP economy is years or decades

away and uncertain and probably part of a fantasy economy, which may never exist.

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

Central Alberta AIDS Network Society

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fourteen cents: the cost of one condom. This condom can prevent down-the-road health costs of \$1.3 million if it prevents one case of HIV positive.

In my constituency of Red Deer-South we have a remarkable 27-year-old charity called the Central Alberta AIDS Network Society, which is responsible for sexually transmitted and blood-borne infection prevention and support in Alberta Health Services' central zone. The society's mission is to foster healthy responses to HIV and related issues through support, education, and research. In doing so, they undertake a broad range of rural and urban work, including prevention efforts and community outreach supports to those experiencing homelessness, gay and bisexual men, people living with HIV or hepatitis C, the street-involved and pregnant women and girls.

Twelve cents: the cost of one needle. That 12-cent needle could prevent a case of hep C, which could cost us anywhere from \$52,000 to \$327,000 if that person ends up requiring a liver transplant.

Since 1998 CAANS has been running an evidence-based harm reduction program, working to support sex workers and people who use drugs to reduce the risk of contracting an STI or hep C. This well-respected program distributes safer injection and inhalation supplies to over 450 active clients.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today and acknowledge the tireless work of the Central Alberta AIDS Network Society in strengthening our community's response to blood-borne infections through prevention and support.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

County Clothes-Line Foundation

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The County Clothes-Line Foundation is proud to be celebrating 30 years in Sherwood Park. In that time they have contributed \$1.6 million in grants and scholarships to local charities, community groups, and individuals within Strathcona county. They accept donations of gently used clothes, toys, games, books, and all small household items, then sold to the public at reasonable prices. Clients referred from local agencies are allowed to shop free in times of emergency.

Unlike some used merchandise stores, the profit from sales of the goods from the County Clothes-Line store goes back into the community through the County Clothes-Line Foundation. As these two entities work hand in hand, the generosity of people in the community continues to enrich the lives of the residents of Strathcona county. The County Clothes-Line Foundation grants funds generated by the County Clothes-Line store to Strathcona county nonprofit groups and individuals to assist them in initiating or supporting ongoing innovative projects or programs which contribute to a higher quality of life for the residents of Strathcona county. I know many seniors' homes have used these grants in order to address some of the needs that are coming up.

Applications for funding are submitted to the board of directors for consideration. Each application is judged on its individual merit and the perceived ability of the organization to meet its objectives. The County Clothes-Line Foundation strongly supports education and culture, local social agencies, and the concept of reduce, reuse, recycle, and repurpose.

2:50

The County Clothes-Line Foundation awards apprenticeship scholarships annually. The recipients are chosen by the Alberta apprenticeship board, and they must be training or living in Strathcona county. Their support has been ongoing to many local groups, and they have granted money to the Robin Hood association, the Strathcona Food Bank, A Safe Place, and the Saffron Centre, just to name a few. The continual contribution that they have in our community is something that we're extremely grateful for, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Carbon Tax

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the last election this NDP government ran on raising a lot of different taxes, but a carbon tax was never one of them. However, yesterday when Albertans were going to their places of worship, spending some time with family, watching the football game, the NDP announced a new carbon tax, which will increase the cost of everything for every single person living in this province: gasoline, groceries, electricity, you name it.

Mr. Speaker, this tax on everything will steal hundreds, possibly thousands, of dollars away from families at a time when they need them the most. Yesterday anti-oil activists celebrated the news of this NDP carbon tax. These groups have no jurisdiction in Alberta or interest in seeing us succeed. One organization even tweeted an image about how this new plan will keep over six million barrels of oil in the ground each and every day.

Shame on this government for rushing through this disastrous idea just to impress their friends in Paris. They say that this tax will be revenue neutral, but the revenues it generates will go straight back to the government and not back into the pockets of families who paid the tax in the first place. That is not revenue neutral, Mr. Speaker. That is a cunning tax grab. This is dramatic interference in the marketplace by an ideological government bent on risky ideas and economic experiments.

The Wildrose knows that there is no better social program than having everyday people having more money in their pockets to feed and support their families. The NDP has no mandate to bring this tax in. This government continues to kick Albertans when they're down. The Wildrose is the only party that will stand up for Albertans and fight against this government's carbon tax, which will make every family in this province poorer. We will be there for families every step of the way.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to give oral notice of a motion for tomorrow's Order Paper, that motion being:

Be it resolved that notwithstanding Government Motion 16 the Government House Leader may notify the Assembly that there shall be no evening sitting that day by providing notice under Notices of Motions in the daily Routine or at any time prior to 6 p.m.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of tablings for the written responses to the questions from my Health estimates from last week.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to also table the requisite number of copies of written responses to questions I committed to follow up on in my budget estimates debate of November 16, 2015.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to table the requisite number of copies in response to outstanding questions arising from the Standing Committee on Families and Communities, November 19, 2015, meeting in consideration of the main estimates for Human Services.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Larivee, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Minister of Service Alberta, pursuant to the Government Organization Act the Petroleum Tank Management Association of Alberta annual report 2014. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Ceci, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, responses to questions raised by Mr. Fildebrandt, the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks; Mr. Cyr, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake; Mr. Bhullar, the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway; and Mr. McIver, the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, at the November 3, 2015, Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance 2015-16 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we are at the point of my dealing with some points of order. The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Point of Order

Referring to a Member by Name

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order raised by a member present under 23(h) and (j), please, if you would: "makes allegations against another Member" and "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." The reason I use (j) is that the hon. minister knew full well that using that naming at this point would indeed cause or create some disorder in the House.

I refer you to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 613 and 614, and I'll quote from that. "During debate, Members do not refer to one another by their names." The minister actually did indeed use the member's name. On page 614: "The Speaker will not allow a Member to refer to another Member by name even if the Member speaking is quoting from a document such as a newspaper article." It goes on to say that "remarks directed specifically at another Member which question that Member's integrity, honesty or character are not in order."

I believe that under 23(j), indeed, it's been discussed in the House, it's caused disorder in the past, and the minister knew full well that using that statement would cause disorder in the House,

and I stand on that. We would ask that the minister apologize, and we can carry on.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this, that there is, in fact, no point of order. As members know and as the hon. member just pointed out, we cannot refer to members of this Chamber by name. What's interesting is that the member himself has used the term "Fildemath." I'll quote from *Hansard* on October 29.

The secrecy behind this announcement is concerning. The minister announced that of the 31 projects on the list, 25 were approved, meaning that six were not. If they're following the Fildemath, maybe they can know what's going on. The minister seems unwilling to tell us what the criteria were. Maybe she has good reason for cutting these projects; maybe she doesn't. Would she tell us why these projects were not approved?

At that time the hon. member did not raise a point of order against himself. You know, clearly, if that was not a point of order on October 29, then there is no point of order here today.

I do want to point out, Mr. Speaker, that the minister did not use the member's name. She did nothing other than what he has done in the past.

While I'm on my feet and we're talking about unparliamentary language, I'd also like to point out that the very member referred to the Minister of Health as mindless today. All members of this House are honourable, Mr. Speaker, and I think that language is close to the line of what is acceptable and what is not.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, do you have additional information to add?

Mr. Hanson: Just something I'd like to add.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I don't believe you get a second opportunity.

Is there another member who would like to speak to it? Is there another member that would like to speak to the discussion?

I have looked, very quickly, at the points being raised. I would point out to the hon. minister of economic development and to the member that I think I would be hard-pressed to say that when an individual member of the House chooses to use certain language, he or she owns it and has the responsibility of that. We all have that responsibility, so I'm not sure the argument that you're putting forward applies in the situation you're suggesting.

I would also suggest that all the members of this House realize that these kinds of words do have at times, depending on how they are used, an inflammation to the sore that already exists. I would very much like the members to please be much more conscious of these words. This is not a schoolyard. You have schoolchildren here, but that does not make this floor a schoolyard. I would ask each of you to not only respect each other but to respect the House and its traditions.

3:00

Notwithstanding those comments, the word that was used was not an actual reference to the individual member named. [interjection] I'm making the ruling right now, hon. member. Please. I would rule that there may be other times, but I do not believe that in this instance there's a point of order.

Orders of the Day Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 202 Alberta Local Food Act

The Chair: Would any hon. member choose to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Chair. I actually have an amendment to present, and I have the required copies to distribute. Should I just read through them or read them out?

The Chair: If you want to just give it a moment for the pages to distribute the amendment. We'll call this amendment A1.

Great. Hon. member, go ahead. Thank you.

Cortes-Vargas: Okay. Thank you. The amendments proposed were made from the lens of narrowing the focus of the bill and addressing the concerns that were discussed in the debate here in the Legislature and through consultations I've undertaken. As the list of amendments is long – it's two pages – I will make comments on the amendments by section.

Section 1 is amended in clause (e) by striking out subclauses (iii), (iv), (v), and (vi). Amendments to the definition of public-sector organization would narrow the focus to the advisory committees and would thus be for developing a realistic strategy that would recommend to schools, postsecondaries, and government.

Section 1 is amended in clause (f) by striking out "and Agriculture." The removal of "and Agriculture" throughout the document is done in an effort to narrow the scope and clearly identify the purpose of the bill, which has always been to be a driver for the local food economy by creating food security and improving, maximizing return on local food infrastructure. The striking out of "and Agriculture" will be seen throughout the document and will remain consistent, and I will no longer mention the strikeout.

Section 2 is amended by striking out clause (b) and substituting the following:

- (b) to improve and maximize economic return and food security by maintaining agricultural land for the purposes of farming;
- (b.1) to support the development of local food infrastructure for processing and distributing food.

The amendment divides and clarifies these two purposes, which the advisory committee will focus on.

The heading preceding section 3 is amended by striking out "and Agriculture."

Section 3 is also amended by striking out "and Agriculture," and "remuneration" is substituted for "renumeration." It's just a spelling error. They're pretty straightforward.

The heading preceding section 4 is amended by striking out "and Agriculture." Again, this is a change to emphasize the focus of the bill.

Section 4 is amended in subsection (1) by striking out "and Agriculture"; in subsection (2) by adding to clause (b) "recommendations for creating" before "long-term, mid-term and annualized targets" and by striking out subsection (c) and substituting the following: "(c) a public website including all recommendations included as part of the strategy"; in subsection

(3)(b) by striking out “, and” at the end of subclause (ii), by adding “and” at the end of subclause (i), and by striking out subclause (iii); in subsection (4) by adding to clause (a) “, organizations or groups” after “agricultural associations,” by adding to clause (b) “, organizations or groups” after “organic farming associations,” and by adding the following after clause (e): “(e.1) retail food associations.”

These changes have been made to reflect the actual intent of the advisory committee. The advisory committee will be struck with the duty to develop a strategy that improves our local food system, much like we saw with the climate change panel. That would facilitate this by adding recommendations for creating a committee that will be able to suggest viable options instead of mandating the public-sector procurement. Ensuring that public websites include all recommendations included as part of the strategy allows the committee to draft reports and collect data, but the local food sector is small enough that sharing the raw data itself will be limited to alleviating the concerns that a release of data would infringe on producers’ and processors’ right to privacy. As the committee is charged with consultation, “organizations and groups” include informal groups that we would often see. The inclusion of retail food associations is identified as important as they are an essential group in the local food system and its growth.

The heading preceding section 5 is struck out and the following is substituted: “Annual report.”

Section 5 is amended in subsection (1) by striking out “shall publish a report every 2 years” and substituting “shall publish a report annually”; in clause (a) by striking out “targets and”; in clause (b) by striking out “recommendations and targets during the preceding 2 years” and substituting “any recommendations for that year”; and in clause (c) by striking out “and targets in the next 2 years” and substituting “for the following year.” As the committee would be coming up with the plan, I believe that the progress should be available yearly, and accountability is essential to success.

Section 7 is struck out and the following is substituted:

Local Food Awareness Week

7 To promote the purchase of local food in Alberta, the Advisory Committee shall designate a week that shall be recognized each year throughout Alberta as Local Food Awareness Week.

Through the consultation process this change would charge the committee with identifying the best date for local food week to happen during the year so the effectiveness of the week is maximized.

Section 9 has been changed to define the act as coming into force on proclamation. This change is pretty standard, and it will allow for further consultation and public dialogue before it becomes law.

Thank you.

3:10

The Chair: Does any hon. member wish to speak to amendment A1? The hon. member for . . .

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah. It’s actually Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. They keep beating me up because we keep forgetting Sundre, so I don’t like to forget the guys back home.

There’s basically a lot in this document, and I’m not really sure how any member can in good conscience vote on this this quickly and actually know what is going on. I mean, this is pretty close to a rewrite of the entire bill, so I would suggest to the hon. member that she refer this to committee so we have some time to discuss this appropriately. If not, I can’t see how this caucus could vote on it in good conscience.

Thank you.

The Chair: Anyone else to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Yes. Thank you. I just want to echo my esteemed colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre; there are an awful lot of amendments here. We do have a parliamentary process in place called the committee, and I would very much like to see this bill go to committee so that we can discuss these amendments and the whole bill at length, go through it in a more fulsome manner than just ramming it through the House. So I would encourage the hon. member to refer this to committee so that we could have a good look at it and take a look at all of these different amendments that are in here. Indeed, in committee there may be some other amendments for improving this bill even further. I would ask the hon. member to do the honourable thing and make use of the legislative committees that we have in place for these things.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Yes, Madam Chair. I didn’t even receive a copy of this till after the presentation was over, so I haven’t even had a chance to read it yet. I don’t see how I can vote on it without time to consider it. I do think it needs to go to committee, or at least give us some time to read it since I didn’t even get a copy of it till after it was presented.

Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Chair. The two full pages of amendments that we’re seeing here in the short period of time since Bill 202 was first introduced show us that, you know, the bill itself was incomplete and deserves further study. It would be very unfair to ask us or any reasonable person to vote on an amendment of this complexity with this short notice. I use that term “any reasonable person,” okay?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Any other hon. member wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Madam Chair, it’s really my pleasure to speak to the bill and especially to the amendments. I think the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park has listened and has consulted widely not only with the constituents in her community but throughout the region, in Alberta. The amendments were written based on the feedback that she has received, so I would really like to urge the Assembly to support these amendments.

Thank you.

The Chair: Anyone else wanting to speak to the amendment? The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Chair. It’s my privilege to rise and speak in favour of this amendment. I appreciate some of the comments that the opposition has brought forward.

A couple of things. Much of this amendment is actually house-keeping in nature and cleaning up some language. There are a couple of points, though, that are a little more substantive, but I want to assure the members opposite that this amendment, that the hon. sponsor of this bill is putting forward, is based on feedback that they’ve garnered from engaging with the different industry

players, small and mid-size. This is something that they were asking for themselves.

I recognize that this can be a little bit of a challenge as far as getting an amendment and trying to flip back through the bill to go through it. I can tell you it's a challenge that we rose to for a number of years, in fact 44 years, going through different amendments that the government of the day put forward.

I do want to just highlight the fact that in part F, when it's talking about section 4, instead of mandating the targets, this is making recommendations for annualized targets, again coming at it from the point of view of targets that will be derived, that should be realized but that aren't being obligated to be met, so providing a little more flexibility in there.

The other section that I will highlight. In section 5 it's talking about reporting I believe it's yearly as opposed to every two years, which, again, just means that information will be more readily available.

Again, when I'm looking through the amendment, much of it is housekeeping in nature. Of course, section 9 is on the act coming into force upon proclamation.

I urge all members of the House to support this amendment, but I encourage further discussion with the mover of the bill should there be any. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chairperson. I just want to put a couple of things on the floor. First of all, again, I thank the member for her work. The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park and the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade talked at length about having fully engaged Albertans and people in Alberta involved in the food industry.

My goodness, are we having a different experience with this bill. Alberta producers I talked to have clearly – clearly – told me that Alberta's extraregulatory framework, Alberta's extra regulations, have already put us at a definite competitive disadvantage to other provinces. They feel absolutely strongly that with a system now where entrepreneurs and Albertans want to have independence, have had strong independence and absolute proper and prime supply of all kinds of local foods, from beef production to bees and honey to farmers' markets, which has worked so well to provide excellent pricing, excellent supply, this kind of thing is going in absolutely the wrong direction.

How sure am I that these people are easy to engage? Again, I'm surprised by what the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade and the hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park have indicated about this great discussion and communication with stakeholders. I already understand that in Lethbridge the government's first chance to communicate with farmers and ranchers about the bill changing occupational health and safety labour standards and workers' compensation is sold right out. People cannot get in. That's how eager this group is to be involved in the stakeholding.

I will say that my colleagues have adequate and real good reason to complain or to state that the intent of this bill is off, is missed on a strong industry that doesn't need help from the government, that doesn't need more government interference. I think, as one quick example, of abattoirs in my constituency that always talk about how many more there are in Saskatchewan, how much more competitive the industry is there, how much easier it is for the competition and the market mechanisms to hit the consumer in Saskatchewan than it is in Alberta. Guys, we're falling behind.

3:20

The intent of the bill is wrong. Some side of seven or eight amendments are thrown on our desks with no time to even try and make it more productive and more efficient for many, many of our good providers, many of them that are in their sixth generation of providing safe, quality, competitively priced food for all Albertans, all 4.3 million of us now. So I, too, will not support the amendments as I don't support the original bill.

When I had a chance to speak to this earlier, I talked about contrasting our food system. I talked about how you can walk into a farmers' market or how you can walk into a Safeway, a Superstore, a Costco and see such great selection, great variety, great prices. I ask the government to consider the comparison of that to Alberta Health Services, where it takes three years to get a semi-elective surgery. This is the area we're going down. You started down the wrong road. Now you're going down the wrong road way too fast. I ask that you consider what my colleagues said, and if you absolutely insist on passing this, let's at least move it to committee. These same people that are going to Lethbridge in record numbers to speak against your bill, your changes on occupational health and safety, workers' compensation, and labour standards without full consideration of the family farm, without full consideration of what these people have been doing for six generations, are easy to engage.

In the spirit of working together, I ask you to consider what my colleagues are saying. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other member wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Yes. Some of these seem to me to be more kind of technical errors than feedback. I'm looking at it, and, you know, if in the two weeks' time since this was introduced, you've come up with this many errors or changes, I think this really kind of speaks to the point that we need to have a chance to take this to committee and review it further, in depth. If we take this and bring it up to some of the experts in the field and have them have a chance to look at it, I think we might be able to find a few more things that would be required to make a better bill. You should have more consultation on this before it gets passed.

I would just say that I would move to have this brought to committee rather than having it done this way. I can't support this amendment as it sits.

Thank you.

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

If not, then we'll call the question on amendment A1 as proposed by the hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:24 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Nielsen
Babcock	Hinkley	Payne
Bilous	Horne	Phillips
Carson	Jansen	Piquette
Connolly	Kazim	Renaud
Coolahan	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl

Cortes-Vargas	Larivee	Sabir
Dach	Littlewood	Schmidt
Dang	Luff	Schreiner
Drever	Malkinson	Shepherd
Eggen	McIver	Sucha
Feehan	McKitrick	Turner
Fitzpatrick	Miller	Westhead
Ganley	Miranda	Woollard
Goehring		

3:40

Against the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Pitt
Barnes	Loewen	Schneider
Cyr	MacIntyre	Starke
Drysdale	Nixon	Strankman
Ellis	Orr	Taylor
Gotfried	Panda	van Dijken
Hanson		

Totals: For – 43 Against – 19

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: We are back on the bill. Are there any members who wish to speak to Bill 202? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Chair. I'll just be brief. I supported the amendment because I think it makes the bill less bad. If there was a further amendment to refer this to committee, I would also support that. But the bill as it is I couldn't possibly support unless it gets referred to committee.

The Chair: Any other member wishes to speak? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak about Bill 202. It would be, I guess, correct to say: the amended Bill 202. I find it kind of interesting that in many places this government sought, in their absolute distinct efficiency as many times as they could, to take the word "agriculture" out of the bill because that is part and parcel of the heritage of this province and is very important to the economy. A prominent Drumheller radio broadcaster likes to use the words: if you eat, you're involved in agriculture. I find that to be quite an interesting, common-sense statement in many ways.

Madam Chair, as you know, I have been involved in agriculture and farming all my life. It's a subject that is not just a job, but it's a way of life. I'm confident in saying that I have some, if not a lot, or a considerable amount of experience in this matter. My other job, though, is representing my constituents, and as their MLA I find that an onerous responsibility. It's actually my second term, and with that they report to me mostly on a daily basis. My cellphone certainly gets the brunt of that. There are many things about being an MLA that are puzzling, and one such instance occurred to me, similar to this situation, when my private member's bill was sent to a form of committee. It was actually initially voted down in the Chamber and then brought back. At the time I felt that it was a straightforward piece. The only amendment, effectively, was to quash the bill or to take it to another form of activity not in the Chamber. We could have achieved that discussion here and now in this Chamber. It's kind of a *comme ci, comme ça* situation. I think that in some ways this bill and some of the writings in it and some of the amendments may have many unintended consequences as we go forward.

The intentions of Bill 202 – and I've spoken to the member from Strathcona-Sherwood Park presenting this. Some of the discussions that we had unfortunately didn't make it to the amendment. I find that kind of interesting. I presented those changes with no malice and with as much openness as I believed there could be. So I find it interesting that there are other changes that we discussed, actually, in regard to the valuation of land, the description of land, going forward here, that are not in the amendment.

Sometimes generalities go off, and the gaps are then filled in by regulations. I'm anxious to see what this committee could bring forward, this advisory-only committee, which I find troubling, Madam Chair, in many ways.

Madam Chair, I'd like to advise yourself and the Chamber that there are many various types of farming operations that utilize this type of market with positive results. Local, small farms, year-round greenhouses, and, indeed, full-scale farms are all able to sell their products directly to consumers and retailers, but in some cases they have different standards. This situation has no allowance for traceability, and I'm concerned with that.

How do we determine the scale and what type of agricultural operations fall under this legislation? Do local community gardens and backyard beekeepers and commercial farms or, indeed, Hutterite colonies qualify? Hutterite colonies, Madam Chairwoman, are actually family farms on a completely different scale. They operate on a large scale. With that, I wonder how future legislation – there are bills that are going to be in front of this House that may or may not affect those scales of operation.

One of the major questions that remains unanswered by this proposal is exactly what segment of agriculture this act is being designed for. What, exactly, is the definition of an agricultural producer under this bill? Is it simply the growers? What about the livestock producers? Will there be an exemption for poultry, for beef, for commercial poultry, for commercial beef, for volunteer beef production, for volunteer poultry production? We have that in our legislation, and it talks about the potentiality of conflict going forward here.

Madam Chair, how can the government ensure food stability without product safety and product traceability? In this situation people that sell their goods – and in some cases the pretense, if you will, of the bill is to have government agencies procure all their food for this, whether that be hospitals, whether that be schools, whether that be seniors' care, whether that be penal institutions. They have to have a method of traceability for their food for safety going forward. I don't see that in this bill, and I'm anxious to see how this can be brought forward with an advisory committee. There's no definitive methodology to bring this forward. Under the agricultural producers act there is. I don't know how this can all be actually brought forward in a form that can create steady annual production or steady annual income for those people.

3:50

If it is required that numerous producers are needed to meet these public-sector needs and there is an issue with an agriproduct and an illness or issue arises, how will this act ensure that the traceability of supply is guaranteed? We don't have that in this situation. Traceability and safety of the food chain is paramount. How does this government propose to ensure that local producers meet the same requirements current commercial producers have in order to have their products enter the supply chain? There are no definitive requisitions within this act that would allow that. Having people produce food on open city blocks, that are open to the public or public vandalism, not unlike with commercial producers, there is no way and no methodology for the regulation of the chemicals that

are applied. There is no soil testing to the soil that the food is being grown on. So there is an unreliable methodology of the food that comes from that source.

Madam Chair, the processing act of this has implications as well. Processing of local food: how, for example, will local producers deal with the regulations and requirements regarding the slaughter and/or processing of livestock? I have spoken to the minister of agriculture on this very subject, and we have several small producers threatened by litigation by marketing boards even now as it is. They are voluntarily and, if I could say, Madam Chair, cooperatively coming together to market their own eggs, and they are facing the full brunt of the egg producers' marketing boards. Sometimes it's a good thing, and sometimes it's a bad thing. We need to know. If this is as successful as the member purports it to be, how could it actually possibly fit into the agricultural marketing boards' laws and acts that we have in the province?

I have discussed in this House previously the example of food supply. For the past four to five years the Canadian beef industry has not had cattle numbers large enough to supply Canada with our own ground beef. We, therefore, import trim to make into ground beef. For example, A & W imports Australian trim to mix with Canadian hormone-free, antibiotic-free, 50-50 trim that is obtained from grain-fed Canadian cattle. Public-sector organizations' ground beef purchases will almost always have an offshore component due to existing regulations. The rules and regulations governing slaughter and inspection will make the processing of small producers' livestock cost prohibitive.

That's the issue with the small producers marketing act. It's not the bent of the bill; it's the actual physical regulations that come into play in regard to food safety and liabilities that relate to that. Will the government be forced to mandate these processing plants to take in small batches of livestock in order to allow sales under the Alberta Local Food Act? These are some of the things that come forward. Or will the government open its own facilities to make sure all producers comply and compete under equal and fair rules?

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and don't feel bad when you miss it. Try saying that over and over in a speech several times in an evening; it can be awkward.

First of all, I'd like to congratulate the member for stepping forward and showing an interest in a rather interesting agriculture initiative. The overlying goal outlined by this bill, to encourage growth in one sector of our larger agrifood industry, certainly seems noble. I'm sure we all would enjoy increased access to affordable, fresh, locally grown food. However, as my friend and colleague from Drumheller has previously pointed out, the methods outlined by this bill leave many more questions than answers. The legislation seems to indicate that government is considering giving public bodies a mandate to buy local. It naturally begs several questions. Who is local? Who decides what should or should not be purchased from whom? Are the food producers in power to seek the most economical options? If not, who will pay the additional costs? The questions, Madam Chair, are endless while the answers are in short supply.

The fact is that there is no way to implement this legislation without creating a new bureaucracy and opposing additional reams of regulations and red tape. I know this government has staked an ideological position on this issue, but the truth is that you simply cannot regulate an economy into growth. However, if you want agriculture growth, there's a better place to start. Try asking

farmers. When you do, they will tell you that the number one barrier to selling their food locally has always been regulations. Whether it was the Canadian Wheat Board, CFIA regulations, or Alberta Health Services' periodic hunts on church bake sales, the number one obstacle between local food producers and consumers is government. The fact is that all Alberta farmers are local farmers and all the food they produce is local food.

Madam Chair, do you know who excels at finding markets for their products? Once again it's our farmers. The proof is readily apparent. Many of the socialist naysayers predicted absolute doom when western Canadian farmers were given the ability to market their own wheat. Instead, the agriculture sector grew like never before. It is no coincidence that the most effective system our farmers have for connecting with local consumers is also one of the least regulated, farmers' markets. If this government wishes to get serious about encouraging local food, it would focus on reducing regulatory barriers rather than imposing new ones.

Unfortunately, this has not been the NDP government's approach to agricultural issues to date. On Bill 6, for instance, which is comparable in some ways to this, the government has chosen to regulate first and consult later. Not only does charging ahead with bills like this and Bill 6 without consultation fly in the face of this government's pledge to do business differently, but it directly impacts the growth and long-term viability of smaller farms, the same farms that currently provide honey, vegetables, and other in-demand raw food. In fact, when it comes to ensuring growth in our local food sector, Bill 6 will do more harm than any good that can be accomplished through Bill 202. When it comes to debating Bill 6, I hope the government will remember this. All farmers are local farmers, and all the food they grow is local food.

Now, Madam Chair, I would like to turn my attention to another matter, efficiency. One of my chief concerns with this legislation is that it seems designed to encourage farmers to embrace less efficient production methods and reject modern innovation. Taking one of the largest sectors of Alberta's economy back a generation may make fine socialist policy, but it ignores some inconvenient truths. Like it or not, we live in a globalized world. The wheat, barley, canola, and livestock grown here sells to markets around the world at a global price. Reducing production here not only holds back Alberta's economy but also raises the price of food in developing countries.

This is not a hypothetical argument. Increased production will be vital. Global population is expected to reach 9.3 billion in 2050. Leading experts tell us that the world will need 70 per cent more food by 2050. As a leading agriculture producer, the world will be looking to provinces like Alberta to help meet the growing demand. We won't meet this demand by embracing less productive agriculture projects. Rather, I suggest we look at history.

In the mid-20th century the war-torn nations of Pakistan and India were experiencing widespread famine despite the availability of vast tracts of arable albeit poor land. At the same time an American with a PhD in plant pathology and genetics was conducting research in Mexico. Concentrating on boosting wheat production, he led a team that would work with nitrogen-based fertilizers to improve poor soil. The wheat varieties grown there had tall, thin stalks unable to carry the weight of plum grain grown with fertilizer. To counteract that, the team put its effort into refining a variety that had shorter, thicker stems. The new variety was particularly well suited to the Asian subcontinent and set a revolution off in food production, saving millions of lives in India and Pakistan. The variety was called dwarf wheat, and the man who gave this gift to the world was Norman Borlaug. He was awarded the Nobel peace prize in 1970.

There have been several agriculture revolutions since that time, each time giving us the ability to increase production and ensure that food remains affordable for all. Turning our back on this innovation would have been short sighted and sends a dangerous message to the world: it's our land, it's our food, and we don't care about you. Madam Chair, sending such a message is not in keeping with our values. From the time of Confederation Canada has always been a trading nation, and in times of world calamity we have stepped forward to help feed the world.

Let's not stop now even if it means taking further time to study this well-intended private member's bill. I say "well-intended" because I believe that is exactly what Bill 202 is insofar as it was drafted with the intention of encouraging growth in an albeit small sector of our large agrifood industry. However, the bottom line, Madam Chair, is that the bill seems designed to create more bureaucracy, more regulation, and encourage farmers to adopt less efficient production practices. The goal may be noble, but the methods are naive in numerous respects. Let's not call this progress. There is nothing progressive about this legislation, and it should be defeated.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

4:00

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak in favour of this bill. I'd like to clarify a few points that both the previous speaker and the Member for Drumheller-Stettler articulated a few minutes ago. First and foremost, this bill is about food security. I mean, some of the members opposite are trying to equate this bill to previous policies in other countries and talking about how this is going to have a hurtful effect on the Alberta economy. Not at all, hon. members. This is about, again, improving food security but also about striking an advisory group to come back with a strategy to government, to all of us, actually, within 12 months. I appreciate the fact that maybe you're trying to speak to your constituents, but, you know, interpreting this bill for what it's not is not helping anyone.

I do want to mention that the hon. member who is the sponsor of this bill did have numerous conversations with the opposition and actually not only took into account some of their recommendations, but they were in the amendment that we recently put forward. I find it interesting that the Member for Drumheller-Stettler spoke about how we removed the word "agriculture," yet that was his request, to remove the word "agriculture" in order to focus the bill and provide a little more clarity. I mean, at first we take his recommendation, and now we're being criticized for taking his recommendation. I don't understand. You can't have it both ways, hon. members.

The other thing that I want to clarify is that I believe it was the same member who asked for – under section 4(3)(b)(iii), "an examination of valuation of agricultural land" has been struck out. Again, it was the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler's request to the sponsor of the bill that that be removed. We, in fact, did that.

We listened to opposition comments in order to strengthen this bill, which is something that we've talked about numerous times as a government, that we want to work with all members in this House, and again this is proof of doing just that. So you can imagine my surprise and confusion when members opposite are – well, I don't want to use the word "attack," but you are criticizing us for doing exactly what you've asked us to do. You can imagine that that's quite confusing from this point of view. Again, I'll save the political comments.

The purpose of this bill, again, is really about empowering a group to come up with a strategy to enhance Alberta's food security. This is not about limiting access. This is not about telling farmers what they can and cannot grow or where they can or cannot sell their products. This is about encouraging local food production for local needs. We completely appreciate the fact that much of the food that is grown in our province is used for export, and we want to continue to work with our agricultural sector and our farmers to do just that. Again, market access is one of my priorities, and looking at ways to enhance that within Canada but also internationally is a priority. So I just wanted to get up and clarify a few of these points.

You know, what the hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park has put forward is really a bill that empowers, again, our own local producers. This is focused more on a strategy moving forward, not on forcing certain action. The other thing, too, is that some of the amendments, like I said earlier, were recommendations from the opposition that we in fact took, and the hon. member included them in her amendment, again showing that we're looking for best ideas, not which party they come from.

I urge all members of the House to support this bill. Let's move it out of committee. There's been great debate thus far, but I'd love to move this into third reading and continue our dialogue at that point.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's another opportunity to talk about local food production and agriculture in Alberta and to talk about how it specifically would be impacted by Bill 202, the Alberta Local Food Act. You know, what I would say is that what we have here essentially is a difference of opinion as to the best way to promote something.

On the side of the government we have the opinion that the best way to promote something is by creating a committee and then going ahead with some government intervention. On this side, for the most part, I think that what we're saying is that those measures should only be used when it is demonstrably effective to in fact implement those measures. If any argument was offered during the course of this debate in second reading that would indicate that government intervention or stepping in with an advisory committee, with a report, with measurements, all of which cost money – all of which cost money – that should happen only if indeed it can be demonstrated that the sector needs assistance and that, in fact, the objectives that are stated are not being achieved because of a lack of that committee or that action.

Well, I would argue that the hon. member that moved Bill 202 provided in her opening comments the strongest possible indication that Bill 202 is, in fact, not necessary. I quote once again – and this is directly quoting from her speech in *Hansard* – "95 per cent . . . of Alberta households are using or want to [use] food grown or made in Alberta." That's pretty hard to improve upon. If you're already hitting 95 per cent, you know, to achieve an incremental advantage in getting those last 5 per cent of Albertans convinced that they, too, should join the crowd, I would suggest to you, is going to be very difficult. In addition, some of the other statistics that were quoted: the number of farmers' markets is up 27 per cent since 2010; the market value of products marketed through farmers' markets is up 64 per cent; with people involved in local food enterprises, there's a 77 per cent increase in investment in business, a 94 per cent increase in sales growth, a 78 per cent increase in profitability, and a 96 per cent increase in gaining new customers.

You know, Madam Chair, this is a great increase, and it's all happening, if you'll forgive the term, organically. It's happening without government intervention. It's happening without a committee, without reports, without targets being set. It's all happening and being driven naturally by Albertans. It concerns me when we have a government that feels that that process has to be somehow interfered with or that there has to be some sort of government intervention in that process. I'm not saying that I don't necessarily trust it, and I'm not saying that government intervention is wrong in all situations, but I'm concerned when there's government intervention in something that clearly is already working pretty well.

In my speech on Bill 202 I outlined a number of areas of local food initiatives that I'm familiar with in my constituency. Really, you know, these are scattered throughout constituencies all around our province. We saw it during the course of Alberta Farm Days, and this is the kind of thing that I really think is a very strong argument against the need for this sort of thing happening.

You know, one of the things that is a fundamental property during the course of any debate on any issue is: is there a need for change? Is there a demonstrable need that the current situation must be changed? I would submit to the members of the Assembly that there is no demonstrable need for change in this situation, that a great deal of success is already occurring.

With regard to the comments by the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade with regard to consultation, I found them rather interesting because our caucus – we're still here – raised a number of issues that we had with regard to this piece of legislation, but we were not consulted on any suggested amendments. Specifically, in my speech I indicated that I had a great deal of difficulty with the latitude that was allowed to the Lieutenant Governor in Council – in other words, cabinet – under section 8, entitled Regulations. Indeed, section 8, regulations, gives an incredible amount of power to cabinet. In other words, regulations can be developed in cabinet without any further consultation, without any further debate here in the Legislature. Specifically, clause 8(c) – and I'll state it again – allows for the making of regulations “concerning any additional matter or thing that is necessary or advisable in connection with the implementation of this Act.”

4:10

That is an incredibly open-ended statement that, I submit – and I'm not a lawyer – could be interpreted in a way to allow such a broad degree of powers, depending on what the implemented measure was, that I simply do not entirely trust the regulatory power that this bill will ascribe to cabinet. I just think that it is overreaching, and I think it's especially overreaching in a situation where things are already happening and happening quite well.

This bill has failed to demonstrate a need for change. This bill has failed to demonstrate that intervention is required. Finally, it has failed to demonstrate that the measures that are being recommended – the committee, the recommendations, the targets, and all the other things that are recommended in the bill – will in fact improve the situation. None of those things have been satisfied in the case of this bill. If those things cannot be satisfied and especially given that this is a private member's bill, on which we can vote freely, and that there is no whipped vote – or at least theoretically there is no whipped vote – I would mention to my colleagues and I would state to my colleagues that this bill should not be passed in its current form.

Now, if we want to see it passed, if we can understand the idea behind it or if we can support the basis behind it, one way to do that is to take it out of the methodology of consideration within private members' business, which has very limited timelines, and move it

to committee and allow committee to delve into some of these matters more deeply. At that point we could possibly come up with the wording of a bill that would then be acceptable across the House, and we could move forward. But in its current form and even with the amendments that were passed, which, I would suggest, are relatively minor and don't really change the bill that much, the egregious parts of the bill are still present. They have not been removed from the bill, and they don't demonstrate in any way, shape, or form that the bill is in fact going to accomplish the goals that are stated.

For those reasons, Madam Chair, I will be voting against this bill.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. While the idea of local food is, in fact, a truly great idea, which I don't think anybody would be opposed to, obviously with the number of amendments that have been presented, the bill has not been thought through carefully. It was not well presented, which has created some of the reaction to it, quite clearly, and it does cause me to fear. If thinking about farm issues are that quickly rushed forward without even clearly thinking them through, what's going to happen with the WCB farm safety bill? We all know we need farm safety, but are we going to see 20 or 30 or 40 or 50 amendments on that one as well, because there was no consultation prior to actually presenting the bill? Those are my problems with it primarily.

Does anyone actually plan to talk to producers or processors or marketers – and all three of those are essential to any kind of food marketing, any kind of food production – with regard to this bill before enacting it? An urban, Birkenstock version of farming just doesn't really do it in the real world; quite frankly, Birkenstocks aren't WCB-approved anyway, so they wouldn't fit in the field. Anyway, I do have concerns about the way this thing has been just haphazardly together and then immediately rewritten, and I wonder if it'll be rewritten again.

Especially in a year that's been extremely difficult for Albertans, with as many people unemployed as we have seen, who've lost their jobs, now we have a government that's not only increasing taxes on almost everything but also creating bureaucracies on almost everything that they can. I do agree with much of what my colleague from Lloydminster has just finished saying about the additions of bureaucracies not really going to the results that are required. I just fear that this government is proving again to be a disappointment in regard to overreaching into the Alberta marketplace, a marketplace that they fundamentally don't understand or have the knowledge or the experience to deal with well.

The intention of the bill is to create a stable market through public-sector food purchasing, which, in fact, contradicts a lot of economic realities. The bill outlines wide-sweeping goals but doesn't really express much in terms of how these vague definitions will be achieved. I rise today to ask the government: exactly how will this bill affect Albertans, and what can Albertans realistically expect from this conversation?

To begin with, I think we would all like to know how this government will decide, for instance, which public-sector entities will be making purchases and what the process is to decide which farms will be able to act as vendors. Is the government going to work to create another delayed sunshine list of producers, of who will be picked and who will be missing out? Is it going to be sole-sourced contracting of some kind? There are so many unanswered questions here in this whole thing.

As has already been said, a lot of this kind of producing, processing, and marketing is already taking place in very, very real

ways. The reality is that the advent of Internet communications has made it possible for farmers all over this province to be marketing directly from their farm gate, and they are, so I don't understand what the value of bureaucracy is going to accomplish. I have my doubts that the government really understands the complexities of the food industry. As has already been said, there are a multitude of factors that affect producers and everything that they do, the whole processing aspect of it, and then the marketing aspect of it. There are three stages there in the value chain for food, and food does not get to your plate without actually going through all of those three processes. The reality is that very, very few individuals can have a completely vertically integrated market and successfully do all three of them at once.

Moreover, the agriculture sector is interwoven into the fabric of international trade deals in this country, whether we like it or not. I fear that this legislation may ultimately be impacted by that, because whatever the recommendations are that are brought forward, then the next step is going to be to want to act on them, and that may throw us up against the issue of international trade deals. By giving government bodies the mandate that they have to buy local, will the NDP be opening up the government of Alberta to an endless stream of lawsuits from our trade partners? They've already shown that they are more than willing to do that. Agrifood issues are often on the forefront of international trade negotiations. Nations that are viewed as too protectionist often lose out on signing new deals, which destroys the prospect of increasing their trade network. While I think the government pays a lot of lip service and has good intentions for the economic diversification of our food industries, actions like these show that the priorities sometimes are quite the opposite.

If the NDP is really serious about helping out smaller scale farms, why are they continually pushing for policies that make Alberta a harder place to do business? Year-round greenhouses contribute significantly to the production of local food, and they do it without subsidies or bureaucratic intervention, quite frankly, but economically these businesses have a very high input cost due to the amount of natural gas needed to heat a greenhouse in minus 40 weather. Are we really to believe that the new carbon tax is going to help these small producers be more competitive?

What about the example of meat-packing facilities? These facilities carry a very large overhead in regard to their electrical bill due to refrigeration. Keeping an animal cold for 21 days, which is standard practice, consumes a lot of electricity, especially with the volumes. What is the NDP's plan to help with this value-added step in the local food industry? Is shutting down power plants ahead of schedule and increasing the cost of electricity supposed to make it so that more meat producers can do business in this province? Clearly, there's a lot of homework to be done on this issue.

We've also learned that the government intends to be policing thousands of acres of farmland as well. How will these inspectors realistically help local food production when they're out there performing their inspections? This bill calls for an advisory committee, which will be handed a blank cheque from the minister's office.

4:20

Recently we've seen the NDP's version of accountability when making appointments. Well, I'm not allowed to use the name, so I won't. Someone was recently appointed to the Manning centre, but there was no appropriate consultation on that. The advisory committee will just be another soft landing place for NDP candidates. How is the minister going to decide who sits on these committees?

Clearly, in my mind, the bill has not been thought through. All of the amendments prove that. It does nothing more than increase the bureaucracy and the obstacles to small business and local food production that this government continues to pile on Albertans. We need less bureaucracy, not more bureaucracy, and food will flourish.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 202, which on the face of it makes a lot of sense for Alberta. I don't know what the proportion of local food consumption and sale is. I hear statistics that it's increasing. That's good. I think that anything we can do to improve the access of people in this province to local food production is good for business. It's good for the environment. It's good, I think, for nutrition if we know and have control over what kind of exposures to chemicals our own local food has. We are not entirely sure because only a sampling of food that comes across the border is tested for various contaminants. Anything we can do to promote local food, I think, is a good thing.

I like the amendments that the hon. member has put forward, and I certainly think that there's an opportunity here that we shouldn't throw out of hand. If we're going to create a committee that's going to actually examine the market system, communications around local food, how we can enhance, perhaps, efficiencies in local food production, if there are some ways that government can facilitate through regulation greater access to local food and promote the growth of local food, especially organic foods, it seems to me that this is an opportunity not only to diversify our economy but also to improve the business climate for small-business people, especially, obviously, food producers, trucking agencies, wholesale and retail markets.

While I appreciate the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster's concerns about giving too much power to put in regulations through an order in council or whatever, I think that's a little far fetched given that all we're doing here is creating a committee to actually examine the benefits and opportunities and how we can actually help, in a way, facilitate what is already growing, to be sure, but could be growing faster, could be benefiting Alberta more, and could be helping us to move into a stronger position economically. I'm not as concerned as my colleague. If we're promoting the purchase of local food in Alberta and adding value and adding potentially safer food, I'm very anxious to support that.

Thanks, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. My family many years ago decided that we would like to eat a little healthier, and my wife convinced me of being able to eat locally grown food. I think it's a great idea. I think it's a fantastic idea, that I personally support. I guess the question that I've come to is: does this need to be a government initiative versus a private initiative? This is something that the free market will automatically promote and that individual consumers will automatically promote. I think that there is education that could be done on this issue, and I do believe that there's actually already education being done. I think that some of the information that I received a couple of years ago, as I said, came from just local individuals saying that the health benefits of eating locally produced produce is valuable.

Really, the concern for me is not that this isn't a good thing. I believe it is a very good thing, and I think that it will help promote the healthy practices of our families. I guess the concern that I have is that when the government gets involved, what is the outcome? What are the consequences to that?

There are some real concerns that I have as I kind of look through the purposes of this act, the first purpose being "to ensure a resilient, sustainable and strong local food economy and agricultural land base in Alberta." Now, the first question that I have is: how do you ensure that? I think that's something that some governments have tried to accomplish, with very little success. I would have to say that probably one of the worst examples of not working are the Communist countries of the Soviet Union. They did try to ensure a stable, resilient, strong local food economy, and they shut the borders. They were hopeful to be able to accomplish that, and it didn't work there. Now, I know that this is more of a microeconomic model that we're talking about, but the principle still stands. If it doesn't work on a macro scale, most likely it won't work on a micro scale.

The other thing that I question is that promotion of local consumption is something that is not just practised by provincial governments but also by the federal government in terms of trade. I'll give you an example of supply chain management. With supply chain management farmers in certain farm sectors, such as with cheese and milk products, have created trade barriers that stop us from being able to buy from outside sources. That was an initiative, I think, to be able to buy locally. Unfortunately, the cost of that to us is three times the cost of cheese. You can buy cheese for three times less across the border in the United States than you could in Alberta. Is this the kind of outcome that we want from this kind of legislation? Is this another measure of supply chain management, which is a federal issue? On a provincial issue do we need to exacerbate this kind of a problem?

You know, one of the things that it says here in terms of purposes is "to increase public awareness of local food in Alberta, including the diversity of local food." I actually applaud that as a purpose. I believe that that's very important. We should be promoting local producers and diversification in our food, and I think that that is a very good role the government can facilitate. That again goes back to educate versus legislate, and it's something that I think needs to be the mantra of this House on many other bills as well. The education of people, I do believe, happens from people in general, amongst each other, through social media, and through the value of eating locally. Is it really something that needs to be done on a provincial level by the provincial government? I question whether that's the reality.

The other thing. It says here: "to promote sustainable farming practices." I think the reality is that sustainable farming practices are best identified by farmers who are successful. That's the best sustainable farming practice that I can think of, and it would probably be the best for this House to recognize. Sustainable means that it's going to last in that it has a proven track record, that it's capable of being able to carry on, not just now but in the future. Usually when the government gets involved, what I've seen is that they get it wrong because they're not in the industry. We don't know everything about every industry. So allowing the industries to be able to make the choices and to determine their course of action is really what Adam Smith taught us about hundreds of years ago. He taught us about the invisible hand, with the invisible hand being the market forces, and how supply and demand and the equilibrium price work. That decides for us how markets should ebb and flow.

4:30

Usually when the government gets involved, it messes up that supply-and-demand equilibrium price. This is a classic example of the supply chain management on the federal side, where we are paying three times what it costs for cheese or double what it costs for milk. If we start to try to micromanage an economy, there are too many nuances involved in an economy that we get it wrong. This is the reason why – even as much as I, personally, in our family, on a microscale follow this already. We've already bought into it a few years ago. We believe that this is something that we need to do, that we need to eat more locally grown food, that it's a healthier product, healthier for our families. But in terms of the application of this from a provincial level, I am not in favour of this, and that's why I'll be voting against this.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just a couple of small items. I'm happy to speak to the amended Bill 202. Speaking of the amendment, it was brought forward by the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. A couple of comments made by the Member for Drumheller-Stettler regarding the amendments and how he had – actually, some of the amendments corrected some of the discussion that's been had by the member with the member proposing. Now, it kind of brings me to my point, the fact that we were delivered this amendment, two full pages, a lot of legalese, and given about 10 minutes to look at it. Now, had the member had maybe 24 hours to discuss and go through and strike out the sections before he made his speech, he may not have mentioned those two points. I guess it's very important that – you know, that's a good lesson to everyone in the House, that maybe if there is an amendment, we should be given a little bit of time to digest it before we start to discuss it.

The other thing is the concern that I have when it comes to delivering goods and services to an institution. We've struck out quite a few of them: "a facility within the meaning of section 1 of the Mental Health Act," the Hospitals Act, or the Nursing Homes Act. But we've still left in quite a few sections: "a department, branch or office of the Government of Alberta," "an agency, board or commission of the Government of Alberta." Then it follows with "a school or post-secondary institution in Alberta the enrolments of which . . ." and it goes on.

Now, my concern is that after the year that we've had in Alberta, with very unpredictable whether – we have drought conditions. You can have pests. A lot of the farmers up in our area are dealing with an issue with clubroot. That's to do with canola. You know, that stuff with the yellow flowers on it. At the point where a farmer or a group has made a commitment to an institution to supply them with, let's say, carrots or potatoes, and they have a drought or a disease come through and wipe out their crop or significantly wipe out their crop, who then becomes responsible to fulfill those contracts? It could be very, very expensive and almost to the point of breaking a local supplier if they had to all of a sudden start fulfilling contracts for a year or on a yearly basis that they've made with one of these huge institutions. That's a concern.

The second one is when it comes to what's already taking place in the province. We've already got, you know, associations that deal with the large greenhouses. I had mentioned Sunshine Food. They supply Sobeys. They supply Extra Foods with locally grown foods. They can buy up anything that a greenhouse can produce. As a matter of fact, I had a proposal with a group from Two Hills that was going to produce five acres of cucumbers, lettuce, carrots,

happens every Friday at 1 o'clock. I'll tell you what. It's the quality of produce, how clean it is, and its price. Those folks in there work that out in a hurry. If you want to sell your produce and get home, it's good quality, it's clean, it's packaged, and the price is right. Now, if we take that away from them by infringing legislation on them and competition with larger groups, it's only going to serve to hurt the small producers. Again, I stress that my main concern is fulfilling contracts. There's a lot of legality here, and I don't think that a lot of these smaller producers can afford to get into a legal battle with an institution where they've said: "Okay. You're going to supply us with carrots every week." "Well, we have a crop failure. Now what do I have to do? I have to go out and buy carrots from Mexico or South America to fulfill my contract." So I guess that's my concern.

The other part of it is that after a mere two weeks on a six-page document, we've got two pages of amendments. Now, I understand that some of the amendments are just verbiage and that they were discussed with our shadow minister for agriculture, and a lot of these things did make sense and were passed. We thank you for considering those. My concern is that if we can find within two weeks two pages of amendments to this document without any chance to discuss it, what are we going to do in further bills that are a lot more complex, that just try to get rushed through the House in a matter of a couple of days without any discussion or going to committee? On those grounds themselves I think the bill is not bad. It could use some tweaking, and with a little bit further discussion we could probably have something that's more workable to the common small producers in Alberta. On those grounds alone I'll be voting against this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wishing to speak?

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. At this time I would like to propose an amendment to Bill 202.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A2.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. In light of the discussion with regard to this bill, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade referred to it as a food security bill only. I see that there are many different aspects of this bill that I would question the validity of. But when we talk about a food security bill, I see that in section 6, public sector procurement of local food, "the Minister, in collaboration with the Advisory Committee, shall consider ways to increase the procurement of local food by public sector organizations as part of the strategy."

In my opinion, this bill is becoming more than just a bill on food security. It is also implementing a strategy to increase the procurement of local food by public-sector organizations without really putting any guidelines into the description of that. I would propose that if we truly are concerned about food security and that food security is the basis of the formation of this bill, we would consider, then, to amend Bill 202 by striking out section 6.

The Chair: Any others wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

4:40

Cortes-Vargas: Okay. I think there needs to be clarity brought forward that one of the amendments in the previous one is to create recommendations, not to mandate public-sector procurement but to create recommendations of what is feasible. The strategy would

address what barriers are faced by public-sector procurement so that they could possibly decide – not mandated, decide. If they want to access local food, they can do it. Are you discouraging public sectors from accessing local food? I really don't think that it's necessary. I think that the amendment provided a circumstance and a way for it to have flexibility and to evaluate the feasibility, and it addressed the issues that you had brought forward. You know, what are the things that make it difficult for the public sector, the contracts? All of those things need to be brought forward in a strategy to answer those questions. That is what this bill is asking for. It's asking to strike a committee that would evaluate the feasibility for the public sector for local food systems to be improved – what are the barriers addressed? – to create a committee that would be voices for the local food system.

Now, I don't think the concept of the amendments that I brought forward was really understood. There is no longer a mandate for the public-sector procurement. To take this part out is to discourage any progress, so I discourage voting for this.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2?

Mr. Hanson: I'll speak to that one.

The Chair: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd just like to point out that, under purposes, under section 2, "the purposes of this act are as follows," under section (c), "to provide an increased and stable demand for local food through public sector organization purchasing." To me, that speaks to legislation when we're talking about government. Okay. I mean, we go through the process, under definitions of the act, of listing which departments or branches of the government of Alberta will be involved in this. We've gone through the motion in the amendment to purposely strike out four different types of organizations, but we still left three in. Then we go and say again in (c), "to provide an increased and stable demand for local food through public sector organization purchasing." Now, to me, that tells me that you're going to legislate and force these organizations to purchase locally.

Cortes-Vargas: The act doesn't give that power. The act is asking to strike a committee.

Mr. Hanson: An act is law. An act is law.

Cortes-Vargas: No; I understand.

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

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. The hon. member who's proposing this bill made a statement a moment ago that said that this is nothing more than a recommendation. Frankly, we don't need a law to make a recommendation. The government of Alberta doesn't need a law to make a recommendation. Bill 202 is a law. It's not a motion urging the government to do something. Perhaps what's really going on here is that this should have been a motion and not really a bill. When you enact a law, this is a law. That's where this bill is headed, to be a law. We don't need a law telling the government to recommend things. It's just silly.

The other thing I have a problem with is that we don't need a law to strike an advisory committee either, yet here we have another advisory panel. I just went through Sunday, and the outcome of one of this government's advisory panels just hit the people of Alberta with a \$3 billion tax bill, so I'm a little bit gun shy when it comes to this government's proposing that we need another advisory

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There are already mechanisms within this Legislature to act as advisory panels to government. They're called standing committees, legislative committees. I am very concerned that this government is so fast to call for advisory panels but is not making use of the legislative mechanisms we already have in place, which are the standing committees, who could then call on Albertans to come and consult and to speak to these bills, have expert witnesses come. This is the consultative process that our forefathers thought was a good idea, so they created these standing committees, which are not being utilized by this government. Instead, you're going time and again to advisory panels, which are expensive, which do not make use of the legislative process we have in place. Is it that you don't trust legislative committees? Is it that, you know, there are people out there you're trying to support by putting them on your advisory panels? What is exactly the problem with having these bills go before the legislative committees that are in place to do this kind of work, to bring people in to give testimony? If we went before a legislative committee, we may find that there are other errors, other omissions, other things that could be included in this.

I agree with my colleagues who have come before me and have said that the intent of this is fine but that it needs help. Quite frankly, you know, when it comes to public-sector purchases, there is already no barrier that I'm aware of hindering the public sector from buying things anywhere that they want to. It is known, for your education and elucidation, as free-market enterprise. We have the freedom to buy wherever we want to buy, and the public sector can do the same. I don't need someone legislating to me where I can buy carrots or not buy carrots, thank you very much. I don't believe that we need to be legislating this kind of a thing. In my opinion, it is a waste of legislative process, especially when you are already not making use of the legislative process that's in place to consider these things. They're called committees.

I cannot support this bill, and that's all I have to say. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other member wishing to speak to amendment A2?

Mr. Hanson: Just a note. The member who posed the amendment: is he not able to close the amendment?

The Chair: He can speak again, but there is not a formal closing of the debate.

Mr. Hanson: So he can speak again? Sorry; he didn't realize that.

The Chair: He could speak again if he wished.

Mr. Hanson: Can we let him go? Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Sorry for that, Madam Chair. I thought I would be asked to stand to speak.

The Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park stated that the amendments brought forward today, in striking out from section 1(e) items (iii), (iv), (v), and (vi), would essentially accomplish the

intent of my motion to strike out section 6. When we have as one of the purposes within our proposed bill purpose 2(c), "to provide an increased and stable demand for local food through public sector organization purchasing," I would have hoped that if that intent was clear, that would have been struck out also.

I would encourage everyone to consider striking out section 6 in the interest that this would be then a food security bill more so than a food procurement bill.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: All right. We are back on the main bill. Any further comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to Bill 202?

If not, then we will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 202 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

4:50

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Feehan: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 202. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

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

Bill 205

Persons with Developmental Disabilities Services (Public Consultation) Amendment Act, 2015

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm incredibly happy to rise today and commence second reading of my private member's bill, Bill 205, Persons with Developmental Disabilities Services (Public Consultation) Amendment Act, 2015.

On December 3, 1992, the United Nations established observance of an international day of disabled persons. The United Nations declared the need for active participation of persons with disabilities in the planning of policies and processes that affect their lives. The motto that came out of that was Nothing about Us without Us.

The goal of this bill is simple in its wording and complex in terms of how the end result will be achieved. This bill is about changing the trajectory of the current supports for persons with disabilities in Alberta. This bill is about changing the way that we do things, and it's about truly endorsing the phrase: nothing about us without us.

Madam Speaker, as I'm sure you know, Alberta has a long and sordid history of supporting people with developmental disabilities. The segregation of people with developmental disabilities has been long documented in this province. Although I think we've taken huge steps to correct things, we still have much work to do. It's beyond just geography. It's beyond just where they live or how they live. When people are segregated and not consulted, they become objects of pity and not true participants in their communities. They become passive recipients of charity and not fully contributing members of their communities.

Like all movements, people with disabilities rallied to change things. Until very recently I was a pretty active part of those rallies, and I never imagined that I would be inside of this House speaking to the issue that I was always outside speaking about. The gains that people with disabilities have made in Alberta and in Canada are a direct result of the work they have done. The community living movement is a direct result of the work done by people with disabilities. Independent living is far more than living independently. Inclusive education is far more than being included. It's about education both ways. It's about students with disabilities, any form of disability, having relationships with students that are not labelled with disabilities, and it's about all students learning from each other. When we have true inclusive education, we all win; inclusive employment, we all win.

Alberta Works is one of the programs undertaken, actually, by the previous government that is still functioning today. Although I disagree with the way that it was born and that it was without real consultation from stakeholders – and by stakeholders I mean people with disabilities – it was an important step in recognizing the skills and attributes of people with disabilities.

Unfortunately, we have far too many examples of the previous government getting it wrong. There were changes from the top-down sort of model to community governance, which was in place for years, which had community boards, appointed boards. Those were removed and replaced with the idea of community engagement councils. Those were also removed, and then there was nothing.

When you don't have something between the bureaucracy and the ministry and the people in the community, you lose something in translation, and I think that in the last few years we've seen that. Examples of that include movements to regulate the way people live their lives, not just where they live but how they live. In an effort to keep people safe, the previous government introduced regulations that looked at keeping people safe, but instead of actually keeping people safe, what they did was create homes that were small institutions. They removed choice, and they segregated people once again because they started to remove options.

Other examples of that were tools that they used to try to level the playing field, but these were assessment tools. One example is the supports intensity scale, which is a needs-based assessment that looked at meeting an individual with a disability and determining what they needed in terms of support. I don't think it's fair to ever assign a number and a level to a person to determine what they need to live successfully in the community.

Those are just some of the examples.

In my life before coming to this House, I worked much of my adult life with people with disabilities in the community, and I learned a great deal. I often had some wonderful ideas and some visions. I've been told that I'm a dreamer, and I don't think I'm the only one. I thought I had the answers for people, and I learned very early on that I was wrong. It was only when I actually consulted the people that I was hired to make decisions with that they worked.

I think it's time for us to not only move towards change in terms of the language that we use and the policies we endorse and the

paths that we take, but we have to focus on giving a voice, giving the decision-making power as much as possible to the people that the decisions we're entrusted to make involve. That means real consultation. That means bringing in the stakeholders – people with disabilities, their families, their friends, their supporters, the organizations that do the work on the ground every single day – not just special-interest groups and not just people that are interested in making decisions for them.

I'm hopeful that we can all together agree on some common things, and that is that people with disabilities have the absolute right to determine what is important for them and for their lives, for their families, and for their friends; where they live, how they work, when they work, where they work; how they're assessed, what supports they get. It's vital. I think it's vital to our communities. It's only when everybody is included that our community is most rich. Inclusion is not a buzzword, should never be a buzzword but should always be a verb and always be something that we work towards.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I look forward to hearing what the other members have to say as well.

The Deputy Speaker: The time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded. We are moving on to the next order of business.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Harm Reduction Policies

505. Ms Miller moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to review how best to integrate harm reduction policies throughout Alberta's public health care and human services systems with the goal of amending and incorporating these policies in related legislation and regulations.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today and bring this important motion to the floor for debate. Harm reduction is and should be an integral part of Alberta's response to the negative effects of drug use. Often we hear about prevention, treatment, or enforcement, all of which fall under the umbrella of harm reduction, but often we miss the conversation about what harm reduction really means in terms of day-to-day action.

It's important that, first, we define what we mean when we talk about harm reduction as this is key to the overall understanding of this important policy tool. Harm reduction includes policies, programs, and practices that aim to keep people safe and minimize death, disease, and injury from high-risk behaviour. Harm reduction recognizes that the high-risk behaviour may continue despite the risks.

The cornerstones of harm reduction are public health, human rights, and social justice. Harm reduction benefits people who use drugs or engage in other risky behaviours, families, and communities as a whole. There already is a lot of great harm reduction work going on throughout our province that is supported by both AHS and by front-line nonprofit organizations. In fact, I was pleased to see that included in the recently announced AHS board of directors was Marliiss Taylor, an expert with years of experience in harm reduction. This shows the continued importance of this issue and how serious our government takes the idea of harm reduction.

The motion was formed in part by the work going on in the city of Red Deer, which has committed to integrating harm reduction policies locally to great benefit so far. The city has incorporated part of the renowned four-pillar strategy to respond to alcohol and drug

use, which focuses on prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and community safety. The success of this strategy is something my colleague from Red Deer-North and I are both very excited about, and we commend all of the constituents involved in making this so effective.

I am also proud to say that Red Deer signed on to the Vienna declaration in 2011. The Vienna declaration is a statement seeking to improve community health and safety by calling for the incorporation of scientific evidence into illicit drug policies. The declaration was drafted by a team of international experts and initiated by several of the world's leading HIV and drug policy scientific bodies and was prepared through an extensive consultative process involving global leaders in medicine, public policy, and public health. The declaration was the official declaration of the International AIDS Conference, AIDS 2010, which was held in Vienna, Austria.

We recognized then, as we do now, that incorporating scientific evidence into drug policy is imperative. But with any harm reduction strategy it's important that we work within the law and with communities to make sure they are safe for everyone involved. This government cares about the health and well-being of all Albertans, including people with addiction and mental health needs. We are supportive of interventions that save or improve lives.

AHS currently does have a harm reduction policy in place, so this motion supports the good work that is already being done across Alberta. The Harm Reduction for Psychoactive Substance Use policy states that

- Alberta Health Services recognizes the value of harm reduction as an important component in the continuum of care required to effectively serve individuals that use psychoactive substances.
- Alberta Health Services may directly, or in partnership with community agencies, provide a range of harm reduction programs and services that assist individuals, families and communities to reduce the risk and adverse consequences of psychoactive substance use.

Programs and services are provided directly by AHS harm reduction teams. Alberta Health currently supports many harm reduction programs and policies throughout Alberta. Most notably, AHS provides harm reduction supplies distribution such as needles and condoms through AIDS service organizations.

The Central Alberta AIDS Network, CAANS, is a local community-based charity located right in my constituency of Red Deer-South, and it's a great example of an organization incorporating harm reduction policies into their programs. CAANS is responsible for sexually transmitted and blood-borne infection prevention and support in the Alberta Health Services' central zone.

But CAANS isn't alone as an organization using harm reduction techniques. CAANS has sister charities across Alberta that all use this approach: HIV North, with offices in Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray, serving the northern zone; HIV West Yellowhead, serving Hinton, Edson, Jasper, and area; Streetworks in Edmonton; Safeworks in Calgary; Lethbridge HIV Connection; and HIV Community Link in Medicine Hat. These organizations all provide exemplary services rooted in a harm reduction approach. We need to continue to invest in addiction and mental health programs and services that have proven to be effective at helping Albertans.

It's also important to note that most of these organizations are working within their main city and that rural outreach is still rare. We know that addictions can be present in communities of all shapes and sizes. That's why I'm so pleased that our government has undertaken the mental health review currently being led by the members for Calgary-Mountain View and Lesser Slave Lake. The mental health review will help inform our strategy for addiction and

mental health services going forward. In anticipation of its release and its recommendations Alberta Health has budgeted \$10 million.

We all know that one of the biggest issues facing many Alberta communities right now is the issue of fentanyl addiction and overdose. This issue has hit Red Deer especially hard. My constituents and nonprofits working to combat this were extremely pleased with the minister's efforts on this issue and the expansion of the community-based, take-home naloxone kits across the province. This action has saved lives, and I thank the minister for her action on this.

It's also important to note that AHS recently launched a fentanyl harm reduction website to coincide with the provincial campaign, www.drugsfool.ca. This campaign targets recreational club users with messaging in environments of potential use and also in online environments. Additionally, the campaign will . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me, hon. member. Can I just interrupt you for a moment? I want to remind the members that we are not in committee and that you must all be in your seats during this portion of the proceedings. Thank you.

Proceed, hon. member.

Ms Miller: Additionally, the campaign will see dissemination of wallet-sized harm reduction materials for the entrenched user population through all partners in Alberta's new take-home naloxone program. I know this program will benefit my constituency, and I know other members of this Assembly can expect the same benefits from this program to be seen in their own constituencies as well. In recognition of fentanyl concerns associated with some aboriginal communities in Alberta, the campaign will also roll out awareness messaging to several aboriginal communities across AHS's five zones. This campaign is exactly the type of action this motion today hopes to support and see expanded.

The study and integration of harm reduction policies will continue to save lives and make a difference in the lives of Albertans facing addiction issues. Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to bring this important motion to the floor today. Harm reduction ensures that people are treated with respect and without stigma and that substance-related problems and issues are addressed systematically. Alberta is already doing a lot of great work in regard to addictions and mental health, and I hope this motion will help to further that work today. I sincerely hope that all members in this House will join me in supporting this motion today.

Thank you.

5:10

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank my colleagues on both sides of the House for their contributions to this discussion and their compassion. I'm going to start with a little history. You know, many years ago during the Troubles in Ireland the British Home Secretary remarked that the situation had been kept to an acceptable level of violence. This comment was widely regarded as a terrible gaffe at the time. It was a cynical calculation that just didn't sit right with most folks.

I think much of the public debate around harm reduction strategies comes down to how we view the calculation at the very heart of harm reduction. Let's make no mistake here. When it comes to the use of narcotics, there is no truly and completely safe way around it. We can see this with the recent fentanyl crisis in this province. The difference between life and death can come down to a single milligram.

Now, I don't think anyone here would disagree that we must try to mitigate the harm done by these dangerous and damaging drugs, drugs that have robbed so many of their friends and family members. However, there needs to be acknowledgement that these hard-core drugs also rob the living of their health, their vitality, and their livelihoods. The ideal – the ideal – should always remain the elimination of these destructive forces in their lives.

The long-term elimination of narcotics in our society is by no means an easy goal. As members of this Assembly we all know how drug use has impacted our own constituencies and our province. Nobody will claim that removing these tentacles of illicit narcotics that have crept into our communities is a simple task.

I'd now like to paraphrase a great leader from years ago, with whom I'm sure many will be familiar. He was speaking in a different context and delivered it better than I can, but I believe the sentiment stands.

We choose to . . . do [these] things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win.

Now, clearly, there is a spectrum of harm reduction policies out there. Many, in fact, are already being used in Alberta. I mentioned fentanyl earlier, and I think it's important to note that many places around North America have expanded access to naloxone, which is the antidote for opiates. Here in Alberta we also offer methadone substitution treatment for addicts to try to help get them off these harmful substances.

That, again, is the key point here. The end goal is getting people off these substances, that cause so much pain, grief, and misery. We must show compassion to those affected. We must reach out our hands to help them out of these cycles of dependency and do everything we can toward that goal. My concern is that a focus on harm reduction has the potential to crowd out treatment and proper support. It is my sincerest hope that we continue to offer every support to those who need it and strive towards the health and well-being of all Albertans.

While there are certainly successes within the harm reduction model, there are also successful alternative models that we should look at. We could examine a nation like Sweden, that has taken a firmer approach to the elimination of drug abuse within their borders. The United Nations notes that the Swedish strategy has yielded positive results in the form of reduced drug use and abuse, even lower than European averages. Keep in mind that they do not use a particularly heavy-handed or overly punitive approach. Their prisons, in fact, have far fewer occupants from drug crimes than many comparable nations.

They do however see an emphasis on drug reduction and the ultimate goal of elimination of these dangerous and addictive substances as part of a broader perspective on health and wellness policy. The alternative to harm reduction is not an increase in harm, and an alternative can have the same public health objectives accomplished a different way. I find their goals admirable. They advocate for a drug-free society, and with compassion, treatment, and adequate supports for those in need they are working towards that each and every day.

Let harm reduction successes be a bridge to treatment and overall harm elimination. Nobody would expect any less for their own friends or family. I dearly hope that we do not see harm reduction as merely a second-best or good-enough solution while treatment and detox supports are neglected. It would be a true tragedy, Madam Speaker, to see treatment options reserved only for those with the means to access them. I earlier mentioned the cynical

calculation of an acceptable level of harm. Interestingly, one law enforcement officer from downtown Vancouver remarked in the *National Post*, "The rich get treatment, the poor get harm reduction." I hope to see a system where all people are given every chance to reclaim their health, vitality, and dignity.

To conclude, I do support some harm reduction strategies as interim measures preventing mortality and improving health outcomes, but I also know and believe that we are already doing many of these things in Alberta. This motion, as written, is also too vague while many of the possible approaches require far more discussion and debate than the very limited time here.

Finally, I would like to see a much greater emphasis on proper treatment options and an eye always – always – toward a laudable goal of harm elimination.

Madam Speaker, for these reasons, I don't believe I will be supporting this motion as written.

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

Miranda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak in support of this motion, and I thank the hon. Member for Red Deer-South for bringing it forward. The concept of harm reduction is supported by research showing that many drug-related problems are not just the result of the drugs themselves. In fact, there are many compounding and contributing factors such as the unregulated manufacturing of drugs in addition to existing policies and laws that do not deal with the root causes of the problem. We know that expenditures for law enforcement related to illicit drug use, while very important, often have limited success in the overall reduction of consumption. We know from history that a prohibition-type policy approach does not work.

Madam Speaker, we need to recognize that high-risk behaviour often continues despite people being informed of the risks or being jailed for drug-related offences. Harm reduction strategies ensure that people who use psychoactive substances are treated with respect and without stigma and that the substance abuse related problems and the related issues are addressed systemically. This will include a recognition that there is a mental health component to this issue. I hope that the mental health review currently taking place will help us reformulate our current strategy for addiction and mental health services going forward. I look forward with anticipation to the recommendations.

I would encourage all members to be supportive of this motion and to support an approach that can save and improve lives and improve the health and well-being of all Albertans because this is a community issue that impacts all of us. We all need to be part of the solution.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

5:20

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm rising today to speak in support of this motion. Members of this House can have honest disagreements about the intent of it or the outcome of it. Perhaps it is vaguely worded, as motions typically are. The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat spoke before me for my caucus and listed the reasons why we should not be giving up on people with addictions and not be focusing on harm reduction to the exclusion of recovery from addictions. But there is still a role for harm reduction, and I don't believe that this motion excludes recovery from addictions.

Too many of us – and I've probably been guilty – look down on people with addictions, condemn them, think we're better than them, but people with addictions are not just the lowest rungs of

society. They're everybody: they're middle-class people, they're powerful, they're rich, they're poor. It can happen to anybody. It doesn't just happen to one social class or one ethnicity. We're all susceptible to it, and we have not done the job we should be doing as a society to help people recover. We haven't done the work we need to do as a government, as a province in helping those with addictions minimize the harm to them.

There are right ways to do this, and there are wrong ways. I once lived in Victoria, B.C., and the government had opened up a needle-exchange program beside my home. Well, doing that in a neighbourhood that did not have those kinds of problems was harmful. It created a crime wave in a neighbourhood that had previously not had that level of crime. It exposed children to danger, with needles on sidewalks.

But that isn't to say that there is not a real place for harm reduction. It's not to say that we shouldn't be doing everything we can to help those who need it. This is one of the roles of government. This is one of the reasons why we are here. Not everybody is going to be cured of addiction. Perhaps I'm a bit defeatist, but not everybody's going to be cured. Not everybody's going to be clean, but we can make life better for them, and we can make life better for those not addicted. Many of the drugs people are addicted to have public risks for those not addicted themselves, be it needles left in parks or crime that comes from people who are willing to do anything to get their next fix.

We can have honest disagreements about how the motion is written, but I read it as not excluding addictions treatment. I read it as promoting harm reduction. Now, the specifics of that are to be seen in the details. We have to wait and see, if this motion passes, what the government comes forward with, and I'll judge that particular bill on its merits. But the motion as presented right now, I think, is in the best spirits of why we're here, to help those who desperately need it, some people who need it and want it, some people who don't even know they need help yet. As long as this motion is not coming at the expense of addictions recovery, then I can support it.

While I will understand why some members here won't – I think we have a legitimate difference of opinion on the interpretation of the wording – I know that all members, regardless of how they're voting on this issue, have the best interests of those that need help at heart. So I encourage all members of this House to support the motion from the Member for Red Deer-South.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak in favour of Motion 505. This past summer I had the opportunity to tour the Boyle Street Community Services, one of the many dedicated social agencies which are located and operate in Edmonton-Centre. As part of that tour I had the opportunity to meet an amazing woman, Marliiss Taylor, who co-ordinates one of their most important programs, Streetworks.

For over 20 years, under Marliiss's direction Streetworks has been working with injection drug users and participants in the sex trade to provide them with the skills, knowledge, research, and support they need to remain safer and healthier. This support is provided without judgement and instead focuses on creating relationships of trust, that allow Streetworks staff to provide crucial education about the health risks that these individuals face, which many members have noted here today, health risks such as hepatitis B and C, HIV, or drugs such as fentanyl. Streetworks arms these individuals with the means to protect themselves and helps them access treatment centres or medical care. Their services are available at six locations across our downtown core and through the Streetworks van, which

operates six evenings a week responding to calls from individuals in need and supplying them with clean needles, condoms, and basic medical care on the streets where they live.

On my tour of Streetworks at Boyle Street Marliiss also introduced me to the HER pregnancy project, which with funding from Alberta Health Services provides intensive outreach to street-involved pregnant women who would likely not otherwise access or receive prenatal care. A recent social-return-on-investment case study found that for every dollar invested in the HER pregnancy program, there is a return of \$8.24 in social value created by the program.

But more importantly, Madam Speaker, through this outreach more than 130 street-involved pregnant women were able to access previously out-of-reach health and social resources and services, leading to 60 recorded births, of which HER staff attended 13. Because of this program 32 children were able to remain in their mother's care and another five were taken in by family or friends. That's 37 children who have a brighter, healthier future. Evaluations have also shown that the women who received assistance also exhibited positive behavioural changes related to their substance abuse and sexual practices and felt more empowered to stay safe and be involved in decisions about the care of their babies.

I'm incredibly happy to say that just one short month ago the woman that headed that program, the woman who's been the driving force behind Streetworks and the growth of harm reduction services here in Edmonton, Ms Marliiss Taylor, was appointed as a member of the new Alberta Health Services board of directors. Now we as a province have the opportunity to benefit greatly from her deep knowledge of and experience with implementing harm reduction as well as her deep compassion for Albertans caught in the vicious cycle of addiction.

These services help people and save lives. They reduce the need for costly health and social interventions by helping individuals in need make safer, healthier decisions. Let's be clear, Madam Speaker. The ultimate objective of harm reduction services is to see individuals empowered to cease the activities that cause them harm. Harm reduction services help people to do so without the judgement and stigmatization which have traditionally accompanied social policy. Organizations like Streetworks support individuals in need to access treatment by first building relationships of trust, by assisting those in need, offering them small amounts of help, and then over time helping to guide them towards treatment and, hopefully, one day being free of the activities that caused them and others harm.

As noted, I recognize that there have been many important first steps that have been taken by Alberta Health Services to support and implement harm reduction services. I'm very grateful to see those having been taken. I believe we have the opportunity now to do much more. We have an opportunity now to benefit not only those Albertans in need, these vulnerable populations, but all Albertans across the province. For that reason, I will be happy to vote in favour of this motion in the hopes that both the availability of and the support for these services will be expanded across Alberta.

Thank you.

5:30

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise in the Assembly today to speak to Motion 505, put forward by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South. First, let me

express my sincere appreciation to the member for bringing this motion forward. I believe wholeheartedly that the member is bringing forward this motion in an effort to help the most vulnerable amongst us, and I salute the member for this.

As I have said before in this Assembly, I believe that as a society we are judged by how we treat the most vulnerable among us. I believe – and I trust that members on both sides of the aisle agree with me – that we should strive each day to help those most vulnerable in our society. We might not always agree on how to do that, but I truly believe that all members of this Assembly do want to help.

I spent a good portion of my previous life working as the executive director with the Mustard Seed. I have worked for many years with homeless individuals suffering from addiction. I had the privilege of growing up in a family that has been dedicated for decades to caring for Alberta's homeless population. It's an issue that I care about very much, and it is at the core of who I am.

There are many reasons why people end up homeless, but with the limited time that I have here today, I would like to focus on the fact that addictions are very common among our homeless population. Some individuals are homeless because of their addictions, some became addicted after they were homeless, and of course, some homeless people are not suffering from addictions. But without a doubt, if you spend any considerable time working on the streets with homeless people, you quickly learn that addictions are a major issue.

With that in mind, I want to make clear to this Assembly that I am all for reducing the harm to those suffering from addictions. I want to ensure that we are helping the most vulnerable in our society, as I have said, Madam Speaker. However, I have some concerns, though, that sometimes harm reduction strategies that I have seen in the past – their focus often unintentionally becomes not about helping people get better or about helping people become productive members of society or helping them overcome the prison of addiction they find themselves in.

I believe wholeheartedly that we need to provide avenues for individuals to not only reduce harm but to truly eliminate harm, to try and fix the situation and to help individuals escape the pit of addiction that has been destroying both their lives and the lives of people around them. We need to make sure that while focusing on reducing harm, we are not just taking the individual and hiding them from the world. Simply hiding the problem from the view of the day-to-day public is not a solution. We must not relegate these individuals to areas that are essentially palliative care and say to them: "Here you go. Here's a safe place. You're not in an alley any more. We're reducing harm from your addiction. You're still harming yourself, but you're just doing it slower and out of sight." Instead, we need to ensure there are places and programs in place to provide support to these individuals and services not only to reduce harm but to eliminate harm, enabling them to get better and to have better lives.

I do not want to see people in the streets, suffering from addiction, placed in what amounts to palliative care, where, yes, the harm from their situation is being reduced, but it is not being eliminated, and they are still suffering from the pain and severe consequences of addiction. I know I have been to more funerals for addicts than I can count and more than I care to count. I have worked with many addicts who are homeless. Some have been able to escape the prison of addiction; some have not. I can tell you that the ones who have escaped the prison of addiction are living happy, productive lives in our society. The ones who did not are still on drugs, living in despair. Many have been shuffled off to housing units somewhere. Some are even no longer with us.

One of my favourite success stories in my career belongs to a young lady who I will not name, Madam Speaker. She realized that she had had enough, that she wanted help. She was severely addicted to methamphetamines for many years. She called an uncle and begged for help. He, of course, did not know what to do, as family often does not, but he started calling everyone he could to help this girl. He called dozens of agencies. All were full or had waiting lists that were weeks or months long. He ended up calling me, and when I answered the phone, he started telling me the story. I had to say the same thing as everyone else: "Sorry. I'm full. I'm beyond full. Every bed is full." He pushed me passionately for this girl. He knew he had no options left.

My gut told me to do something, Madam Speaker, so I talked to our staff, and we ended up putting her up in a motel, and we found her some treatment programs focused on beating her addiction. She arrived at our facility less than a hundred pounds, looking as near death as I have ever seen somebody walking. Within six months she was unrecognizable, sober, and learning the skills she needed to cope. She would eventually become my executive assistant and would go on to college. Just last year she graduated with an accounting degree and has never looked back.

I know dozens of stories like that. They're what made the job worth doing. That is important for two reasons. The reason this girl got treatment was because we managed to squeeze her in. Our donors generously provided enough resources so that we could go outside the box and get her the help she needed. Secondly, from the moment she arrived, we focused on getting her the help she needed, not reducing the harm that came from the behaviour but, instead, giving her the tools and the support to overcome her addiction.

I've seen other street people that I have known through the years, that came into our facilities to eat or sleep on the mat. They stayed on the streets or entered programs that were not focused on getting resources to help them overcome their addiction. Many of them are dead now, Madam Speaker, more than I care to remember.

Addictions are terrible. Of course, we want to see harm reduction, but we do not want to see out-of-sight, out-of-mind policies: you, go sleep here; continue your behaviour. This is less risky, but you're still doing what is killing you. That is basically palliative care for drug addicts. I do not want to push to have the problem become out of sight, out of mind. Putting them in this corner makes it a little more comfortable for us and safer for them to do their behaviour, but the behaviour is still killing them, prolonging the inevitable. To me that is the avenue of no hope. That is the road of giving up. I instead would prefer to help people overcome their addictions, overcome their burdens and have great lives.

I spoke in this Chamber before about my dad. My dad is my hero. Here is a man who was homeless at 12 years old. He became addicted to every substance under the sun. He drank Lysol and other terrible things just to fuel his addiction. The RCMP in his hometown became so sick of him that they decided to go with the out-of-sight, out-of-mind approach. They picked him up passed out in a park, because they were so sick of dealing with him, and they threw him on a bus. He woke up in Calgary, where he continued to live on the streets and slowly kill himself.

If it was not for a group of men who saw him and took pity on him, fed him, clothed him, housed him, taught him how to face his demons, I shudder at the thought, Madam Speaker. If it was not for them, I would not be here, my brothers would not be here, my kids would not be here, the Mustard Seed certainly would not be here, and the tens of thousands of people that my dad helped through his work at the Mustard Seed would not have been helped. The girl I told you about would not be a sober accountant living a successful life. You see, those men chose to invest in my dad. The RCMP that

day – and I’m not ragging on the RCMP – chose out of sight, out of mind.

I ask you, Madam Speaker: which option was the better option for my dad, for our society? Clearly, the path to getting my dad sober and free from demons was the better path. The path of supporting the girl I worked with, who is now an accountant, was the best path. The critical thing for her was that the resources were in place that were needed to get her help. We need to ensure that we get the funding to those who can help the people in need, that we make clear that we can face these terrible problems with people and help them overcome it, that we choose to invest in people rather than put them out of sight, out of mind.

I’m all for harm reduction. I know that we cannot help people who are dead from overdosing on a bad fix. I know how terrible it is to see somebody get an incurable disease from sharing needles. I’ve seen it. I get it. But I’m not in favour of the sort of harm reduction that focuses on the palliative care model, which provides no avenue of hope to overcome the streets or the prison of addiction.

For me this motion is vague. It does not fully spell out what we are trying to do. I cannot vote for a motion that does not make clear that we as a society, as a province, and as a government are not only focused on reducing the immediate harm; we must remain focused on eliminating that harm and helping people out of the prison of addiction. As such, I cannot support this motion. I feel obligated to always vote on the side of investment in individuals. I want to ensure that we are not just reducing harm but that, instead, we are providing hope and making lives better.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thanks to the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundry for his very honest and powerful statement supporting, I think, harm reduction in addition to the many other ways that we have to show real commitment and compassion to people who have a disease called addiction and who cannot make good choices as a result of that addiction.

I hesitated to get up because I am involved in the mental health review with the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake. But it’s a well-established, well-shown, well-proven approach to reducing risk. It is only one aspect of a comprehensive care that includes housing and counselling and detox and many approaches to cognitive and behavioural therapy and all manner of things: for some, meditation; for some, acupuncture. There are many different traditional treatments in the First Nations community that have been shown to help.

5:40

Nobody is saying that harm reduction is the be-all and end-all treatment of addiction. What we’re saying is that there’s been ambiguity not only in this province but also federally by the Conservative Party of Canada about whether they support it or not. They’ve given a little bit but not sufficient. They have not been clear about what they do not – and it is a subtle issue, to be sure. Some people can argue that you’re enabling drug abuse by giving a substitute, for example Suboxone for fentanyl or methadone for blocking . . .

An Hon. Member: Heroin.

Dr. Swann: Heroin. Thank you.

It is only one of an array of care that has to do with really helping a person to take that next little step to freedom.

While I can’t indicate recommendations before the committee commits to its recommendations, I can say that as a public health officer, someone who’s been involved with addictions over many years through the public health system, I’ve seen the benefit of limiting the spread of HIV with condoms. I’ve seen the benefit of methadone in people who reach the point where they suddenly say: “I think I can do this. I have the supports I need. I have a house. I have the mental capacity now. I see what I’m doing. I’m going to make the tough decision. I’ve been given these extra few weeks or few months as a result of the methadone I’ve been on. I’ve had a good counsellor for the first time. Somebody has demonstrated their commitment to me, and I suddenly feel like I believe in myself.” All these things come together, and harm reduction is just one piece of that, which allows them to take that big leap to say, “This is it; I’m going to get off” whatever the addiction is.

There’s no question that it’s a little big vague. It’s a general principle, but it’s a general principle that we haven’t had the confidence of the federal government. Even the provincial government hasn’t sustained and seriously committed to and educated the public to reduce the stigma and to reduce the sense that this is enabling drug addiction or that it’s enabling promiscuity or whatever they want to argue about the other side of harm reduction. I just wanted to say that from a public health perspective, from somebody who has worked with high-risk individuals in the past, there’s no question in my mind that the evidence is there. I will certainly be supporting this, and I’m hoping that my committee – I’m only one of three who are heading up this review committee – will also support it clearly and strongly.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other hon. members who wish to speak to this motion? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I really want to acknowledge the wisdom and courage that’s been shown by many of the speakers across the aisle as well as on our side. I’m rising, actually, just to augment and echo what the Member for Calgary-Mountain View was saying. As a physician I’m very aware of the medical consequences of not doing harm reduction. Some of you may know that for many years I was the medical director of a blood transfusion service in this city. I can tell you that the failure of our medical system back in the mid-80s to recognize harm reduction as a means of preventative health led to one of the greatest medical tragedies that this country has ever experienced. Whether or not we can deal with mental health issues with medication or with counselling or with better genetics, we are still left with this problem of needing to deal with the consequences of this, and certainly this motion would help our society deal with the realities of the effects of mental health.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Then the hon. Member for Red Deer-South to close debate.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I’m very pleased that I had the opportunity to bring this important motion to the floor today. I really enjoyed the thorough debate and appreciated many of the points made from all sides of this House.

In closing debate, I’d like to reiterate that there already is a lot of harm reduction work going on throughout our province that is supported by both AHS and by front-line, nonprofit organizations. I’m proud that this government cares about the health and well-being of all Albertans, including people with addiction and mental

health needs. The minister's work on this file shows this. We are supportive of interventions that save or improve lives. Harm reduction ensures that people are treated with respect and without stigma and that substance-related problems and issues are addressed systematically.

Madam Speaker, I hope this motion will be able to help further that work, and I thank everyone for their contribution to this important discussion today. I sincerely hope that all members in this House will join me in supporting this motion today.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 505 carried]

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

Mr. Bilous: I thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am seeking consent to adjourn the House until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:47 p.m. to Tuesday at 10 a.m.]

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