



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 30, 2015

Day 25

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

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

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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)	McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (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)	
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)	

Party standings:

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

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Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 30, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us reflect. Fellow members, this past week we lost a former member from the 26th Legislature and then one of our own, the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway. Yesterday many of our fellow members attended the memorial and heard his family and friends express heartbreaking words to describe the loss of light in their lives. Although it's hard to make sense of the events of this past week, the tragedy of a great life lost too soon, it is clear that this gentle giant of a man brought light to countless lives here at home, abroad, and indeed to this Assembly. Let us take a moment to remember him and what he would be asking of us as we move forward.

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

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Hon. members, I believe that our former member who has left us would have been singing that national anthem with pride.

Sergeant-at-Arms, would you please march off the colours of Alberta.

Please stand.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms removed the Alberta flag that was draped over Mr. Bhullar's desk and marched it out of the Chamber]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Thomas Palaia, consul general of the United States of America. The consul general took office this past summer, and we're delighted to welcome him on his official visit to Edmonton. The bonds between Alberta and the United States run deep. The U.S. has long been our largest trading partner. In 2014 alone Alberta's exports to the U.S. were more than \$109 billion. We have strong linkages in energy, agriculture, and forestry and countless ties in education and culture as well. I had the pleasure of hosting Mr. Palaia at a luncheon earlier today. We discussed areas of mutual interest and the potential to build on our relationship, especially when it comes to leadership on the environment. Mr. Palaia is seated in your gallery. He has risen, and I ask all members of the Assembly to give him the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: I understand that we have some schools with us today. The Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Riverview and fellow cabinet minister I'm happy to introduce a group of students from Grandview Heights school. There are 35 visitors in the audience. Ms Levesque as well as Mrs. Chan, Ms Stromberg, and Mr. Li, would you and the students please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Legislature a group of grade 5 and 6 students from Aurora elementary school in Drayton Valley. There are too many guests for me to introduce individually. I want to assure this Assembly that Aurora school is an amazing place full of dedicated teachers and students totally engaged in their learning. Over the years I've been welcomed on many occasions to the school as I've run basketball clinics and programs for the elementary students in Drayton Valley out of Aurora school. In the group today are former colleagues, former students, children of students I have taught, and to top it off, there is even one student that goes to the same church as myself. This is my family. May I ask the students and staff of Aurora school to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors, do you have another introduction?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House a group of medical students who are here today to advocate for changes to the immunization policy in Alberta. These medical students have a rich history of advocacy related to their future patients and to the health of all Albertans. They include Justin Khunhkhun. He is here as the chair of the Political Advocacy Committee at the University of Alberta. We also have John Van Tuyl, senior chair of the Political Advocacy Committee at the University of Calgary. Both are joined by their student colleagues, who share in this Assembly's passion for public health. I ask that they rise in addition to the other members of the delegation and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Edmonton-Centre.

1:40

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today two people without whose love and support I would not be here today, my parents, Ruthven and Annette Shepherd. My father arrived in Alberta from Trinidad in 1967, my mother from the Netherlands in 1948. They are proud Canadians, who've worked hard to build good lives here and now in retirement freely give of their time, most notably in support of their church community and their 13 grandchildren. While our political views may differ and from time to time we've had the differences that parents and children do, I know that I've always had their love and

their support, as evidenced by their presence here today. With them here today is my niece Brooklynn Shepherd, who I look forward to the opportunity to speak a bit more about when we have an opportunity to speak about Bill 205. While they have risen, I'd like to ask everyone to provide them with the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The 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 this Assembly Dan Jolivet. Dan is one of my constituents, who lives in Belle Rive. He's extremely interested in government and politics and has volunteered on numerous political campaigns, including the most recent, Janis Irwin's federal election campaign, as well as my own in Edmonton-Decore. Of course, I would like to ask Dan to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a privilege and an honour to introduce to you and through you some very hard-working folks who live and reside in my constituency. I'd like to introduce you to Mr. Dave Plett, the CEO of Western Feedlots, and Melissa McWilliam, the resources manager of Western Feedlots. Some folks travelled with them today to talk a bit about Bill 6 outside on the Legislature steps, and those would be Darlene McWilliam, James Palin, and Bernie McWilliam. I ask them to rise and this House to give them the warm traditional welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. and Mrs. Stephan and Mira Quintin. I've had the pleasure of knowing them for quite some time. Stephan and I have a shared mutual interest in going door to door and making phone calls, which we've done quite a bit of this year. Mira, of course, is a proud employee of the government of Alberta, and I'm glad that she gave up her lunchtime to spend some time with us in the Assembly today. With them is Mira's mother, Stojanka Lakovic – I hope that I've got that reasonably close – who is visiting all the way from Serbia. I ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the staff of the Rutherford constituency office, Thomas Bonifacio and Vicki Anderson, two very hard-working people who spend their day amending all of my errors. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly four fantastic people whom I love and admire. First of all, I would like to introduce to you my two youngest children, Savannah and Justus. I

have five children, but these are the only ones that are still at home. Next, I would like to introduce to you my beautiful wife, Angie. She has been the love of my life for 25 years, and I look forward to the next 50 years with her. Last but not least, I would like to introduce my mom. She is the one who, when I was young, was my greatest champion. She was the loudest cheerleader at the basketball games and the most embarrassing person at sappy movies. These four drove up today in order to show their solidarity with our farm brothers and sisters. My wife is a city girl, just so you know. I say this to show that this movement is supported not just by rural Albertans but by everybody. If you could rise and receive the traditional welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I have others.

The Speaker: My apologies. Please proceed.

Mr. Hunter: Sorry. We don't want to forget anybody here.

I'd like to introduce to you Brian Hildebrand. He's a third-generation farmer from Skiff, Alberta, who farms with his wife and five children. He is here today because he is concerned about the implications that Bill 6 could have to his family farm. Brian's grandfather immigrated from Ukraine after the Russian Revolution in search of freedom and opportunity and purchased the farm where Brian now lives. Brian is hopeful that his children will follow in the footsteps of his grandparents Gerhard and Maria and his parents, George and Irma, and continue the family passion and business of providing Albertans, Canadians, and the world with food that is produced in a safe and responsible way.

I'd also like to introduce Don Penner from Grassy Lake. He's a third-generation farmer. Don and his wife, Jennifer, raised three children on their irrigated dryland farm. His daughter and son-in-law, Ben and Rebecca Thomas, now farm with him and are here also because of their concerns with Bill 6. Ben and Rebecca have three small children, who are enjoying growing up on the farm.

Tim Willms from Grassy Lake is a third-generation farmer who started farming with his father when he was knee-high to a grasshopper. Tim farms both irrigated and dryland with his wife, Michelle, and three children. Tim and Michelle hope their children will follow in their footsteps on this 90-year-old safe and amazing farm.

Jason Saunders from Taber is a fourth-generation grain farmer. Jason began farming with his father, where he learned safe and best practices from three generations before him. He has two adolescent children, who are enjoying the opportunity that farm life provides them. Jason has served on numerous boards and commissions and is a great advocate for agriculture in Alberta.

I'd like them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Mr. Cooper: You got Whac-A-Mole.

Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and introduce a good friend of mine as well as a constituent of the magnificent constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. Devin Hartzler is a farmer in the Carstairs area, where he farms on a multigenerational farm. He has a number of children, all of whom also have a passion for farming. There's no one in this entire room that wants a safe farm more than Devin Hartzler. He's here today to express some of his concerns about the direction that this government is going, and I really appreciate and value his long drive here today. I ask that Devin rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today and introduce to you and through you three gentlemen from Foremost, also a long drive away, that also run very, very successful family farms. Whether it's the 1,600 e-mails I received since Friday or the 1,500 people on the front steps two hours ago opposed to the implementation of Bill 6 – the value that these gentlemen and these farms have provided to all Albertans. I would like to ask Dan Mehlen, Ross Scratch, and Wade Sturtevant to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A great pleasure for me today to introduce to you and to the House my incredibly hard-working office manager, Shannon McClennan-Taylor. Shannon has worked for me for three years coming up in January. Diligent, compassionate, and very competent, keeping my office and sometimes my life running smoothly, she's joined by her husband, Lonnie Taylor, who is assistant manager at Atmosphere in downtown Calgary. Both are great assets to me and my constituency. I wanted to recognize his five years of service as a member of the Social Media Committee with the Calgary Stampede and the last three years with me in Calgary-Mountain View as well. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:50

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other guests for introduction today? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you for the indulgence, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to introduce to you and through you indeed to all members of the Legislature some of Alberta's fine farming families. These are the same farming families that have taken time out of their hectic schedules to exercise their rights to play opposition to actions, potentially, in the Legislature. They deserve to be acknowledged. They are Shandele Battle, who has achieved 21,000 electronic petition signatures, and her husband, Ted; my assistant, Laura McDonald, from Hanna; Faye Hibbs; Laurie Painter; Guy Neitz; Doug Larson; John Gattey; Daryl Bouisson; Danny Hozak; Travis Olsen; James Palin; Justin Griffith and Dawn Griffith along with their children Cordel and Mandy. We also have Neal and Vanessa Roes with their toddlers Brinley, Tenley, Jurta, Riber, and Kywnn. Also, we have Vaughn Roes with that same family. We also have Kevin James and Pat James, Vernon Snethun, Jason Wilson, and Jared Dougan. Would those of you who were able to make it into the Assembly please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Oral Question Period

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

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation Consultation

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, all my questions today are about trust. When a government loses the trust of voters, it becomes much harder to govern. This NDP government is determined to squander whatever trust Albertans were prepared to give them. First, they attacked our economy with tax increases and more regulation. Second, they went after the energy industry with the royalty review. Third, they went after a \$3 billion carbon tax, that no one campaigned on, and now they want our farmers and ranchers to trust

them. What has this government done to keep the trust of Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the opportunity to address the question. Certainly, we are working to make sure that we have opportunity to collaborate with Albertans themselves. I want to thank my colleagues for taking the time to actually attend the rallies that have been spoken of. I think it speaks to our values in wanting to work collaboratively with individuals to make sure that we set the record straight around what specifically this legislation means and making sure that we get it right in regulations moving forward.

Mr. Jean: Sounds like we might actually have consultations coming.

There are over a thousand farmers and ranchers here today because they don't trust this government to protect their way of life. They know that this government has zero hands-on experience in farming or ranching. They also know that this government is too arrogant to actually listen to farmers. They know that the government ministers and MLAs say one thing, but the government's own information sheets and the bureaucrats who are running the come-and-be-told meetings say the exact opposite. Why should Alberta farmers and ranchers trust this government at all?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have been informed that there was some misinformation shared by officials at the meetings. That is being rectified. We will have cabinet ministers in attendance at all of the consultation meetings moving forward, and we are very happy to engage with the individuals.

In terms of assertions that have been made about people not having any hands-on farm experience, that's simply not true, Mr. Speaker. There are lots of different types of farms in Alberta. I myself actually happen to be a shareholder in a farm. We own our family farm, that was homesteaded by my grandparents, and I'm very proud of that and to continue with that legacy.

Mr. Jean: Well, I'm sure that if your grandparents were here, they'd have something to say about this particular lack of consultation.

Mr. Speaker, there are 45,000 family farms. I doubt you could even find a hundred of them who are prepared to give this government a blank cheque on regulating every aspect of farm life. Everyone is telling the government to go back to the drawing board. Even left-wing commentators are saying: tap the brakes; slow down. Farmers don't trust this government because they know that this government doesn't trust farmers. If this government won't listen to farmers, will they at least listen to their friends and apply the brake to their plans to hurt Alberta's farm families?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we are also upset about some of the ways that this has unfolded, that there has been misinformation shared by some members, even, of this House about what the actual legislation is about. We're working to make sure that what we do is that if some tragic incident does happen, farmers don't have to worry about losing their farm and that the family members of the person who may have been harmed don't have to worry about losing their only source of income. This is legislation that's in place in every other jurisdiction in Canada, and we're

working to make sure that we can bring Alberta in line with what was done 98 years ago.

Mr. Jean: News flash: you're in control of this mess.

The NDP government has a strange definition of consultation when it comes to farmers and ranchers. They have written a law that allows cabinet to do whatever it wants through regulations, and their answer to concerns is: trust us. Well, every farmer who attended their first meeting knows that no consultation is happening. Not only that, but the civil servants at that meeting had no answers for the thoughtful questions put to them by farmers. That is not consultation; that's telling them how it's going to be. Why is this government treating farmers and ranchers like second-class citizens?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We certainly heard the feedback loud and clear from the members in participation in Grande Prairie. Tomorrow there is a consultation happening in Red Deer. There will be cabinet ministers in attendance as well as a number of other supportive parties. We think that the questions that have been asked have been very valid and deserve to have thoughtful responses, and that's one of the reasons why we've worked to expand the number of consultation meetings and to make sure that members have access directly to the ministers implicated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jean: Every single person wants safe farms, but anyone with real-world experience in agriculture knows this is a very complicated issue. Farms and ranches are so much more than workplaces. The rules for a white-collar office or a factory have to be different than those that apply to a 24-hours-a-day, 365-days-a-year farm or ranch. If this government actually did any consultation whatsoever, they would know that, and if ministers and government MLAs attended the come-and-be-told meetings, they would know that. Why isn't this government actually consulting with Alberta's farmers and ranchers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are going to be attending all the meetings. There will be cabinet ministers in attendance tomorrow night. [interjections] I know that the question was asked, and we already gave the answer in an earlier question, but it was asked again, so I'm giving the House the respect that they deserve in knowing what's going to be happening moving forward.

I want to thank people for wanting to build this in partnership. I know that there are many farmers, including farmers in my own family, who want to make sure we get this right and that everyone can rest assured at the end of the day. We are absolutely committed to making sure that we address the various types of farms in consultation with farmers.

Mr. Jean: It's very simple, Mr. Speaker. Stop the bill. Put the brakes on. Listen to farmers and ranchers. Don't pass it next week. Any farmer who attended the first information meetings on farm labour changes quickly figured out that it wasn't a consultation meeting. They also figured out it wasn't a place where they could go for any answers whatsoever. Any detailed questions were met with: oh, I don't know. Any government that introduces a bill that impacts the lives of 45,000 Alberta farm families but can't answer detailed questions has got it wrong. Stop. Will the minister just

admit that she has messed up this issue, and will she slow down this bill and actually go back and consult with farmers and ranchers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard from farmers and ranchers, and I want to thank them for speaking up and making sure that we work together to support their livelihood moving forward. One of the reasons why we've added so many new consultation opportunities is because there has been significant demand as well as making sure that cabinet ministers are there in the future and that there will be opportunities to get answers. There is consultation happening tomorrow, and there will continue to be consultation for many days to come. I think that farmers are showing great leadership in this.

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

Royalty Review

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A hundred thousand Albertans are unemployed, and the NDP remain stubbornly attached to their risky ideological agenda. Carbon taxes, business taxes, massive job losses: it's all beginning to add up. There is perhaps no better reminder than the NDP's royalty review. Over the weekend a panel member had this message to send about the end product. Quote: I am confident that segments of the industry will remain competitive. Unquote. Translation: companies will be shutting down. How can Albertans possibly trust this Premier after the economic chaos the NDP is bringing to our province?

2:00

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. We are working with industry to ensure that we optimize our royalty system to maintain competitiveness and create long-term sustainability for industry as well as for Albertans. The panel will submit its advice to the government in the near future. We look forward to receiving their feedback and making sure that we are acting as the owners of the resource and that it's certainly supporting all Albertans.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Well, here's another quote from the royalty review panel member: whenever you have a change of this magnitude, there are always elements of the industry that cannot be competitive. Unquote. We know the carbon tax will handicap companies. Oil well drillers have already said that without lower royalty rates, companies will be running out of this province, and now panel members are cushioning Albertans for another crippling blow to jobs in the energy sector. It's making Albertans sick. Does the Premier realize the damage her policies are doing to people's lives, or does she just not care?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're absolutely working with the royalty review committee. They will be submitting their report by the end of the year. One thing that I think is really clear to all of us on this side and, hopefully, some members on the other is that a good economy is good for Albertans. The two go hand in hand. We are certainly working with them to make sure that we take the feedback that's being gathered into careful consideration. We want a healthy energy sector for many years to come to benefit all of us.

Mrs. Aheer: We hope this idea of feedback will transfer to some of these other issues we're talking about.

Jon Schroter, the head of Victory Well Servicing, has already had to move out of Alberta because of this toxic investment environment, calling the NDP, quote: one more reason why the western Canadian oilfield is slowly going to die. Unquote. Mission accomplished for the NDP. For other small to mid-sized companies still trying to invest in Alberta, all signals are that this royalty review will either make them shut down or move operations. Premier, that's fewer jobs for Albertans out of work; that's less money here in Alberta. Does anyone in the NDP understand?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're really proud of the fact that we're continuing to work with industry on a variety of initiatives, including the royalty review as well as the climate leadership strategy, and that was endorsed astoundingly by a number of individuals in the sector, including CAPP. They want to make sure that they have a strong product that they can sell internationally. Part of that means a strong reputation internationally, and the only way we're going to have that is if the fearmongering on the other side stops and we start working for what Albertans want, which is good Alberta product and good long-term jobs.

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

Public Consultation

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By now we've all learned about this government's farm and ranch consultation process. It consists of a few consult phone calls, some trust-us-we-know-everything meetings, and little sharing of the feedback received. This government only hears what they want to hear and already agree with. To the Premier: for the benefit of rural Albertans who are wondering why they were not consulted before legislation was forced upon them, what can you tell us about what your government's policy for consultation should be?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. I know that after 44 years sometimes it takes time for change and what the processes are going to be moving forward. We made it really clear after the first meeting that we are going to be having cabinet ministers at the consultation meetings moving forward. We've increased the number of consultations, and we're going to be making sure that we have an opportunity to engage with individuals. Certainly, the member opposite would have every opportunity to bring recommendations forward to government or to the democracy committee moving forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about change. When I was labour minister, our government, including the agriculture minister of the day, met with farm and ranch communities on farm safety, and we were at the point where our discussions were leading to overall acceptance of some new rules. Since then, this government has gone in the opposite direction and washed away all of the trust and goodwill built up. To the labour minister: what have you done to so obviously break trust with farmers and ranchers and undo the good work that was previously done?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. It will give me the opportunity to clear up some of the misconceptions that are out there. We most certainly have been consulting with farming groups right throughout the summer. Acknowledging perhaps the work that the third party had done and did nothing about, we will, I assure you, take it forward with the consultations that we're going to be taking from now and moving forward to make sure we're doing the right thing.

Thank you.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, farmers and ranchers don't agree with what the minister said.

Mr. Speaker, public relations companies are hired to sell products and push out messages. This government hired such a public relations firm to facilitate what they called a consultation in Grande Prairie. To the labour minister: how much was this PR firm paid, and was the contract sole sourced?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. It's very important to us as a government to make sure that we're walking with farmers and ranchers to ensure that we hear, and it's so important that we understand the nuances of the industry. That's what we're going to do. We've changed things for the forums coming up, and I'll be attending them along with the agriculture minister.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, when this government was elected, there was a lot of hope – a lot of hope – that perhaps things would be different. I said “was” because it seems they're falling into the same trap that so many governments before them have fallen into. I'll take the House back to June 3, 2008, when the Government House Leader said, when dealing with a contentious piece of legislation, “I don't think that we ought to be making significant changes to policy that affects thousands and thousands of people's lives without consulting with them.” [interjections] To the Government House Leader: do you still believe this?

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member. I did not hear your question because of the noise in the House.

Mr. Clark: I will happily repeat the question, Mr. Speaker. On June 3, 2008, the Government House Leader said, “I don't think that we ought to be making significant changes to policy that affects thousands and thousands of people's lives without consulting with them.” My question to the Government House Leader is: do you still believe those words?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question around government policy and consultation. We're certainly taking the feedback that we've been hearing after Grande Prairie's consultation into careful consideration. The meeting tomorrow will be held differently. We will continue to ensure that we have opportunities for farmers to work in partnership with the government of Alberta to support their industry.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now I'd like to share what the hon. Premier said on that same day, June 3, 2008, when she talked about consultation, saying that we need: “to consult with

those who are impacted by it. You know, work that is done behind closed doors does not count . . . as the kind of consultation that's required." To the Premier: do you still stand behind those words?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the opportunity to say again that we are absolutely taking the feedback that's been given through phoning our offices, sending e-mails, and attending the meetings into consideration. It's absolutely impacted the way that consultation . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Now could I hear your answer, please, Madam Minister.

Ms Hoffman: It's impacted the way that consultation is going to be continuing to unfold moving forward, and I thank Albertans for their feedback on that. Hopefully, everyone will be feeling better about the process tomorrow, after the meeting, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, I'd like to share one last quote from the Premier, this time from May 15, 2008, when she said that the government "should talk to the people who work in the system," and that "a lack of consultation . . . will not achieve [their] goal," that "we need to ensure that we take the time to finally get change for the better." Now, this government wouldn't change legislation affecting unions, teachers, and nurses without consulting them first. To the Premier: are there stakeholders in Alberta that are not worth consulting prior to implementing legislation?

Ms Hoffman: No, Mr. Speaker. We're happy that we've had so much feedback, that there's been so much interest in moving forward. We also are going to be happy, at the end of the day, when people can . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Could you try again, Madam Minister?

Ms Hoffman: We want to work with family farms and with all different types of farms to make sure that there are so many different types, that they have opportunities to have their voices heard. There are a number of individuals that have said that they appreciate some of the assurances that will be brought forward with WCB. Some have already volunteered to be a part of that. We hope that we hear from everybody on all sides of this moving forward because we know that what farmers want is also what we want: safe workplaces and good returns for Albertans, Mr. Speaker.

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

2:10 Provincial Fiscal Position

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's financial plan has had positive response from constituents speaking with me. The Finance minister met with economists and credit agencies last week to discuss Alberta's economic outlook. Can the minister update the House on those discussions?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to update the House and the MLA from Spruce Grove-St. Albert. I've heard a lot of things and positive responses about the budget, but I think the most important one is that today DBRS came out with a confirmation of Alberta's triple-A credit rating, and they said that we're stable. They confirmed that our government's strengths include a

strong financial position, the lowest overall tax burden amongst all provinces, and a low debt to GDP.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: in your meeting with the Conference Board of Canada and chief economists what advice did you hear on how to kick-start Alberta's economy?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. The meeting took place last week, Mr. Speaker. I heard that Alberta is focused on the right things, I heard that they supported our countercyclical approach to investment in Budget 2015, and I also heard that we're in line with private-sector forecasters around WTI and other things.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the sharp decline in the global price of oil this year, again to the same minister: what advice did you get from chief economists about the government's forecasting?

Mr. Ceci: The advice they gave me is to look at private-sector advisers and to see what their forecasts are. We've taken a low average of all those forecasts going forward.

They also said to stick with the program. They believe that we have to keep on top of expenditures and bend the curve on operational expenditures. They also believe that we've got a countercyclical approach that'll benefit the economy in this province in the outgoing years.

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

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation Consultation (continued)

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are frustrated with this government's lack of wide consultation. This government claims to be doing things differently, but when groups like the Western Canadian Wheat Growers, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, and indeed the Hutterian Brethren have cause to complain, this government needs to listen. To the Premier: will this government state today that they will promise actual consultation with Albertans that are directly affected by proposed legislation rather than special-interest groups?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I'm going to start with something that we can all agree on, and that is that safety is paramount. I think everybody in this House can agree on that. You know, I had the opportunity to talk to many farmers just out here on the steps this afternoon. I welcomed that opportunity to do so. I welcome the opportunity to consult and talk with as many farmers as I possibly can over these next few days and over the next few months, keeping in mind occupational health and safety regulations. We have 13 months yet to consult and talk with these farmers, and I very much look forward to doing so.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, indeed, Minister, safety is a priority.

I have a lot of friends today in the gallery and indeed outside the door. They want the government to make this Legislature a place where problems can be solved, where a level of co-operation and trust between all parties can be achieved. To the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: will you give more than lip service to these Albertans by actually spending time hearing their concerns today?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member again for the question. I absolutely hear the concerns of these farmers. I take it very seriously. I take it as a personal responsibility, a responsibility of this government. As we've said, as cabinet members have already said today, we're taking all that very seriously, and we're moving forward. We're hearing as many farmers as we possibly can.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member. Second supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government has no issue with creating panels to consult with ivory tower elites on climate change and indeed royalties, can the minister explain why you chose to ignore farmers' direct input? Will the minister commit to attending a public forum in Bassano on December 5 to face these farmers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for his suggestion to attend a forum in a town I hadn't known there was a forum in. I couldn't commit to that. Members might know that I lived for some years in Bassano, so I'd actually welcome that opportunity. I also welcome the opportunity to talk to as many farmers, as many farm families as I possibly can. I've had the opportunity to talk to very many – many, many – over the summer; I welcome that opportunity again. Moving forward, this is going to be the right thing to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Family Farms and Bill 6

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As someone who grew up on a farm, I understand that farming and ranching is a lifestyle. It is a labour of love. Small family farms are community driven, and friends and neighbours are a big part of how these farms survive when the workload reaches capacity. Growing up on a farm teaches you a great deal about life and hard work. The majority of Alberta's farms are small family operations. As an MLA in rural Alberta I'm proud to have the support of many constituent farmers, and I work hard to advocate for them and their families. I'd like to ask the minister of labour: do you support family farms?

Ms Sigurdson: Family farms are essential to the culture of Alberta. They're very important to us. I myself grew up in the Peace River country, and my friends went to 4-H. They'll continue to go to 4-H. Friends and neighbours, the culture: they'll still exist. This bill does nothing to take that away. We're very proud to increase safety on farms. That's what this bill is about. It's about safety.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there's a big difference between a family farm and a large corporate farm or a

large feedlot when it comes to labour, to the minister of labour: how do you differentiate between family farms and corporate farms?

Ms Sigurdson: Well, it's very important for us to work out these nuances together in the consultations to make sure that we're hearing them because there's not one size fits all. It's very important for us to make sure that we listen to farmers and make sure the legislation is reflective of that. We absolutely want to work with the farming and ranching sector to get this right.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for the answer. Given that you support family farms and you differentiate between them and large corporate farms, to the minister of labour: do you think you can group family farms and corporate farms into a one-size-fits-all basket for labour standards?

Ms Sigurdson: We absolutely knew that we can't do one size fits all. That's why it's very important for us to work with the sector, and that's why we're having these consultations. We very much need to work that out. We're very pleased because we know that everyone wants workers, people, to be safe on farms, and that's what this legislation is about.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, this weekend I saw something that I have never seen before. I organized a town hall this weekend, and within 24 hours I had 184 farmers come to tell me their concerns. I saw people plead and cry over proposed draconian, government-forced changes to their lifestyle. These farmers love to do what they're doing, and if you mess with that, you're not just messing with their livelihood. You're messing with their lifestyle. How many people will it take telling the government not to do something before the NDP actually listen?

2:20

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Certainly, we are keen on working in partnership with farmers throughout Alberta. There are over 11,000 farms just in the NDP caucus ridings alone, and we know that there are many on the other side as well. We want to continue to work in partnership with them and make sure that their feedback can be well received, and I thank them for doing so.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, there were 1,500 people out there telling them one message: kill the bill. We know that education versus legislation is the best approach. Given that we have the lowest farm-related fatality rate per capita in Canada – and this because no one cares more about farm safety than the moms and dads who run them – what makes this government think that mandating a government-led initiative will be a silver bullet that makes everything better given that the industry-led initiatives have been working for years and years and years?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are different types of farms, and of course we want to make sure that no matter where you are working, you can go home at night feeling safe. I thank the many farmers of Alberta for showing their leadership over many

years. It's been 98 years since they were left as the one sector not protected by legislation, and 98 . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Just finish your sentence, Madam Minister.

Ms Hoffman: We want to make sure that workers as well as employers can feel safe at night. Farmers are often employers for their communities and for their neighbours. Certainly, the way of life is something that we want to continue to support moving forward, Mr. Speaker, and we'll do so in partnership.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, we have consulted with farms and ranches. They feel it's safe. Why can't the NDP government get this?

Given that it is already difficult for young farmers to take over the family farm, does this government believe that adding more red tape will incentivize young people to get in the saddle and take the reins of the family farm, or is this just about the government's plan to have big, unionized, corporate farms buy out the family farms?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that there have been a lot of misconceptions and misinformation out there. Let me be clear. Kids will still pick rocks in the summer, neighbours will still help each other out in times of strife and when they need help with their work, and . . . [interjections]

Mr. Mason: Come on, you guys.

Mr. Nixon: Well, stop lying. Jeez.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Ms Hoffman: Albertans want to roll up their sleeves and help each other, and that will continue to be the case in Alberta. We're confident of that. What has been said is that too much time has passed where simple protections haven't been offered to workers and assurances to employers that if something tragic happens on the farm, they won't lose the farm because they didn't have supports of WCB or other types of insurance programs. We simply want to make sure that we work in partnership to make sure that everyone can continue to have successful livelihoods.

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

Family Farms and Bill 6

(continued)

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past weekend I met with farmers and their families with tears in their eyes because they thought about the future of their way of life and our province once the NDP are done wreaking havoc. I can tell you that all that my constituents are asking for is just a chance – just a chance – for their voices to be heard before their livelihoods and their communities are attacked. To the minister of agriculture: will you acknowledge the need to actually listen to farmers and ranchers before this government attempts to ruin their way of life?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I can assure the member that I will protect family farms to my last breath. The safety of family farms is paramount and will continue to be so. We heard from the third party earlier about the

decade of work they've done, that they've unfortunately failed to act on. I will assure you that this government will act. We'll do the right thing.

Mr. Nixon: Well, given that our province as it stands today was built around family farms and homesteads and given that any drastic changes made to the rules surrounding the 45,000 family farms in our province will have a serious and direct impact on farmers' livelihoods, their children's, and their children's children, will the agriculture minister wake up and realize that listening, not unilateral implementation of legislation without consultation, is the way to go?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the member: I can assure him that I am fully awake, and I relish the opportunity to talk and discuss with as many farmers as I possibly can going forward on this. Hearing from them, I hear their concerns. Without a doubt, I'm looking forward to the discussions at the town hall meetings, as many as I can. I can assure you that I do listen to them.

Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Given that there is the truth about family farming and the way that it will be implemented by this government and then there is what the government is saying and given that over the weekend the jobs minister said, and I quote, that farm kids will continue to make their communities proud in the local 4-H programs, end quote, and neighbours and relatives will continue to help each other out in times of need, when you look at OH and S's own website, it says the exact opposite. To the minister of jobs: why does her ministry's website disagree with her?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for bringing up 4-H. I'm quite proud of our 4-H program in Alberta. I'm quite proud of the 4-H program right across Canada. This legislation will in no shape or form have any effect on the 4-H program; 4-H is an educational, recreational system. It's not an employer-employee relationship. Anyone who thinks that it is, I'm afraid, is sadly mistaken. As well, the culture of a farmer helping out another farmer: this legislation will in no shape or form change that.

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

Farm Safety

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The most important thing when it comes to farm safety is education. Farms are owned and operated by caring and responsible Albertans, who understand just how dangerous things could be if not treated with the respect that they deserve. The diversity of size, the diversity of product, and the diversity of cultural background of each and every farm in this province have a bearing on what farm safety looks like. Family farms strive for the safest possible working conditions because their farms are not only their workplace; they are their homes. My question to the minister of labour: can you explain what expertise this government has that Alberta farmers do not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to the member for the question. I know that many farmers every day are very conscious of safety and doing everything they can to make

things safe. We want to work with them to make sure that that's across the board, that there is no jurisdiction in Alberta where workers aren't safe. We'll make sure that the safety rules go ahead. We're going to do that.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Only an NDP minister of labour could equate legislation with safety as a causal effect.

Given that the Farm Safety Advisory Council has researched and consulted extensively with Alberta's farming industry to create action plans for increasing the culture of health and safety through education, certification, and training resources, to the minister of labour: what recommendations from the Farm Safety Advisory Council's 2012 report have been integrated into the government's future plans for farm safety?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of labour.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for the question. I just want everyone to know that we're using all of the information that's already been gathered. Further, through the consultation processes we are listening very specifically to farmers about what we need to know. It's, of course, education and legislation, those two things together. Every other worker in Alberta has that, and we're going to make sure that farm workers are protected, too.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very interesting that the minister of labour's interpretation of that safety council report is very, very different from what the authors of the report stated. Given that one of the most dangerous aspects of the farm is often machinery or heavy equipment operation and given that Alberta farmers know very well how to get the most out of their equipment for the longest period of time, will this government be implementing regulations that will require farmers to upgrade older equipment to adhere to regulatory standards?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of labour.

2:30

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We're continuing to listen to the farming and ranching sector to make sure that we're understanding the very specifics of their sector. We want to work with them to make sure that it works for them, and we're very proud to make sure that it'll be safe for everyone. Just like workers in other workplaces, they'll be protected, too.

Thank you.

Health Services for Transgender and Gender-variant Albertans

Mr. Connolly: Mr. Speaker, transgender and gender-variant Albertans face a variety of barriers on a daily basis, not the least of which is adequate, supportive access to health care services. As someone who's very involved in the fight for LGBTQ-plus equality, I hear from people from across Alberta concerned about this issue on a daily basis. To the Minister of Health: what measures does the ministry have in place to assist transgender and gender-variant individuals seeking full access to health care?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Our government is very proud of the commitments that we've made to publicly support the trans and gender-variant community in Alberta. Of course, part of that is continuing to have budget allocations for gender reassignment surgery from Alberta Health. That's included in this year's budget. As well, we are proud of the fact that we brought Bill 7 forward as a government caucus, which passed first reading unanimously in this House last week. We're working to enshrine gender identity and gender expression as protected categories in the Alberta bill of human rights.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that supportive medical personnel in care can be vital for the well-being of transgender and gender-variant individuals and given that transgender and gender-variant people are at a higher risk of heart disease, anxiety, depression, suicide, substance abuse, eating disorders, interpersonal violence, and certain cancers because physicians and mental health practitioners often turn away transgender and gender-variant people because of prejudice or perceived lack of skills to treat such patients, how can Alberta Health ensure that these individuals will be able to access appropriate resources?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Our government, of course, believes in universally accessible health care, meaning that we have that top-quality health care for all Albertans, not just those who can afford to pay for it. We are working to identify good models of practice for standard of care.

In Alberta there is a gender clinic at the Grey Nuns hospital, that has been operational since 1996, something we should all be very proud of. As well, in the Calgary zone there's currently a pilot project at the mediclinic, that's been operating for about a year, at the Alberta Children's hospital, which was formed with the partnership of endocrinology, addiction and mental health, and sexual and reproductive health and has demonstrated positive outcomes and a good set of evidence-based practices for care. The mediclinic pilot . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Mr. Connolly: Mr. Speaker, given that many transgender and gender-variant Albertans are worried about beginning and maintaining hormone regimens, to the same minister: are there any plans to help make hormones more accessible?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Right now physicians in Alberta can prescribe hormone therapy to assist with transition if a doctor and patient together decide that that's the best course of action. At times Albertans are also referred to an endocrinologist to ensure that appropriate hormones are prescribed. I'd encourage all Albertans and their family physicians to contact the College of Physicians & Surgeons to identify the appropriate physician specialist to assist with ongoing care of individuals who receive hormone therapy.

Thank you.

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

Government Policies

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Words are important as they provide meaning to what we are trying to say. Words have definitions. It seems like this NDP government has trouble with definitions. They seem to have the incorrect definition for terms like “revenue neutral,” “consultation,” and even the simple word “no.” To the government: how can something be revenue neutral when it raises \$3 billion in new money? People across this province and outside these doors are against some of your most recent actions, saying no. Is it NDP government policy to not consult, or is it just the current government practice?

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: Second point of order noted.
Response, minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member. If I understand the question, of course, our carbon announcements last Sunday made by the Premier referenced the uses for our carbon price, which is that every dollar that is collected in the new carbon price will stay right here in Alberta to build a new economy. An adjustment fund will help families make ends meet. It will support small businesses, First Nations, and people working in the coal industry. That is what leadership looks like. Throwing up your hands and denying the science of climate change is a thing of the past.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government does not have proper definitions or answers, let’s fix the problem by giving them all dictionaries for Christmas. Given that during the last election the NDP promised to review rail costs for Alberta’s agriculture industry in order to make transportation more affordable to them, maybe the next definition they should work on is “promise” because this promise was broken. To the Minister of Transportation: why are rail fuel taxes rising in your budget when this government promised to lower rail costs?

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, it’s pretty clear to me with respect to this matter that our taxes, rail fuel taxes are lower than in other provinces, and in difficult times it is time for all of us to pull our weight.

Mr. Loewen: Given that farming can be a difficult thing to do in that the majority of farming is time sensitive as seasonal changes dramatically affect farming actions and given that this government is interested in forcing legislation onto farmers that is ill conceived – I see that no one on the other side represents farmers, though there seems to be lots of consultation with unions – can this government commit to real consultation before passing any bill that affects our most important agriculture sector?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Rest assured that we’re going to be talking to those farmers going forward. It’s paramount that we take all into consideration for this legislation.

Thank you.

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

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation Consultation

(continued)

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One thing that I find to be the most valuable tool to a legislator is the ability to consult, to listen, and to learn. There are 1,500 folks here today with family farms. They didn’t get consulted, they weren’t listened to, and certainly no one learned from them. To the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: can you tell us specifically who you spoke with who actually has a family farm?

The Speaker: The minister of labour.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. It’s very important for us to be consulting with farmers and ranchers, and we have been and will continue to. It’s ongoing and . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Please continue. I will continue to give you the necessary time until I can hear your answer, and that goes to the entire House. Madam Minister, please proceed.

Ms Sigurdson: It’s very important to us to hear and listen to farmers, and that’s what we’re doing. We’ve had one consultation, and there are eight more scheduled. If we need to schedule more, we’ll do that. Please rest assured that we’re doing that. It’s very important to us.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Consulting after the fact.

Again to the same minister: given that we’ve heard from stakeholders who report that the consultation process can in some cases be a phone call informing them of a decision or a meeting where the details of the decision are provided in lieu of asking for thoughts and opinions, can the minister provide any assurance to Albertans who are concerned that government has confused consultation with declaration?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the minister I just want to apologize for some of the challenges that have already gone on. We have listened, and we know that we need to do things differently in the forward consultations. So we’re listening, and we’re changing the way we’re doing it. We know that this is about safety, and we all want that. We all want to make sure workers on farms are safe. I know everyone agrees with that.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that a key component of proper consultation is a constant and respectful interaction between government and those affected and given that as elected officials the buck should stop with us, will you commit that the members of your caucus will attend every single consultation going forward? If not, then who is ultimately responsible for answering to this legislation?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The buck stops with me. I know that it’s my responsibility, and I take responsibility. I went out on Friday and listened to farmers talk about their concerns. I went out today. I’m going to be attending the consultation as well as ministers and

caucus people. Rest assured that the buck stops with me, and I'm wanting to go forward to make sure that we listen and make a plan with farmers.

Climate Change Strategy

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, following the climate rally at Lethbridge city hall yesterday my constituents told me that the new climate change strategy shows that we are showing leadership to protect our health, environment, and economy for future generations. I'm proud to say that around Lethbridge we're home to one of the biggest wind farms in the province, several biogas plants, and that many constituents have solar panels on their homes. To the minister of environment: how will the new climate change strategy support . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Today the Minister of Energy and I announced our government's plan to have 30 per cent renewable energy by 2030. We were joined by leaders from Alberta Energy and electricity companies as well as companies looking to invest in building Alberta's future electricity system. We know that what we have done here has charted a path forward for a stable investment climate for renewable power and a way to transition us off coal, protecting our families' and our future generations' health.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that places like Lethbridge College currently offer training that supports growth in important renewable energy industry jobs, to the same minister: how will the new climate change strategy help expand new jobs for Albertans?

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that investment will be the driving force behind many of the new jobs that our policies are creating. For example, the vice-president of EDF EN Canada today said, "With this announcement the province is well-positioned to attract billions in direct investment from corporations like EDF EN, growing the green energy economy and creating well-paying jobs for Alberta families." I believe that those job creators speak for themselves.

The Speaker: Second supplemental, please.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that coal-fired power plants will be phased out by 2030, again to the same minister: what are you doing to ensure that Alberta has a strong, stable, diversified renewable energy sector to support our power needs?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We are working with our partners to steer Alberta towards a cleaner electricity future. Through this transition we will work in co-operation with the electricity generators and our power regulators, the Utilities Commission and the Electric System Operator, to implement these goals. The president and CEO of the Alberta Electric System Operator today said, "The AESO is confident that by working closely with government and industry, we can reliably implement the transition away from coal." That's exactly what this province will do.

Members' Statements

NutraPonics Canada Corporation

Cortes-Vargas: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today and acknowledge an Alberta-based business venture that is five years in the making, in my riding of Strathcona-Sherwood Park. What is clear is that there are a variety of ways that many of my constituents continuously focus on local food sustainability and entrepreneurship. This manifests whether it's in our fields or in our warehouses. In this case it's in our warehouses.

NutraPonics Canada Corporation is dedicated to the development and commercialization of intensive, small footprint, high-density natural food crop production technology. I toured this facility in October, and I learned about how this process works. It contains a single aquaculture tank of fish, which supplies nutrients to 10 plant-growing bays as well as harvesting and processing areas. It covers a 38,000-square-foot warehouse, and this warehouse can provide food to over a thousand people in the constituency, Mr. Speaker.

The technology is perfectly suited for individual businesses. Its scalable, modular facilities fit any production demand. Their modular growing facilities are well suited to urban agriculture, remote communities, industrial camps, commercial developments, and even farms. There is low water utilization because they are using recirculated water. NutraPonics supplies naturally grown vegetables and herbs, functional foods, nutraceuticals, and much more. Finally, NutraPonics gives back by contributing to solutions addressing the United Nations zero hunger challenge.

Mr. Speaker, this is an exciting business and a fine example of innovative, sustainable entrepreneurship happening in Strathcona-Sherwood Park. Moreover, it's how the larger conversation of local food sustainable practices needs to be had throughout our province.

Thank you.

Bill 6 Opposition

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, there's an old saying. Put 50 farmers in a room, and you'll hear 100 opinions. That old saying doesn't ring true today because today hundreds and hundreds of farm families have rallied at this Legislature to send this government one message: stop Bill 6 and provide meaningful consultation prior to passing this bill. They're joined in spirit by thousands and tens of thousands of their friends and neighbours back home who are organizing in opposition to Bill 6. Our rural communities are very, very concerned about how this government is taking this rushed approach to this bill. This approach puts at risk their livelihoods, their homes, their very way of life. Farmers are going to have none of it. By refusing to provide meaningful consultation on regulations prior, this government has angered rural Alberta like never before.

Over the past week my office has received a flood of opposition to this bill, hundreds of calls and e-mails, not to mention the stacks of hastily prepared petitions. Family farms shouldn't have to be here demonstrating and demanding a voice. Grandmas and grandpas shouldn't have to be going seat to seat in local arenas for signatures just to protect their very way of life. But they're doing it, Mr. Speaker. They're doing it because they care about their friends, their families, their neighbours, their communities, and their way of life. They're doing it because they recognize the inherent value in that way of life and this government is choosing to ignore it.

Mr. Speaker, if the government's chief objective with Bill 6 was to organize farmers, congratulations; they've done it. This government promised change, to admit when they were wrong, to apologize for their mistakes, and fix the error of their ways, and that's exactly . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Bill 6 Opposition

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, farming is more than a job; farming is a way of life. Across Alberta thousands of farmers are rising up in anger because they see their way of life threatened by Bill 6. Already facing the usual challenges of markets, weather, and rising input costs, now farmers are facing legislation that threatens the very fabric of rural communities. This government has insisted that Bill 6 does nothing more than give farm workers the same rights afforded workers in other sectors. That sounds great, but it's not nearly that simple.

Bill 6 tries to treat every one of the 45,000 family farms in Alberta like little factories, factories that operate from 9 to 5, shut down on weekends, and stay closed on statutory holidays. It completely ignores the reality of farming. There's not a farmer that gets seeding done by working a 40-hour work week or gets harvest done by shutting down on weekends, Mr. Speaker, and I have yet to meet the cow that can plan her calving around weekends, after hours, and statutory holidays.

Let's be very clear. Opposing Bill 6 does not mean opposing farm safety. But in its present form Bill 6 goes too far too fast and demands Alberta farmers accept rules that haven't been discussed or agreed to, and this, to farmers, is completely unacceptable. It's no way to treat the people that feed us and feed the planet.

2:50

We agree that employed farm workers should have a financial safety net in the eventuality of an injury or death, we agree that farm accidents should be investigated, and we agree with common-sense rules that are supported by facts and best practices. But we disagree with rules that have no clear details and threaten the 90 per cent of Alberta farms that are family operations. We disagree with ramming this legislation through without proper consultation.

Please, delay the passage of Bill 6.

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

HIV/AIDS Awareness

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow, December 1, is World AIDS Day. It's a day to help us remember and reflect on all that we've lost. December 1 is also the start of Aboriginal AIDS Awareness Week in Canada.

It pains me to say that in 2014 there were approximately 2 million newly infected people world-wide, bringing the number of people living with HIV/AIDS to 37 million globally. While the face of HIV has changed, in Canada there is still much more work to be done to address the stigma and improve access to testing, treatment, and support.

In 2011 over 71,000 Canadians were living with HIV, and it is estimated that over 3,000 people were newly infected. It is also estimated that at the end of 2011 25 per cent of Canadians who were living with HIV did not know they were infected. If people aren't aware that they have HIV, they may unknowingly infect others.

World AIDS Day is a day to reflect on what we have achieved with regard to the national and global response to HIV and what we must still achieve. World AIDS Day is also a time for remembering those who have passed on and for raising awareness about AIDS and the global spread of the HIV virus. We have what it takes to break the AIDS epidemic. Let's all do our part to break the cycle and the stigma.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Calgary Lions Club Festival of Lights

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, 2015 marks the 29th year that the Lions Club has lit up Calgary's greatest constituency, Calgary-Klein, with its Festival of Lights. The Festival of Lights is a drive-by Christmas lights display located on the corner of 14th Street and 24th Avenue on the Confederation golf course. Of course, people are welcome to walk through the display and use the wicked toboggan hill located on the site. Otto Silzer, Lions chair, says that the display was started by the Lions as a way of giving back to the community for its support of the Lions' traditional sight-related programs such as the Lions Sight Centre and diabetic research.

While the display is always magnificent, Mr. Speaker, this year is particularly special because 2015 marks the year when the Lions Festival of Lights, which stretches over a half kilometre, is an entirely green display. With an investment of \$120,000 and over 3,000 volunteers, they converted 300,000 conventional incandescent light bulbs to LEDs. It is estimated that a string of 25 LED lights uses the same amount of electricity as one incandescent bulb.

This year's feature display is a fanciful Rudolph, which stands more than 11.3 metres high and 10 metres wide. The fanciful Rudolph fits perfectly with this year's 29th anniversary. The lights bring greetings from Santa Claus, toy soldiers, Rudolph, Frosty, misty snowmen, toy trains, and the gingerbread family. Stockings full of toys, 18 dancing Merry Christmases, 50 decorated trees, tolling bells, and trumpeting angels bring joy to the nativity scene.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Lions Club as well as all the volunteers and sponsors for this wonderful and well attended display, and I encourage all to pay a visit.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Bill 6 Opposition

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All across Alberta farmers and ranchers packed town hall meetings to voice their concerns about Bill 6, and Wildrose MLAs were proud to be part of that process. We understand the critical importance of consultation, and we know that farmers want to be heard on this even after the NDP tried ignoring them. Ramming through this legislation is going to hurt family farms.

Just like in Grande Prairie last week the members opposite were absent for most of these meetings, so farmers and ranchers picked themselves up, got in their trucks, and drove here today to the Legislature. If this government was listening, they would hear them loudly but respectfully telling them to slow down Bill 6 and get it right.

These aren't the only people calling for a slowdown to Bill 6. Today the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association said the same thing: slow down Bill 6; get it right. Even some of this government's biggest supporters are saying: slow down Bill 6; get it right. But the government doesn't want to listen.

It's no secret that this government is being run by people from virtually everywhere in the country except Alberta. Since there are no farmers in this government, let me enlighten the members opposite about what kind of people farmers are. They are some of the hardest working and most dedicated citizens. They feed us, they steward the land, and they solve some of the most complicated problems. In Alberta we're proud of our farmers, and we look for ways to support them, not attack them.

You can't just ignore farmers or hope they give up. They have the strength and courage of conviction that the members opposite couldn't even begin to understand, and when it comes to Bill 6, they have right on their side. Slow down Bill 6. Get it right. You can hear the calls coming from every corner of this province and from the front steps today. This government needs to listen.

Thank you.

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I would like to report that the Standing Committee on Private Bills has had certain bills under consideration and wishes to report that the following private bills proceed: Bill Pr. 2, Bethesda Bible College Act Amendment Act, 2015; Bill Pr. 3, Rosary Hall, Edmonton Repeal Act; Bill Pr. 4, Canadian University College Amendment Act, 2015; Bill Pr. 6, Covenant Bible College Amendment Act, 2015; and Bill Pr. 7, Living Faith Bible College Amendment Act, 2015.

Further, the committee wishes to report that Bill Pr. 1, the King's University College Amendment Act, 2015, and Bill Pr. 5, Concordia University College of Alberta Amendment Act, 2015, proceed with amendments. As part of this report I'm tabling five copies of the recommended amendments to bills Pr. 1 and Pr. 5.

I request the concurrence of the Assembly in these recommendations. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the member has requested concurrence in the report. Does the Assembly concur in the report? All in favour say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Opposed, say no. The motion is carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent for two items. Number one, I request, in reference to Standing Order 7(7), that we go past 3 o'clock to finish the Routine for today.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Mr. Bilous: My second request is that we revert briefly to introductions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Calgary-Bow, you have a report?

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the following six letters of support for Bill 204. They are from the Elizabeth Fry Society of Calgary, CEASE up here in Edmonton, the YWCA of Calgary, Calgary Housing Company, Calgary Counselling Centre, and HIV Community Link Society. I have the necessary five copies of each letter.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of my colleague to table a petition detailing hundreds of signatures of people across Alberta who oppose Bill 6.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm pleased to table five copies of the Child and Youth Advocate annual report 2014-2015 in accordance with section 21(1) of the Child and Youth Advocate Act.

3:00

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Hoffman, Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Occupational Therapists 2014-2015 annual report, the College and Association of Respiratory Therapists of Alberta annual report 2015, the College of Dietitians of Alberta 2014 annual report, the College of Physical Therapists of Alberta annual report 2014.

The Speaker: My apologies. We need to revert to Introduction of Guests.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Please proceed, hon. member for the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three fine young Calgaryans from the riding of Calgary-Fish Creek. I ask that they rise as I introduce them. The first guest is Philip Schuman. Philip is a professional in the risk management industry, working for the third-largest insurance brokerage in the world. He also instructs at the Insurance Institute of Canada and the Insurance Brokers Association of Alberta. Outside of this busy schedule he is an active and dynamic entrepreneur, with many projects and partnerships always on the go. He also runs a weekly poetry club at a seniors' residence and is politically active and engaged, volunteering on several constituency associations, including his current role as the youngest president in the history of the Calgary-Fish Creek PC Association.

Next is Elliott Schuman. Elliott is a visual designer with knowledge and experience in various creative fields and mediums while also being active in the promotional industry. Elliott is also an entrepreneur, having just launched his new business, Alpina Visual, which seeks to provide small business and charities with affordable options in creative and original designs. Elliott is active in PC Youth, sits on the Calgary-Fish Creek PC board, and volunteers his time for several other worthy causes.

Finally, Kinga Nolan. Kinga is a politically active high school student who has been involved with a variety of federal and provincial political campaigns since 2006. Additionally, she has been in the sea cadet program for four years, having been awarded three medals for her citizenship work; namely, the Lord Strathcona medal, the Royal Canadian Legion cadet medal of excellence, and the Navy League medal of excellence. She has volunteered at a local long-term care facility, at the Royal Canadian Legion, and with sustainable resource development to help build trails and identify species at risk. Kinga has suffered from postconcussion syndrome for over 16 months. However, in truly inspirational fashion she has used this negative experience to strive towards bringing awareness to the danger of concussions in youth. She

hopes the province will consider a bill similar to Rowan's law, which is currently under consideration in the Ontario Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in the traditional warm welcome accorded to all guests.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a very great honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly five guests, that I was told were going to be here, and I certainly hope they've made it. In the spirit of the season they are five wise people who have come from the east. They're here because they have serious concerns about Bill 6, and I'm very pleased that they were able to make it: Melissa Guenther, Lindsay Westman, Helen and Tyler Nowosad, and their five-year-old son Rowdy Nowosad. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd like everyone to join me in giving them the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there any other guests? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two Lions Club members who made the journey from Calgary today: Otto Silzer, Lions Club chair, and Alastair Smith, Lions Club member. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, any other guests? Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the House Barry Anuszewski. He's a farmer from the Whitemud area, northwest of Valleyview. He drove a long way to be here. The Premier mentioned that some of the issues with Bill 6 were about giving the farm workers the opportunity to say no. Barry was at the Grande Prairie meeting and, of course, with everybody else there said no. He's here today, too, to say no. I'd like to give him the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Hon. members, any other guests?

I believe we are at points of order, and I noted that there were three today. The Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Parliamentary Language

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll proceed with my first point of order, and I will withdraw the next two. At 2:22 the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre said to the Minister of Health something to the effect of: then you need to stop lying. The word that is considered perhaps the most unparliamentary of all is to accuse other members of lying. I want to reference, I mean, obviously, 23(h), (i), and (j), but under *Beauchesne's*, Unparliamentary Language, section 485:

- (1) Unparliamentary words may be brought to the attention of the House either by the Speaker or by any Member. When the question is raised by a Member it must be as a point of order and not as a question of privilege.

Mr. Speaker, section 488 gives a partial list of words that are considered unparliamentary. In this list, on page 146, the word "lie" is referenced 36 times. It is, I think, perhaps the most unacceptable and unparliamentary thing that can be said in the House.

I will indicate also, Mr. Speaker, that I have had numerous complaints from this side of the House of other members on the other side using this term. I have not, unfortunately, heard them and so have not taken this step until today, but I clearly heard the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre use the word. So I would ask that the member apologize to the House and withdraw his comments.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise to address the point of order. From time to time in the House temperatures can rise and certain members can get a little bit excited, and I think that it would be best for all if on behalf of the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre I withdraw and apologize and ensure that he does not make accusations of the other side being liars or lying again.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I personally did not hear the comment myself. Yes, that's one way of describing it, that the temperature rises occasionally. It's usually the noise that's rising occasionally.

I should also mention, for the advice of all of the House, that I received a note of apology from a member last week who used a very similar phrase. I just want to remind all of you: please do not let the temperature rise to the point that those kinds of comments take place in the future.

You had another point of order, Government House Leader, or did you withdraw it?

Mr. Mason: I withdraw those. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Point of Order

Items Previously Decided

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a report which I considered at the last sitting of the House, last Thursday, and I reserved a ruling on a point of order raised by the Government House Leader. The point of order was raised in connection with a question asked by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, which can be found on page 646 of *Alberta Hansard* for last Thursday.

I wanted to review *Hansard* before deciding on this point of order as it is in his preamble to the main question that the member referred to an amendment in Committee of Supply that was proposed to the estimates of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and was defeated. In arguing the point, as found on page 650 of last Thursday's *Alberta Hansard*, the Government House Leader cited *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, at page 617, for a principle that a question once decided by the Assembly cannot be questioned again.

3:10

Although not mentioned in the discussion of the point of order, the principle referred to by the Government House Leader is in fact incorporated into Standing Order 23(f), which states as follows:

- 23 A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that Member . . .
 - (f) debates any previous vote of the Assembly unless it is that Member's intention to move that it be rescinded.

I have reviewed *Hansard*. The member's actual question did not refer to the vote on the estimates, what transpired in Committee of Supply; therefore, I must rule that it was not a point of order.

However, even though questions may not violate the rules, I want to remind the member and all members that preambles should be tailored to comply with the usages and practices of the Assembly and relate to the actual question. Hon. members, there have been instances when I might have risen and have drawn your attention to that. I particularly want to advise Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition that on future comments you be conscious of that.

Go ahead.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for that recognition.

I wish to advise the House that notwithstanding what's on the Order Paper, there will be no evening sitting tonight.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

[The Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

Alberta Health Services Employee Earnings

- Q1. Mr. Barnes:
As of April 1, 2015, how many Alberta Health Services employees earned more than \$200,000 per year in salary and total benefits?

Student Learning Assessment Spending

- Q6. Mr. Smith:
How much has the government spent on the student learning assessment pilot projects for the fiscal years 2010-11 to 2014-15 and from April 1, 2015, to November 30, 2015, and what are the details of what the money was spent on?

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

Alberta Health Services Surgeries and Procedures

- Q2. Mr. Barnes asked that the following question be accepted.
For the fiscal years 2012-13, 2013-14, and 2014-15 how many surgeries and procedures were postponed in each Alberta Health Services facility?

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wish to have an answer to this written question for a number of reasons. In the three and a half years that I've been the representative of Cypress-Medicine Hat – and I'm very grateful for the opportunity to serve – other than the furor around Bill 6 and the lack of consultation with that, other than the previous government's attempt to harm our property rights, easily the most consistent and enduring complaint and concern of over 42,000 constituents has been the two to three years of waiting to get an elective or a semi-elective procedure done, often to be cancelled at the last moment, often to be delayed further, months into the future.

There is great compassion that I feel for these people, that other Albertans and taxpayers would feel. Of course, there are all the surgeries and procedures that are not elective. How often do those get postponed? How often does some very needy, worthy Albertan fall through the cracks?

You know, it's compounded when I jump into my car and turn on the radio. For any one of Medicine Hat's five quality radio

stations easily – easily – the number one paid advertiser is a Montana station from Great Falls or Kalispell saying: Albertans, come here; no wait time; we'll do your surgery. Then there are a number of Albertans, a number of Cypress-Medicine Hatters, that come into my office and tell me how they spent \$13,000 to \$17,000 to get a rotator cuff fixed or \$23,000 to \$29,000 to get a knee or a hip fixed rather than wait the three years. Madam Speaker, these are the kinds of things that we have to measure. We can't manage it unless we accurately measure it. These are the kinds of things that Albertans need to have control over and Albertans need to have better results in.

Part of the reason why I also feel that this question is very, very pertinent is the recent New Democrat budget. We've hit \$19.7 billion in annual health care spending, almost \$12 billion of it to Alberta Health Services, escalating at over 6 per cent a year, and we're not getting the measured outcomes. So let's measure the outcomes. Let's make the system more accessible for all Albertans.

I would also add that in the recent budget, Madam Speaker, 700 full-time equivalents were added to Alberta Health Services, without the oversight, without the direction. Again, I think that one of the key areas that our New Democrat cabinet can look at is: let's see how many surgeries and procedures were postponed in each and every Alberta Health Services facility, where these facilities are now receiving, coupled with the Alberta Health Services money, \$19.7 billion of our hard-earned tax money.

Madam Speaker, that's why I seek the answer to that question.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, as well as to the member for bringing forward the written question. Certainly, the intent is, I think, worth responding to in a factual way. I want to make sure that we can get the actual information that's being sought, so I have two very small amendments that I would like to move with regard to question 2. The first is by striking out the words "and procedures," and the second is by striking out the word "facility" and, instead, substituting the words "high volume surgery site due to system capacity issues." I'll provide some rationale on the wording of the proposed amended written question.

Would now be an appropriate time, Madam Speaker? Thank you. So the question would read:

For the fiscal years 2012-13, 2013-14, and 2014-15, how many surgeries were postponed in each Alberta Health Services' high volume surgery site due to system capacity issues?

There are a couple of reasons why I think this is pertinent, Madam Speaker. One is, of course, that we don't perform surgeries on people who aren't healthy enough to be able to have them done. So there are some times when test results will come back and will require that a surgery not be provided that day, that it would have to be postponed because of patient need. But I'm proposing, to get back to the original wording, striking the words "and procedures" because it's not actually defined for data collection and monitoring purposes. Surgery certainly is, but procedure is not something that is used to track or that is well defined within our tracking systems.

I am also proposing to amend the question to specifically high-volume surgery sites because those are sites where Alberta Health Services currently maintains information on postponed surgeries. To be more specific, AHS collects information and data on the top 20 sites where surgeries are most likely to be, the top 20 areas of volume. So there are, certainly, areas where we do have that data and would be able to share it. AHS is working towards an integrated operating room reporting system to get better data for operational

purposes and reporting to the public just as has been motivated by the member who asked the written question.

I look forward to providing the member with further details related to this question in our written response, but these are the two amendments that I'm proposing today to make sure we can give you a timely response and an accurate one, Madam Speaker.

3:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat on the amendment.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the Health minister for your answer. I appreciate it. I can accept that the word "procedures" was maybe not detailed and focused enough and that surgery is, you know, more direct and maybe easier to measure.

Limiting it only to high-volume surgery sites greatly concerns me. We have seen since the creation of Alberta Health Services and the centralization eight or nine years ago the lack of engagement, the lack of autonomy, the lack of authority, and the lack of success. Compassionately, the human resource side is a mess in rural Alberta, where good front-line workers can quite often not get answers to their questions, cannot become involved in making the system better for all Albertans. To me, 20 high-volume surgery sites suggests that once again some rural providers, some rural hospitals may fall through the cracks.

In today's electronic world, where – my goodness – we can track so many things, I can't imagine that a corporation with 110,000 employees and \$12 billion of our money can't make this wherever surgeries are performed, wherever hard-working Albertans are willing to let their tax dollars go to make our system better.

I'm wondering, hon. minister and Madam Speaker, why the minister wants to add the words "due to system capacity issues." You know, in some ways it clouds the answer. I also believe I've seen the hon. minister quoted as saying that many of the problems in our health system now are systemic, so maybe that means they all are going to be caught in this situation.

I appreciate that we all want a system that works compassionately and well for all Albertans – all Albertans – that need our jurisdiction to be the great provider that it can be and should be, and it starts with accurately and comprehensively measuring where our tax dollars are going now. So I would ask members of the Legislature to vote against the amendment and to stick to the original question. Please, let's have as much quantifiable information as we can to ensure we help all Albertans, urban and rural.

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

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Any further members wishing to speak to the written question itself as amended?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Health to close debate.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues for their understanding around the current reporting structures and also to the member, who proposed that we not support the amendment, for his feedback around data tracking moving forward. It's certainly something that I will raise with my officials around the smaller facilities.

In terms of the root of the question I think it's in terms of the system that surgeries are being delayed, not in terms of the health outcomes. I know that to test blood, make sure your white blood cell counts are at appropriate levels so you can recover from a

surgery and that it won't put you at greater risk: I don't think the House is interested in information that's based on medical need. It's based on system need, so that's the rationale for that amendment, which was just supported.

Thank you to my colleagues. I appreciate the feedback.

The Deputy Speaker: My apologies, hon. members. It was the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, the mover of the motion, that was to close debate, so I will call on that hon. member now.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thought that was great, too. That's great, and thanks to the Minister of Health for her commitment to get some measurables so that we can actually make the system better.

Again, my concern is clearly with the rural divide and the needs that so often, the further you are from the centralization, can be overlooked. If the problem is systemic, we don't need that part added to the question. Just bring us the information, and let's measure it in a way that – again, I think of the people that have waited two, two and a half years for a surgery that have it postponed at the last minute, and they hear it's because our system didn't have the capacity to handle other emergencies or handle the overflows that are in the acute beds. You know, when it's about the money that goes in, it appears to be rationing a system and forcing people out of our jurisdiction, who have worked all their lives in Alberta. I think the very least we owe them is a measurable and a commitment to make it better.

Thank you.

[Written Question 2 as amended carried]

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

Alberta Health Services Overtime Payments

Q3. Mr. Barnes asked that the following question be accepted. What was the total cost of overtime payments to all part-time employees of Alberta Health Services for the fiscal years 2012-13, 2013-14, and 2014-15?

Mr. Barnes: Thank you again, Madam Speaker. I just want to talk about two primary reasons that I ask this written question today. First of all, again, in Cypress-Medicine Hat and when I go around the province, dedicated, intelligent, caring front-line workers tell me time and time again that the centralized system has moved them from a situation where they can have authority and autonomy to ensure that needs are met quicker, more cost-effectively, and, obviously, something very important in the medical profession, more effectively. I think the whole premise behind centralization, or one of the major premises, was to save money. From what I hear about overtime costs throughout our system, I think the light that this question could shine on our spending could be enormous. It could be very, very helpful in the measurement we need going forward.

You know, I hear about the story – and I think I've said it in here before – where a front-line worker, a maintenance person, needs a little bit of glue, and four weeks later a whole case comes down from Edmonton. Then I hear front-line workers tell me about the overtime costs and how they see it and how they can't believe the inefficiency. Again, we're here for good, effective programs. We're here to compassionately help all Albertans when they need it, but we owe it to the hard-working taxpayer to get as much value for these programs as we can.

The other part of this question to the Minister of Health, the NDP cabinet, Madam Speaker, is that it's hard to find too many of our

good front-line workers who will say that they are happy in their job. I am concerned. I am very, very concerned about the human resources impact that this centralization is having on our good front-line workers. Using Medicine Hat as an example, I'm told time and time again that 10 years ago, when we were regional and we always came in on budget, if you had a problem, you could go into the minister's office, the administrator of the hospital's office, or to one of the people in charge and have a resolution in 20 minutes and then go about your day. That's why you wanted to be there serving and helping Albertans in need. Here's what I'm told happens now. An answer goes up the chain, usually no answer comes back, and if it does, it's five or six weeks later, and it's usually inconclusive.

3:30

Madam Speaker, we've got this big, big centralized system, which we sought for stability and cost savings. We've seen, with people quitting, with the appointment of yet another board, that the stability is very, very much in question. As I've just detailed, you don't have to walk too far in any Alberta Health Services facility to find human resources teetering on the edge as well. I'll bet you that when we look at the total cost of overtime payments to all part-time employees, we will find considerable waste and a lack of resources in the way that they should be. So that is why I would like to see the answers to this question and an effort to be more compassionate for the needs of Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It probably wouldn't surprise the House to know that before Alberta Health Services became one health region, there were multiple, different payroll systems that were deployed in the various regions, and for that reason, of course, in terms of data gathering and comparative data it makes it highly labour intensive. I don't think that the intention of this House is to create highly labour-intensive initiatives for public servants who are working in the organization but is, rather, to have information to help guide future decision-making. I want to say that I commend the position from where I think this request is coming.

I do have an amendment. Basically, I want to strike the words "2012-13," but to do that, I have to strike all of the years, 2012-13, '13-14, and '14-15, and substitute "2013-14 and 2014-15." The rationale is that that data simply is not easily accessible for 2012-13 because of the multiple, different payroll systems. So I doubt that it would be the intention to spend considerable HR resources, that could be spent on addressing some of the concerns that the hon. member has just brought forward, to gather information from before there was one consolidated system.

The good news is that by having the move forward to one system, we have much more easily accessible data like the payroll data around overtime payments from one system. AHS has moved from these multiple legacy systems that existed with the former health regions to one, single province-wide system, so it certainly is going to make this request and any subsequent request – I imagine that this might be one that might come up on a regular basis – easy for us to be able to provide the information on in a timely fashion and consistently.

Just to clarify, the amendment is to strike "2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-15" and substitute the words "2013-14 and 2014-15." The amended written question would read as follows:

What was the total cost of overtime payments to all part-time employees of Alberta Health Services for the fiscal years 2013-14 and 2014-15?

That's the rationale for the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat on the amendment.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you again, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank the Health minister for that answer. Certainly, transparency costs money and is always worth it, but in the interests of moving forward, in the interests of the commitment to gather the information and go forward, I would ask the House to accept this amendment. Let's go forward, build on that, and use this information.

Thank you.

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

If not, the hon. Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors has moved an amendment to Written Question 3.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to the written question as amended?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to close debate.

Mr. Barnes: Just again, thanks to the Health minister for the commitment to making, you know, our measurements stronger in there. In the three and a half years that I've been here, it's sort of frustrating and interesting that so many Auditor General reports start with the words: cabinet failed to have enough oversight. I encourage you to put in the measurables to make our very, very important health system as good as possible for those that need it. Obviously, we all will someday, our families and our friends. I appreciate the commitment to that and your commitment to electronic health records as well. It's nice to hear that that's high on our list as well. When I'm out talking to Albertans, it's important that we have this system developed and we have a system that is there for all of us. Again, I ask everyone to support the question now, and I look forward to going forward with this.

[Written Question 3 as amended carried]

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

Distracted Driving Violations

Q4. Mr. Cyr asked that the following question be accepted.
How many tickets were issued for distracted driving violations pursuant to sections 115.1 to 115.4 of the Traffic Safety Act, broken down for the period from September 1, 2011, to December 1, 2011, the calendar years 2012, 2013, 2014, and from January 1, 2015, to August 31, 2015?

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The reason we're moving this question forward is that I've talked with several law enforcement agencies across the province, and they're bringing forward concerns that distracted driving convictions are increasing. The only way to find that out is by actually writing a question. That's pretty much exactly why we're moving this forward.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I would like to thank the hon. member for his written question, and I would like to propose an amendment that Written Question 4 be amended by striking out "tickets were" and substituting "convictions resulted from tickets that were." The amended written question would read as follows:

How many convictions resulted from tickets that were issued for distracted driving violations pursuant to sections 115.1 to 115.4 of the Traffic Safety Act, broken down for the period from September 1, 2011, to December 1, 2011, the calendar years 2012, 2013, 2014, and from January 1, 2015, to August 31, 2015?

The reason for the amendment is that Alberta Transportation does not receive data on the number of tickets issued for distracted driving violations but only the resulting convictions. I want to indicate that I think, based on what I heard the hon. member say, that this will be sufficient for his purposes because it's actually what he's after.

I wanted to just conclude, Madam Speaker, by saying that distracted driving is unacceptable, dangerous, and puts everyone on our roads at risk. Between 20 and 30 per cent of all collisions are due to distracted driving, so it's clear that more work needs to be done, and our government is committed to doing that work. We have increased fines under the Traffic Safety Act from \$172 to \$287 for distracted driving. Those charged with careless driving could face fines of up to \$543.

I would like to make this amendment as requested, and I want to also indicate to the member and to the House that we are pursuing distracted driving demerit points through regulation. That is a key disincentive for repeat offenders, some of whom are happy to just pay a monetary fine. Actually, the demerits provide a real disincentive over a longer period of time for distracted driving. We are committed in moving in this direction.

I thank the hon. member for his question with respect to this matter. Thank you.

3:40

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, do you wish to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. Thank you to the hon. minister. I would agree that this clarification of my question does add clarity, and I would thank him for that clarity and would ask all of my colleagues to accept this amendment.

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

If not, I have to call the question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Deputy Speaker: On Written Question 4, any other hon. members wishing to speak to the question?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake to close debate.

Mr. Cyr: I'd like to close debate.

[Written Question 4 as amended carried]

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

Alberta Health Services Employee Earnings

Q5. Mr. Cooper asked that the following question be accepted. For the fiscal years 2009-10 to 2014-15 what was the total amount and the amount at each level paid to employees at the management and executive levels in the Alberta Health Services central zone?

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The reason why I proposed this question is that there are some who believe that the costs of management are increasing greatly. Oftentimes it's difficult

to get answers in the midst of question period debate, so I wanted to provide the opportunity to the Minister of Health to give some indication to all members of the Assembly of just exactly what's happening in the central zone.

I've had a number of folks contact my office that are front-line workers, who share some concern with the perceived growth at the management level and that the front lines of the hospitals in the region aren't seeing the sorts of supports and resources that they believe are critical to ensuring that they can provide a level of service that Albertans expect, that certainly members of this Assembly expect, that we on this side of the House expect, and, I'm certain, that members on that side of the House expect but who at the same time are quite frustrated that they see multiple layers of bureaucracy growing and growing and growing. So I said that I would be happy to ask to see just exactly what that looks like, and then it will provide us an opportunity to continue the debate around levels of management.

I know that, specifically, I've had individuals highlight some concerns about what it takes to get a job posted and, like my hon. colleague from Cypress-Medicine Hat mentioned, what it takes to get some glue or other supplies, some of the inefficiencies that these multiple layers of bureaucracy have created.

It's a small step just to try and get a sense of what's happening at that management level. It's unfortunate that finding the information is so difficult that we need to take it to this step, but I look forward to the minister being forthcoming with all of the information that is available to her.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Some of the information is difficult to access; other information certainly is not. For example, the executive level compensation is posted on the website. Part of this is very easy to access. It's through the audited financial statements. But we'll be happy to gather that information in a way that makes it more easily digestible for all members of this House.

I do have a slight amendment: first, by striking out the words "management and executive levels" and substituting "executive level," and then later, after the word "zone," adding the words and what was the total amount paid to management in the Alberta Health Services Central Zone commencing the fiscal year that Zone reporting and the single, province-wide payroll system (E-People) took effect up to and including the fiscal year 2014-15.

Just for a little bit of rationale, Madam Speaker, I'm proposing the amendments because the information requested is readily available at the executive level in schedule 2 of the AHS audited financial statements but not readily accessible for the management level. For management pay requisite data can be provided for the central zone starting with the first available fiscal year when both zone reporting and the single province-wide payroll system e-People came into effect, so not dissimilar from the amendment we voted on for Written Question 3, which I believe was 2013-14. Certainly, we can gather that information for the executive and management levels and return it to this House in a timely fashion.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills on the amendment.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I might just say that late last week, on Friday I believe, the chief of staff to the Health minister did call and provide a bit of an update that this may be the direction that the minister would like to go, and for that I would just like to say thanks. All too often in this place we have a fairly

adversarial approach, so from time to time when we can work on areas of mutual benefit or concern, it's always enjoyable. I would love to see the government take more direction, if you will, from the opposition. I know that might make them a little nervous, but at least, perhaps, the government might listen just a little bit more, and we could actually have more of these types of exchanges, which I think would be better and not worse.

Having said that, I just wanted to very briefly highlight – and I don't want to pile on – some of my concerns that got us to this point. I must admit I was surprised on Friday to hear the extent of the work that the department would have had to undertake if the amendment hadn't been accepted, just in terms of trying to go through old paper records and finding boxes of files. It's surprising to me that it was only, really, just a few short years ago that this information became so readily available, and I hope that the new government can continue to make a commitment and then follow through on that commitment to a more open and transparent government in terms of information.

I know, certainly, that on this side of the House that has been and that would be our desire. Should Albertans ever trust us to form government, we will be advocating at every turn to try and find ways to make information that should be available to people readily available to people and to be able to access it where appropriate. Obviously, we don't think that, you know, personal details of every employee of the government should be released publicly, but where appropriate we should be taking steps to move in that direction.

I thank the minister for reaching out to us. I express my disappointment that the question can't be answered, because much of the concern of the constituents in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills certainly began around that time frame that was written into the question. Having said that and knowing that the information is extremely difficult to garner, I will encourage members on this side of the House and all members to accept the amendment as presented by the Minister of Health.

3:50

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

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills to close debate.

Mr. Cooper: With brevity being close to godliness or something like that . . .

An Hon. Member: That's cleanliness.

Mr. Cooper: Oh, cleanliness. I sometimes get these things wrong. . . . I'll close debate.

[Written Question 5 as amended carried]

Motions for Returns

[The Acting Clerk read the following motion for a return, which had been accepted]

Alberta Health Services Severance Payments

M2. Mr. Barnes:
A return showing a list of all severance payments made to Alberta Health Services employees at the management and

executive levels, broken down by each individual position, for each of the fiscal years 2012-13, 2013-14, and 2014-15.

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

Construction Projects

M1. Mr. van Dijken moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing for the period from April 1, 2007, to March 31, 2015, a list of all the projects identified in each of the published Alberta Transportation three-year tentative major construction projects lists that have not yet been contracted.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm asking Alberta Transportation to provide a list for the last eight years outlining all of the projects that were not contracted yet published in the Alberta Transportation three-year tentative major construction projects lists. This is an exercise in accountability. These lists were not sunshine lists. They provided a snapshot in time of what may have been the transportation projects in a three-year forecast if something more important didn't arise.

By identifying the projects not contracted over this time frame, Albertans will be able to hold Alberta Transportation to account for some of the most important projects not done. Not only this, but Albertans will start to understand the scope and magnitude of the infrastructure deficit at Alberta Transportation by seeing all of the projects that were priorities that suddenly became no longer priorities. Madam Speaker, there may even be an opportunity to identify political projects on these lists. Highway 19 has been promised to be twinned for two or three elections now, and it still has not happened. The latest list has the highway 19 twinning project broken down into smaller sections.

Madam Speaker, this request is very simple. It may take a junior clerk or an intern summer student a week to check against the road optimization and decision-making application database and compile a new list for distribution. I trust that the hon. Minister of Transportation will see the valuable service the compilation of this list will provide to himself and his department as they strive to serve Albertans better each and every day.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I, unfortunately, will ask for this motion for a return to be rejected. The Transportation department tenders hundreds of projects through each year. As this is a continuous process, the list of uncontracted or untendered projects is ever-changing and is, therefore, only valid on the day it's produced, particularly for the current construction program. The department does not keep historical records of what projects went untendered on an annual basis.

Although our list of major construction rehabilitation projects over a three-year cycle is updated each year after careful planning and is available to the public on the Alberta Transportation website, how many projects are contracted and completed in a given year or when exactly a project is contracted depends on many factors, including the project priority changes and what new projects come onboard; the length of the construction season, which depends very much on weather, as we all know; environmental issues; market

capacity for material; unexpected land- or utilities-related challenges; industry and sector capacity; and the evaluation of projects for cost-effective delivery.

As a result, some projects may be delayed, some may be combined with other projects for cost-effective delivery, and some may be cancelled. To produce the requested list would require going through Alberta Transportation's contract system to check the status of about 1,500 projects. Additionally, changes were made to the contract system technology in 2010, so the time required to retrieve earlier data would be even greater. This would be very time consuming and, I suggest, not a very effective way to use an already busy staff who are working hard to move these projects forward, and that is our priority. If the member is interested in specific projects, we would be happy to work with him or other members to make that specific information available.

I would urge all hon. members to vote against this motion. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak in favour of my hon. colleague's motion for a return. While we've had a fair amount of co-operation in the first number of questions – and for that I'm grateful – I think that the other thing we're seeing is that governing can be quite difficult and finding answers can be quite difficult. I wish that I had before me some of the comments that the Minister of Transportation has made in the past when it comes to rejecting motions for returns or written questions because I certainly have been privy to a number of times when members of the NDP, while they were in opposition, stood up in this place and were extremely frustrated and disappointed in the government when they would reject a question out of hand all because it was difficult to answer.

While I appreciate the challenge – I think the number used was 1,500, and that is a big number – some of that information is vitally important to Albertans, and as my hon. colleague mentioned, the truth of the matter is that it could be very valuable to the department to have a sense of contracts that they tender and that they don't and exactly where they're at in the process, particularly on a year-over-year basis, so that it can help them in their planning. So not only is it good information for us to have, it's also good information for the department to have. It allows them to plan on a year-over-year basis. It allows them to decide when they should and shouldn't be sending things for tender and exactly what processes they might need to be refining so that they can move forward in a more effective and efficient manner.

When we reject a question out of hand like this, the challenge is that it gives the illusion or the sense that there's information that the department has that they're trying to hide not only from opposition members but from Albertans and particularly folks like the road builders association and others who are concerned about the status of our roads. I know there are lots of counties that are concerned about the status of bridges and the overall condition of roads and maintenance. This is a really good opportunity for the department to come forward with that information, to provide information to all of those folks that might like to have a better sense of the direction of the department and also provide the opposition with the information that we require in order to do our job.

4:00

We've seen the Minister of Health work as well as possible with members of the opposition to try to come to a mutually agreed upon solution when it comes to the question that's being asked, and I find

it a little bit unfortunate that the Minister of Transportation wasn't able to do the same. While he mentioned in his remarks that some of the even older information is significantly more difficult to track down and to go back and find, I am certain – I wouldn't want to speak for my hon. colleague, but I might just say that it would be my best guess – that if the hon. member had proposed some form of this question so that we could get a sense of the direction of the department, he too, like the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and myself, would be agreeable to getting any piece of the information we're hoping for.

It is a little unfortunate, and it is for these reasons that I will be supporting the motion as written and not the fact that the government will be rejecting this request for information out of hand.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock to close debate.

Mr. van Dijken: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's been identified by the minister that this appears to be too onerous a job to actually get completed and that it would be too time consuming, but from my understanding of the road optimization and the decision-making application database, that's already been compiled, I fail to see where it would be too onerous and not offer good information for the department and also, then, for Albertans to know where we are at with these projects. So I would continue to encourage everyone to vote in favour of this.

[Motion for a Return 1 lost]

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

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment to present, and I have the required copies to distribute.

The Chair: The amendment shall be known as amendment A1.
Go ahead, hon. member.

Ms Drever: Thank you. The amendments proposed were made after discussion I've had since the introduction of my bill in an effort to increase protections for tenants as well as those they care for. The amendments are as follows. Section 2 is amended by adding the following after clause (a):

(a.1) by adding the following after clause (j):

(j.1) "protected adult" means an assisted adult, represented adult or supported adult as [those terms are defined] in the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act.

This amendment will extend the protections of this bill to not just include children under the age of 18 but would also protect those whom the tenant cares for, whether they be a dependent blood relative or someone that the tenant is a caregiver for.

Section 4 is amended in the proposed section 47.2(1) and in section 47.3(1) by striking out “when a person or that person’s dependent child” and “or that of a dependent child of the tenant” respectively and substituting the newly added clause including protected adults.

In the proposed section 47.4 in subsection (2)(b) there is a similar substitution, again to include protected adults. Again, in the proposed section 47.4 the amendment adds the following after subsection (4): (5) the designated authority shall issue a decision with respect to an application for a certificate made pursuant to subsection (1) within seven days of its receipt.

These are high-risk situations, and we need to ensure that applicants for these certificates are not waiting around for weeks to know whether they can flee without the financial repercussions. This addition ensures that they will receive a response no later than seven days after the application.

These amendments offer more protection to the survivors and those they care for. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Back to the bill as amended. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Ms Payne: Yes, Madam Chair. I rise to introduce an amendment to the bill, and I have the requisite number of copies.

The Chair: This will be amendment A2.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Ms Payne: Thank you. I am pleased to rise to table the following amendment on behalf of the Minister of Service Alberta. The bill will be amended as follows. Section 10 is struck out, and the following is substituted:

10 This Act comes into force on Proclamation.

This government amendment, to delay implementation of Bill 204 until proclamation, will allow for consultation on regulatory development to begin in January 2016. Time for regulatory development and consultation with affected stakeholders will allow government to implement Bill 204 effectively and properly and ensure that all stakeholders understand their roles in protecting tenants who’ve experienced domestic violence. Service Alberta expects consultations and regulatory drafting with key stakeholders, including landlords, certified professionals, and women’s organizations, to take six to eight months.

I implore my colleagues to support this amendment, and I commend the Member for Calgary-Bow for her fine work to support and protect victims of domestic violence across Alberta.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just rise for a very brief – I won’t say that, just in case it’s not. I rise to speak to amendment A2. Part of my concern or frustration is that we’ve seen an amendment proposed before the House, and we are all going to need to make a decision on that in the next few minutes. There’s a pretty high likelihood that at the end of me being on my feet, the government isn’t going to continue debate. I don’t know how many of my hon. colleagues will also be rising, but the challenge is that we received this amendment approximately 35 seconds ago – that’s

untrue – at the beginning of the hon. member’s discussion. It’s my guess that prior to her rising, she had a very good sense that the Minister of Service Alberta would be proposing this amendment. It makes some significant changes to the way that the bill will be rolled out.

4:10

We have seen some co-operation in this House earlier. In fact, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow had the opportunity and shared some of her amendments or some of her hopes for her bill earlier with the opposition, which allowed the opposition time to review, to think about, to consider some of the ramifications of the amendments that she just proposed. As we saw, the opposition felt that there were a number of good things here, but the benefit is that we had the opportunity, prior to a couple of minutes ago, to review those and then to make the decision that we didn’t have much to add specifically to the amendments. We saw them voted on in this House by members of this side and members of that side, and the bill can move forward. I think that that is a healthy process.

The hon. member talked about consultation from the time that she introduced the bill until today, which has been a number of weeks. We’ve seen some of the positive things that can come from consultation, and we’ve seen the government – perhaps the government could learn a lot from this hon. former colleague and, it’s my guess, someday to be a colleague again on a day very soon. Not that I would speculate, but if I was, that would very likely be the case. So we might just, in fact, see her back on the government benches, and perhaps that’s going to be a win. The hon. member gets the need to reach out to stakeholders and potentially deviate course on a bill and an amendment, and we saw that, but what we haven’t seen on this particular amendment is any reach to the opposition.

We heard the member rise and speak about the need to change the proclamation date so that they could consult on regulations. If, in fact, there is this great need to consult on regulations, we on this side of the House have been very clear over the last number of days that this is exactly the type of thing that needs to be done prior to making law because so many of the details of a bill are often tied up in the regulations. What regulations do is that they give cabinet essentially carte blanche ability to make whatever changes they see fit as long as it fits within the framework.

We’ve seen the government propose an amendment that makes significant change to the rollout of Bill 204. Let me be clear – let me be very clear – that members on this side of the House and, as we’ve seen in the past during debate, members on that side of the House fully support Bill 204. Today, as I stand here, I continue to support Bill 204 and much of the very, very, very important work that Bill 204 intends to deliver upon.

The frustration is around the government’s lack of desire – and I say the government’s lack of desire because it was moved on behalf of the Minister of Service Alberta, who is not a private member in this Assembly – to consult. They certainly didn’t even mention it in passing to the opposition, that this might be something that you want to consider and be prepared for. We’ve seen legislation move through this House quite quickly from time to time, and today very well may be another example. So it is extremely difficult for me under such short timelines to understand the full ramifications of what moving the date of proclamation around does, particularly in terms of consultation on regulations and some of the details and the nuances that will be required because of this bill. It’s because of that that I certainly won’t be able to support this amendment.

I know from consultations with members of the community in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills that what they had hoped we would do, certainly me and, I would expect, many members of this Assembly, is to be able to provide thoughtful consideration to

legislation that's placed before the Assembly. Submitting amendments mere moments before expecting members to vote on them is not what our constituents expect. What they expect is for us to be able to provide thorough, thoughtful review that at the end of the day will ensure that our province is better tomorrow than it is today.

While Bill 204 does many of those things – and let me be clear. At third reading, barring any massive new surprises in amendments from the government, I will be proud to stand in this Assembly and support Bill 204 and all of the good intentions that it does do. But I will not be supporting an amendment that's placed before the Assembly with no prior consultation, with no discussion with the opposition. We saw this last week as well. It's becoming a trend.

We have also seen the government make some errors when they haven't taken the appropriate time. I don't want to dig up old challenges, but 7.25 per cent comes to mind. Bill 203 comes to mind, when the government went one way and then stopped to go another. Lots of times that happens because they haven't taken the time to listen to the opposition. They haven't taken the time to properly consult, which is exactly what we're seeing in government business on Bill 6, and are creating significant concern.

So I will not be supporting the amendment as presented. I would encourage others, when it comes to considering legislation thoughtfully, that's it's very difficult to do in just a matter of moments.

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

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to speak to this amendment. I guess I, too, have conflicting thoughts here. I'm very much in favour of the spirit of the bill. But, quite frankly, I'm frustrated by the process, as a succinct statement. I am pleased to see that the Member for Calgary-Bow has tried to put forward a piece of legislation with the intent to make a hopeful and a helpful and a meaningful impact for victims of domestic violence. To be clear, violence is evil. I am totally, truly in support of the intent of the bill. Albertans escaping domestic violence already face a lot of substantial barriers to a safe and healthy life. A dangerous living situation can actually be made worse by sort of the systemic issues that this bill desires to change.

4:20

Sometimes people just need to leave the situation that they're in, pick up and go, so to speak. When a situation is unsafe, it's really not fair to expect Albertans to put themselves or their family in harm's way, which is what sometimes going back to a residence means. Often the perpetrators of domestic violence will still be at the victim's home when they come back from a shelter or a hospital, and we just don't think that that would be appropriate, to expect them to have to go to an unsafe place. As legislators it is our responsibility to ensure that Alberta's most vulnerable really do have a means to protect themselves and their families regardless of the economic issues. This is really a core of what it means to believe that violence is not appropriate in our society. Just because a person can't afford to break a lease shouldn't mean that they're bound to stay in an abusive situation.

So while I think that the bill has noble aims – and I will support it, as I said at the very beginning – my point is that I'm very frustrated with the process not just for this bill but the pattern of the process. I do believe that there are opportunities to make this legislation more complete. What I'm frustrated with is to see bills continually presented and then, "Oh, withdrawn; we forgot to put

this in," and before we even get to discussing them, a whole raft of amendments are thrown at us. Surely, these things should have been thought of before the bill was handed out and presented.

The reality is that a really good intent that's done in a wrong way doesn't produce a good result. I think what we're seeing here with bills being presented or motions or whatever being presented and then, "Oh, let's take it back and change something," maybe change a whole bunch of things, as with the bill we saw the other day, 24 different amendments to it, is that there is a lack of consultation. There is a lack of considered thought going into these things. They're being thrown out like I don't know what, and I am frustrated with the process. This is not a professional way for us in the Legislature to be presenting bills that change people's lives. I just wish we could slow things down and think through them well enough so that we don't have to change them before we even start discussing them. That's my biggest frustration.

I would like to suggest, though, that in light of that, there are some areas – and I throw them out for consideration – to be thought about because I do believe there does need to be consultation on this bill, that there are some important discussions that need to be had here rather than just rushing forward with it. There are a number of nonprofits in the service sector that do help victims of violence who have actually written and made suggestions to us. I think they need an opportunity to be heard. I think the bill can be made more complete. I'm glad to hear that at some point there will be some sort of consultation. The reality is that it probably should have happened before we got to this stage.

One of the points that's been made to us by one of the foundations in Calgary is that the bill makes no provision for accountability on the part of the abuser. They go on to say that they would recommend that the bill not be put forward for second reading and, further, that inclusive consultations with service agencies would actually take place. I actually am glad to see that implementation will be delayed somewhat so that some of this could happen. But, again, I think the process here – I mean, it's continually getting the cart ahead of the horse, pushing things forward and then having, "Oops, we need to change that," before we can even deal with it.

A second suggestion again from the same organization. Their concern is that parts of the way this bill is written may in fact in the end reduce the number of available places for rent to victims of violence. Why? Because they may in fact be shunned and passed over in the rental application process when some landlords figure out that they're dealing with those kinds of situations, and then they have this bill. I think there just needs to be more thought put into bills before they're put forward. I think one of the essential principles of law-making is that they should be just, that you should do no harm, and I agree. I understand that's the intent of this bill, no harm for one segment of our society, truly a vulnerable segment. At the same time sometimes in our enthusiasm to protect one group we turn around and we create injustice for another group.

We have those who have said to us that in its current form – actually, the Calgary Homeless Foundation has suggested that in its current form landlords are exposed to a great deal of risk from those who may seek to exploit the program. I think that it's possible to mitigate some of these risks while still maintaining the intended protections for those who are vulnerable and those who are victims of abuse.

May I also suggest in that regard that the reality is that many landlords are amateurs. They're not professionals. They're not slumlords, as sometimes they're caricatured as. In fact, a growing number of landlords in our province at this particular stage in our economic cycle are people who have lost their jobs, some who have gone elsewhere to get work. They've got their house. It's underwater in terms of mortgage. They can't sell it. They want to rent

their house out. The truth is that many of those landlords have no idea how to actually rent a house. To be honest, many of them don't even understand the landlord and tenancy regulations. Furthermore, many of them, quite frankly, are good, gracious, and I'm going to say sometimes timid people who don't want to offend, who don't want to be abusive, who don't want to be hard with tenants.

As a result, all too often – and I'm sure many of you know stories and experiences of the horrors of being a landlord – you can be taken advantage of. You can end up with people that you can't get rid of. You can end up with people who do thousands of dollars of damage and then leave in the night and you have no idea where they went. Amateur landlords, what I think of as homeowner landlords, who don't understand the process, who don't understand the rules, often get taken advantage of, beat up, and abused and spend nights in tears and fear and lose thousands of dollars over it.

There are seniors that I know of who in an attempt to try and fund their income have actually moved into smaller places, tried to rent out their house, but again they're not capable landlords in some cases, and they get taken advantage of. I don't know. Sometimes the landlords are also abused, and I think that there needs to be a justice that goes for all people.

I just suggest that it needs consultation, it needs thinking.

An Hon. Member: Then vote against it.

Mr. Orr: I'm going to vote against the amendment. I will vote for the bill because I think that the spirit of the bill is right. I just wish it was written well in the first place. I wish all the issues were taken into consideration before a bill that's half thought through is thrown out for everybody to approve.

So I will vote against the amendment in principle, but I think that in principle it's the right thing to do. Let's just do it properly. That's all I'm saying. When nonprofit agencies who care for abused people are sending letters saying, "We have concerns with how this bill is going to be implemented," it causes me to sit up and listen. I cannot vote for the amendment, but I will vote for the bill because I think that it is an important bill and I think that we should move forward on it. I just wish we could see a process in which things would be handled a little bit more clearly and professionally.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much. I just want to rise very briefly to address some of the comments that have been raised. I mean, obviously, this amendment is intended to make it the case that, in fact, the bill doesn't come into force until proclamation. It's a fairly short amendment. It's fairly straightforward. The reason that it's not going to come into force until proclamation is because we would like to consult on some of these very issues. This is an amendment that has been moved by the government to a private member's bill.

I just want to say that I actually think that some of the member's comments with respect to the bill from the Member for Calgary-Bow are overstepping a little. I think that she's done a very good job with this bill, and I think to say that she proposed a bill that was slapped together or unprofessional is a little bit unfair to her. I think that she's done a very good job. I think that, you know, people have proposed some amendments to that bill that will make it easier to move forward. We're all co-operating, and I think that we're working very well together.

Those are my comments. Thank you.

4:30

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

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to support this amendment because I like the idea of going back and making sure that all the t's are crossed and the i's are dotted. In doing so, I think one of the things we find when we look at putting legislation together – and this has happened in a lot of cases – is that as we come up with the final product, there are oftentimes people who come forward and bring out a thoughtful change. I think intelligent leadership is looking at those changes and saying: okay; that actually makes the bill better. I actually believe that you don't have to necessarily assume that a bill is slapped together when amendments are brought forward. I prefer to think of it as making thoughtful changes in order to make a bill better.

In this case, I was happy to see this bill, and I believe, in speaking with the member who proposed it, that the idea behind bringing in the amendment that the act comes into force on proclamation is just to be able to get some checks and balances in place so that when the bill actually is used, there is an opportunity for people to use it in the right way. That's why I'm going to support this.

I want to actually talk about something, and the member brought it up. I think it was the concept that there could potentially be discrimination against people once there is a bill like this. I'm going to go out on a limb here and assume that you're talking about single moms. I find it a little bit disturbing that there would be a conversation about the potential of keeping single moms out of rental facilities because there is an assumption made that they are in that situation because they're a victim of domestic violence. I would also say – and I say this as a single mom – that if a situation arose where any woman in the province felt she was being kept out of a rental facility because someone made that assumption about her, I would hope that she is able to come forward to the government, report that landlord, and that landlord would face punitive measures for their behaviour.

When we have positive legislation such as this, I think that we have to put aside that need to nitpick, and I think we have to move forward with it and understand that sometimes some checks and balances have to happen afterwards, but in this case, I think – not every piece of legislation is perfect, but having a discussion about it, making some changes as you go through the process, and moving it forward so people in this province, so women in this province can use it and be protected by it I applaud. I applaud the amendment. I applaud the bill. Let's just get on with it.

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

If not, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Chair: We're back on Bill 204. Are there any further comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak in favour of the Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015. Domestic violence is an unacceptable societal wrong, which we must all stand up against. Often victims are forced to stay in dangerous living situations because of financial reasons, putting themselves and often their dependants in harm's way. This bill proposes an approach to help mitigate the financial burden of breaking a lease due to domestic violence.

My office has received some concerns about this bill which have led me to make the following minor amendment. This amendment is merely a housekeeping formality, which I've actually spoken about with the member already, to attach a statutory declaration to the attested statement. I believe this will provide concerned landlords the insurance that this process is monitored and is subjected to a strict . . .

The Chair: Excuse me, hon. member. Can you ensure that the amendment is brought to the table here before you continue with it? We need the original copy.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. Do you want me to wait?

The Chair: Just until we at least have it here.
The amendment will be A3.
You can proceed, hon. member.

Mrs. Pitt: I'm actually just going to read the amendment. I move that Bill 204, Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015, be amended in the proposed section 47.4 by adding the following after subsection (3):

(3.1) A statement made under subsection 2(a)(ii) must be in the form of or accompanied by a statutory declaration attesting to the veracity of the statement.

I urge my colleagues to support this motion with this common-sense amendment, and I thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for putting forward this piece of legislation.

The Chair: Any hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A3? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Madam Chair. Just a couple of questions for the mover of the amendment that maybe she could respond to. I guess the concern might be that the steps that would be required to obtain a statutory declaration may be difficult to achieve by someone who's under the stress of family violence and trying to move out and protect their kids and so on. Could the hon. member speak to how a statutory declaration might be obtained and how somebody under considerable personal stress might be able to accomplish one in a timely fashion?

Mrs. Pitt: That's a fair question. It was actually one that was discussed when this amendment was first proposed within the caucus. I mean, the intention is to sort of satisfy the stakeholder groups, the landlords in this situation, while still making sure – the intent of the bill is to protect those fleeing domestic violence, that they are having an easier time getting out of those situations. It's actually quite easy to have a commissioned letter free of charge, too, in most places. I'm sure that it won't be that difficult in that situation as well, understanding, too, that a lot of times these situations aren't actually immediately, that night, that this is something that has been in the works possibly for a couple of days, weeks, months, whatever the situation may be. But city halls offer, free of charge, services for this; I believe there's somebody always at a police station as well, so it won't create an extra barrier in this circumstance.

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

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm looking at the amendment, and I have some additional questions. The amendment says, "A statement made under subsection (2)(a)(ii) must be in the form of or accompanied by a statutory declaration attesting to the veracity of the statement." Now, I noticed that in the initial bill as presented, the declarations are provided by members of various

professional organizations. I think the College of Social Workers is one of them. Now, I am a member of a professional organization myself. I'm a member of APEGA, the professional engineers and geoscientists association, and when I make professional statements, my stamp and seal are the standard that I'm held to. I trust that my colleague from Calgary-Foothills can also attest to that because I know that he is also a member of APEGA. It seems to me that just having a written statement from a member of a college or a professional association should be good enough.

4:40

I'm just wondering why the Member for Airdrie is not willing to take professional people practising within their scope of practice at their word and why they're putting this additional hurdle in front of people when professional members of these professional associations are providing their professional opinion, which they have to be held to account for according to the code of ethics that they operate under. It just seems to me that this might be an additional hurdle to the people who are seeking this kind of declaration. As well, it degrades the value of the professional services that the people on the list are providing. So I'm wondering if the Member for Airdrie could provide some more clarification on those points.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: I would be more than happy to. Thank you. I first of all would like to start off by saying that I have great respect for all persons with professional designations. That's not quite the issue here. When a document has had a statutory declaration, the person who is responsible for signing that document can actually go to jail in a case of fraud whereas persons with a professional designation don't have that level of accountability . . . [interjections] – sorry; I've not finished that sentence – as much as somebody who has actually commissioned the document. That's just the way the law is. It in no way is meant to be or add any additional barrier to a person fleeing domestic violence. It's just adding a layer of accountability during this process so that this is, in my opinion, a really good piece of legislation.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Gold Bar, then the hon. Member for Calgary-North West. Or Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I caught a case of the cold sweats when you suggested that I was from Calgary.

In response, then, I can't speak, of course, to the processes that are in place for the members of the professional associations and colleges that are listed in this particular bill, not having been a member of any of those associations at any time in the past. However, speaking from my own experience as a member of a professional association that does have a code of conduct and ethics, that all members have to abide by, I can say that the range of penalties for making false or misleading statements as a professional member of this professional association includes administrative penalties, letters of warning, and can range all the way up to having my professional designation revoked, which in essence means that I would no longer be able to practise as a professional geologist if I was found to make false or misleading statements in a professional document.

You know, I have no particular desire to go to jail, and I don't think that any members of any professional associations require that kind of penalty hanging over their heads to dissuade them from making false statements. Professionals or professional members are bound by a code of ethics. By and large, most members uphold those at all times that they're doing their work. I fail to understand

how this is going to prevent somebody from making a misleading statement. In fact, I think it's a quite serious allegation against those professional associations to suggest that the codes of ethics and the regulations that those members have to abide by aren't sufficient and that we need to go to the level of requiring statutory declarations so that people can go to jail if they're making false or misleading statements.

I guess I'd like the Member for Airdrie to suggest to me why she thinks that the professional associations that these members in the bill are members of aren't doing their job well enough to encourage compliance with the law and why she feels that additional steps are necessary here.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Airdrie, did you wish to respond?

Mrs. Pitt: I do. I just want to add that this is something that's done in other provinces. It's commonplace; it's best practice. That's it. That's all. It's very simple.

Ms Jansen: I have to say that I've heard in the past from my Wildrose colleagues and from their leader that they didn't want to legislate on social issues. I get it; you don't like it. You're uncomfortable with it. But I find it unbelievable that your critic on women's issues would look at this bill, and the first thing that comes to her mind is: how do we protect the landlords? I think these folks seriously need to look at their list of priorities. When they're thinking about a woman leaving a situation where she is a victim of domestic violence and it's clearly stated in the bill who she has to talk to, they come up with an amendment suggesting that we need to protect the landlords. Unbelievable.

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

Ms Drever: Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank the Member for Airdrie for the amendment, but domestic violence is on the rise in this province. This bill addresses one of the barriers that currently stops survivors of violence from breaking the cycle of violence. We ensured that those lists of those able to write the third-party statements included professionals from communities in both rural and urban Alberta.

In rural communities, for example, having to make a declaration or to take an oath, as this amendment suggests, will create another unnecessary barrier to receiving help. In rural Alberta it is already difficult for survivors fleeing domestic violence to be able to get the help they require, which is why additionally seeking a commissioner to validate the statutory declaration on top of finding a professional from section 47.3(3) may have the unintended consequence of deterring a survivor of violence from taking the first step to break the cycle of violence.

The professionals on this list are individuals that deal with survivors of domestic violence on a daily basis, and I have the utmost confidence in their ability to decide on whether to issue their third-party statement. This amendment, although proposed with good intentions, will add additional barriers, especially to rural Albertans, and for that reason I ask that the amendment be defeated.

Mr. Clark: Very briefly, Madam Chair, I don't know what can be said beyond what was said by the hon. Member for Calgary-North West. I'm maybe not quite as charitable as my friend here from Calgary-Bow, but this is a ridiculous amendment and deserves to be defeated.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to share in my appreciation for the previous comments on this. I am, like the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, somewhat concerned at the aspersions that are cast on professional organizations. I am a physician, and I believe I am actually listed in the act as somebody that could sign this. To have an aspersion cast upon whether or not I would be faithful in pursuing my activities is reprehensible. I would feel the same if you'd cast aspersions on my colleagues in social work or psychology or nursing.

4:50

I think what's important is that women in this situation have the ability to remove themselves from the situation, and that's what this bill is about. It's not about people trying to game the system. These are women in crisis. Whatever this Legislature does, it needs to protect the most vulnerable. I would ask the Member for Airdrie or a member of that caucus to justify the comment that a statutory declaration can be acquired for no cost. I don't think that that's true. But if it is true, I would like to have the information so that I can pass it on to some of my constituents that might need that information in the future.

The Chair: Any further speakers to amendment A3? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: I wasn't going to say anything. I thank the member across from me and the mover of this bill and the other people who have spoken against this amendment.

My kids are alive, and I'm alive. This amendment would put myself, my children, or any other woman in that position in jeopardy. Please vote against this amendment.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: The irony of what's happening here, the fact that we weren't consulted about this amendment: that is not common sense. The common sense that happened here was the bill that was introduced, which protects people from domestic violence in a way that is feasible by having social workers, by having the people that are already working get them out of that situation into a better place. That's common sense. What this amendment does is that it creates another barrier, and it shows that you don't understand what the issue is.

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

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Chair. I feel compelled to rise to some of the comments that have been made in the Chamber. When I was first elected to this illustrious Chamber, I sought out to achieve the use of a legacy building that was abandoned in the small town of Youngstown, Alberta, to be used as a women's shelter. To the Member for Calgary-North West: I do know, and I have been involved. Many members in this Assembly will know and can learn that you can sign commissions. That's part of your role as representatives. You can sign commissions as a member of the Legislature. That is some of the role that we can do. So I think that some of the misconceptions and some of the emotions that are being brought forward here are unfair. This caucus is simply trying to improve a piece of legislation.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Chair, thank you. Let me be clear. We support Bill 204. We support women fleeing domestic violence and

all of the horrible things that come with that. To say that we don't is a challenge. I just want to be clear that at no point in time was it the intention of this caucus, at no point in time was it the intention of the Member for Airdrie, at no point in time was it the intention of any member of this House to create barriers to women fleeing domestic abuse. It certainly is and was our intention when the amendment was proposed that it would not create those sorts of challenges and barriers in the future.

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the committee now must rise and report pursuant to standing orders.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 204. 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? All those in favour, say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed, say no. So ordered.

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Microgenerator Regulations and Policies

506. Mr. Feehan moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to amend the necessary regulations and policies to encourage microgenerators to contribute more renewable electricity to the grid such as locally generated wind and solar.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise today to put forward Motion 506. I am very pleased to have an opportunity to speak to this particular motion and idea here in this House as I think it is very consistent with the movement of this government in its climate leadership initiative and continues the work that is being done by the government in a particular area, and that is the area of microgeneration.

Some 10 years or so ago new regulations were brought into this Legislature that allowed individuals, communities, and small farms to begin to provide electricity through various sources such as solar and wind and, most importantly, to be connected to the electrical grid and allow their generation to be contributed to the larger society around. At the time this was a dramatic change, allowing individuals to move on their beliefs and contribute to the larger society in a very particular way, focused on climate change, on responsible electricity generation.

We were very pleased that that legislation was brought in at the time, and now we're asking, as the legislation is coming due for renewal on December 31 of this year, that we revisit these regulations because so much more can be done than was previously done in the regulations introduced earlier. In particular, there are a number of limitations on the amount of generation that is allowed

for individuals, whether they be an individual home or perhaps a farmer wishing to generate his or her own electricity or perhaps in the area of community leagues in the cities or in small towns throughout the province.

5:00

One of the limitations that was introduced at the time was that one could not be compensated for any more electricity than you actually consumed yourself, which meant that, at the very best, houses in the city or on farms throughout the province could simply generate enough electricity to pay off their own electrical bill. Of course, a laudable regulation at the time, but so much more is possible.

Now we have reached a place where wind and solar and many other forms of microgeneration have become viable for the average person. We can now put solar onto our house and be able to actually expect to pay the cost of that solar panel in a reasonable lifetime of our home. It means now as well that we have to consider something new, not simply that people are able to take care of their own contribution to the change in climate and to be responsible electricity users. Now we've reached the point where they can actually be contributors to the whole province and be part of a solution that goes much beyond themselves and their own personal needs in this situation.

We've reached a point where a farmer may be able to put solar out into his field and may be able to put solar onto the roof of his barn and generate enough money to not only pay off the costs of his or her electrical use on the farm but also generate small amounts of income to help sustain the farm over time. Given our deep concern for the family farm in the NDP we would really like to see an opportunity for them to be able to generate that kind of electricity and to be able to contribute not only to the environment, which, of course, they're very dedicated to as farmers, but also to the neighbourhoods in which they live and all of the electrical use in the communities they depend on to go and get their groceries and so on. This is a great opportunity for us.

There are a number of other regulations that I could go through, but each of them essentially is focused on the same point, that it's time. It's time that we not only have people able to take care of their own needs but that we invite every single person in this province to become part of the new economy that we are creating here in this province, the economy that is not dependent solely on the roller coaster of oil revenues but, rather, on a renewable energy production system that would involve not simply a few big companies but every single household.

Imagine, if you will, a community that every household has solar on the roof. Imagine that every farm has wind out by the barn. Imagine that every community in Small Town, Alberta, is able to use a biomass generator to generate their own electricity. What we have, then, is an opportunity for people all over this province to feel like they are contributors, to assist in this move forward from the economy in which we've lived for the last 44 years into a bold new economy, an economy that is already true in many other places in the world. Places like Denmark and Germany are already in a place where their renewables are producing enough electricity to account for full days' worth of electrical use in some of those countries on occasion. We, too, can be part of that.

As part of this, it gives us an opportunity as well to begin to develop the technology, the resources, the production lines, the training necessary to ensure that we become the leaders in international, global renewables and the installation of microgeneration.

Right now we are in a terrible place where we're watching other countries do things that we are moving away from. We are reducing

our coal usage. We'll be completely out of coal usage by 2030, and we're watching at the same time countries like China build more coal plants. We need to set an example for them. They look to us for the type of living that they want to have. They see across the ocean, and they say: that's the middle-class living that we want to have; therefore, we are producing more and more electricity using coal because we want to have that middle-class living. Because we are the models of middle-class living and we do such a good job of it, it's a requisite upon us to make sure that that middle-class living is indeed a sustainable, long-term form of middle-class living. Simply doing what we've been doing for generations over and over again, we have learned, is unsatisfactory. Climate change is real, climate change is man made, and it is time for us to establish a new way of being that the rest of the world can adopt in becoming sustainable members of the whole world community.

This is our chance. I'm asking that we all in this House support the opportunity for people to come forward to develop the new green economy, to develop the opportunity for farmers to make a few dollars, for community leagues in the cities to be able to make a few dollars, and for small towns to be able to make a few dollars, all of which will sustain them financially and also sustain them in terms of providing work in the new green economy locally, in their situation, in their homes. This is a great opportunity for us. I'm thrilled to have an opportunity to do this.

Some 23 years ago, when I built the home that I live in now, we built a home to R-2000 specifications here in the city of Edmonton. As a result, we have felt like we've been contributors to this new, modern world. Unfortunately, at the time that we built the home, the individual who built our home, a well-known net-zero home builder in the city of Edmonton, told us that it just wouldn't work to put solar on the roof, that we'd never be able to reclaim that amount of money. So we didn't choose to do that, and now I find myself here in the House saying: let's change these regulations so I can go back and revisit what I wanted to do some 23 years ago and turn my house into a net-zero house. Everything else about it is ready. It's an R-2000 registered house with the federal government. All I need to do now is generate enough electricity, and I can actually stop polluting.

Thank you. I appreciate it.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you Madam Speaker. I'll be brief. I'd like to congratulate the member from the government caucus. It's the first green initiative, I think, that they brought forward that doesn't directly cost jobs. So congratulations on that.

You know what? I think the thought behind this is okay, so I'm not going to criticize the member for that. I think that his intentions are good, and I will even admire his grand vision on where this could go. I think the motion on its face is not a bad thing, but I think that when we go forward and green the planet and do all these things, we need to always make sure that we're not doing more harm than good.

What I like about the motion is that for those people that produce, if I understand it – I hope I do – more electricity than they can consume, they can sell it to the grid. Beautiful. If that's what it is, that's beautiful. If it's to have solar panels on every house in the world, maybe. Here's the problem. Again, as I think I understand it – and I'm happy to be corrected by someone with better science than I've read – solar panels are a good idea because the sun provides free energy. On the face of it, it is free. But solar panels have issues, I understand, because it uses up the rare-earth minerals that are available at a higher rate than they probably ought to be for

what they produce. Nonetheless, for those that do experimental things, if they're going to produce the electricity anyways, why not let them put it into the grid? Great. Windmills have issues. When the wind is blowing, the electricity is essentially free, and the motion says that if you're going to produce the wind energy anyways, you should be able to sell it into the grid. Good idea.

All the new technologies start out with problems, but you don't get past them unless you experiment, at least with the new technologies. For those that put solar panels on, great; let them sell it into the grid. Let's study those solar panels so that we get to the point where we know that solar panels are good. For those that produce wind, let's let them put it into the grid while we study the windmills and we look for better ways to have windmills work and every other technology, too. As far as that goes, it's fine.

5:10

I probably wouldn't be quite as giddy as the member making the motion, assuming that the current technologies are that good that it's going to take us into the future. I would say that with every technology for more green energy that comes up that while we're studying it, we might as well let people put the energy into the grid. We should always be trying to do more research so that we can get better, cleaner, purer forms of energy, and for that, I'll say that I just wouldn't want anybody to make the assumption that this is any magical answer.

A lot of these technologies have good intentions. I mean, the first battery-powered cars and maybe the ones now: I think it was proven that the environmental damage might be more than the environmental good because of the problem with recycling the batteries after the life cycle of the car. Nonetheless, the intentions were good, and great for trying that.

I applaud the member for his good intentions. If it is what I think it is, that those who produce electricity be allowed to sell it into the grid, beautiful. I just wouldn't be quite as giddy as the member was that made the motion.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise, of course, in support of this motion. I note that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford went through a list of things that we could imagine: imagine if we had a world where we had more solar rooftops, imagine if we had small family farms producing their own power, imagine if we had community leagues or First Nations producing their own power and taking those input costs out of the functioning of their communities. I would submit to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford that I disagreed with none of what he said. However, I don't think that we need to imagine anymore. I think that the time has come in Alberta to act. We can act, we can do, we can move beyond imagining, and we can lead.

We heard during the panel process a great deal about micro-generation, a great deal about the possibilities. These were, in fact, some of the conversations with the public that were the most animated, that were the most real for people. Certainly, in the consultation process, in the technical engagement sessions, Madam Speaker, we heard as well from the renewable energy industry on this matter of microgeneration. But more than that, we heard from municipalities on this matter, we heard from First Nations on this matter, and we heard from the agriculture and forestry industries in the technical engagement sessions on this. We also heard in the buildings and houses technical engagement session a great deal of interest in moving our microgeneration policies beyond their

current straitjacket of one megawatt into a more fulsome policy where we might realize some of the gains that other jurisdictions have begun to realize.

This is about more than simply feeling like we are doing the right things for small businesses, for our agricultural producers, for our forestry industry, for our First Nations, and for municipalities. It's about taking input costs out of their budgets. It's about smoothing out many of their electricity costs and other costs of undertaking the business of their organization such that they may focus their efforts on other important works: if they are municipalities, then focusing their efforts on issues related to reducing housing and homelessness, for example; if they are landlords for low-income housing, ensuring that they may keep rents affordable. These are all ways that organizations might benefit from such an undertaking as amending the microgeneration regulations, Madam Speaker.

We also heard in the engagement sessions, both in the public consultations, in which almost a thousand Albertans participated, and in the online written submissions, which numbered close to 500, a great deal about community power, about geothermal, bioenergy, and waste to energy. Again, Madam Speaker, these are community-building initiatives in which there is a great deal of entrepreneurial energy, that previously the government of Alberta had taken a pass on, essentially let it pass them by. We are interested in those job-creation opportunities. We're interested in that entrepreneurial activity. We are interested in the spinoff effects that such trades and other manufacturing jobs could have across the province.

Dr. Leach's panel did recommend an amendment to the microgeneration regulation, and, you know, in principle we liked that idea. The question then becomes, Madam Speaker, how to do it and to ensure that we are making the right policy design changes, that we are doing so carefully and thoughtfully in ways that ensure grid stability, to ensure that we have accommodations for later times once we have future advances in things like energy storage, that we have an appropriate regulatory framework for such undertakings, that we have the appropriate interaction with the transmission system. So that is the kind of work that our government will now undertake within the rubric of the overall implementation of our climate change leadership strategy, a leadership strategy that, I might add, is receiving local, national, and global acclaim for its collaborative nature.

One of the things that we heard loud and clear was that Alberta had previously not had an energy efficiency strategy or much in the way of a renewables overall strategy or framework, Madam Speaker. So those are undertakings that we will now examine through the work of the Ministry of Environment and Parks. Part of that will mean that we will make commitments to Albertans with respect to energy efficiency and what they can do in their own homes, and part of that will be these matters of microgeneration.

We've heard a great deal since launching the climate process in June on the possibilities for individuals, for small businesses, for First Nations, for municipalities, for farms and ranches, for forestry operations, and we believe that those dreams ought not to be dreams anymore. We believe that they should become reality, Madam Speaker. I think we heard a great deal in many ways from Albertans on this because this presents a democratization of power. It puts power in the hands of people.

Given that independence is a distinctly Albertan virtue and a value that all members of this House hold dear, I urge all members to support this motion.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of this motion. I note that this is something that we put out in the Alberta Party climate change plan, called Alberta's Contribution, last week, so I'm pleased to speak in favour of this. I'll note while I have the floor one more time that we are the only party on this side of the House that has actually put out our own climate change plan in addition to a full shadow budget. So I do look forward to seeing both of those from our friends if not in this go-round, then next.

But that's not what we're here to talk about. What we are here to talk about is microgeneration, of course, which I'm here to speak in favour of. Clearly, the one megawatt limitation was far too low. I concur with my hon. colleague, that this is the future of generation, and it's also part of that transition away from other forms of energy.

Now, I note that my hon. friend from Calgary-Hays noted that there are some challenges with microgeneration of solar and wind, but I can tell you that there are challenges in the generation of any kind of electricity, most notably coal-fired power. The impact of coal-fired power is of significant particulate matter in terms of pollution, a significantly higher portion of carbon emissions, which I give this government credit for taking steps to tackle.

I will cede the rest of my time, but I wanted to be on the record as speaking in favour of this motion. I encourage all members of the House to do the same.

Thank you.

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

5:20

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today with enthusiastic support for Motion 506. I'm only sorry that he beat me to the punch. I am a renewables junkie. It's been my vocation for a lot of years. I am just thrilled that we are going to take a good, long look at the microgen act, and I'm hoping that at the end of the day, we just take the cap right off that sucker and throw it out the door.

I'm pleased to see this motion. Wildrose believes in practical, cost-sensible solutions to fight pollution on all fronts, and this is one of those lovely little things that can really do a major job on pollution of all kinds, not just greenhouse gas emissions. I know we focus on GHGs all the time, but frankly there's a lot more to pollution than just GHGs. Let's be honest about that.

I really look forward to having some sort of mechanism in place to reduce electricity demand by developing market-based mechanisms rather than subsidies, that encourage conservation and efficiency to allow our businesses, our co-ops, and individual Albertans to sell locally generated electricity from their cogen – wind, solar, biomass, or any other of the many alternatives that are out there – and move it back into the grid. Granted, that's not without challenges. We're going to need some very major changes in how our grid is currently managed and metered, as the member would know.

Now, this government recently announced the results of a climate change panel, and there didn't seem to me to be a sense of the technological and practical difficulties that make that plan kind of costly and, in my opinion, infeasible in 15 years. But if we were to take the cap off microgen, we just might squeak it in there. We'll see.

I am surprised, also, that this first truly sensible move since our government came into power, regarding the greening of Alberta's power grid, has come to the House through a private member's motion. But I'll take what you give me – right? – and I'm pleased to see a sensible proposal with the potential to really profoundly and positively impact Alberta's power generation.

We have a risky investment climate right now with this government and some of the plans that they've been throwing out here. We've got a call for 5,692 megawatts to be replaced by 2030. That number does not account for the expected growth in our demand for electricity of about 500 megawatts a year. Every time someone brings up numbers and facts, of course, it seems like those aren't really taken seriously, but this amount of power is enormous to just make up in 15 years. Although, in my opinion, this NDP government has been halting a lot of further industrial growth in Alberta – it certainly seems to be their plan – replacing 5,692 megawatts is a pretty daunting task if we're just going to be tackling that at a utility scale, that requires billions and billions of dollars of investment. It's going to be difficult to attract that kind of money here.

There's something else that I wanted to bring to everyone's attention in the House here. You know, I realize that coal has been vilified a whole lot, but I want you to know something about the last couple of coal plants that were built. Maybe this hasn't been brought to the attention of members opposite, but when it comes to particulate emissions, the last coal plant that was built, that came online, I think, in 2011 or 2012, actually has fewer particulate emissions than combined-cycle natural gas. Yet we're going to prematurely retire that thing, and the billions of dollars that the company is going to come after the people of Alberta for in compensation, that are going to come out of our pocket to unnecessarily retire a coal plant like that are to pick up what? In fact, it removes more particulate than combined-cycle natural gas. So why retire that thing so prematurely when there isn't any particulate gain and, efficiencywise, it's almost as efficient? It just seems kind of silly to me to be spending that kind of money.

Energy infrastructure has a cost, and that cost is amortized over three to five decades. The energy infrastructure that we're talking about for gas, for example, is going to cost about \$3.3 billion in infrastructure.

There are a couple of other things here that I wanted to cover just briefly. To give you a little bit of an idea about the scope of replacing the amount of power that we're going to retire out of coal, we're going to need something between seven and nine times more wind than we currently have. That's substantial. Coming at this from the microgen point of view, it seems to me that it puts all Albertans now at work, and everybody and anybody that wants to contribute to the grid can if the changes are made appropriately in microgen. That is going to cause, though, a little bit of a problem, and that is the variable nature of so many renewables coming on and going off and coming on and going off the grid.

I've talked to some of the stakeholders about the current system that we have managing our grid. They're not sure that a high renewables fraction – I'm sure the member understands "renewables fraction" – can be accommodated by the current management system. That's going to be a cost. That is going to be a cost. You've got to admit that, right? You see. He's admitting it. There you go.

There's more than just saying that we're going to take the cap off with the microgen act and let everybody go at it. The grid has to be able to respond. We still have a baseload that needs to be covered off. If we have a lot of renewables coming in, how is that going to affect the bidding process, too? This is another consideration that has to be taken into account. Microgeneration can strengthen the grid by mitigating grid disturbances.

I want to add one more element here, and that is distributed generation with microgeneration. Distributed generation, of course, is always serving a nearby load, which means you are not then having to access massive infrastructure to get the power from here to there because you're just serving a nearby load. One of the mechanisms that we may have to look at, that I bring to the hon.

member's attention, is that if you're not going to require the main infrastructure for transmission of that electricity in serving a nearby load, are you still going to be hit with the transmission costs that are currently out there? This is a big consideration. That is a big number. I would ask the hon. member to take that into consideration here.

I've taught a number of students at NAIT that now work in renewable and alternate industries, and I've met with a number of this industry's stakeholders, and one of the topics that consistently comes up is the manner in which the existing limits on the microgen act have prevented investment and growth in this industry. In talking to them, there were three regulations that most of the time came up in those conversations, that I feel are preventing the act from achieving its desired outcomes. One, the regulations demand that the total nominal capacity of the generating unit does not exceed that required by the customer, so you have to consume the power on your own site. Number two, the regulations require that the unit is located on the customer's site or an adjacent site but no further. Number three, there is a very low cap, one megawatt, in place on the microgenerator's generating capacity under the regulation.

Another issue that was actually brought to my attention by a municipality is the movement of energy across property lines, from one property to another property. Currently, apparently – and correct me if I'm wrong – we don't have an allowance to allow for the movement of energy in this way. One of the benefits of microgen and distributed generation is that there is a component involved beyond just generating electricity, and that is the generation of heat. When you take, we'll say, a natural gas fired cogen unit or a combined heat and power unit, the efficiency of that unit could be in the 34 to 40 per cent range. When you also have the capacity to move and sell the heat from that unit, your overall efficiency now climbs into the high 80s, low 90s. There is no other form of generation that comes even close to it, and I'm sure the hon. member is familiar with CHP.

Again, we come to this problem of moving heat energy across a property line to sell to someone else. This is an issue that is going to have to be addressed if we're going to take the lid off microgen because now we're talking about moving substantial amounts of heat energy and electricity across one, two, three, four property lines. Now we're talking about energy corridors. [Mr. MacIntyre's speaking time expired] And I'm all done.

I'm going to support . . .

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

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My knees were getting sore; I was going up and down so much here.

I confess that I do not know as much about . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Just one moment, hon. member. Just a reminder that we are not in committee.

Thank you.

5:30

Mr. S. Anderson: Okay. I do not know as much about this as the hon. member who just spoke at length, which I found interesting because every day I'm trying to learn more about these things, but I was excited when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford brought this forward. Feeding this electricity back into the grid and people getting credit for it: we know that right now the existing regulations have limits on them to a certain extent, where it wasn't intended, you know, to incent this microgeneration, and I think most of us here are saying that we know this needs to change. You know, as well, I was excited about the climate change panel's

leadership report, that included recommendations to renew and update the microgeneration regulations, which will investigate the feasibility of small-scale community generation.

Madam Speaker, this does fill me with excitement because I've been receiving a number of questions and suggestions about possible positive changes that we can look at in the regulations from hard-working and innovative constituents in Leduc-Beaumont and actually, in general, in Leduc county. You know, the climate change panel also heard some broad interest from these individuals and co-ops and munis, or municipalities – I call them munis all the time – and it kind of brings to light some of the incredible initiatives being undertaken in Leduc county. Some of these projects I can't really talk about right now because they're under way and they're in early stages, but suffice it to say that things are changing in the province for the better. Keep an eye out for the county of Leduc as a leader in many aspects of that change.

I think we have many opportunities here to work hand in hand with these communities and industry and innovators, whether it be with biomass, wind, solar, bioenergy, geothermal, to create jobs and a greener economy, and I think we're all looking forward to that.

Madam Speaker, I think the future looks bright, and I, for one, am looking forward to being actively involved in it, so I encourage every member to support this motion. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I will first recognize the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's truly an honour to speak about this, and I believe I'll speak in support of this from the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. I can speak about it without a good deal of notes because I've done a lot and I've worked on this microgen regulation a lot on our farm. I was one of the first farmers in our district to have a solar-powered remote water pump, and I was one of the first operators in our area to spend some money – I actually got a master's student from Minnesota to explore our farm to see about the potentiality of wind generation and the sites that I'd chosen and how that would fit into the regulation existing at the time, once it came forward.

The concern that kept coming back from it was that the actual energy – the actual energy – in the province is cheap. It's not the cost of our bill. We have a bin site location at one of our farm sites where the bill that came just this summer was \$240, but the actual energy charge was \$2.38. The ongoing transmission of some of this stuff is frustrating. When we need energy at that bin site, we need to be able to flip a switch and have that energy at our beck and call and our demand. We can't wait for the wind, and we can't wait for the solar. We have no efficient method of storing it. If we could and if there was some way that we could efficiently store energy and retrieve it in an adequate fashion – that, I believe, is what some of the failure is going on.

I also want to speak to the success of a former private member of the Chamber at the time, an independent member, who at one time was the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, who got a private member's bill passed in this Chamber, the first bill in 90 years, I believe, that was a private member's bill, and it actually talked about the itemization of all energy bills that are brought forward in the province, and that will allow customers, consumers, to understand what their actual energy charges are and what the transmission and distribution charges are, which a lot of Albertans are being held ransom to.

Back to the microgeneration, the construction of or the achievement of. I do have it, and I believe that solar generation is on a new horizon, and that is a more modern way than the potentiality of wind generation. East of the town of Stettler there are some 90 windmills

there in the county of Paintearth that are feeding power into the grid when the wind blows, with the great acceptance of the county of Paintearth, but when I attended the county of Paintearth's 50th anniversary celebrations and I met with the people from Capital Power to learn how they could commercially develop 90 windmills on a site and why I couldn't have one effective business model for my farm, the gentleman from Capital Power said: Mr. Strankman, in three words, the reason for this project is "American carbon credits." There wasn't a business model for what they were doing there. It was based off an assist from a foreign jurisdiction.

Now, I don't know the effect of that, and I never did go beyond that, but I know from the feasibility study that the master's student from Minnesota did for our farm that the potentiality of generating wind-generated electricity would have been something beyond 15 years. The lifespan of many windmills is 25 if properly maintained. So with a \$60,000 investment – we have many machines on our farm that are worth well more than \$60,000 – if there would have been a business model, a business investment for that, we could have gone to the bank or achieved whatever means possible to create a business model to have that, but because our energy costs are so low and the transmission costs are so large, the way this system feeds power in, it's not effective.

To my understanding, in other jurisdictions they have what they call a feed-in tariff. Much of the cost of electricity is somewhere near 15 cents a kilowatt hour whereas in Alberta the wholesale price at some times is well less than 3 cents a kilowatt hour. So there are great variables in this jurisdiction that we call Alberta. Fifteen cents a kilowatt hour would not be beneficial to businesses. It would not be beneficial to any sort of creation of normal businesslike models that need to be brought forward. So we need to be careful in our quest for what is somewhat ideological that there is reality to the business model that we bring forward.

Right now on our farm I'm looking at the extension – those members opposite who were at the AUMA and at the AAMD and C convention saw new innovator awards that went to the county of Starland, which is in the diverse constituency of Drumheller-Stettler, and that county of Starland has solar projects that are creating a lot of I'll say enthusiasm for that model, and there is reason for that to be done. It's a nonmoving thing, and solar panels now are of new technology. They're far more efficient than they have been in the past, and possibly they are created more efficiently. With that, I think there are ways that we can explore this. There are ways that we can look into doing this in efficient fashion.

I also want to close with a comment that a friend of mine that I confer with, counsel with, made mention of the other day. He said that within the last two years one of the most newly energized coal plants in the world was in the jurisdiction of Germany, and because they've learned that to create the flat power line curve that's desired and needed for AC electricity, they need to have a stable source of energy. Atomic energy is still not applicable or suitable to the personalities or the communities of people in Germany, so they went to what's called clean coal. Whether our facilities here in Alberta, with their electrostatic filtration devices like they have in Forestburg and Sheerness, are to that standard I don't really know, but it's something that we need to strive for because if we're going to continue to use alternating current electricity, it is an issue that we maintain a flat input curve to the electricity that comes forward.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'll turn the chair back to you.

5:40

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise in this House today to speak to what is probably my favourite topic. I really want to congratulate members opposite for their insightful and important contributions. The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake is obviously an expert on this, and I think we have a lot to learn from him. I would actually encourage him to consider resigning his seat and taking a job with the government and helping us with implementing some of these new regulations.

To the Member for Drumheller-Stettler: as I said in my maiden speech, he and I have a common background in farming. I still operate a reasonably large farm in Manitoba, and I'm continually impressed with the ability of my colleagues that are farmers and involved in agriculture in general to be innovators, and this is what we're talking about. We're talking about looking at innovation and applying it and removing obstacles from the application of that innovation.

I also want to thank the other people that have spoken today on this. I will admit to being somewhat skeptical when everybody is in agreement with us on a bill. Is there a trap waiting for us? I don't know. I'll ask maybe my other colleagues that have more experience to help me out with that. But it is truly appreciated.

I'm sitting here looking at a monitor that tells me that the solar panels on my roof today have produced 118 watt hours. I've had solar panels on my roof here in Edmonton for over two years, and while it's not a money-making proposition at the present time, I have had a significant reduction in my power bills, and I get that warm, fuzzy, sunny feeling of contributing to the control of the emission of greenhouse gases. I would think that the members opposite would also be encouraged to support this motion. This is a no-cost-to-the-people-of-Alberta solution except for the valid concerns that were raised about the transmission system. From the microgeneration point of view, if I were allowed to put 28 panels on my roof instead of the 21 that I was limited to by the current regulations, this is of zero cost to the economy, and I would be producing, I guess, another third more power and reducing the equivalent of greenhouse gas producing coal-powered generation.

Alberta is a leader in this sort of thing. We have more solar-powered homes in Edmonton per capita than any place in Canada, and this is living in a city north of the 53rd parallel. Our citizens here in Edmonton and, I dare say, citizens in Calgary and the rest of the province are really interested in this. We need to respond to that interest and make it easier for them and make it more profitable for microgenerators to proceed.

I would invite all members to consider attending the ecosolar tour, which happens on a yearly basis here in Edmonton. The home builder that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford referred to is one of the main organizers of this, and there were 16 homes this past year that are net zero homes. One of them had two Tesla Model Ss parked out front, which all us old guys drooled over. One of them didn't belong to the homeowner, but that homeowner did own one of them, and even with the powering of that electric vehicle his home was net zero. Probably this summer there are going to be 25 homes on that tour.

We look outside the province of Alberta to the state of California, the state of Nevada. Germany was mentioned. Throughout the developed world, really, we're seeing the application of solar power to replace generation.

I do want to mention something that would be of interest to those of you that are representing rural ridings. I was at the conference, the bioenergy meeting, just recently. The bioenergy folks, which includes forestry companies as well as municipalities with waste management issues and, of course, farmers, are really interested in expanding this, and they are limited at the present time. As has been mentioned, they are limited at the present time by the cap on

microgeneration. Let's get rid of it. Let's make it easier for Albertans to participate in dealing with this crisis that we have. We want to be leaders in climate change, and this is one way that we can contribute to that.

The solar panels that were put on my roof were actually supplied through Enmax. Both Enmax and EPCOR have programs that are supporting the application of solar panels. They do provide interest-free loans to individuals that are interested in this. To my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford: he could probably benefit from using the interest-free loans.

But the most important thing is that we need to be facilitating the easy application of this phenomenal technology. It's not just solar. It's not just wind. It's a whole range of others: bioenergy, biomass, methane. The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat knows about Methanex in Medicine Hat. They have very innovative projects to convert methane to non greenhouse gas causing elements. There's also in his riding a wind power system on the Milk River that we need to be helping to facilitate getting hooked up to the grid.

I think all of these initiatives are really positive, so I'll close with that. I am in full support of this motion, and I would encourage every member of this Legislature to support it.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise also in support of this motion to strengthen Alberta's microgen legislation. I actually operate my home and business with more than 45 solar panels on my own home. I'm not quite at zero net.

An Hon. Member: It's a big house.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah, and the business is as well.

Again, I feel the same as you. It's a wonderful feeling to be able to know that you're contributing to that part of this process. It's wonderful. It's so wonderful to hear. Thank you so much for bringing this motion forward and for helping us choose a path of accountability when it comes to these things and to become better stewards of the environment. These are all wonderful things, so thank you for that.

This was a long time coming, and I think that one of the things that we need to talk about, though, of course, is customer choice. By allowing Albertans to generate their own electricity through solar panels and wind, microgeneration fuel cells, geothermal, biomass, or small-scale hydro, we permit every single Albertan to be accountable for their own electricity in any way that they wish.

I know from our meetings with the stakeholders that one of the biggest issues faced by the companies is, of course, gaining that grid access. The thing that's so great about microgeneration legislation is that in its current form Albertans interested in generating their own electricity, like my family, are enabled to be part of the grid on their own terms. Small microgenerators under the act are permitted to sell their electricity back to the grid at commercial rates, but the larger generators are selling their excess back at the pool rate. These regulations will allow a consumer to express their individual willingness to pay for green technologies without actually burdening the users on the grid to share in that high cost of renewable generation. So it's obviously the most sensible way to green the grid in a noncoercive way.

5:50

One of the things I'd like to reiterate from my fellow legislator from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake is that he already highlighted the array of choices that would likely need to be taken into consideration. I'd just like to echo that a little bit by focusing on the fact that right

now these units have to be located on the customer's site or be site owned or leased by the customer that's adjacent to the customer's site. So it can be very limiting for some obvious reasons; for example, for Albertans that don't own their own homes, Albertans that are living in high-density housing, Albertans who live in the middle of our cities and who live in condominium communities or other housing communities with standardized rules about how the houses have to look. That's extremely prohibitive, especially if you don't own your land or have room for a wind turbine or have permission to do something like a solar panel.

Raising the cap on microgeneration is a subject that we've brought up with many of our province's renewable energy stakeholders. The Alberta-based solar company noted that increasing limits on microgeneration could allow for things like a wind co-operative. That idea would have to have a bunch of individuals buy into a small wind farm; for example, in the Bragg Creek area, actually. Allowing for off-site microgeneration would be a really important step toward allowing Albertans to make those markets more accessible. In terms of the economics of that, that cap would be more efficient. Again, I do agree with the hon. member and with the other members that that cap needs to be raised or even extinguished.

Just to talk about California, that was mentioned as well. Just as something that I'd like to expand on with that, they've taken a number of steps to green their grid, and they've also made some mistakes that I think we can learn from. One of them was their decision to embrace solar panel generation, which was intended to get around the drawbacks of the burden of the large-scale renewable energy projects, like the capital costs of energy transmission across the large states. For that reason we believe that that initiative is laudable.

What California learned, however, is that the policy to transform the grid with tens of thousands of little decisions through their initiative to have Californians themselves develop a 12-gigawatt renewable energy infrastructure by 2020 has its pitfalls. One of the things that we want to look at is: what is that highest nominal capacity? What will allow that source of renewable power to function at that highest capacity? One of the things that has happened in California is that a large number of residential rooftop solar installations in San Francisco happened, but San Francisco has a humongous amount of cloud cover and fog during the summer, so it would be more optimal to relocate those high numbers of solar

panels to an area like Apple Valley, where there's 22 per cent more solar energy each year.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 8(3) I will now call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to close debate.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Noting the time, I won't take very much time to end this debate. I just want to acknowledge and thank members on both sides of the House for your very thoughtful contributions. Many of the issues that you have identified were also identified by our team in terms of looking at the changes in microgeneration over the next little while. I really look forward to having further conversations with all of you and asking for your input, your experiences with the solar panels you have now, and, of course, talking to people all across the province who are interested not only in solar but in wind, in small hydro, in fuel cells, in biomass technologies, and in geothermal technologies.

My conversations so far with members of the rural municipalities and the wind and solar generation societies in Alberta have all led to the point where we can quite happily say that this is no longer a time when we're envisioning some great future. We are indeed at the opportunity where we can live that future today.

As the minister of environment indicated earlier, it is truly the time to act. I encourage all of you to vote in favour of this motion and for the government to take it upon themselves to act, to act now, and to act fully and thoroughly in terms of making the changes necessary so that microgeneration becomes a reality for everyday Albertans as soon as possible.

Thank you very much for your time.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 506 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. On that happy and harmonious note, I suggest that we conclude the day's business and call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m. to Tuesday at 10 a.m.]

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