



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 14, 2016

Day 4

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Second Session

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Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)	Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)	McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret, Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
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Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND), Deputy Government House Leader	McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
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Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)	Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
Kleinstauber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)	van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)	Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND), Deputy Government Whip
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)	Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)	Vacant, Calgary-Greenway

Party standings:

New Democrat: 54 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 14, 2016

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us reflect. Hon. members, let us be reminded of the great privilege it is to be a servant of the public and the great responsibility that it places upon us. As you will hear in a few minutes, today is Commonwealth Day, and this year's theme is An Inclusive Commonwealth. Let us, each of us, in our own way reflect on this message and on our responsibility to search for ways to increase the inclusivity of our very own institution and indeed all persons across our wonderful province. Hon. members, let us continue to keep that thought in our minds.

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

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Commonwealth Day

The Speaker: Hon. members, today is in fact Commonwealth Day, and throughout the world our fellow Commonwealth nations will be celebrating with a special message given by Her Majesty the Queen. This year's theme is An Inclusive Commonwealth. Let us use this day to promote the values of tolerance, respect, and understanding amongst the Commonwealth's 2.1 billion citizens. Please note that this message from Her Majesty has been placed on each of your desks for review and for sharing with your constituents.

In honour of today I am pleased to have some members from the Royal Commonwealth Society seated in my gallery to recognize Commonwealth Day. I would ask that our guests rise as I call their names: Lieutenant Commander (Retired) Roy Busby, Dr. John Dugan, Miss Brittany Phillpotts, Mr. Gordon Smith, and Mr. Joe Zasada. Could we give our guests a welcome and appreciation.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly students from Holy Spirit school in my riding. I was delighted to go to the school and present them with a provincial flag and to learn of their original school song. The students are with teachers Kathy Knox, Jenna Bishop, Pat Stanbridge, Cathy Hopcraft, and also two student teachers. I'm delighted to see the student teachers learning their craft so they can become great teachers in the future. The student teachers are Mary Gillis and Baylee Frissell. Would you please

stand up so that the Assembly can give you the customary welcome of the House.

The Speaker: I'd like to compliment the three or four ministers who have arrived late that they didn't walk between the Speaker and the person who was speaking from the floor. Let that serve as an example for everyone.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you the students from Muriel Martin school today. They're joined by Mrs. Jody Bialowas and Mrs. Susanne Ambrose as well as Mrs. Heather Kerschbaumer. If they would please rise and accept the warm legislative greeting.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three guests visiting from British Columbia: Norah Miner; her 12-year-old son, Andrew Lirag, and nine-year-old daughter, Isabella Lirag. They're here to learn about politics, to observe the political process, and hear something about the law. I would like to ask them to rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. It's my honour first to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two of the founders of SAFQEY, or Safe Accommodations for Queer Edmonton Youth, Carla Segura and Sam Leibel. Carla works with Homeward Trust and the Poundmaker's Lodge. Sam is a social worker with the Alberta government. Together they have partnered with Boyle Street Community Services to secure housing for SAFQEY that will be used to provide shelter and much-needed specialized supports for Edmonton's sexual and gender minority youth. I'll be honoured to speak more of this work in a member's statement later today.

Also here today are five students from the CCI-LEX, Cultural Connections Institute, which teaches English language classes to temporary and permanent residents of Canada. With us here today: Angel Vivas, a petroleum engineer from Venezuela; Weilan Wang, an electrical engineer from China; HaJung Kim, a business owner from South Korea; Praneet McCoy from Thailand, the owner of Ruamit Thai restaurant in Sherwood Park; and Sonal Modi from India. They join us here today with their instructor, Ellen Campbell.

I invite them as well as Carla and Sam to stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a wonderful organization from my riding of Edmonton-Decore, the CapitalCare Foundation. My riding of Edmonton-Decore is home to two CapitalCare centres, CapitalCare Dickinsfield and CapitalCare McConnell Place North. Dickinsfield centre has 275 long-term care beds and offers specialized programs for those suffering with dementia, and for young adults who require long-term care. McConnell Place North provides 36 supportive living spaces for individuals with dementia. I visited both of these

centres and look forward to spending more time with the wonderful residents in the near future. Visiting us today are Dave Jamieson, Sherry Schaefer, Francine Drisner, and Maureen Flynn. I would ask that they now please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and to the House the student group Alberta Students' Executive Council, here in Edmonton to advocate on behalf of fellow students. They've taken time from their busy lives as scholars and executives to speak with MLAs on issues affecting postsecondary students: ASEC Chair Kristen George; Vice-chair Joshua Bettle; Finance Officer Katie DeRuyck; Executive Director Teresa Currie; vice-president internal for Concordia Students' Association, Kelsea Gillespie; VP academic for SAIT Students' Association, Kimmi Nguyen; vice-president of operations for the students' association at Red Deer College, Luke Neilson; Advocacy Co-ordinator Cameron Dykstra; and from the mental health initiative project, which I've had some significant exposure to and been impressed by, Aala Abdullahi. They're standing. Please give them the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other members who have a guest that they would wish to introduce?

I see some more students here today. One of the privileges of being in this House, that I know we all share, is the opportunity to see people from literally around the world who join us here. It's really quite our privilege.

Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to rise to introduce to you and through you two guests who are sitting in the members' gallery. Jason Silvert has brought his father, who is visiting from Ontario, here to visit us and see the proceedings in this House. Jason is a constituent of mine, and it's great to see him along with his father, who've come to witness the proceedings today. I wish them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Victim Services

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the overwhelming aftermath of crime or tragedy in Alberta people can access support, information, and referral services through our network of victims' services societies. I am proud to say that the first RCMP victims' services society was formed in my constituency of Stony Plain to serve the entire region in 1986. Last year the local unit assisted over 2,600 people in our communities. Trained volunteers, called advocates, provide services for those in need by working with RCMP and various community agencies. They assist victims by helping them to lessen the effect of immediate crisis.

We often think of crime or tragedy as something that happens to other people, but in fact anyone can be a victim of crime. It is a daunting and traumatic event that can cause physical, emotional, and cognitive difficulties.

It is a fact that early intervention always reduces the long-term effects of trauma suffered. Victims' services intervention correlates to victims experiencing increased confidence when dealing with the RCMP.

There is much to be proud of in this made-in-Alberta solution; however, the needs and challenges are growing, and funding resources are limited. An incredible amount of valuable volunteer hours are contributed to make victims' services a success. While the number of crimes has risen from over 58,000 files in 2008-09 to a staggering 71,000 files in 2013-14, funding has been a continual challenge.

I am thankful to see how local communities have come together repeatedly to raise funds for this important issue. It requires dedication and a tremendous amount of time and resources.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In February Alberta's unemployment rate jumped to 7.9 per cent, the highest it's been in 20 years. Folks in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills fully understand what's required in these difficult times. When the statistics turn against us, we fight back, finding strength in our numbers. We rely on our friends, our family, our neighbours to help us weather the storm. Our province's greatest strength has always been Albertans. Our faith in one another is what gives us the stability to persevere through any crisis.

Over the past few months I've been gathering input from constituents, including seniors who have seen their fair share of economic downturns. Here's some advice they've shared with me. One says: times are tough, but we can't lose sight of the big picture; spending wildly is not the solution; we need to focus on upgrading skills and helping those who've lost their jobs and can't pay their mortgage; we can't spend ourselves rich. An elderly couple, aged 86 and 90, said this: we know what it is to live within our means, and we're not in favour of going into large debts. A third says: we can't afford tax increases; get us working, and we'll support the province. The last one has struck a chord with me personally because I think it illustrates a sentiment felt right across the province: given the freedoms to do what we do best, Albertans trust each other to overcome these hardships; we need a government to demonstrate some faith in us, put policies in place that allow us to succeed.

Mr. Speaker, it's time for this government to step back from their ideological policies and start showing some faith in Albertans.

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

The Right People

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to share a little story right now that I like to call The Right People. It's a story of the pitfalls that one can face when they don't associate with the right people or have the benefit of the right ideas.

Now we're beginning to get an idea of who the right people are. They raise a ruckus at the idea of coming in to work at 9 a.m., not because they're lazy but because they have no computer and support staff. The right people know that the best way to help an abused woman get out of a lease is to add the swearing of a statutory declaration to their burdens. They have a limitless energy for outrage, pointing out all manner of tax dollars wasted, yet they filibuster with glee.

When their bills and motions are rejected, they bring them back over and over. Now we see that the right people are prepared to introduce Bill 201, likely to be uniquely known as Yet Another Recall Act, and they're doing it for the third time in a row. So while Alberta is dealing with a serious economic crisis, low commodity prices, increasing debt, and unemployment, the right people are intent on making us relive a political issue that was dealt with in the 1930s by the Social Credit Party.

The right people can help you decide who to talk to and who not to talk to, like: for heaven's sake, do not talk to B-list reporters; and for heaven's sake, do not articulate your position on social issues. In fact, push them way, way down the list, past 100, so the public cannot absorb just how unpalatable they actually are. We are so lucky in this House to know the right people, who proudly state that they wouldn't legislate on social issues because the right people don't need to protect the vulnerable; they don't need to stand up for parents or start their workday at a reasonable hour. What kind of province would we be, Mr. Speaker, if we did things like that?

The Speaker: Government House Leader, I understand that you have a point of order.

Point of Order Interrupting Members' Statements

Mr. Mason: I do have a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is very clear in the rules of this place that members' statements are supposed to be delivered without interruption by other members. The prolonged clapping from the right people over there was a clear violation of that rule, and in future I would ask that people be allowed to give their members' statements without being interrupted by other members.

1:50

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to the point of order. I think you're likely to find that there's a fairly long tradition of not calling points of order during members' statements as well, but since we're here, whether it was the clapping or the laughing, I'm not really sure which one it was that was interrupting the member's statement. But here we are at a matter of debate – at a matter of debate – and this is exactly the challenge with calling points of order during members' statements.

The Speaker: Both sides' points are well taken. I'll deal with this matter later. I have a feeling that there may not be a simple answer. The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Alberta Sports Teams Accomplishments

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to join all Albertans in marking the remarkable achievement of three Alberta sports teams.

The 2016 Scotties Tournament of Hearts was a very successful event hosted by the city of Grande Prairie, and it energized the entire province and all of Canada. On February 28, at Revolution Place in Grande Prairie, Chelsea Carey used her final stone to draw to the four-foot to win the Canadian women's curling championship. Chelsea was joined by Amy Nixon, Jocelyn Peterman, and Laine Peters. They train at the curling centre of excellence here at the Saville centre at the University of Alberta. They will be representing Canada at the world women's curling championship from March 19 to 27 in Swift Current.

Yesterday, by winning the 2016 Canadian men's curling championship, the Brier, Alberta won its 27th title, tying Manitoba for the most by any province. It was also the third championship for Kevin Koe, who won in 2010 and 2014. Joining Koe were Marc Kennedy, Brent Laing, and Ben Hebert. This is a new team, but it gelled at the right time, with coolness, consistency, and tremendous shot-making. They will now represent Canada at the world championship in Switzerland in early April.

Thirdly, in a major victory by the underdog, the Calgary Inferno overwhelmed Les Canadiennes de Montreal to become champions of the Canadian Women's Hockey League. Led by five-time Olympian Hayley Wickenheiser, the Inferno captured their first-ever Clarkson Cup. Many of its players will now go on to represent Canada at the world championships.

All of Alberta is extremely proud of the accomplishments of these teams and will be intently following their progress at the world championships.

Another Canadian curling championship is happening this coming weekend in Canmore and Banff. The Canadian Medical Bonspiel is attended by curling doctors from across Canada, including my team. You're all welcome to attend and wish us good luck as we follow in the footsteps of Carey and Koe.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Government Policies

Mr. Jean: For months the Wildrose has been pleading with the NDP to do no further harm. At a time of economic uncertainty that should be any government's top guiding principle. Today 15 employer organizations representing thousands of job creators in Alberta wrote to the Premier warning her of the effects of her policies. "The rapid deployment of... ambitious government policies... have further undermined business confidence and competitiveness." These job creators are simply asking for a moratorium on further job-killing policies from this government. Will the Premier heed this warning?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by saying that there will not be a moratorium on governance in this province. What we will do, however, is to work with stakeholders and Albertans across the province. Now, when we were elected, we asked the companies that benefited the most from economic growth who continue to be profitable to pay just a little bit more and the same in the case of wealthy Albertans. Most Albertans still support that. Going forward, we have a number of different plans to work with business leaders, to grow the economy, and to create jobs, and we look forward to meeting with the folks just mentioned to talk about that.

Mr. Jean: Home and road builders, restaurateurs, small-business owners, steelworkers, landscapers, and oil well contractors: all are asking the Premier to please just stop, stop with the ideological agenda and economic experiments, stop with the tax hikes. Now is simply not the time for more red tape and regulation, and it's not the time for a \$3 billion slush fund under the guise of a carbon tax. This advice is not just coming from Wildrose now; it's coming from thousands of businesses who want to create jobs and grow the economy for the benefit of all Albertans. Why won't the Premier just take their advice and stop with bad, ideological policies?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, we're exceptionally proud of our climate change leadership plan, and we are looking forward to moving forward with it because not only does it reflect the growing concern of all Canadians about our need to act on climate change and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but it will actually serve to be an incredible stimulus for economic diversification in Alberta. So I'm looking forward to moving forward on it. I think it's actually good governance, and I know there are many, many people in the business world who agree with me.

Mr. Jean: I haven't met any.

What this letter makes quite clear is that while the Premier has spent precious time fund raising for the anti-Alberta Ontario NDP, she isn't meeting with groups that employ hundreds of thousands of Albertans. Wildrose has called for a job summit to bring leaders from business, nonprofit, and charitable sectors to the table with legislators and government to share ideas on how to get Albertans working again. All that this would cost the Premier is some of her precious time. Will the Premier spare just a few hours to meet with Alberta's job creators and launch a job summit today to actually listen to what Albertans have to say?

Ms Notley: Well, let me just begin, Mr. Speaker. I need to take issue with one point made by the Leader of the Official Opposition. I am absolutely sure that he has met with business leaders that support our climate leadership plan because I know who they are and I know they talk to him, too. So that's simply not true.

As far as meeting with people about where we're going forward and consulting with them in terms of our job-creation plan, that's absolutely what we will be doing. The Minister of Finance and I will be consulting with Albertans over the next few weeks, and I look forward to meeting with these folks to hear about their ideas.

The Speaker: Second major question.

Public Service Compensation

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, for months Wildrose has been recommending that the Premier negotiate a wage freeze with public-sector workers. The media has asked the Premier about such a freeze. She always responds that there are contracts in place, so she can't freeze wages unilaterally. That's true, but there are also new contracts that are currently under negotiation. We have learned that AHS has been offering raises to its employees for 2016 and 2017. Premier, is it the NDP's policy to offer raises for this year and next year on all new public-sector labour contracts?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite is a little bit confused. The agreement that they are referring to is the continuation of negotiations that were begun by the previous government, so we are somewhat bound by those. But let me be very clear. Going forward, that set of negotiations will not form the pattern for new negotiations. Beyond that, as I've said before, I will not negotiate, respectfully, with our employees in public or in the media. I will save that for the bargaining table.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, a little over three weeks ago AHS went into arbitration with local 58 of AUPE. AHS is actually offering three years of raises. Since the government is offering raises, the arbitrator can't very well come back with a wage freeze offer. Meanwhile across the private sector in Alberta pay cuts of 10 and 20 per cent are not unheard of. Can the Premier explain why her government is actually offering up raises when private-sector workers are taking massive pay cuts if they're lucky enough to keep their jobs?

Ms Notley: As I said previously, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite doesn't quite understand what he's talking about. This is the continuation of negotiations that began well over a year ago, probably more than a year and a half ago, and it's, hopefully, the completion of those negotiations. We are bound by the positions that were taken, to some extent, at that point. Beyond that, I'm not going to bargain in this House with our employees because that's not respectful. We will, however, take an exceptionally prudent approach going forward. These negotiations do not in any way, shape, or form form the pattern for future negotiations going forward.

Mr. Jean: In Edmonton CapitalCare nurses just got a 3 per cent raise while the government gave provincial judges a raise of over 2 per cent. For the first time in a generation Alberta is paying its bills on a credit card, yet the government is offering raises in labour negotiations. Thousands of Albertans are without work, worried about their EI running out. Those who still have a job have offered to take a pay cut to keep that job. Meanwhile this government is actually offering raises. What Albertans want to know is: how can this Premier be so out of touch with Albertans?

Ms Notley: Again, Mr. Speaker, the member across the way is not super well informed on this issue. First of all, this government will not break contracts that are already in place.

The second thing. With respect to the judges let's be very clear. Those recommendations came from a judicial committee over which this government has no discretion. We followed those recommendations, and that's what governments do.

Thirdly, going forward, it is not our view that we create jobs by firing people. It is not our view that we create jobs by publicly beating up on our old employees. It is not our view that we're going to raise the price of oil by . . .

2:00

Rural Health Care

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, every day this government fearmongers about opposition plans for public services. In fact, listen; just a few days ago the NDP used this fear-and-smear campaign in a fundraising e-mail. The facts are that the only people here who are laying off nurses is this NDP government. They just laid off as many as three dozen nurses in Sundre. To the Premier: why is her government shutting down long-term care beds and laying off nurses in Sundre?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The opposition continues to struggle with the facts. They're still trying to scare people about what we're doing. The government has actually looked at the 15 beds that were in Sundre, and we're replacing them with 40 new beds and a brand new facility. So for the benefit of the opposition Finance critic and the Leader of the Official Opposition, 40 beds is 266 per cent of 15 beds.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, this government is bloated; AHS is even worse. It has managers managing managers managing other managers. So what is the NDP's solution? Do they target the waste? No, they don't. They cut long-term care beds and replace them with lesser levels of care, and then they say that they are full levels of care, and then they lay off nurses. So on one side this government is offering raises to union, and on the other side they're laying off front-line nurses. Is the Premier closing long-term care beds and

laying off nurses so that she can afford to give all the other public-sector workers raises?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm really proud of the fact that we're working to make sure that we get the right care in the right place by the right provider. Certainly, when we're looking at some of the demographics that are in the community, we want to make sure that we have dementia beds, we want to make sure that we have the right levels of support, and I think that that's responsible from a level of government.

The opposition still wants to have it both ways by making empty promises to seniors and midwives while boasting about massive cuts in the first set of questions, reckless cuts that would make our public health care system very – that we would not be able to recover from. So the opposition can indulge in fact-free attacks, but the truth is that more beds are going to be in Sundre, and we're moving forward on more beds across Alberta as well.

The Speaker: Could I again underline to both sides of the House: please direct your comments through the Speaker.

I believe we're at the second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, it actually gets much worse. When AHS told Sundre that they were shutting down half the beds in the hospital and laying off up to three dozen nurses, they wouldn't actually confirm that the Sundre hospital would even stay open. They didn't want to talk about it. Well, Albertans expect this government to actually tell them about their plans. Will the Premier assure Albertans today that this government isn't planning to lay off nurses and shut down hospitals right across rural Alberta?

The Speaker: Hon. member, again I would ask both sides of the House: please, through the Speaker.

The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and for the opportunity to talk about health care, which, of course, is one of the big reasons why the Official Opposition wasn't elected in the last election. Albertans want a government that can make sure that they have the right care in the right place at the right time by the right provider. Of course, in some communities that's a hospital, and we're really proud to have those hospitals. In other communities we want to make sure that we've got midwives and nurse practitioners and family care centres, so that's exactly what we're doing. We'll continue to have these conversations very publicly with Albertans and with members of the Official Opposition as well.

The Speaker: Fourth major question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you. I'd love another question.

The Speaker: My apologies. The leader of the third party.

Linear Property Assessment and Taxation

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have heard that changes to the linear assessment may be coming as part of the MGA review. Both the AAMD and C and the AUMA have provided recommendations to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. To the minister: given that the minister has told the AAMD and C she will share information on the linear assessment review this week, will the minister tell Albertans now in this House what exactly she plans to change with linear assessment?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, being from rural Alberta myself, I understand the challenges that rural communities face. As this province grows, it is very important to recognize that our communities transcend municipal boundaries. I know that many districts and counties rely on linear tax as a significant source of revenue, so we are approaching this issue with one question in mind, how best to ensure that rural Albertans receive the support that they need.

Mr. McIver: Well, it sounds like we're still going to be short information, so I'll try again, Mr. Speaker. Given that the AAMD and C and the AUMA have both said what they want done or not done with linear assessment, is the minister aware of which municipalities benefit most and least from linear assessment, how much they're receiving, and will you help municipalities that are negatively affected by your decisions?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, this is a complex question, and we've been doing a thorough analysis, including looking at the information that both the AUMA and the AAMD and C have provided as we see them as incredibly valuable partners. I have stated very publicly that we will not be funnelling linear assessment dollars to Calgary, Edmonton, or any other city. We certainly are examining what the best assessment structure is that will work the very best for rural Albertans.

Mr. McIver: I didn't get my question answered, but I got a little bit of actual information, and for this I'm grateful. I have with me the AAMD and C recommendations and the AUMA recommendations on linear assessment, which I will table later today, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: when considering how you will resolve this difference in opinion, will you (a) disappoint the AUMA, (b) disappoint the AAMD and C, or (c) disappoint both, and how?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I value the well-being of our rural residents here in this province. Like other rural Albertans, I am concerned about the sustainability of our municipalities. The decision that we make will ensure the health and well-being of the various rural regions in this province, and I look forward to sharing that information relatively soon with the members of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. Again, would you direct your comments through the Speaker.

Dr. Swann: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

Income Support Program Access

Dr. Swann: Unemployment in Alberta is the highest in 20 years. In response this government has made repeated requests to the federal Liberal government to make changes to EI so Albertans can make ends meet. Here in Alberta the responsibility for helping those with income needs falls to Alberta Works. Unfortunately, those needing access to this vital service are being turned away in droves, not because they don't qualify but because of apparent understaffing. To the minister: why is it that increasing numbers of Albertans needing income support can't get the help they need?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. We have seen an unprecedented increase in the demand for Alberta Works services in the past six to eight months, and we are absolutely committed to making sure that when Albertans fall on tough times, we are there and we provide the necessary services. We are taking immediate steps to deal with this situation.

Dr. Swann: So what exactly are you doing to improve access?

Mr. Sabir: That was the question I was waiting for. We have taken three, four steps that have helped us improve the situation. The situation was particularly concerning in Calgary and Edmonton, so what we have done is that we have made our helpline available 24 hours a day, we have reassigned staff from other regions where we have capacity to the Calgary and Edmonton regions to deal with the lineups and capacity issues, and we have also increased the timing of Alberta Works offices so the staff has more time to clock.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, is this government looking at the earned income and allowing more earned income because of the straitened circumstances that people are in before you get cutbacks in EI? Have you examined that question, that earned income can be left in the hands of those who need it?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to EI we are pursuing that with our federal government, and the Premier has talked about it with the federal government. On that note, I want to mention here that there was a motion moved by the federal NDP in the House of Commons that was watered down by the Liberal government and their Conservative fellows in the federal government. We are still pursuing EI, and we will make sure that we provide Albertans all needed support when they need it and where they need it.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Royalty Framework

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many in my area of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville are reliant on the oil and gas sector for their livelihoods, both in Alberta's Industrial Heartland and further in the province, and the economic downturn has them worried about their futures and their families. I heard from countless folks involved in the industry who are nervous about the royalty review and how this would impact their jobs. To the Energy minister: what has been the reaction from Albertans to the royalty review report?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. So far I'm very pleased with the reaction from all Albertans, including industry and Albertans themselves. They see our new framework as a means to ensure transparency, certainty, competitiveness for our industry as we move forward. On Friday we got a big vote of confidence with the announcement of \$2 billion worth of investments from Imperial Oil in Cold Lake. This announcement certainly is a sign that our government is creating the certainty that industry needs to make these investment decisions.

The Speaker: I'll underline again that, particularly, I had difficulty hearing it with the clapping.

First supplemental.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that at the end of the day Albertans are the resource owners of our oil and gas and given that many expected a larger overhaul of our royalty system, to the Energy minister: what new benefits can Albertans expect to see from the new royalty system?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, our new royalty framework responds to the pain and uncertainty that workers and families are feeling across this province. The opposition would have us believe that the sky is falling if we even dare to look at the royalties on these important resources. The do-nothing approach has kept royalties stuck in the past, and we need to be ready for the future as we move forward. Albertans can count on this government to take a hands-on approach to modernizing our royalty framework and to bring in investment for jobs and create new projects.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the sharp decline in the price of oil and given that many companies in the oil and gas sector were worried about how changes to the royalty system would affect their bottom line, again to the same minister: what are the benefits to industry with the new royalty system?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, our new royalty framework recognizes the realities of today's economy. The framework is designed to encourage more investment such as we saw last Friday from Imperial Oil, \$2 billion. We will incent better management of costs, and the industry will remain efficient and competitive moving forward. We'll extend drilling incentives that were scheduled to expire into the new process, and we will act on opportunities to diversify our energy industry.

Long-term Care in Sundre

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it has taken less than a year for the NDP government to turn its back on front-line services. In my constituency of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre locals received the worst possible news when AHS dropped the hammer on closing down half of the Sundre hospital. This closure will result in as many as 36 front-line health care workers losing their jobs and residents being forced out of their community in the later years of their life or when they are most vulnerable. To the Minister of Health: how can you campaign on not laying off front-line workers and then sign off on closing half of the Sundre hospital?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, for directing your comments through the Speaker.

The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said in a previous answer, we're actually looking at the 15 beds that were auxiliary hospital beds in the hospital and increasing them to 40 beds. It will be a slightly different level of care, but it will be the right level of care for the citizens who are living in them. We're working to make sure that we've got the right care in the right place at the right time for the citizens who need it. Of course, we're going to make sure that there are opportunities for all 15 individuals to stay in the community should they choose to because we know that's really important to them and it's important to us as a government.

Mr. Nixon: Perhaps it's time to brief the minister on her own department. Given the fact that the long-term care beds in the Sundre hospital require RNs and given that the lodge in Sundre's highest available level of care is nowhere close to long-term, the numbers don't add up, and seniors that are most vulnerable will be displaced, and given the fact that the lodge is already full and there is a waiting list, how can the Minister of Health say with a straight face that she is not displacing our seniors as well as our most vulnerable and putting our front-line nurses out of work?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question and for the opportunity to inform the member a little bit more about the project in his own riding, which is not about the lodge. It's about a brand new facility that will have 40 beds. We're looking at a brand new facility that will have the right level of care for the individuals who are living there. It will be a higher level of care. It won't necessarily be long-term care because we don't think that that's necessary for the community. We're looking at the demographics of the region and making sure we have the right beds in the right place for the right members of the community.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I find it more than a little disappointing that the NDP government has turned their backs on the most vulnerable in our rural communities. Given that those in Sundre are now waiting for the other shoe to drop and for the NDP government to shut down their entire hospital and given that this hospital saved my own life in 2007 and since it is crucial to all the residents and visitors of Mountain View county, will the minister commit right here and right now that the NDP government will not shut Sundre's hospital?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Glad to hear that the health care system has served him and many others well, as all of us have experienced in this Assembly. In terms of the specific beds, the people who are living in them are living in the hospital, and they are long-term care beds. Obviously, we all know that nobody wants to stay in the hospital more than necessary. You want to be in a home-like environment if that's possible at all. We're certainly working with the individuals to make sure that they land in the right place and have the very best place to live. We're going to continue to have conversations in a respectful environment with the members opposite about health care throughout Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Farm and Ranch Worker Regulation Consultation

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As this government moves forward with consultation planning to draft the regulations on Bill 6, I hope they're planning to include the newly formed ag coalition. This group has formed an industry leadership advisory committee that will engage with farmers and ranchers to represent their interests. They are the ideal group to include in the Bill 6 consultation process. To the minister of agriculture: will you commit to having at least one, preferably more, members of this ag coalition on the technical working group for the Bill 6 consultation?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I can guarantee that there will be some members from the ag coalition on the technical working groups. I very much welcome their input. I thought it was quite interesting that they met on January 29 in Red Deer to get together. I think any opportunity that we have to expand our consultation process, even if it's arm's length, is a welcome opportunity, and I welcome the opportunity to work with them in the future as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the minister has not made an effort so far to work with the ag coalition, which includes 29 important agricultural groups such as the Alberta Barley Commission, Alberta Beef Producers, Alberta Canola Producers Commission, Alberta Cattle Feeders' Association, Alberta Chicken, Alberta Milk, Alberta Pork – I could go on – and given that you recognize the importance of this coalition, can the minister explain how he plans to actively involve the coalition in the Bill 6 regulation process?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I want to correct him on just one small point. We have been working with the ag coalition. I've met with them once in person, several times via the phone. I've talked individually with the chairs of the ag coalition as well. I'm very much looking forward to working with them and working with all other people in the agriculture industry as well across the province as we move forward on the consultation process.

Thank you.

2:20

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was different information than I was given.

Given that the ag coalition is holding consultation meetings all across Alberta to hear feedback from Alberta's producers, not just a select few, and given that it seems to me that they're doing your job, will the minister commit to giving them a bigger seat at the table?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member asked if they can get a bigger seat at the table; I'm not sure if that means physical size or number of members at the table. Agriculture will be, of course, very well represented on the technical working groups. It's important to have very good representation not just from the ag coalition but from others as well that perhaps don't have a voice at the ag coalition, making sure that we have all of that represented. Agriculture, as you've probably realized, is very diverse in this province. We need to have all of those voices at the table.

Thank you.

Athabasca University

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, Athabasca University is a success story. It serves over 10,000 Albertan students and provides much-needed learning alternatives. It's also a major employer. But rumours are circulating that Athabasca University may close its doors and leave. These rumours are creating uncertainty in a region that's been devastated by low oil prices and risky policies. Will the minister put

the rumours to bed and assure the people of Athabasca that this university will remain open and operating in its current structure in Athabasca?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question and for giving me the opportunity to address this issue here in the House. It just so happens that I had a meeting with the president, the board chair, as well as faculty association representatives last Thursday to discuss the future of Athabasca University. I was quite direct in my guidance, and I was quite clear that the number one priority for any path forward for that university is to make sure that Athabasca University stays in Athabasca.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you. Given the fact, then, Minister, that you sat down recently with the president of Athabasca University and considering the hundreds of Albertans that would face job losses as a result of potential closure or relocation, was relocation discussed at this meeting with the president, and does the minister retain confidence in its current governing board?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that supplementary question. I believe I answered the question the first time that I answered, but I'm happy to state again that our government's number one priority with respect to Athabasca University is to make sure that that university stays in Athabasca. We know that it's a valuable institution not just to the students of Alberta and around the world but to the community that it's in, so Athabasca University will stay in Athabasca.

Mr. Taylor: Out-of-work Albertans are flooding back to school to further their education, and this minister is playing coy with the future of hundreds throughout various schools. The NDP bases their decisions on ideology over common sense. Has the NDP government examined the impact that a closure like this in the future, if it happened, would have on Alberta postsecondary students and the economy, or is the government simply planning on leaving another community high and dry?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would recommend to the hon. member across the way that he actually listen to the answers when he stands up and asks the minister responsible so that he doesn't look ridiculous in his supplementary questions. I'm quite pleased to be able to give a clear and direct answer, that Athabasca University will stay in Athabasca. I could write it down on a piece of paper if the member would like it because he can't understand what I am saying. I don't believe I can be any more clear than that.

Municipal Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, last week the Municipal Affairs minister had the opportunity to provide clarity to Alberta's Mayors' Caucus and come clean on this government's plan for MSI funding but failed to do so. Sadly, again later here that day and today, too, all we hear are more platitudes and misdirection on the subject. Minister, MSI is critical for planning and building strong and resilient communities. For the record, again, will the minister do the

right thing and clarify MSI funding intentions for our municipal partners that are here in Edmonton today?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I have great respect for all of the municipal leaders and the work they do in working with us to ensure that Albertans have the services they need, which is why we consider them a valuable partner and understand the importance of MSI to their communities. Given the extreme fiscal challenges of the province we are having conversations around that; however, we remain committed to providing the support to municipalities that they need to take care of the Albertans they serve.

Mr. Stier: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, I don't know if we heard any facts here.

Given that the construction season is short, by not presenting a budget this past February, this government has cost our municipal partners some of their most critical building months. To the same minister again: for what mysterious reason did this NDP government delay session, delay the budget, and delay this vital information when there is so much important work to do in our communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are working incredibly hard to work within the budget as we present that budget well within normal timelines. However, it's not formalized, and I expect to have amazing support for that whole section from the member across from me. We are investing \$34 billion in necessary roads, schools, transit, and other public infrastructure to provide communities with the facilities they need to get Albertans back to work, and we are committed to supporting municipalities, again, in providing for their members.

Mr. Stier: Well, Mr. Speaker, thanks to the minister for some detail there.

Given that the Premier herself said that a significant portion of the carbon tax revenue would be cycled back to municipalities for, quote, green initiatives but municipalities, though, really need bridges, roads, and water-treatment facilities among other core infrastructure projects, and while solar panels and green-roofing systems are nice to have, can the Minister of Municipal Affairs say if any of the carbon tax revenue collected will be allocated to those priority infrastructure projects instead?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of quick points. You know, it's quite correct that municipalities require and rely a great deal on infrastructure funding. Let me just be very clear that infrastructure funding is a key part of our jobs plan, and that's why I'm proud that we have invested \$9 billion more into our plan than would have been invested under the Official Opposition's plan. So that's the first point.

The second point is this. When we make significant changes, we're going to talk to people first; we're going to consult. Now, there are rumours out there. There are always rumours out there, but let me be clear that if municipal leaders haven't met with us and haven't advised anything, then I think they should be pretty comfortable.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Northwest.

Bill 1

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government promised change and, boy, are they delivering. They promised a more open government and did a bait-and-switch briefing for the opposition parties on the throne speech. They promised a jobs program worth 27,000 new jobs and had to cancel it because it failed to create more than one job. The response to this was Bill 1, which was literally the first time in my memory that we had to pass a law to tell the minister what his job should be. To the Premier: given that Bill 1 is the job description for the minister, what will he be doing until Bill 1 is passed and proclaimed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll clarify for the member that Bill 1 provides the legislative tools and framework for government to be able to respond and act very nimbly. Now, the global price of oil and the continued drop in the global price of oil have had significant impact on Albertans, on their families and communities. Now, unlike the opposition who governed for many decades and failed to adequately diversify the economy and move us off one resource and unlike the opposition who would rather we sit on our hands and do nothing, our government is taking action and showing leadership through Bill 1. Thank you.

2:30

Ms Jansen: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister may be nimble, but he's not very quick.

Given that the minister should already have been doing the work mandated in Bill 1, is the Premier ready to acknowledge that Bill 1 is completely pointless as a job-creation plan?

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will thank the hon. member for the question and for giving me the opportunity to speak of the initiatives that our government has rolled out since last fall, since the creation of this ministry, which are exactly what businesses and industry have been asking for: a one-stop shop in the government, to have a ministry that focuses exclusively on the economy, on diversifying the economy and supporting our sectors and building on our strengths. In addition, Bill 1 is going to give us the legislative tools that we need to be able to respond to our current economic climate in a very concise and straightforward way. [interjections]

Thank you.

The Speaker: It's getting a little noisy, folks.
Second supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans' unemployment rate is climbing at a startling rate and given that they are abandoning their first flagship job-creation plan faster than the House leader rushed his way into the House last Tuesday, to the Premier: are you actually planning to listen to and accept amendments and constructive solutions from the opposition to make Bill 1 better and turn it into a plan that can actually be executed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're still waiting for some constructive suggestions from any of the opposition parties, quite frankly. But let me again be clear that our government is taking action. You know, I want to take a second to talk about that. While the Official Opposition and the opposition

run down the province and are actually fearmongering, we have some great news. There are great examples of how Alberta is a great place to invest and to do jobs. Just on Friday Imperial Oil announced a \$2 billion investment here in Alberta. We welcome that news, and we'll continue to work with . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Edmonton-South West.

Tourism Promotion

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the government's throne speech there was a commitment made to diversify the economy, and given Alberta's diverse landscape, increasing tourism is one of the ways we can do this. Given today's economic climate, promoting Alberta as a destination of choice would create more jobs and move Alberta towards long-term diversification. To the Minister of Culture and Tourism: what is being done to grow the tourism industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for my first question during question period. Tourism remains the one shining star in our economy right now, contributing over \$8 billion to our economy and 127,000 jobs to our province. I have had the opportunity to meet with stakeholders. I will continue to do that and look for opportunities to grow this great economy.

Thank you.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our tourism industry will grow more quickly if visitors can more easily travel to Alberta, again to the same minister: what is he doing to increase air access to this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. During my first week on the job, actually, I got to go to my hometown, Calgary, and announce the beginning of three-times-a-week flights directly from Beijing to Calgary. We are going to continue working on that. We will continue to do that, talking to our members from across the way and talking to people from our government as well. We're going to continue talking to our partners and look for new ways to increase travel to Alberta.

Thank you.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are great tourism opportunities in all corners of our province, not just in our major cities, to the same minister again: what is he doing to promote tourism across rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. A tourism and entrepreneurship program started in late September of last year, attracting approximately 200 participants. We also had Open Farm Days last year, which is another program that we continue to encourage. We're looking forward to it again this year. [interjections]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Could we keep the volume down, please?
The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Student Learning Assessments

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to an ATA survey nearly three-quarters of grade 3 teachers think that the pilot student learning assessment is of little benefit to the students. This pilot has cost the government millions of dollars, and for two years Albertan parents have not received information about their child's achievements relative to expected outcomes, yet the government is committed to this pilot again for another school year. This is no longer a pilot but a commitment to failure. To the Minister of Education: will you listen to teachers and cancel this failed experiment?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question as well. Certainly, I've been looking very carefully at all of our assessment tools, from diploma exams to PATs and, of course, the SLAs. From the time that I assumed the ministry, I decided to make them optional for the school boards this year. I had 59 out of the 61 take up that option. Certainly, I'm open to looking for ways to more effectively use the student learning assessment tool so that it is diagnostic and it helps our kids to learn and parents to understand what they are learning.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always nice to hear that the Minister of Education will listen.

Given that teachers voted at the ATA's annual assembly to put this test on pause until the issues surrounding it were resolved and given that parents have also expressed deep concern about the effectiveness of the SLAs, Minister, these tests have not proven to exhibit any real, positive impact on student learning. Will you agree to reinstate the provincial achievement tests until the issues surrounding their learning assessments are rectified?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. Certainly, I'm assessing many different options, but let's remember what we are using these SLAs for at this time, which is our grade 3 students. I don't know if you've seen grade 3 students: they're seven years old, and they're so wonderful, but they're very, very young. So it's very important that we design diagnostic tools that will help the teachers be able to build a program for kids but not make it onerous on seven-year-olds, putting in PATs.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Alberta Education website states that the government will, quote, co-ordinate with education partners and given that the Alberta Education website states that the learning assessments will remain in the pilot phase "until we are certain we have it right," can the minister explain why he's ignoring front-line teachers, parents, and education experts who are telling him that the pilots are a waste of time and money that do little to improve student learning?

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly, it's important to be objective and to weigh all the different options around testing and assessment in general. I'm listening very carefully to teachers. I know as a teacher myself that the best tool that we have to determine the outcomes for students is to maintain the professionalism of teachers and the integrity of their capacity to analyze where their kids should go. We will give them any

assistance along the way to do so, diagnostic tools such as SLAs, other ways to make sure that kids learn and they get the best education possible.

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

Naloxone Kit Availability

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give this government credit for making the fentanyl antidote naloxone widely available. However, many Albertans view naloxone as a cure for overdosing on fentanyl when it is not; it simply buys time for a victim to receive life-saving medical care. With that critical piece of knowledge lacking in the general public, Albertans will continue to die needlessly. To the Health minister: given that the grave misunderstanding that naloxone is a cure can result in death, how are you ensuring that Albertans are aware that it is critical for someone who has received naloxone to obtain medical attention as soon as possible?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

2:40

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for asking a question of such importance to Albertans and members on both sides of this House. Certainly, fentanyl is a deadly threat, and we're working through public awareness around making sure that the awareness of the risks is available; also, harm reduction, which was mentioned. Naloxone: every one of our distributing centres is working with citizens who are getting these kits to explain to them how to use them and to follow up with proper interventions afterwards. Certainly, there are lots of community groups helping to distribute these kits to those who most need them, and they're providing the education on the ground.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that most addicts are in denial and will not proactively obtain a naloxone kit from a doctor or a pharmacist and given that family and friends who desperately want to help their loved ones cannot obtain a kit and training unless the addict is with them and given that this government's naïveté of addictive behaviour is failing to ensure that everyone who wishes to save the addict's life has the opportunity to do so, why are you not allowing family and friends to obtain naloxone kits upon request?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're working with evidence to make the best decisions on behalf of citizens. Certainly, the evidence has shown that those who self-identify as using, so anyone who self-identifies as having a history of use or having used in the past or currently, have access to one of these kits. We're making them available through a variety of means, including pharmacies, but where we started, actually, was with the service agencies that are working most closely with the addicts; for example, here in Edmonton at Streetworks, a needle exchange program. They are the ones being trained on how to distribute and share the information, and they're doing a great job of getting it into the hands of those who most need it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that addicts are solely focused on their next fix and act defensively if someone offers them help and given that placing the onus on addicts to obtain naloxone reflects a common misconception about a drug addict's typical behaviour, will you commit today to let family and friends obtain naloxone kits if their loved one is resistant to taking that proactive measure?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. Certainly, any citizen who has a history of use has access to these kits if they express that they've self-identified as being a user having a history of use. We would encourage people who have that history to disclose that to either a pharmacist, to EMS – RNs are now able to prescribe the kits as well – or to any of these on-site programs that work with populations who are at risk typically. We're very proud of that, and we're continuing to work with the fentanyl response team as well as developing an opioid reduction strategy that will consider expansions to other demographics, potentially. But we certainly want to make sure that we're using evidence to derive . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Safe Accommodations for Queer Edmonton Youth

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past September I had the opportunity to view a powerful documentary, *For Want of a Home*. The film shares the stories behind a troubling statistic, that although only 5 to 10 per cent of our population identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning, they make up over 25 per cent of homeless youth. These youth are often reluctant to turn to shelters, where they may face discrimination from other residents, inflexible gender binaries, or a lack of understanding from staff and volunteers.

In 2014 SAFQEY, or Safe Accommodations for Queer Edmonton Youth, was formed to try and address this need. Currently Toronto is the only city in Canada that offers dedicated beds for LGBTQ2S youth; SAFQEY is working to make Edmonton the second. Through Boyle Street Community Services they've secured access to a housing facility, and they're now working to raise the funds needed to operate it as a shelter for trans, nonbinary, and two-spirited youth.

Mr. Speaker, it's heartbreaking to see the challenges faced by these young Albertans who are left homeless, often due to a lack of understanding of their identities, and rejected by their families, an unfortunate truth that confirms for me the importance of supporting the right of LGBTQ2S youth to feel safe and protected in other social spaces, like their schools.

To the board and members of SAFQEY I would like to say thank you for the incredible progress that you've made in two short years. This government and, I dare say, the majority of this House stand with and support you.

Thank you for your commitment and dedication.

Cold Lake Air Show

Mr. Cyr: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand before you today and represent my home constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake. In our constituency we have various events throughout the year, including the Glendon Pyrogy Festival, cabane à sucre, and Cold Lake First Nations Treaty Days, to list a few.

One of the most anticipated events this year is the Cold Lake Air Show. This year it is being hosted by 4 Wing and the Canadian Forces base Cold Lake in conjunction with the city of Cold Lake. The Cold Lake Air Show itself has a very special significance for myself as my daughter Charlotte was born during the 2009 air show, and that year especially I was floating in the clouds, up there with the Snowbirds. The air show is always an exciting weekend for families in and around Cold Lake, with something for everyone. It attracts performers from across North America. We're proud to showcase our Royal Canadian Air Force and to welcome a number of celebrated performers to our skies. Mr. Speaker, we have the CF-18 Demo Team, Snowbirds, F-16 Demonstration Team, SkyHawks, Firefly Aviation, Ace Maker, Pemberton Aerosports, Indy Boys, and AV8FX pyrotechnics coming to the Air Show this year.

This year Cold Lake is proud to announce that it has solved a problem that plagues many local air shows: parking. With an all-new, professionally developed plan there will be room for everyone who wants to come out and enjoy the show and no more long waits to get in or out, so this weekend will be hassle-free.

Whether you're an aviation enthusiast or a family looking to fill a weekend, the air show is an exciting, jet-blasted spectacle that's guaranteed to please. Just make sure that any young ears are equipped with hearing protection. I would like to take this opportunity to invite everyone to come out and witness the thrill of the Cold Lake Air Show on July 16 and 17.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship and in accordance with section 5(5) of the Property Rights Advocate Act I am pleased to table five copies of the committee's report on the 2014 annual report of the Alberta Property Rights Advocate. Copies of the report are available through the committee office and online.

Thank you.

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

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund it's my pleasure to table the report covering the committee's activities during the 28th Legislature, September 2014 to March 2015.

I would also like to table the committee's report covering activities from the 29th Legislature, June 2015 to November 2015.

These reports fulfill the requirements of Standing Order 55 and section 6(4)(c) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act. These reports are posted on the Assembly website, and copies are also available at the committee's office.

I would like to take this opportunity to quickly thank the officials from Alberta Treasury Board and Finance and AIMCo and the staff of the Legislative Assembly Office for the continued support of this committee.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I have two reports to table this afternoon. I'd like to table five copies of the report of the committee recommending the reappointment of Mr. Merwan Saher as the Auditor General for a two-year term.

I'm also pleased to table the report of the committee recommending the reappointment of Mr. Glen Resler as Chief Electoral Officer.

Copies of these reports are available online or through the committees branch. Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour and the minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have an introduction of a bill. I would like to give oral notice of a bill to be introduced tomorrow, that bill being Bill 4, An Act to Implement a Supreme Court Ruling Governing Essential Services.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. member, go ahead.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today, two that I promised in question period, advice for the Minister of Municipal Affairs on linear assessment, one from AAMD and C and one from AUMA.

Also, I rise to table the required number of copies of an open letter from the highly regarded Alberta Enterprise Group to the Premier, with advice on government policy.

2:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, I rise today pursuant to section 25(16) of the Conflicts of Interest Act to table the report of the Ethics Commissioner dated March 14, 2016, regarding the allegations involving the Premier of Alberta, the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Point of Order

Interrupting Members' Statements

The Speaker: There was a point of order raised during Members' Statements by the Government House Leader with respect to the interruption of the Member for Calgary-North West. While the desk-thumping was somewhat – my word, it seems to be robust of late. It did not in fact deter the member from proceeding and making her statement. She was able to complete her statement.

I would note, as Speaker Kowalski did on April 5, 2006, at page 733 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day, the principle that members should have the opportunity to speak on any subject they wish without being interrupted. He seems to have been also at the same time referring to points of order. So while there may not have been a point of order, the chair, as you may have noted today, wishes to underline again to all members that we need and I need to be vigilant, particularly around the volume of both comments as well as noises.

Privilege

Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

The Speaker: At the same time, while I have the floor, I would speak to the matter with respect to a point of privilege that was raised about an early release of the throne speech on March 8, a purported question of privilege raised by the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. Hon. members, the chair is prepared to rule on the purported question of privilege raised by the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster on Wednesday, March 9, 2016.

The discussion on this matter can be found on pages 38 through 42 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day. To state the purported question of privilege in the proverbial nutshell, the issue is whether the dissemination of copies of the Speech from the Throne on an

embargoed basis to media but not members prior to its delivery in the Chamber that afternoon constitutes a contempt of the Assembly.

The notice provided by the hon. member complied with the procedural requirements found in Standing Order 15(2). The Speaker's office received notice of the purported question of privilege on Tuesday, March 8, at 4:51, which far exceeded the requirement for notice to be provided two hours before the opening of the afternoon sitting. I would like to thank the member for proceeding by way of notice instead of raising the matter during the proceedings, during the Speech from the Throne, which would have disrupted this proceeding. It would not have been dealt with until the following day in any event. Thank you for that.

As I understood the hon. member's argument, it is that the distribution of the Speech from the Throne and the briefing impeded members in the performance of their duties and constituted a contempt of the Assembly. There did not seem to be a dispute as to the facts surrounding this purported question of privilege. As the Deputy Government House Leader confirmed, it seemed that there was an embargoed media briefing at which copies of the Speech from the Throne were distributed.

In terms of providing a basis for his claim, the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster was good enough to provide a definition of contempt from page 251 of *Erskine May*, 24th edition. In this Speaker's ruling on November 2, 2015, found at pages 400 to 401 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day, I relied upon the distinction between contempt and privilege at page 82 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition. To quote in part from that longer excerpt, a contempt is

any action which, though not a breach of a specific privilege, tends to obstruct or impede the House in the performance of its functions; obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of the House in the discharge of their duties; or is an offence against the authority or dignity of the House, such as disobedience of its legitimate commands or libels upon itself, its Members, or its officers.

The member also acknowledged that there was no precedent, by which I mean a Speaker's ruling on the dissemination of the Speech from the Throne prior to the delivery. Without a precedent the arguments proceeded on the basis of an analogy, with the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster claiming that this situation is the same as when copies of a bill are distributed prior to its introduction in the Assembly. To be clear, a possible contempt could occur in the circumstances where a bill is on notice on the Order Paper and before it is introduced, the bill is distributed to persons other than members and the specific contents of the bill are revealed. This was the essence of Mr. Kowalski's March 5, 2003, ruling, where he did find a prima facie question of privilege when the contents of a bill on notice were revealed at a media briefing. His ruling relied upon the March 19, 2001, ruling of then House of Commons Speaker Milliken on the same issue, which the member quoted in his presentation last Wednesday.

Although not raised in the discussion of this purported question of privilege, there is a subsequent ruling by Speaker Milliken on whether disclosure to the media of the Speech from the Throne prior to its delivery by the Governor General constituted a breach of privilege. In his ruling, found at pages 282 to 283 of *House of Commons Debates* for October 23, 2007, Speaker Milliken ruled that there was no breach of privilege. He stated at page 283, "The Chair can find no procedural authority for the claim that the premature disclosure of the Speech from the Throne constitutes a breach of the privileges of the members of this House."

I find this argument to be persuasive and applicable to this situation. As did Speaker Milliken, the chair finds that the situation surrounding the disclosure of the Speech from the Throne is

analogous to budget secrecy, which is a matter of parliamentary convention rather than of privilege. I would refer members to paragraph 31(5) of *Beauchesne's*, 6th edition, and page 894 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, which state this proposition.

Accordingly, for the reasons I have provided, I find there is no prima facie question of privilege. The matter is now concluded.

3:00

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 201 Election Recall Act

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today in the Legislature to move second reading of Bill 201, the Election Recall Act.

This bill is intended to strengthen Alberta's democracy by putting the power of our system further into Albertans' hands and giving them the ability to recall an elected official should the need arise. The premise of this legislation is simple, to ensure that any Member of the Legislative Assembly stays truly accountable to their constituents.

Mr. Speaker, it wasn't so long ago that many of us here in this Legislature were elected for the first time. For me personally, it was an honour and a privilege – and I'm sure it was for everyone – to be chosen by their constituents to represent their interests in this Legislature. It's an honour that I do not take lightly.

Mr. Speaker, our representative form of democracy is not perfect. There are some inherent flaws in it that have existed as long as Alberta has been a province. Indeed, Sir Frederick Haultain, the first Premier of the Northwest Territories, from 1897 to 1905, which then included Alberta and Saskatchewan, envisioned a very different western Canada. He wanted a single province called Buffalo, that would be governed on a nonpartisan basis; in other words, a democratic government where elected representatives did not represent political parties and where party politics did not dominate the Legislature. Sir Frederick Haultain did not get his way, and today we have a representative form of democracy that is dominated by party politics. Indeed, Albertans have experienced the great harm that can occur when we elect an MP to Ottawa or an MLA to this Legislature. We can see what happens when they believe that they can consistently ignore or not represent the wishes of the people that elected them.

My first introduction to this idea of recall began when I met Preston Manning and helped build at a local level the Reform Party in my constituency. The slogan The West Wants In resonated with western Canadians and with Albertans, and it spoke to our dissatisfaction with a government that could rule over us without representing our interests in this Confederation. Recall along with other democratic measures were proposed by the Reform Party, and I personally believe these bills and the actions of the Reform Party allowed western Canadians to channel their dissatisfaction back into the political process in a positive fashion rather than to support the more radical notions of separatism that appeared at the time to be raising their heads and which perhaps today could be raising their heads again in Alberta.

Recall should not be easy. It should be hard to recall an MLA or a Member of Parliament. But allowing for recall brings the benefits of accountability. It provides a positive path of action for an

electorate that realizes that the representative they have chosen is not enhancing democracy but perverting it by their personal actions or by placing emphasis on party politics rather than their constituents' desires. Our party's system brings many advantages to our system of democracy. For MLAs and constituents alike it also creates an uneasy dynamic where the MLA must sometimes choose between supporting the wishes of their constituents and the desires of the political party to which they belong. This issue of "How should your MLA vote when caught in the middle?" is difficult. It's difficult when two divergent forces are clearly seen to trap the MLA or the Member of Parliament. We saw that, I believe, during the Bill 6 debate prior to Christmas, and it's not a nice place to be. As we clearly saw these government MLAs caught in the middle, it was hard to see that they had to make a choice between their party and their constituents.

Bill 201 is an attempt to rebalance our democracy so that the people of Alberta will be able to hold their MLA accountable for their voting record and their public actions so that we really will have a system of democracy where the people rule rather than the party. The elected representative may happen to be in any political party, but they must be representative of their constituents. Let me make it clear to all that are in this House that I do not believe that this is a partisan bill. This bill is not left wing, it's not right wing, and it really shouldn't matter whether you're on the government or the opposition side. This bill speaks to Haultain's vision of a less partisan House, a House where the elected representatives are better able to balance their constituents' desires with those of their party.

Bill 201 does not speak to the wider issue of when an MLA should be able to speak and to vote against a party or an electorate that is asking them to vote against their personal conscience or to pass legislation that does not respect the rights of minorities and would therefore be tyrannical. I will always seek to serve, at least to the best of my ability, my constituents and to make sure that the voices of those in my constituency are heard loud and clear. The discussion surrounding this issue, about when an MLA should follow their conscience or defend minority rights, I will leave for another day and for another bill. I do believe that we should have those discussions in this House.

If passed, this bill would provide a mechanism where when 66 per cent of the electorate's signatures from the previous general election are collected in a constituency in 60 days on a sanctioned petition, an electorate would have the ability to recall their local MLA. A threshold of 66 per cent is not so impossibly high, Mr. Speaker, that it could never be reached, but it is also not so low as to ensure that the law is frivolously used. Indeed, this percentage is an attempt to address some of the NDP's concerns regarding Bill 206 from last session. They said that setting a percentage of 20 per cent of the electorate was just way too low.

Any canvassers pushing for a recall of their MLA cannot be paid in any way, Mr. Speaker. This would prevent wealthy groups from having undue influence, ensuring that a campaign is truly grassroots. A canvasser could not be paid and would also have to be a registered voter who's been a resident of Alberta for at least six months. This would prevent influence from outside jurisdictions or an attempt at manipulating the recall system.

Finally, a payment of \$5,000, payable to Elections Alberta, would ensure that the petitions would not be paid for by taxpayers and that an individual is serious before initiating a recall petition.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to have introduced this legislation, that has been adopted again and again as a party policy by the Wildrose.

3:10

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and speak early this afternoon to Bill 201. You know, we have recall in this province. It happens once every four years. I know there are many people in this province who are deeply frustrated by the political situation we find ourselves in that perhaps didn't expect the government we have now to win election, and I know there are members opposite who also didn't expect to be elected to this House and certainly didn't expect to be sitting in government, but there they are. They're making the best of the situation and, I believe, doing the best they can.

But here we are. We have three years and perhaps two months until the next election, and that's when the people of Alberta have the opportunity to once again pass judgment on this government and to elect, I think very likely, a new government.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I have a lot of concerns about this bill. There seems to be the intended or perhaps unintended consequence of creating loopholes which seem to go far beyond what this bill's stated goals are. It is not simply, I think, about recall. But what I worry is that it's perhaps a stalking horse for something else, perhaps an opportunity to subvert important rules we have in this Assembly and in this province around campaign finance. I'll get into that specifically as I go through this bill.

First, I think I'm going to just point to the example of the only other province in this country that has recall, and that's our friends to the west in British Columbia. They have recall. It's been used 26 times. It has been unsuccessful 25 times. And the one time it was successful, the MLA in question resigned before the petition actually went through, which raises the question of: what's the purpose of recall? If in the one jurisdiction of this country that has it it has never been used successfully, why would we want to pass that here in this province?

Let's talk a bit about the thresholds and some of the details of this particular bill. The \$5,000 fee may sound like a lot of money, but it really isn't. It really isn't. When you have a bill that says that although you need to wait 18 months past an election to then try to institute a recall petition – but if we look at section 2(5), if that petition fails, you can try again and you can try again and you try again and try again. So what we're going to do, if we observe our friends to the south, the frankly chaotic process of constant campaigning that we've got in our friends in the U.S. – there's a big risk that we fall into exactly the same situation here in this province, a situation I am sure none of us want to find ourselves in.

Now, we've talked about the 66 per cent threshold as well as if that is a significant number. My staff and I did some simple calculations earlier this afternoon. We've determined that in the constituency of Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, based on the number of votes cast in the last election, it would only be about 6,300 signatures needed. That's not a very significant number. In Lesser Slave Lake it would be even less than that, 5,978 signatures required. In Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo: 6,323 signatures. These are not significant numbers; these are not large numbers.

Now, my hon. friend from Calgary-Mountain View issued a news release earlier today and talked about perhaps 40 per cent of all electors as an option. That difference in some cases – in Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley it is as little as 218 votes difference between the 40 per cent threshold and the 66 per cent threshold. Again, I think what we're talking about here is a fundamental principle of the way that our democratic system operates and is intended to operate.

The cost of holding a by-election is in excess of \$200,000. That is a significant cost, which I think we need to be very mindful of

should we be in a situation. The other is: who can actually organize and advocate on behalf of the recall petition? Although the bill says that a person in the constituency must officially be the one to raise the petition, anyone from around the province could flood into that constituency to then work on behalf of organizing that recall petition.

What I want to spend most of my time talking about, though, Madam Speaker, are the financing provisions of this bill and what I see as being significant loopholes. Nowhere in this bill is the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act referenced. By the literal and strict reading of this bill, monies could be raised under the auspices of a recall petition. Let's say that we have a union that wants to raise \$100,000 and donate all of that to a petition to perhaps remove a member of this Assembly. Now, that petition fails, that money is put in trust, and that union says: you know, I'd like to see that money flow directly to the New Democratic Party. According to this bill, that's exactly what can happen.

Let's say that a wealthy individual wants to organize a recall petition and donate that money to a registered political party, any registered political party. More troubling, we turn to the very last page of this bill, section 16(1), penalties. If any of the rules in this bill are contravened, particularly the sections that relate to chief financial officers and other areas, if they're found to be guilty of that offence, they're fined a maximum of \$10,000. Well, let's say that we have this wealthy individual who puts in \$100,000 – by the way, no disclosure of who that wealthy individual or that corporation or that union is, which contravenes the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. They put \$100,000 into a campaign which they know is going to fail because that wasn't the purpose. The purpose wasn't really to recall the MLA; the purpose was to find a way around the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. But they do none of the things that they're required to do under this bill. They're fined \$10,000, they've put in \$100,000, which are now directed into a political party or a constituency association, and they're \$90,000 ahead.

There are significant, significant problems with this bill. Section 10(2) says that all expenses must be recorded by the campaign and that the chief financial officer must incur recall petition expenses, but section 10(3) says: "with respect to the personal recall expenses of an authorized participant." What's a personal recall expense versus a campaign expense? That's unclear. That's terminology I've never seen before and that I don't believe exists in the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. I'd be happy to stand corrected if, in fact, that's the case.

There are significant problems with the form and structure of the bill, and while I think it may be tempting on democratic principles to want to have recall in Alberta, I know of no other jurisdiction except British Columbia in the entire Commonwealth that has recall. Now, I could be corrected on that. If some hon. members want to correct me on that, I'm certainly happy to be corrected.

I have significant concerns with the concept of recall in principle. It's not the way our democracy works. There are opportunities for Albertans to have their say, and that opportunity occurs once every four years, frankly, whether we like the current situation or not. I can assure you that there were plenty of times in my lifetime when I haven't liked the situation very much, to the point where I chose to stand for election, as each and every one of us has done. That is the way the system works. In fact, I think, Madam Speaker, what I like about our system is the fact that there is that stability. In a majority government situation we're not in constant campaign mode, and I think that what we would have should this bill pass is exactly that.

I think I've made all the points that I wanted to make. With that, I will sit and say that I cannot support Bill 201.

Thank you.

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

3:20

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak in favour of Bill 201. I think that this is an important piece of legislation when it comes to ensuring that people have access to democracy, and I'd like to just spend a little bit of time chatting. You know, our critics will say: "Oh, you don't like the current government. This is a case of sour grapes."

[The Speaker in the chair]

Well, Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. This is not about recalling the Member for Banff-Cochrane. This is not about recalling any particular member in the Assembly. This is about providing access to democracy. This has been a long-standing policy of the members of the Wildrose. In fact, one of our founding principles was just this, finding ways to ensure that politicians are significantly more accountable between elections to their constituents.

While my good friend the independent Member for Calgary-Elbow, my good friend at the end of this side of the House, would like to make statements like "We'll be in constant campaign mode," I think that if we look at other jurisdictions that have recall, it's just not true. British Columbia, for example, isn't in constant campaign mode, and I can tell you that there are a lot of people in British Columbia that aren't happy with the current government. But the point is that the very presence of recall requires politicians and elected officials to be more accountable to their constituents. That is exactly why members of this Assembly should be supporting it, because if they believe in being more accountable, more transparent, then they ought to believe in recall.

I would also just like to mention that in conversations that I've had with colleagues on this side of the Assembly – and I would hesitate to speak for them all – I know that it was the intention of the mover to try and get this bill right. So if the threshold is the big hang-up, I would suggest that we and he would be open to amendments. If there are loopholes in the financing of petitions and recalls, I would suggest that we and he are open to amendments. This isn't about the opposition passing a piece of legislation. This isn't about us trying to score political points. This is a long-held belief of many folks that we represent, that MLA recall is a positive way to ensure accountability and transparency to the constituents and to the people of Alberta.

I might just add further to the comments from my colleague that when it comes to the threshold, 66 per cent of all those who cast ballots in the previous election is in response to some of the concerns when the previous Bill 206 had been tabled and, unfortunately, was unable to be debated here in the Assembly. Now, while members who, I might suggest, might not be the right people would like to say that we're just rehashing ideas, things that have already come before the Assembly, in fact this recall legislation has never been debated in the House in the last number of years. So this gives a good opportunity to talk about some important issues when it comes to democracy and accountability with Albertans, and here we have a change from the initial bill because we're listening to Albertans, and the threshold was a concern to some.

We've heard that in some constituencies the threshold would only be 5,000 or 6,000 petitioners, but in others we see a significant amount of requirement when it comes to petitioners. For example, in Edmonton-Gold Bar, one of the highest voter turnouts in the

whole province, with over 22,000 voters, it would take 14,000 petitioners to initiate recall. In Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, with just over 20,000, it would take more than 13,000. To get those 13,000 signatures in just 60 days works out to be over 200 people a day signing the petition. This is a significant effort. For Edmonton-Strathcona it would be over 10,000, and for Calgary-Hays, the leader of the third party, it would be over 11,000 signatures. The point is that there is a significant effort that would be required.

The other important factor that this threshold would provide that just a percentage of the voters list doesn't is that it places importance on every vote and would encourage, in my opinion, voter turnout in the general election. Politicians and elected officials who have done a good job would be more inclined to do a number of tasks that would increase voter turnout that, in turn, should a recall petition ever be launched, then would require even more work. So there is a dual benefit of requirement on petitioners in that the voter turnout is likely going to be higher because for all elected folks or those running for office, it's of benefit to ensure that voter turnout is high.

So it would be my hope that in some of the other constituencies that have been highlighted this afternoon, the turnout would actually be increased, and as a result a recall would be more difficult or the threshold would be higher than the numbers pointed out by the independent member.

There are a vast number of good reasons for recall, many of which we've laid out. I just want to reiterate as I wrap up here that this isn't about recalling a particular member or the government. It's about a long-standing belief held by the Wildrose Official Opposition of being more accountable, more transparent, and giving the people of Alberta more of a voice to hold their members accountable. Certainly, we've seen in just the previous government that there would have likely been a significant change in behaviour of many of those members who certainly made some poor decisions, and as a result recall in place may have stemmed some of that. The long-standing belief on behalf of many of our members: this is a great way to provide more access to democracy.

I would just end with: if members of the Assembly haven't been involved in activity that is scandalous, if they have been busy meeting the needs of their constituents, if they are listening to the people of Alberta, there is no reason to be concerned about recall, and it's exactly what I'll be working on in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, ensuring that the good people there are represented well. I consider it an honour to come into the Chamber every day and represent them, and I will do my best to ensure that they would never have a need to enact such legislation. But I also believe, Mr. Speaker, that they should have the ability to fire me if I'm doing the exact opposite of that.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity today to rise and speak to Bill 201, the Election Recall Act. I think we should maybe consider calling this the Election Redo Act, but I'll speak to that in a few minutes.

Mr. Speaker, during the election in 2015 Albertans were presented with a number of different platforms by various parties, and on May 5, 2015, everyone had the same opportunity to vote in support of the platform that they felt best represented their beliefs or where they felt the direction of the province should go. It's a democratic process that repeats itself every four years. Obviously, it needs to be repeated here yet again, that Albertans chose a government that will make decisions in a responsible way and one that is not willing to leave people behind. They chose an NDP government. Yet here we are again debating how to change the

democratic process into something that – well, if we don't like the results, then let's come up with something else to just simply hijack the process.

3:30

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

The Speaker: There's a point of order.

**Point of Order
Relevance**

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, it would be nice if the opposition would actually speak to the point of recall. This is not a bill that is talking about a general election or how the results of a general election come together. This side and the person that brought forward this bill completely agree with the fact that general elections choose MLAs, choose governments. This bill is about recalling those members that have not been doing their job, that have not been speaking for their people. So it would be nice if he would address those issues, please.

The Speaker: Any comments on the point of order raised by the member?

Mr. Carlier: Yeah, Mr. Speaker, on the point of order. I believe that the member is speaking on the bill. It's in relation to the entire democratic process that we enjoy as a parliamentary system in Canada, and he should continue on with his line.

The Speaker: Hon. member, your point is well taken.

I would ask the member, however, to get to the point. I believe that's where you were intending to go. I would urge you to get there sooner.

Mr. Nielsen: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

Debate Continued

Mr. Nielsen: As has already been pointed out by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, it's the third time in six years that we have seen the Wildrose opposition bringing forward this type of distracting legislation. You might be asking, Mr. Speaker, why I call this distracting legislation. Well, instead of working on how to navigate through this economic downturn and concentrating on things that matter to Albertans, like diversification and job creation, we're getting ready to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayers' money on unnecessary by-elections because they're not happy that they didn't win. Overturning election results will not get Albertans back to work. For an opposition that does claim to be such fiscal hawks, rather than working collaboratively to propose solutions, they are solely intent on overturning these election results and spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on these costly by-elections.

Mr. Speaker, this government has already taken steps to specifically address democratic accountability with the passing of Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta, banning the corporate and union donations. But it didn't end there, which is why the all-party ethics and accountability committee was formed. Contrary to the transparency and accountability shown by this government, Bill 201 is an attempt by the members opposite to put corporate money back into politics: the \$5,000 process; the petition can come from anywhere; and the campaign to get those signatures can be corporately financed. They are trying to find a way around no corporate, no union donations, and this would be the first step in that plan to do it. This bill proves that the Official Opposition thinks

corporate money belongs in politics, and they obviously can't be trusted to do what they say they will.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's time for the Official Opposition to stop taking its orders from the Kudatah folks. Rather than trying to find ways to have a do-over of the last election, maybe they should be spending their time presenting constructive alternatives and contributions that work with government to ensure that the needs of all Albertans are taken care of. Mind you, this, of course, would mean having to address some of the social issues in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I don't see how Bill 201, the Election Recall Act, does anything to support democracy and political engagement. Rather than being a tool to hold MLAs accountable during election periods, this legislation will pave the way for special-interest groups to hijack the political process and create even more political discourse in this province.

The all-party Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, Mr. Speaker, has a mandate to discuss this exact type of legislative proposal. They are currently engaging with Albertans on changes to our democratic institutions, and we should let this committee do its work. Quite frankly, this bill distracts from that mandate and the work that is already being done.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's no secret that voter turnout has been in decline for the last several years, and we need to do better to engage voters. But this bill will set a floor of only 66 per cent of previous votes cast rather than a majority of the electorate. It feels like one of the intentions of this bill is to exclude people simply because they didn't vote the last time. Given that it's Commonwealth Day, with a message of inclusiveness, this bill falls a little bit short on that point.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, this bill would allow in some cases fewer than 6,000 signatures to overturn the results of an election. Great news if you're trying to exclude people. If I may use the example of Lesser Slave Lake, in the May 5 election there were 20,227 eligible voters. Unfortunately, only 9,057 ballots were cast. This means that under the proposed legislation only 5,977 signatures – I'll say that again: 5,977 signatures – would be required to overturn that election result and create a \$250,000 by-election. A minority of people allowed to make decisions for the majority: again, great news if you're looking to exclude people.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are expecting much more from this Assembly than useless discussions on how we can get election do-overs because the Official Opposition didn't win. I cannot support this bill in any way, and I urge everyone else to do so as well. I think there are much bigger things that we should be spending our time on and are expected to be spending our time on.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of Bill 201, the Election Recall Act. Recall of elected members has been a core western Canadian, small "c" conservative principle for over a generation now. Every once in a while, in spite of nomination contests, party vetting, and elections the electorate will elect a dud to office. Finding out that your MLA is a dud can be very disappointing. It is particularly galling when the elected MLA won't do the right thing and resign. It is a privilege to be an MLA. Some are reluctant to do what's right in spite of whatever scandal, investigation, criminal act, or dishonourable action is conducted. Winning an election shouldn't give an MLA immunity from a performance review for four years. Four years is a long period, and there are not too many jobs where employers have no recourse for improper actions of their employees, like sitting MLAs enjoy.

Albertans are their bosses and should be afforded the ability for corrective actions.

The only province currently to implement recall is British Columbia, and it was the B.C. NDP under Mike Harcourt in 1995 who brought in recall, feeling duty bound by a referendum on the topic initiated by the Social Credit Party. Although recall can be considered a small “c” conservative principle, it was Harcourt’s NDP government that also supported this principle. British Columbia has lived with recall for 20 years and has had the distinction of having 26 recall petitions launched. Only five ever made it back to Elections BC for verification. Four petitions did not have enough valid signatures.

Around 1998 the Liberal MLA for Parksville-Qualicum was accused of writing letters to newspapers under assumed names, praising himself and attacking political opponents. A Parksville newspaper had asked a former RCMP handwriting expert to compare a sample of the MLA’s handwriting to that of letters to the editor submitted by a Warren Betanko. The newspaper then ran a story entitled *MLA . . . Is a Liar, and We Can Prove It*. The MLA was ejected from the B.C. Liberal caucus although he chose to remain as a Member of the B.C. Legislative Assembly. He resigned his legislative seat on June 23, 1998, when a recall petition led by Mark Allan Robinson had enough signatures from the electorate and was about to be certified. Can you imagine having a situation like that in Alberta and having no recourse?

3:40

A long time ago Alberta had recall legislation. It was during the time of the Social Credit government of William Aberhart. As soon as the legislation was used directly against the sitting Premier, however, the legislation was retroactively repealed from the books lest the Social Credit lose their leader. With the third party’s past issues with leaders it’s no surprise that one of their MLAs spoke against recall earlier. With the possibility of recall it makes government more accountable and ensures that MLAs have the freedom to stand up for their communities’ best interests.

Some Canadian elites have mocked recall. Perhaps scandal provides fodder for newspapers and content for social media, but – make no mistake, Mr. Speaker – elected officials deal in serious matters, and recall is a serious matter, not to be taken lightly. That is why Wildrose has placed some hurdles in the proposed legislation to ensure that a recall drive is not a frivolous, vexatious, or nuisance act. A petition could not be started until 18 months into the term, and an MLA could only be subject to recall one time in a term, so the NDP MLAs, that have just been elected 10 months ago, wouldn’t have anything to worry about for at least eight months.

Again, a \$5,000 application fee to the Chief Electoral Officer being required to start a petition is a hurdle that many will think twice about before launching a recall drive. Most people do not have \$5,000 lying around to launch a recall drive. It will take time to raise the money. In contrast, B.C. only has a \$50 requirement, making our proposal much more challenging.

Then there is the requirement to obtain physical signatures of electors from that constituency within a 60-day period. It will not be an easy feat to obtain physical signatures of eligible voters in a constituency equalling 66 per cent of ballots cast in the previous election. For a petition drive to succeed, the petitioners would have to be well organized and the MLA’s offence would have to be quite serious.

In addition, no canvassers can be paid in any way, preventing wealthy groups and special-interest groups from having undue influence and ensuring that the campaign is truly grassroots. Canvassers must be Albertans, ensuring that groups from other provinces don’t meddle in provincial affairs. As you see, Mr.

Speaker, these are good hurdles to disallow any frivolous, vexatious, or nuisance recall drives.

If an MLA is doing their job and they respect the office that they have been elected to, they have nothing to fear from recall. Recall is an emergency valve in democracy in order to restore dignity and honour to the elected offices. An MLA need not fear recall if he stands for the values, ideals, and people that elected them to represent their constituents. Recall would also make backbench MLAs less inclined to quietly toe the party line when unpopular, dishonest, or irresponsible policies are being implemented by leadership.

Former MLA Paul Hinman summed it up nicely when speaking in the House on the version of the Recall Act, Bill 208, that he presented in 2010.

In conclusion, this bill is about ensuring that the people of Alberta are the ones holding the power and that when elected representatives no longer represent the people, they have a process that allows them to remove politicians with hidden agendas who are not putting the interests of the people first. Recall is the only 24/7 way to hold elected people accountable and in check. If we want people to be engaged in politics, then they must be empowered.

I trust that my colleagues in the opposition and the benches of the governing majority will support this honourable piece of legislation. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood : Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak against Bill 201 and the intentions of the bill. For an opposition party that claims to be fiscally responsible, rather than working collaboratively to produce solutions, they seem solely intent on overturning democratic elections instead of getting Alberta back to work. If this bill were passed, progress would not happen. This legislation is intended just to bog down the Legislature in democratic process. This bill has been tabled by an opposition party that can’t move past May 5 of last year, which sometimes seems like a huge leap forward in time given recent statements by some members.

When this government was elected, it ran on a solid platform that spoke to the will of the people. We committed to creating a mature, resilient, diversified 21st-century economy. We committed to working to restore honest and open government. We committed to protect vital public services like health care and education. We committed to restoring a progressive income tax structure. The government you see here today was chosen by the people of Alberta because they knew the issues, and the government was elected democratically. This government works to do things that would move our province ahead.

Instead of working together on the issues that really matter to Albertans like economic diversification and job creation, this bill and the members opposite are distracting from the issues that Albertan families expect a government to focus on. The members opposite would prevent this government from diversifying Alberta’s markets through supporting value-added markets with our new petrochemical diversification program, a program that will spur billions in investment.

They would prevent us from doing anything about climate change. NASA has all of the evidence a person would need to show that climate change is real and that we do contribute to it. This opposition would continue to risk the health of children and seniors due to the burning of coal, which puts NOx and SOx, nitrous oxide and sulfur dioxide, into the air and have no plan on how to transition towards clean and renewable energy. That research, if the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler would like to look at it for himself,

can be googled. I am sure that the LAO has supplied the hon. member with a smart phone.

They would have this government reverse the reinstatement of funding that saw to the needs of a growing student population, that needs teachers to go along with them, and would work to remove a government that has committed to stable funding for our hard-fought health care system.

Mr. Speaker, this government ran on a platform of honest and open governance, and the first act of this government was the passing of Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta, banning all corporate and union donations. Prior to these changes our political system had been far, far too dependent on funds from a narrow range of donors with deep pockets and far too removed from the interests of ordinary people. Now, for a second time, the members opposite present a bill that puts corporate money back into politics. The \$5,000 can come from anywhere, and the campaign to get the signatures can be corporately financed. They are trying to get a way around corporate and union donations, and this would be the first step in their plan to do it. This bill proves the Official Opposition thinks corporate money belongs in politics. Our government under leadership of the Premier created the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, whose mandate is to review the legislation governing democratic processes in Alberta and is currently engaging Albertans on these exact issues.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite could not connect with enough voters to form government, and they're trying to get a do-over. The matters they spoke about did not resonate with voters. As the economy started to take a hit last winter and spring, all the opposition could talk about was lowering taxes. They had no plan to create jobs. They had no commitment to protect all of the work that had been done by teachers, nurses, and the previous government to undo the Klein cuts of the '90s. At the time we had a government that had fallen out of favour and out of touch with voters and an Official Opposition with no clear plan on how to improve the economy or how to protect the services that Albertans rely on.

What people did pick was a government that had a clear plan, laid out in our platform, that clearly reverberated through the whole election. Me standing here in this House is proof positive of that. I intend like everyone else here to run during the next election on a four-year record.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, there will be legislation that is popular with some and unpopular with others, but we do so with accountability, knowing that we will be judged according to what we hoped to do versus what we accomplished. I stand proud in this House that I supported farm worker safety legislation. I can go to work knowing that as of January 1 of this year farm workers can expect workers' compensation if they are injured or, God forbid, if someone is killed. Their family will have something to help them pay the bills. I can hold my head high knowing that occupational health and safety for the first time has the ability to investigate a serious accident like someone breaking their back, losing their arm, or losing their life. We can take that information, and we can actually use it to inform policy that will ultimately help everyone. I can be proud that for the first time in history farm workers will not have to worry about having no legal recourse if there are bad employment and labour practices.

As a province collaborating between producers, commissions, and experts in the field, we will create a floor that provides a minimum set of standards that farm workers can count on to protect them. This is how we create social change, when someone has the courage to stick their neck out and take the heat to fight for the

rights of others. If we were judged on a recall basis, task to task, we would never have the ability to fight for those bold changes that, while controversial, are necessary to create a fair and just society.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most important pieces of legislation we have is the institution of publicly funded health care. Powerful interests fought against this bold and, at the time, provocative move from Tommy Douglas. Ninety per cent of doctors went on strike, private insurance providers spoke out against it, and \$114,000 in 1962 money was spent to spread propaganda, making threats of doctors leaving the province and threats of having out-of-country doctors come here to practise. This is exactly the type of chaos that Bill 201 would create. I will tell you that without out-of-country doctors choosing to move to Alberta and choosing our rural communities as their home that we wouldn't have access to proper medical care. Out-of-country doctors were once upon a time some sort of terrible threat, a threat that shows that with time social attitudes change, as evidenced by the support for Bill 7, which enshrined the rights of gender identity and gender expression as rights no one can discriminate against.

Attitudes progress over time but only with the work of those prepared to stand up for what is right. That work can't be done when the person prepared to argue is under the threat of powerful interests that would take a person's democratically elected seat away, these recall attempts and public smearing through paid advertisement and personal abuse by those empowered through the new double-edged sword of social media. Mr. Speaker, this opposition continues in its attempts to sow fear and dissension within Alberta instead of finding constructive solutions that would bring hope to those same people.

Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that included in this bill are details pertaining to fundraising. Under section 13 it includes that a report must be made to the Chief Electoral Officer of what the amounts of donations and contributions are and that after the recall campaign any leftover funds are put into trust. But then this person who has initiated the campaign may direct that same Chief Electoral Officer to transfer these funds to a registered political party, a registered constituency association, or a candidate, or all of them. What this would suggest to any thinking person is that this legislation is not intended to hold an elected member of this Assembly to account but is intended to be used as a campaign fundraising tool for opposition parties to help build their war chest for the next election.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I have to think about small communities, that hinge on very intricate social relationships and economic relationships. What would I do if I had someone come to my door, that I know has status and power in the community, and they asked for my signature to help vacate the seat of my local MLA? If I sign it, I could potentially feel that I am undermining someone I support, that I may have voted for. But if I don't sign it, then this person at the door may use that information as ammunition against me at my parents' group at the school or they could discourage patronage at my business. Every voter has the right to privacy when it comes to who they choose on the ballot, and I fear that this puts that fundamental aspect of democracy at risk.

And if we were to adopt this, why stop at one recall? Why not just use public funds to recall each . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak about one of my favourite things. That is democracy. I'm one of the

unique examples of democracy. I'm a new Canadian, and since I immigrated, I have had amazing opportunities in Alberta, one of which was to pursue a political career. Even though I was not born a Canadian citizen, I was granted the ability to run for political office. The reason I was able to run for this office is because of democracy.

I came here from the largest democracy in the world, but there democracy works differently. You need lots of money and muscle power to be appointed as a candidate in an election. Here in Alberta democracy actually works, and sometimes it works differently here, too. So I'm not an accidental MLA. My life was put on display for all of Calgary-Foothills. I ran three times to get here. My record as a professional engineer working in the energy sector was examined and compared to my competitors. The knowledge that I was born in a different country was well known. My work and participation in the community was another determining factor in voters' minds. With all of this information, it was decided that I would be the best person to represent the people of Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Speaker, you may be wondering why I am telling you all this. I'm coming to the point. I'm going to talk about just this bill. I'm not going to talk about – circling about all other things like Bill 201 and all and which has no details. That's some of the reason, you know, so that people have an option to recall their legislators when they bring in the wrong bills and they are doing a disservice to Albertans.

Because I have led the people of Calgary-Foothills to believe that I would be the best choice as a representative of their concerns, I have led them to believe that I represent their values, both social and economic, the best out of all the candidates. If I start to show the people of Calgary-Foothills that I lied, then what recourse do they really have? Do they have to wait for four years, for three and a half years to un-elect me, or should we empower them with options? That's what I'm talking about. If I went back on my promises to the voters, then the voters have no recourse under the current laws. The people of Calgary-Foothills are stuck with me until another election is called or I vacate that position. They should be able to give me a job performance review more than once every four years.

The people of Calgary-Foothills could protest on the steps of this Legislature and demand my resignation, or they could sign petition after petition to stop me from passing legislation they never agreed to, or they could write letter after letter asking me to reconsider bills, legislation, or suggestions that they do not want me to pass. We have seen, Mr. Speaker, what happened on Bill 6, how much people had to struggle to come here, driving hours and hours to come to this Legislature and to make their voice heard. We can make it easier for people, but with the way Alberta's electoral system works, none of that would matter. Once I am elected, I could do whatever I wanted, propose any legislation I wanted, and if my constituents did not agree with me, there is nothing they could do to stop me other than wait till the next election.

4:00

Of course, I would never go back on my word or pass legislation that would cause my constituents to protest against my decisions. I won't do that, but just for argument's sake – just for argument's sake – if I really screw it up and my constituents are really so unhappy with me that they drive three hours from Calgary to protest on the front steps of the Legislature, they should have some way of channelling that anger, that frustration, that unhappiness into real action. Of course, it should always be peacefully.

One of the reasons I ran under the Wildrose banner, Mr. Speaker, was because of the option to have free votes in the Legislature. These free votes are designed to give an MLA the ability to

represent their constituency in the most accurate way possible. In the same way, voters should be given the option to recall someone who does not vote in the Legislature the way their constituents desire. That is what this legislation is about. Bill 201 puts the power of democracy back in the hands of the people.

I as an elected official should not be able to run rampant with the government's abilities, especially if it goes against people's wishes. Democracy should not only work once in every four years. The people should have the ability to recall an elected official prior to the election if they feel that the MLA they elected has misled them. The legislation is not a threat to the government, as some of the members opposite mentioned. I mean, they made it sound like a coup, that the opposition is trying to destroy the government. It's not true. This legislation is not a threat to the MLAs who represent the people as they want to be represented. When the people elected me, they were given a picture of who I am, where I am from, what I believe, and where I stand on voter issues. If after the election it is discovered that this picture of who I am was photoshopped beyond all recognition, then the people of Calgary-Foothills should have the right to recall me.

I'm not afraid of this legislation. I'm not afraid of being recalled. I gave my constituents the most accurate representation of who I am and what I believe. My constituents know exactly what I will and will not do. There will be no surprises for them in the months and years ahead. I encourage every single MLA in this House who believes that your constituents elected you because of your values, because of your beliefs, and where you stand on voter issues to vote for this bill. If this bill is passed and you are right, that you are doing exactly what your constituents wanted from you, then this bill will never affect any one of us here. But if you are afraid that you turned out to be someone completely different than who your constituents voted for, then vote against this bill. If you know that you're not doing what your constituents elected you to do, then vote against this bill. If you are a photoshopped version of the picture you painted for your constituents, then vote against this bill. If you are everything that your riding voted for, are now doing everything they wanted you to do, then vote for this bill because this bill will only affect those who misrepresented themselves to their constituents.

Mr. Speaker, I ask everyone in this House to vote in favour of this bill. Thank you.

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

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm standing today to speak against Bill 201, Election Recall Act. I'm proud that some of the first actions our government took were the passing of Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta, and the establishment of the all-party Select Special Committee on Ethics and Accountability, of which I am the deputy chair. These two actions are just a few of the steps this government has taken to increase not only accountability but democratic participation as well.

Mr. Speaker, our committee is already hard at work reviewing legislation and recommendations to strengthen our democratic institutions, and we need to let that work continue. This bill before us today is a distraction from those efforts.

Bill 1 banned all union and corporate donations, finally removing big money from Alberta politics and giving all Albertans a stronger voice in their democracy, a voice that for too long had been drowned out. However, this bill before us today strikes me as an attempt to undo that work and, instead, put corporate money back into politics. This bill proves that the Official Opposition thinks that corporate money belongs in politics and that they can't be trusted to do what they say they will.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to point out the irony of this bill. This is an opposition party that, rather than working in collaboration, seems totally intent on overturning the results of a democratic election and, in turn, spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on by-elections instead. Each by-election carries a price tag of around \$250,000. Wouldn't this money be better spent on infrastructure and front-line workers, keeping Albertans working in these tough economic times?

Mr. Speaker, we've all heard some of the dangerous rhetoric going around right now, and this bill seems to me just another attempt to stoke the fear and anger of Albertans. The people of Alberta expect that the opposition should be proposing more constructive solutions to Alberta's economic climate rather than suggesting that we fire teachers and nurses and attempting to overturn the results of an election.

This is not a game where you can have a do-over if you don't like the results, Mr. Speaker. An election is a fair, democratic process, and the Official Opposition should be using their time to put forth constructive alternatives and contributions, working with the government to ensure the needs of all Albertans are met in these tough economic times. The Official Opposition may not like the results of the last election, but like I said, you cannot have continuous do-overs till the candidate you prefer has been elected.

Albertans voted for change last election, and it is a change for the better. During the election our government promised to introduce reforms to our democracy, and we are following through with our promise. This bill does nothing to support democracy and political engagement. During this period of prolonged economic slowdown our government is focused on issues that matter to Albertans, including economic diversification and job creation.

Rather than being a tool to hold MLAs accountable between elections, recall legislation paves the way for special-interest groups to hijack the political process and the political discourse in the province instead. I will not be voting in favour of this bill, and I encourage everyone else in the House to do the same.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise on Bill 201, Election Recall Act, which is fraught with problems, as we've been hearing. Let me reiterate some of what has been said before, but for the record the Liberals put a recall bill before this House three times in the last 20 years, and we can only support this if it was amended substantially.

Most importantly, the caucus should insist that the required signature threshold would be 40 per cent of all electors in a constituency at the time of the last general election. Democratically elected people sometimes don't do the job, so there has to be a mechanism for checks and balances on somebody who simply is not doing the job and may be harming the constituency. But there have to be very strict and well-managed controls on that.

4:10

Additionally, the rules around who may contribute to a recall campaign initiative and in what amount need to be tightened up and brought in line with new and impending political donation rules, which we supported when this government was elected last year. Long before the Wildrose the Alberta Liberals had a lengthy history of championing an accountability mechanism such as this, but we appreciate that there should be a high level of respect for the democratic process and election outcomes. Any system of MLA recall should not be an easy one to achieve. Striking the right balance is key.

Under Bill 201 the number of signatures required will vary from constituency to constituency. In some of the most remote constituencies or some of those constituencies where very low voter turnout is a concern, it doesn't seem reasonable to have such a low bar. For the Liberals, we accept 40 per cent of electors in a constituency at the time of the last general election, the same figures we proposed in 1993 and '96 and which B.C. adopted in 1995.

In the present form Bill 201 could be used to circumvent the new pending political donation rules pursuant to the work now being undertaken by the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee by not placing any limits on donors and donations and allowing excess funds to be transferred to a registered political party or a constituency association or candidate.

At \$5,000 this bill chooses to make the cost of applying for a recall petition the more challenging part of the process. We think the challenging part of the process should be collecting the signatures, not so much the financial barrier. In fact, neither of our two recall bills even proposed a processing fee to be able to apply for a recall petition. In B.C. the recall fee is \$50.

Wildrose has had three different bills, including this one, in the last year, with different rules. I guess I would ask them to think deeply about what it is they're trying to achieve. What Bill 201 effectively means is that it is going to favour certain constituencies, perhaps more rural than urban. It looks somewhat self-serving in that respect. It could be used to circumvent the new spending rules, and the bill is too open ended in terms of its finance suggestions. As written, one could raise unlimited funds from unlimited parties and transfer what remains to a political party.

I can't support the bill as written and will be recommending substantial amendments. I hope the party will be open to those.

Thank you.

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

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always an honour to have the opportunity to stand in this House and provide my insight into the ongoing debate. Today I rise against this bill. Our government is committed to further strengthening our democratic institutions and ensuring that all Albertans are reflected in our decision-making processes.

I happen to be one of several members of this House that currently sit on the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, which has been mandated to discuss these exact types of legislative proposals. We are currently engaging with Albertans on changes to our democratic institutions, and it's important that we permit the committee to continue doing their work. I would simply state that Bill 201 distracts from the mandate and work that is already being done.

Mr. Speaker, let's talk a little bit more about the bill in front of us today. It's well known that voter turnout has been on the decline world-wide for the last several years. Despite this fact, this bill sets a floor of only 66 per cent of the previous votes cast rather than a majority of the electorate. In constituencies where turnout is lower than 50 per cent, this creates a serious problem, allowing even fewer people to have a say in who their representative is. We do not believe that a minority of voters should be allowed to make a decision on behalf of the majority of constituents and overturn the results of our democratic process.

Another aspect of this bill for you and the other members of this House to consider, Mr. Speaker, is that this bill is an attempt to put corporate money back into politics, as many of my colleagues have already stated. They're trying to find a way to get around no corporate and union donations, and this is the first step in their plan to do it. This bill proves that the Official Opposition thinks that

corporate money belongs in politics, and they can't be trusted to do what they say they will do.

Mr. Speaker, the passing of Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta, which banned all union and corporate donations and finally removed big money from Alberta politics, was one of the first steps towards ensuring all Albertans a stronger voice in their democracy. Bill 201 now wants us to take a step backwards. Starting a petition requires a \$5,000 processing fee to the Chief Electoral Officer, and there's nothing that stops corporations and special-interest groups from contributing to that campaign. Instead of strengthening democracy, as the Official Opposition claims, this recall bill would put these same narrow interests back in charge of our political process.

Recall legislation is a distraction from the issues that Alberta families expect their government to be focusing on. Rather than being a tool to hold MLAs accountable in between elections, recall legislation instead paves the way for special-interest groups to hijack the political process and the political discourse in this province. Rather than finding ways to work with government and other constructive criticisms and ideas, recall legislation instead offers an avenue for well-organized, well-funded parties to try and eliminate MLAs they disagree with or even just find irritating to their own particular causes.

During this period of prolonged economic slowdown our government is focused on the issues that matter to Albertans, including economic diversification and job creation. Attempting to overturn the results of an election will not put Albertans back to work. It will instead create more instability in a period of time when Alberta businesses and families need their government to be stabilizing our economy. Our government has a concrete plan to weather this economic downturn that involves putting Albertans back to work through investing in infrastructure projects and diversifying our economy.

One week ago we brought forward a throne speech that lists a lot of very important matters that will help Albertans get through these difficult times. Instead of wanting to debate those matters, the opposition is more interested in navel gazing.

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

Loyola: Instead, they seem to be interested in spending their time talking about uniting the right and coming up with systems to undo . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, there's a point of order.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, just on sections 23(h), (i), and (j), language likely to create disorder. The hon. member continually has been referring to this piece of legislation as an opposition piece of legislation. I find it quite insulting to the hon. member. This is not an opposition piece of legislation. This is a private member's bill, who was duly elected by his constituents and is doing his very best to represent those constituents. If the member across the aisle would like to refer to the legislation as private members' business, as it is, I'm sure that this could just be a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Any other perspectives with respect to this item? The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's just, you know, a matter of wording. I'm sure the member would be okay with adding the opposition "member's" bill.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. member, I think there is some point being made here. I would prefer that you refer to it as a private member's bill because this is private members' business, and it should be, I think, most appropriately referred to in that manner.

If you would proceed.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I retract the statement although I believe on several . . . [interjections] Okay. I retract the statement. I retract the statement.

An Hon. Member: Great apology.

Loyola: Okay. Well, I am truly and sincerely sorry.

4:20

Debate Continued

Loyola: Mr. Speaker, each by-election costs about \$250,000. This would be better used and invested in supporting our front-line workers or contributing to infrastructure projects that keep Albertans working during these tough economic times.

With that being said, Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members of this House to vote against this bill.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been interesting to listen to the spinmeisters today. They've been very busy. I wasn't exactly sure how they were going to spin this, other than the fact that the best way to convince the electorate that this is something that's not for them is to make it seem like there is some big conspiracy by the Official Opposition. I find that rich. The interesting thing about this is that as I've listened to the arguments here today, it seems to be that everybody got these speaking notes, especially the people of the third party. Yet we didn't get those same speaking notes. So it's interesting that they had an interesting way of approaching this.

What I'd like to do is I'd like to be able to stand in favour of this bill. The person who actually first introduced me to this concept is from my riding, and we've had many conversations about this issue. He said that one of the things you can do to be able to help people – if you become government, the first thing you should do is that you should introduce a recall bill because what that will do is it will help people understand that you are not there to rule from the top down but that you are there to rule for the people.

Yet I think what's interesting is that if we were on that side of the House, I really question if we were to have introduced this bill in the first days of our governance whether or not the House members on that side, if they were on this side, would vote for it, whether they would support it. Would they say that, no, this is not something that's acceptable? I really doubt that they would be opposed to it. I really doubt it. I would ask the members from the opposite side to think about that and to remember that four years will be up and at some point you could be on this side. If that was the case, what would you do in that situation? Would you support it or not?

I am grateful to the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon for presenting this bill. When it was first introduced, last session, we heard a lot that it was not presented in a way that would be palatable to the members here, so there was great work done to be able to make it more palatable.

Each of us in this place today is here as a result of the ballots cast by our constituents. The decisions we make here affect Albertans greatly. Their jobs, their finances, their schools, their livelihoods, and their property rights are all potentially impacted by what is done and decided here. Yet there is something profoundly wrong, Mr.

Speaker, with the fact that anyone in Alberta can return and exchange an appliance that doesn't perform to expectations, but they can't do so with something so important as an MLA.

We have an obligation to respect the wishes of our constituents not just on election day but every day that we sit in this House, Mr. Speaker. That's what this legislation is about, and that's why I support it. At a time of worry and uncertainty like this, when the unemployment rate in this province is now at its highest level in 20 years, it's particularly important that we always stand for our communities' best interests. I believe that this is in the communities' best interests. Simply put, our constituents are our employers.

This shouldn't be news to anyone. We were willing to put our names forward on election day, and we should be willing to put our names forward every day that we sit in this House. We should never be ashamed of the fact that we are doing what we're supposed to be doing in this House, and if our record is true to what we campaigned on, then we should never have any problems with this bill. The ballots cast in elections should not be a *carte blanche* to do as we please over the course of four years. We were elected based upon the promises we made in our campaigns. Winning an election shouldn't make politicians immune from job performance reviews for four years.

The possibility for recall makes governments more accountable to Albertans and ensures that we have the motivation to stand up for our communities' best interests. Nobody in this place should be insulated from the needs of their constituents – never – and if election promises are broken or the person engages in inappropriate conduct, those who voted should be able to say: this is not what we voted for.

We have seen over the last 10 months where many people throughout this province have said: we are not happy with what's going on. They have tried every way they can, Mr. Speaker. They have tried to write letters. They have tried to sign petitions. They have tried to come to the Legislature, to speak through blow horns. They have tried everything they can to help this legislative body know their will, yet those things seem to have fallen on deaf ears. Now they have asked us, the elected representatives for their constituencies, to represent them once again, to bring forward a bill so that they can have the opportunity to be able to say what they think so that these legislators will listen. I don't think that it's a difficult thing to ask for.

Now, of course, as we also know, there is a cost to taxpayers that comes from having a by-election and there is a cost that constituents face when they don't have an MLA for a period of time and, thus, have nobody standing in this place on their behalf such as when a member resigns or, should this bill pass, if an MLA is recalled. That's why I'm pleased to see that my colleague's bill has important safeguards in place to ensure that electoral recall does not become a right that is open to abuse and various distracting measures.

A successful petition would require the physical signatures of eligible voters in a riding equalling 66 per cent of ballots cast in the last election. It's pretty hard to get 66 per cent of people to agree on much, never mind get them to physically sign off on a petition for it. This is a substantial threshold – we realize that that threshold was not met the last time and that it needed to be increased – and it helps ensure that a recall represents the will of constituencies.

A recall petition could not begin until 18 months after an election. This discourages postelection knee-jerk reactions that are not based on the actual job performance of an elected member. Petition signatures can only be acquired within a 60-day period. This, too, is a barrier but ensures that MLAs won't have a petition hanging over their heads for too long. Starting a petition requires a \$5,000

processing fee for the Chief Electoral Officer. This discourages frivolous nuisance attempts at recall.

If successful, a recall petition would force a by-election where the unseated MLA would be eligible to run. This negates the government's comments that minorities should not be able to rule what the majority do. They would still be able to run in an election, and if this was not the will of the electorate, then they would get in again. And an MLA could only be recalled once in a term. Many U.S. states have recall provisions, but British Columbia is the only province with recall legislation here in Canada. It is used very sparingly, not commonly as those opposed to this bill may believe.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that time and again in our history we have seen the interests of Albertans take a back seat to the political class. We saw it once when a one-time cabinet minister awarded a \$400,000 consulting contract to his recently departed staffer, for which there was no physical work produced, paid for by the taxpayers. And let's not forget the misuse of government aircraft or the lavish Premier's suite constructed on top of the provincial government's federal building beside this place, a sky palace, a shrine to excesses of the political class, paid for by the taxpayers.

Voters had clearly had enough of that type of government by the time of this last election, and the continual contempt they felt led to a new government. Perhaps, had recall been in place over the last decade, voters could have kept that last government from getting so out of touch with Albertans. We will never know. But my point is that the MLAs in this House should not look at recall as a threat but as a tool which can keep MLAs and, in particular, their caucus leadership in touch with what our constituents want.

I've heard the argument once today – and I would like to state it again – that backbenchers on the opposite side would not vote for some of these bills coming forward if in their ridings they would pay for it. So I believe that's something that would definitely empower backbencher MLAs. If we are the place that we proclaim to be, an Assembly that represents the people of this great province from the top to the bottom and everywhere in between and beyond, then we cannot have a political class that rules as it sees fit without consequences between elections.

Mr. Speaker, I believe it is so important to make sure that every person in this House, every elected legislator has the ability to represent their constituents, their ridings, and their ridings' interests. The interest of . . . [Mr. Hunter's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:30

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I think it was quite interesting to hear from the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, who talked about this being a Wildrose policy that they campaigned on and earlier said in a member's statement – and I apologize if this is not verbatim as I've not had the chance to see the *Hansard* Blues yet – to put policies in place that make us succeed that are not based on an ideology. It seems almost contradictory on my impression, anyway.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to this bill, and I don't need to remind the House of the cost that's associated with running a by-election. We've thrown around the number of up to \$250,000. Need I remind the members of this House that the members to my left, which sounds weird, who are supporting this bill, campaigned in the last election against the previous government's calling an early election due to the costs associated with that election? Now we're here in this position, where they're talking about spending extra money on by-elections.

Now, I'm also very concerned about the requirements for collecting the signatures under this proposed law. Under this proposed law this will have the Chief Electoral Officer potentially contacting every single person and confirming that they did in fact consent and sign this petition, not to mention that the Chief Electoral Officer will be responsible for cross-referencing these individuals to ensure that they voted in that specific riding in the last election. If Elections Alberta did not confirm with these people, I'd be very concerned about the potential issue of fraud occurring in these by-elections.

In Calgary, Mr. Speaker, we have seen in the past few years issues related to fraud in regard to the democratic process. When I lived in ward 10, I saw fraud first-hand as allegations were made about an individual requesting ballots on someone else's behalf. This led to a court battle, where the city ended up picking up some of the costs, a councillor resigning, and a new election being called, having extensive costs to the taxpayers in Calgary. We have also been hearing new allegations about people misleading individuals to sign petitions in Calgary opposing the southwest transitway.

It is important for the sake of transparency that we remove any opportunity people have to extort our electoral system. This also puts our elected officials into a position where they could be subject to blackmail if a trade union during a contract negotiation, a businessman who's putting a contract to tender, or an unhappy fringe group who can't manage spell-check properly could all try to force an elected official's hand by threatening to recall them.

I am troubled that this may be the hon. member's way to get around Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta, that we all passed unanimously through the House, which is supported by all members. I suspect that this is indicated by the fact that a \$5,000 price tag is required for this process, which would prevent everyday Albertans from participating in this electoral process. In Bill 1 corporate and union donations are banned from the political process, and this bill before us today is an attempt to reverse this decision. Instead of strengthening our democracy, as the members to my left claim, this recall bill would put the same narrow interests that we worked so hard to remove back in the political process. Our government is committed to further strengthening our democratic institutions, and we're ensuring that all Albertans are reflected in our decision-making.

Now, I also must remind us, Mr. Speaker, that last week we had the Speech from the Throne, and it reminds us that we are all members of the Crown. With that being said, I am extremely concerned that this may contradict our Westminster model, which outlines that the Queen, who is the head of the state through the Lieutenant Governor, has the power to dissolve the Legislature. This was reinforced in the verdict of Engel versus Prentice last March, when Tom Engel attempted to prevent an early election from occurring due to fixed election dates that were proposed and passed through this House. The judge ruled against Engel, stating, "Nothing in this section affects the powers of the Lieutenant Governor, including the power to dissolve the Legislature, in Her Majesty's name, when the Lieutenant Governor sees fit."

While B.C. has recall legislation, with 26 attempts there has never been a successful recall application, and some of these applications have dealt with heavy irregularities. I feel that if one of them ever became successful in B.C., it would be tied up in lengthy court proceedings and that the rule would be overturned, with a similar verdict to that which we saw in the Engel versus Prentice case.

I'm also a little unsettled that the members who sit in the Official Opposition continue to bring this concept forward when we need to work towards finding ways to diversify our economy, create jobs, and work on challenging social issues. The members next to me say

that they have a plan, but I consistently see the subject avoided when they have an opportunity to bring it forward.

We as a Legislative Assembly have already started working towards creating more accountability with the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, which I am excited to now sit on. This select special committee has a mandate to discuss these types of legislative proposals. The committee is currently engaged with Albertans on changing our democratic institutions, and we need to let this committee continue to do this work. This bill distracts from the mandate of work that is already being done.

Like the Member for Calgary-Elbow said, we already have a system in place for recall, and it's called a general election. It is why I'm the Member for Calgary-Shaw and not the member before me. I am very concerned that this practice could tie up important work that needs to be done with battles over recalls and by-elections, and that is why I'm urging all Members of this Legislative Assembly to vote against this bill.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand today and speak on Bill 201, especially, I think, from the point of view of someone who's been very interested in parliamentary democracy for most of his life. I will tell you that there are a number of things about the bill that trouble me, and there are also a number of things about the proposal, about the discussion in general, which I have to say has gotten a little off the track on a number of issues.

I want to state from the outset, though, that I understand the concept that our electors are our bosses. I want to make that very clear to members on both sides of the House, because I think we all know this. The question really becomes: exactly how do they exercise that influence? It really comes down to a debate between the delegate versus the trustee form of representation. I am an ardent supporter of the trustee form of representation. I know that the delegate form of representation is the form that is more commonly used in the United States, but in my view and certainly in the view of most parliamentary democracies around the British Commonwealth it is the trustee form of representation that has won out.

I'm concerned that this bill will drive us towards even more short-term thinking when we consider things, and the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville made a good point, in that sometimes there is a requirement to take a stand on things, and those stands can sometimes be unpopular. Sometimes it takes great courage to take those stands because it is those stands that move the social progress of our societies forward. I would personally be very concerned that there might be less likelihood to take courageous but unpopular stands if there was a possibility of being recalled at such a low threshold, as low as 27 per cent of the electors in some ridings if you apply the 66 per cent to the actual turnout in some of the ridings.

You know, there's a quote from James Freeman Clarke that really resonates with me, and it goes like this: politicians think about the next election; statesmen think about the next generation. Our job in this Chamber, ladies and gentlemen, is not to just think about the next election, and it's certainly not to think about what will avoid getting us recalled in the middle of a term. Our job is to build this province, not for the next five years or 10 years but the next 50 years or 100 years, like the people whose portraits hang on the walls outside did consistently. That's our job. We have to understand that our time here may be very finite, but indeed our job is to think about that next generation. I'm concerned that this legislation will in fact promote short-term rather than long-term thinking.

4:40

I'm also concerned about the mechanics of this. Now, Mr. Speaker, recall is something – and we'll talk a little bit about our neighbouring province, British Columbia, that has recall – that is primarily an American construct. Nineteen of the states in the U.S. have recall. Six of 26 Swiss cantons have recall. It was put in place somewhere between 1846 and 1892, the thresholds are vastly different, and it has never once successfully recalled a state or a cantonal representative within the canton system in Switzerland.

Now, in the United States the experience has been a little bit different. I give the example – and this is, to me, a strong argument against recall – of the city of Covina, California. In Covina they had recall legislation for their municipal council. Now, the municipal council brought in a 6 per cent tax increase in order to keep essential services going. There was a recall of those municipal councillors. They were all recalled and replaced by a new council, led in large part by the folks that ran the recall legislation. When those folks actually got into a position of government and found out what the books actually were and found out what the cost of the essential services actually was and that there would be 43 layoffs if they, in fact, went ahead and didn't go ahead with the tax increase, they went ahead and increased the taxes, not this time by 6 per cent but by 8.25 per cent because of the loss of intervening time. So you tell me how recall served the people of Covina in that situation. To me, it didn't serve them at all.

You know, the mechanics of recall really run contrary to our British parliamentary system. In fact, in British Columbia in 2003 – and I'm actually surprised that the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon didn't sort of do some more research on this because there's an excellent review of the British Columbia recall. It's in a 71-page report that he published in 2003. I'll table the document tomorrow. He says on page 13:

The Select Standing Committee noted that recall is “alien to our parliamentary system of government and posed special problems if it was to be integrated effectively into our legislative system.”

It found that the concept of recall was highly complex and required careful consideration to the practical challenges of implementing recall in British Columbia.

There are some other problems with recall that this report found, and I want to go into them now. The Official Opposition espouses itself as a party of fiscal responsibility. Well, I can tell you that while it is perhaps a dangerous thing to put a price tag on democracy, recall is not cheap, and \$5,000 per recall petition doesn't even come close to covering the cost of recall. In this same report, for the first nine petitions, that were covered in the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 fiscal years the Chief Electoral Officer came up with an estimate of \$553,954 required to administer those nine petitions, an average of over \$60,000 per petition. So – I'm sorry – the \$5,000 figure is hardly cost recovery. As a fiscal conservative you should be promoting cost recovery. This is scarcely cost recovery.

Now, the other thing is that they say: well, if there are no petitions, there are no costs. Well, actually not. According to the Chief Electoral Officer of British Columbia

it should be noted that although the number of recall petitions actually issued and returned affects the costs of administering the Recall and Initiative Act, Elections BC must incur recall-related costs even if no applications for recall petitions are received. The infrastructure necessary to administer the recall process must be in place at all times to ensure that Elections BC can meet the requirements of the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, we have in our democratic system in this province a system of recall. As the Member for Calgary-Elbow says, it's called a general election.

You know, the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills said that if recall were in place, it would have changed the behaviour of those past Legislatures, those legislators from past governments.

Well, recall wasn't in place, but I can tell you that when I meet with constituents and they specifically tell me that they have an issue – and specifically, one of the most difficult issues I dealt with in the last Legislature had to do with pension reform. When I met with a group of people who were part of the pension plan of government and they told me how it would affect their lives, I did change my mind, and I went to our government and I said: we have to pull this bill because it's just not fair to people who are in the middle, who have been counting on a certain set of rules, that we change the rules in the middle of the game. I was very grateful that our Minister of Finance decided to withdraw those changes that were proposed to the pension system. I'm not pretending that I had a lot to do with that. I'm sure I had a lot of colleagues that said the same thing. But recall wasn't going to change how I approached that problem.

Now, I do want to say, Mr. Speaker, however, that I'm a little bit frustrated with some of the speakers who have spoken against this, who have tried to drag in things like backdoor financing through corporations, who have tried to state that this is some attempt to do a do-over. I don't honestly think that that's the case here. This has long been part of the policy of the party that's in the Official Opposition and its forerunner, the Reform Party of Canada, and the Social Credit Party, for that matter, going back to the '30s.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, I'm a big believer in the trustee system. I believe that the trustee system of representation serves us well. But, above all, I'm a big believer in long-term thinking, and I don't believe that recall legislation serves us. I don't believe that an American style, an American construct, serves us. Just look at what's going on in the United States right now. That's all the proof you need. We are a British parliamentary system – today is Commonwealth Day – and this is not the time to bring in an American construct to make us more American in this country. Indeed, we should be proud of our heritage and stay where we are.

Therefore, I reject Bill 201.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Minister of Labour and democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 201. As the minister responsible for democratic renewal I, in particular, welcome suggestions and ideas for how we can reinvigorate our democratic system, how we can improve things, make things more transparent.

I'm very proud of our government, which created a facility for this discussion to take place through the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, and I'm proud of the work that that committee has already done, which includes having some very open discussions amongst all parties about things we would like to see changed within our democratic system, ideas we would like to get more research on to help support our discussions. We've had briefings from the electoral officers involved with all four pieces of legislation that we are reviewing, including the Election Act, election finances act, Conflicts of Interest Act, and whistle-blower act. We have created a space where not only the ideas brought forward from the parties but also ideas from the public as well as special stakeholder groups will be able to be discussed and really debated so that we can prepare a report that I as the minister will be happy to receive and work on from there.

The public was invited to provide feedback on all four acts, and that feedback window just closed on February 26. We received quite a few submissions, I'm pleased to say, not only from impacted

stakeholder groups but from private citizens who took the time to fill out their thoughts on any one of those four acts and submit them to the committee. Committee members are reviewing that. Committee supports is preparing a compilation of those suggestions so that these things can be discussed. Because we have such a strong forum for collaboration among all parties, it seems interesting to me that this bill has come here for discussion rather than to the committee, particularly when we have such large issues in the state of our current economic climate, when we have so many major things to discuss.

4:50

This is the second time in a single session that this bill has come forward from a group of individuals who tell us that they have many, many great ideas, which I'm sure is true, but here we have the same idea twice in a single session when there is another forum for these ideas to be brought forward to. So I find that interesting.

I would like to echo the members for Edmonton-Decore, Red Deer-South, and others about the concerns around cost when it comes to by-elections, the increased frequency of by-elections, potentially at \$250,000 per by-election. I agree with the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster in his concerns about wanting to keep things more long-term planning as well as the potential influence of special-interest groups. I very much appreciated his phrase "courageous but unpopular stands" becoming more difficult under a framework where recall legislation is in place.

So those are some initial concerns, potentially the financial loopholes. The Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee I anticipate will be having in-depth discussions around the remaining donation limits and third-party advertising and its impacts on our elections, those types of ideas. Similar to that, here in the recall legislation there seems to be some ambiguity and some concern raised by, again, many members of this House around the impact of those donations and how they could be improperly used by special-interest groups.

For some of those reasons, concerns around the legislation and the suggestion that the committee is likely the best place to have this discussion, I will not be supporting Bill 201. I will be very interested to see if recall legislation is something that has come forward from our public members in their submissions. I think that might be an interesting discussion. For now I do not support Bill 201, but I look forward to talking more about democratic reform and democratic renewal as we go forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour today to stand before everybody again. I've listened to this debate for the last two hours, and I guess what distresses me when I've gone through this debate is to hear several of the MLAs saying that this is a waste of time. I don't believe any debate is a waste of time. I have to say that the hon. colleague from Vermilion-Lloydminster brings up some very good points, and it is only through debate that we can bring these points forward. The fact is that by limiting debate or saying that debate shouldn't happen is where we have a real flaw.

The fact that this is a long-standing Wildrose policy, Bill 201, should say that we don't have an intent to actually displace this government because our intent was to form government. That means that we were looking to put a bill in that held Wildrose MLAs to account. If we didn't do our job, we would have been removed. We had a process in place, and this process could always use discussion, debate.

Now, I hear the other side talking about Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta. They use this as a reason for corporate and union donations and how we have some sort of nefarious reason for wanting this recall legislation through. But I will point out that it was through debate of Bill 1, through debate of An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta, that the Wildrose put forward an amendment and changed what that bill was going to look like. To further that, we had the government amend our amendment through more debate. This isn't a waste of time. This is important.

I would like to say how exactly this, for me, is very important. Four years ago we had a candidate go forward in our constituency. I supported this candidate, thinking that he was the man that was going to win our constituency. Now, the fact is that I didn't do anything. It's my failure. I'll admit it. My candidate, Roy Doonanco, a man that I very much respect, lost by a few hundred votes. Had I been out there door-knocking, putting signs up, getting donations for Roy, he might have been that MLA. He worked hard, but he wasn't successful.

Does that mean that I held the MLA responsible that had won? No. Do I think that the MLA, the member that had won, should have been recalled? The answer is no. The fact is that when we're looking at the different legislation that comes through, it comes down to debate. It comes down to actually saying: what is the intent of this bill? The intent of this bill isn't to displace government; it is to promote accountability.

Now, I do hear the comments that the independent member and the third party make that the general election does dictate who gets elected, and that is the primary reason for that election. But sometimes – sometimes – during that four years something goes very bad. Sometimes we actually need to say that a specific MLA needs to be held to account.

A member from the third party while on government business was caught in a prostitution sting. That member was thrown out to be an independent. That member soon went back to the government, eventually. Was that appropriate? No. Did that member get another three years? Absolutely. Was that right? No. That member should have been thrown out. But that's not my call; that's his constituents' call. If they put the work into moving the recall legislation forward, to sign those petitions, then absolutely he should be held to account and removed in a by-election.

We've heard repeatedly that this is not something that happens all the time. This isn't something that is going to happen every day. I know for a fact from talking to government MLAs that they work hard at their jobs, too. Do we see eye to eye on everything? No. Do I think that everybody on the other side should be recalled? Absolutely not. Do I believe that you are the government that Alberta has brought forward? Absolutely. Do I believe that we need to move forward with recall legislation? Absolutely. We need this to bring accountability back to Alberta. Now... [Mr. Cyr's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

5:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i) it provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's bill to close debate. I would invite the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon to close debate on Bill 201.

I'm advised that in actual fact we go immediately to 5 o'clock. Therefore, I would ask the Clerk to outline the motion.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

The Speaker: Yes. Go ahead.

Point of Order Closing Debate

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, I'll find the citation here fairly quickly, but my concern is that I do believe it is quite correct that the hon. mover of this piece of legislation should be afforded the opportunity to close debate on this piece of legislation but that we have now used the two hours fully elapsed to discuss it in second reading. I believe that one way or the other we're either going to have to add an additional five minutes of debate time in two weeks' time, or, alternatively, I would actually prefer that we conclude the matter today and allow him to finish debate and then move into the 5 o'clock matter. But that, of course, sir, is up to you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. There was time consumed at the beginning by the points of order that were dealt with, and the 5 o'clock time has come into effect. However, if you or another member would like to get unanimous consent to grant the five minutes in a vote, I would be prepared to accept that.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, I would so beg leave of the House to ask for unanimous consent to allow the mover of the bill five minutes to close debate.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Housing for Vulnerable Albertans

501. Ms Drever moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to review current policies and strategies with a view to increasing community capacity to deliver transitional and low-barrier housing for vulnerable Albertans suffering from complex mental and physical health needs.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to rise today to bring forward this important motion regarding the delivery of transitional and low-barrier housing for vulnerable Albertans. And may I say that it's so nice to be on this side of the House speaking.

Mr. Speaker, I'm here today on behalf of my constituents of Calgary-Bow and the many Albertans that have spoken during my time as an MLA to speak on this urgent issue. Access to safe, secure, appropriate, and affordable shelter is a fundamental human right, but in recent years it has become an ever-increasing challenge for Albertans with complex mental and physical health needs.

Decent housing has several requirements. It must be safe, free of dangers. It must be secure, without the threat of eviction hanging over one's head all the time. It must be appropriate and meet the social and physical requirements of the person's life circumstances, and it must be affordable. Typically, 30 per cent of income is considered the maximum a person should be paying.

Research and observation tell us that when people have decent housing with the related services they may require, they will be much more likely to successfully manage all aspects of their own lives: to find and keep appropriate employment, to stay healthy, to develop relationships, and to contribute to community life. They will be positive members of the community and will not be in need of emergency services to address crises and problems.

Without proper support systems in place, many vulnerable Albertans with mental and physical needs are at increased risk of becoming homeless. It is imperative that government in collaboration

with ministries, departments, the housing industry, community organizations, and Albertans work together to increase community capacity to ensure that all vulnerable Albertans can receive the powerful benefits of having decent housing and access to housing. Mr. Speaker, I'm extremely proud to be a part of a government that is continuing to protect the most vulnerable even in these challenging times.

Mr. Speaker, the 2014 Alberta Point-in-time Homeless Count identified that 6,663 Albertans were homeless. In my hometown of Calgary alone 3,555 Albertans identified themselves as homeless. Members, more than 50 per cent – 53 per cent, to be exact – of homeless Albertans live in Calgary.

Now, the correlation between mental and physical needs issues and homelessness is not a new link. Countless studies focusing on the link between health and homelessness have resulted in the same conclusion. Those experiencing mental and physical needs issues are at increased risk of falling into the traps of poverty and homelessness. In 2014, for example, the Library of Parliament released a study titled *Current Issues in Mental Health in Canada: Homelessness and Access to Housing*. This study concluded that mental illness, often undiagnosed in vulnerable populations, is a significant barrier to obtaining housing and may cause unstable employment and lead to high levels of stress, substance abuse, low self-esteem, hopelessness, and depression. People who are homeless or living in inadequate housing experience a wide range of physical health challenges and are more likely to die younger.

As you are all aware, Alberta's homelessness plan takes a housing first approach that provides people with wraparound supports, including mental health counselling, addiction treatment, and other services they may require. The Mental Health Commission of Canada's landmark research project on homelessness and mental health indicated that housing first resulted in lower costs associated with other services. For every \$10 invested in the housing first model, \$8.27 was saved in public dollars as having a home reduced the services utilized in health care, shelters, police services, and the judicial system for high-needs participants; \$7.19 was saved from moderate-needs participants.

In Alberta between April 2009 and June 2014 43.5 per cent of housing first clients had mental health issues. During the same time frame 44.7 per cent of housing first clients had physical health issues. It is clear that individuals with developmental disabilities have complex mental and physical health needs and require access to a continuum of integrated, specialized housing options that are available across the province, both in rural and urban settings.

In addition to having access to a range of housing supports, these individuals require access to other personal supports to live in the community. Access to a range of community-based housing options is an outstanding need for Albertans. As Albertans endure this tough economic climate, it is critical to be reminded of the fact that getting people into stable, accessible, and affordable homes reduces the strain on other services. People successfully housed through housing first programs are spending 83 per cent fewer days incarcerated, making 51 per cent fewer emergency room visits, and spending 67 per cent less time hospitalized.

Many of the people who struggle with homelessness have a need for permanent supportive housing, not only for assistance during a temporary period. Permanent supportive housing, when combined with a range of housing first wraparound supports and an increased supply of low-income affordable housing, is demonstrated to be a cost-effective method of addressing homelessness by assisting formerly homeless individuals to remain housed rather than just accessing more costly interventions in the health and justice systems. For example, the province may spend up to \$100,000 annually to support a homeless person in the health and justice

systems versus perhaps \$40,000 to serve them through good supportive housing facilities and services. Not only is affordable housing a basic human right, but for a province in an economic downturn it makes fiscal sense. I have no doubt that the members opposite will agree with me on that point.

5:10

I would also like to take a moment to acknowledge the tremendous work already being done by the provincial government and Albertan communities. I've spoken about the housing first program, through which 12,250 homeless Albertans have been housed. More than 4,200 have graduated from the housing first program since 2009. Out of 3,631 women housed through housing first from April 2011 to September 2015, 49.9 per cent have self-reported being exposed to or fleeing from a family violence situation. The Ministry of Seniors and Housing works closely with the ministries of Health and Human Services to ensure that those receiving housing supports have access to the additional resources and supports they need.

Many excellent community-based organizations work closely with Alberta Health Services to ensure access to addiction and mental health services. In addition, AHS, or Alberta Health Services, has contracts with operators for supportive living beds, targeting individuals with chronic mental illness. Special-needs housing through the Ministry of Health provides operating subsidies to nonprofit organizations, municipalities, and housing management bodies that provide subsidized housing to approximately 1,300 Albertan households.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the great work that is being done by the Student Run Clinic, an organization founded by medical students from the University of Calgary, which provides health care services to Calgary's vulnerable population. I believe the government in collaboration with local community organizations has the opportunity to reduce the increased barriers for vulnerable Albertans, especially those with mental and physical issues.

This motion reaffirms my commitment and this government's commitment to the most vulnerable Albertans in these challenging economic times. Albertans living on the streets or in unsafe housing such as couch surfing or emergency shelters represent an insufficient use of public spending. As such, affordable housing for vulnerable Albertans reduces stress on public services. Moreover, affordable housing increases the overall well-being of individuals, families, and communities by reducing the risk of violence, sexual and economic exploitation of vulnerable Albertans.

Thank you so much.

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

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Motion 501, to "urge the government to review current policies and strategies with a view to increasing community capacity to deliver transitional and low-barrier housing for vulnerable Albertans suffering from complex mental and physical health needs."

Before I begin, let me state for the record that the Wildrose is one hundred per cent committed to protecting Alberta's most vulnerable, especially when it comes to providing real housing solutions for those with complex mental and physical needs. Recently my colleague the Wildrose shadow minister for Health released our mental health strategy, which maintains our strong commitment to improving mental health services. Part of this is assessing access to shelter and how difficulties accessing shelter are compounded when combined with other health factors.

Mr. Speaker, this is just one type of the common-sense ideas that Wildrose is putting forward. Given our common-sense, best-

practices approach we support this motion to review the current policies. The review proposed in this motion is absolutely needed. I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow for joining us in calling this government to account in this area. These are systemic problems which need to be addressed, and it is up to this Legislature to bring them forward when cabinet will not.

So let's talk about some of these problems. This motion is targeted toward Albertans with complex needs. This means multiple issues, which can include mental health and/or addictions, developmental issues, involvement in the criminal justice system, problems finding and maintaining housing, and so on. As a province Alberta needs to be innovative and flexible and co-ordinate between many different programs and services in order to help vulnerable Albertans with these needs. One of the most important things we need to do is to ensure that persons with disabilities and with complex service needs have access to a safe and appropriate range of appropriate housing options. This starts with community capacity, with ensuring that appropriately skilled human resources and other community supports are in place to serve this unique group of clients.

To provide some background to this Assembly, in February 2013 Edmonton hosted the AHS-PDD Best Practices Symposium. This conference drew on the expertise of service providers and respected researchers to create balanced policies on living and housing for those with complex needs. Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned that this government is not reading legacy best practices, so let me read a passage from theme 2 of the AHS-PDD best practices statement.

There is compelling evidence that persons with developmental disabilities and complex service needs achieve better outcomes and higher quality of life when they reside in appropriately supported independent living homes in the community.

I appreciate that this government was just elected in May, but let me take this chance to remind them that there was an institutional government that was there before this government, and it will be there after it. Reviews often tie up the functions of the government that should be focused on helping the most vulnerable. We all understand the importance of social services and supporting the most vulnerable members of our communities, but we are concerned that this government is getting caught up in endless reviews. We cannot stress enough that viable, substantial, actionable improvement must be the end goal of all policy reviews. Protecting the most vulnerable is something that we all need to be concerned about.

Wildrose supports this motion as it shares the spirit of our own recommendations. I hope it renews Alberta's commitment to build community capacity to deliver transitional, low-barrier housing for vulnerable Albertans suffering from complex mental and physical health needs. I also encourage all members to support this motion in helping set up this cabinet's agenda for them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and speak in support of this thoughtful and important motion. I stand both as a nurse and as the proud co-chair of the mental health review that was so recently completed. One of the first actions Premier Notley took as Premier . . .

Some Hon. Members: Name.

Ms Larivee: Yes, I know. Sorry.

. . . was to establish the Alberta Mental Health Review Committee to comprehensively review addiction services, mental

health services, and the mental health system. At that time the Premier appointed both myself and the Member for Calgary-Mountain View as co-chairs, a truly nonpartisan effort. Together we travelled the province to hold engagement sessions with individuals, including those living with addiction and mental illness and their families, NGOs, professionals, First Nations and Métis people and communities, front-line workers, community groups and associations, government ministries, and service providers.

We received during that time nearly 2,900 responses to an online questionnaire and over 100 written submissions and presentations. Throughout that process we resoundingly heard everywhere we went in Alberta the significant concerns with the lack of this type of housing, that has existed in this province for so long. Inherently, all those who came to share their thoughts on the review understood that access to safe, secure, appropriate, and affordable shelter is a fundamental human right. Mr. Speaker, they understood that people with complex mental health needs have greater difficulty than others in accessing housing and other supports. They understood that when these individuals cannot access housing, there is both a personal cost for those individuals and their families and an economic cost for all of us. These individuals are overrepresented in Alberta's homeless, which is incredibly unfortunate. Homelessness both complicates and amplifies the symptoms of addiction and mental health problems and also makes it more difficult for those individuals to get needed services.

Our conversations across this province made it very clear that this long-term lack of adequate housing has greatly increased the personal suffering for these individuals and for their families. Not only is there that clear personal cost, but as the member pointed out, Mr. Speaker, there is great economic cost to the province as a lack of adequate housing for these vulnerable Albertans leads to far more costly interventions. Obviously, this is a lose-lose situation for all of us, and it makes both ethical and fiscal sense to start working across all jurisdictions to begin to address the marked deficit of adequate housing for these vulnerable Albertans, that has lasted for so long, as was requested by so many during that extensive consultation.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, the review team compiled all that we heard during the review and put forward the recommendations in our report entitled *Valuing Mental Health*. Upon reviewing those recommendations, our government accepted the recommendations from the report and committed to progressively implementing them over time, including committing to collaborating across jurisdictions and departments as well as with NGOs to increase the availability of permanent supportive housing for those Albertans with addiction and mental health issues, who have difficulty accessing other forms of housing and supports. Together we can improve current use and future planning of housing and prevent homelessness due to addiction and mental health.

I welcome this motion as complementary to our committee's recommendation and look forward to the support of those in this Assembly to better address the needs of our vulnerable Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today very much in support of this motion. I'd like to just start off by thanking the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing it forward. My experience around housing is primarily around homelessness in our province. I spent many years of my career working with the poorest of the

poor in our province, as did my father and most of my family. While some of what I'm going to talk about focusses a lot on addictions, I do want to be clear that housing is needed for more than people with addictions. It's just that my primary experience, of course, has been around people suffering from addiction issues, that are usually primarily related to mental health issues.

I do want to start by telling one of my favourite success stories of my career about a young lady. I won't name her. If she's watching, she'll know who I'm talking about, though. I was running one of the Mustard Seed facilities, and I got a call from a gentleman who said: "I have a niece who's arrived at my house. She's suffering from methamphetamine addiction. Her parents have kicked her out, have cut her off, are not providing any more resources to her because of the frustrations associated with that addiction." He didn't know what to do, as most people wouldn't. I think most of us here would appreciate that. If your niece arrived suffering from a methamphetamine addiction, which is a very serious addiction, what would you do?

I had to tell him, Mr. Speaker, that all my beds were full. "I can't take her; try calling here; try calling there; try calling there." He hung up. He tried to call all those places. They were all full, too. Not enough housing, not enough facilities that could deal with somebody suffering from this. So I gave him another list, and he called them, and he called that, and he called that. He called back; he still had nothing. So finally I went out to my staff, and I said: "What are we going to do? This guy sounds so scared and so frustrated. He doesn't know what to do." So we agreed to put this individual up in a motel until a bed came open. They brought her to our facility. I'll never forget her. She was probably weighing in at 80 to 85 pounds, looking terribly ill. We put her up in a motel, helped her detox, to go through that. Then she was able to make it into one of our beds and was able to go through our programs. She ultimately would be sober for a year, would move on to become my executive assistant while I was the executive director there, and then ultimately went to Mount Royal College and just this year graduated with a degree in accounting and has her CPA.

The reason I bring that up is because without housing or resources, this person couldn't succeed. It is the first and most important step to being able to help somebody in that situation to be able to move forward. If we can't even provide basic shelter, food, and the basic needs for somebody like that, they can never move forward. In this case this person was able to move forward and become a very productive member of society, which is excellent.

When my father started the Mustard Seed in Calgary, there was only the Booth Centre that had housing. There was nowhere to go. It was almost always full. He would often, I remember, try to call local churches and stuff to try to get individuals who needed help to be able to sleep there, particularly when it was cold because of the concern about people freezing to death. I can remember that sometimes, particularly when it was cold, Mr. Speaker, he would bring home individuals from the Calgary streets to sleep at our house. My dad always worked late at the Mustard Seed, and he would often, mostly on Fridays, bring home people. Now, I have five brothers, and we would often on a Saturday morning race down, all six of us, to see who dad had brought home. Sometimes my mom would be very upset because he didn't use sheets on the couch, different things like that, but they would always welcome them into our home, and we would feed them. Often, I think, we had a tremendous impact, but we could not have the impact that we did later, once we had housing units. So dad and his team and the volunteers and all the donors worked very hard and began to build housing all through Calgary, and now, last I checked, they're able to house over a thousand people a day through the Mustard Seed

programs. It is absolutely critical that we are able to provide housing. That's why I support this motion.

I will also echo my colleague from Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo's comments that the time for discussion on this issue is done. We know that this is important. This motion, I hope, will help move this issue forward. It's time for action, and I strongly encourage this government to stand up for what they say they believe in and to make sure that we're able to provide the most adequate housing for all the areas that people need in our province, to make sure that we can have more success stories like my former executive assistant, to make sure that single moms and kids can get into homes, to make sure that people suffering from alcoholism can get the help that they need. As a province, Mr. Speaker, I strongly believe that we will be judged by how we treat the least fortunate amongst us.

So I challenge you to do that, and again I ask all of my colleagues to very much support this motion. I thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing it forward.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I've seen your other brothers, and I can only imagine you coming down the stairs together.

The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in support of this motion. Ultimately, everyone deserves to be housed. Everyone deserves to be supported in moments when they find themselves in need. Not only is this the compassionate answer, but it's ultimately more financially responsible. Jail isn't the right place for people who've been unfortunate enough to fall into poverty as this results in increased interactions with the law going forward for these individuals.

As was pointed out by the Member for Calgary-Bow, housing for supports costs considerably less. The average annual cost for housing for supports is \$40,000 for an individual compared to an estimated annual cost of about a hundred thousand dollars a year for emergency room costs, hospitalization, jail, and other expenses. People who are successfully housed have 83 per cent fewer days incarcerated. They have 51 per cent fewer emergency room visits and 67 per cent less time in hospital. I feel that these statistics bear repeating because this isn't an issue just about the individuals; it's about government as a whole and how we want to respond to things going forward.

Mr. Speaker, I've heard from multiple groups in my constituency on this issue, including community service advocates as well as a number of municipal leaders in other areas. It's also an issue I was very familiar with in my work at Student Legal Assistance. We would often see people who would come into conflict with the justice system, and in many cases these people had just gone down an unfortunate path. They had lost their housing for whatever reason, often as a result of a medical emergency in the family that imposed additional costs on them, sometimes as a result of losing jobs, and sometimes just as a result of the incredibly high cost of housing, that has sort of begun to become the case in Calgary and in other places throughout the province. These people would lose their homes, and then they would come into conflict with the justice system. That would result in criminal charges, which further marginalized them and pushed them further to the outside because once they had been convicted on criminal charges, they then had difficulty finding employment, which made it difficult for them to afford housing.

This issue was also recently raised by a group of doctors working with an organization in my riding, about the cost of discharging people from a hospital into homelessness, which is interesting

because similar costs can be seen when we discharge people from a correctional institution into homelessness. They often come back very quickly and not for reasons of being people that need to be locked up but for reasons of just being marginalized.

This issue was also raised in one of my very first meetings with the chief of police right here in Edmonton. Mr. Speaker, it's often the case that, unfortunately, individuals who suffer from mental health and addictions and who have been rendered homeless as a result of this wind up turning to the police because they are essentially the emergency room of society, and those are the only people they have left. This is not only incredibly costly personally for the individual who is homeless, but it's incredibly costly for the system generally.

5:30

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out that homelessness disproportionately affects indigenous persons, and this homelessness can often result in poorer health outcomes and increased interactions with the justice system. As we know, indigenous people are often overrepresented in our justice system, and as we move forward in my ministry to try to address this particular issue, I think it's critical that we be able to address the underlying drivers of this problem, one of which is this issue of a lack of affordable housing.

I thank the member very, very much for her incredibly helpful motion. In summary, I suppose I will simply sum up by saying that ultimately this is about giving people back their dignity, but it's also about saving on costs to the system as a whole.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise on the motion before the House and speak to this. In my view, this is of utmost importance. During my time on city council in Calgary – a lot of members probably don't know this – I chaired the Calgary Housing Company for three years, which at the time was and probably still is today the largest landlord in the city of Calgary, at that time about 10,000 units and about 25,000 people living in those units. While it was a good thing to do, what's sad is that it's probably still the largest landlord in the city of Calgary today, and probably the same thing is true for Edmonton and every other city in Alberta that has a public housing corporation.

What I think I learned during that time, Mr. Speaker, is that having this transitional housing and the services to help people get into a home and have the wraparound services that they need is not only the right thing to do – and it's clearly the right thing to do – but it's actually also good business. It's both, interestingly enough.

Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. Justice minister talking about some of the things that happen in the justice system, and there was a word for it or a phrase for it when I was on city council. It was called the catch-and-release program. If you have someone that needs care – you know, some people are just low income, and they need support, but other people need more than one support. Some people have mental health supports that they need, some have addiction issues, and if you don't give the wraparound services, then they end up on the street again. They end up in the hospital, they end up in the court system, and they end up in the health care system again and again and again. It's no good for the health care system, it's no good for the courts, it's no good for anything, and it's surely – surely – no good for the citizens of this province.

That's why I'm going to support the motion. It's the right thing to do. It's something that, frankly, while it's a good motion and I'll support it, probably should be done every three to five years

anyway. It's not that it can't be done right; it's just that societal changes happen on a regular basis. Sometimes it's a matter of what drug is on the street. It sometimes is a matter of what country immigrants are coming from, because different countries have different backgrounds, different political backgrounds that affect the supports that people need when they get here, different languages that they need. Somebody from a war zone obviously needs different care than somebody from a western European country when this happens. There are just people that are born and live their whole lives here that need help, too, and they all need to do that.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I congratulate the member for bringing this forward. Vulnerable Albertans need, deserve, and ought to get the care that their individual circumstances require, and it will never happen by accident. It will only happen if we in this House agree to do it. It will only work if the government – the government is in control; let's be clear on that – commits to working with municipalities who are dealing with the issue, if the government commits to working with NGOs, if the government commits to working with charities, other organizations that care for people that need supports and really gets behind it and digs in and does it together.

Mr. Speaker, if there was ever an issue where we're in it together, I think this is it. As the saying goes, there but by the grace of God go I. Every one of us in a different circumstance could lose our job, could suffer from mental health, could fall into addiction.

For this reason, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to stand up and speak in favour, and at some point later I will sit down and vote in favour.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to rise and speak in support of this motion. As a long-time advocate for affordable and supportive housing it is a pleasure to see how much time we are devoting to this issue in the 29th Legislature. Thank you to the Member for Calgary-Bow for recognizing the need for housing for persons who are the most vulnerable in our communities.

I am wondering if any member of this Assembly has been involved in building transitional or low-barrier housing for vulnerable persons in their communities. I have, and I think that the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and possibly the Member for Calgary-Hays also have. If so, they will know the challenges faced by organizations who do so: finding the capital funding, then finding the operating funding to provide the needed support, then the NIMBY campaigns by local residents – these are usually very ugly, and they attack those most in need of housing – and then you have to navigate between government ministries to create the right kind of housing and so on. So kudos to the organizations who have successfully navigated the current barriers to creating the needed housing for Albertans with complex mental and physical health needs.

Given the current challenges to creating and sustaining the right kind of housing, I would like to highlight one organization in my riding that is providing housing units to these Albertans. Brittany Lane Housing Co-operative in my riding has set aside six units for persons who are part of community living and two units for persons with mental health challenges. These residents are part of the housing co-operative that by its nature provides support and opportunities to volunteer and take an active part in community life.

There are now a number of academic and community-based research results that have demonstrated that a housing first approach for vulnerable persons is cost-efficient and reduces demands on hospital emergency rooms, emergency responders, police, the justice system. But, more importantly, it's a path to wellness, community integration, and community contribution by these people.

All communities struggle with this issue. The Alberta Rural Development Network recently released a study on rural homelessness. In it they note that some rural communities have a greater need of housing for those with complex mental and physical health needs than those in the major urban centres.

Mr. Speaker, I would urge all members of this Assembly to support this motion. Thank you.

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to also rise and speak in support of the motion. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing the motion forward. I would also like to perhaps see if she might be able to give me some advice in the future as to how one could be so successful at the private members' draw. That streak that she's been on in getting these wonderful numbers is both impressive and something to long for at a future date.

So much has been said, and so much I support. I know there are lots of other speakers, so I'll keep my remarks very brief. I agree with the Member for Calgary-Hays, who spoke about the need to be reviewing these sorts of projects on a quite regular basis. The need to assist is so great, particularly as pointed out in the motion, for those with "complex mental and physical health needs."

5:40

I just want to spend a very brief moment urging the government as it certainly seems the motion is going to pass with overwhelming support. As the government, you know, moves quickly to act upon this motion, which I'm sure that they will be doing, inside the motion it speaks to "strategies with a view to increasing community capacity." Only because I've had a number of folks in the Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills constituency contacting my office about underutilized existing capacity, I just want to urge the government, when the review is conducted, that they will look not just to shiny, new announcements, as sometimes can be so attractive in politics but, you know, look at the great capacity that we're increasing. I know that there are a number of units in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills that are currently set aside for low-income housing and those with housing needs that are currently not being utilized for a wide variety of reasons. I just think it's so critically important that we maximize the capacity we have and then move to try and expand that capacity.

So in the vein of co-operation and knowing that my full support is already behind the motion and some of the things that have been said, I'll be happy to continue to listen to the debate.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to a motion that speaks to an issue that deeply affects the communities I represent. It's an issue that I'm pleased to hear we have much support for in this House.

You know, in the many meetings I've had with residents and stakeholders in Edmonton-Centre, there's been one request that I've heard from pretty much every group, whether it's local community leagues, business associations, seniors' groups, nonprofits, my municipal colleagues, or at our consultation with the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce and the Finance minister in the fall. They've all asked for one thing, and that's increased government investment in affordable, accessible, and supportive housing.

Mr. Speaker, we're seeing an unprecedented level of growth in Edmonton's downtown right now. It's fantastic. The construction of the new arena is sparking a new era of investment, some real excitement, some genuine revitalization, but with that is also coming an increased awareness of the challenges that we face in a

lot of our core neighbourhoods for individuals who are homeless or precariously housed.

The Member for Calgary-Bow brought forward some statistics, you know: Edmonton is currently home to as many as 600 men and women who are considered chronically homeless. Those are individuals who've been continuously homeless for a year or more or have a disabling condition that's led them to experience at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. The majority of these individuals, Mr. Speaker, live in our central neighbourhoods.

Now, as the Member for Calgary-Bow noted, these individuals face some complex challenges with their mental or physical health, and it often involves addictions or substance abuse. As she noted, the research clearly shows that these challenges are most effectively addressed when these individuals are first provided with a stable, safe, and secure place to live. In the case of the chronically homeless it's essential, as has been mentioned by some of the other members, that the housing incorporates wraparound support services that help them address their complex physical, mental, and emotional health needs.

A great example here in Edmonton: a facility called Ambrose Place, which provides a home to 42 aboriginal men and women who are challenged by disabilities and substance abuse, some of whom were homeless for as long as 40 years. Ambrose Place is a wet facility. It operates on a harm reduction model that aims to help the residents moderate and reduce the harms that come with the use of drugs and alcohol while also providing supports to address their underlying physical and mental health issues. This is a model that's been proven to improve the physical and mental health of the individuals it serves while dramatically reducing costs for the communities that they live in. However, in February of last year Ambrose Place had over 100 people on their waiting list waiting to secure a space there.

Mr. Speaker, if we're going to make serious gains in the area of poverty reduction and the elimination of homelessness, all orders of government must come together at the table to co-ordinate our efforts, to increase and improve our stock of transitional and low-barrier housing for the most vulnerable and needy among us.

As the Justice minister mentioned, just this past Saturday I had the opportunity to also speak with Edmonton's deputy chief of police, who echoed conversations I've had with many community groups, that being that when we take people off the streets and we give them the dignity of a safe, secure place to live, we cut costs to our system. It reduces the need for police officers to act as mental health and social workers, which reduces our municipal costs.

It frees up hospital emergency rooms and beds and reduces the need for expensive urgent care and treatment of the effects of untreated, chronic conditions.

Mr. Speaker, the residents of Edmonton-Centre have made it clear to me that they stand with government in the commitment to look out for our most vulnerable during these challenging economic times. I'm pleased to hear that's true for members on both sides of this aisle. They are in favour of our government taking all possible steps to invest in and encourage the construction of the affordable, accessible, and supportive housing that we so desperately need.

I thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing this motion forward, and I look forward to working with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to see this initiative realized. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I feel like I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the comment made previously by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills about the member having a

bill last session and a motion this session. It's true that that is amazingly good luck in the draw.

The other thing that is true is that there was a very intense campaign right after the member was elected to have the member thrown out of this House and to have the member recalled. I have to say how proud I am today to hear all members of this House speak in support of the motion and how proud I was last session when we unanimously supported the bill that was being proposed by the member as well. I think it goes to show that the potential that individuals have in this House is immense, and no matter how you ended up here, you have an opportunity to make great change for Alberta.

I have to say that the piece around complex mental and physical health needs I think is really timely. I think this is important if we continue to – we have massive deferred maintenance when it comes to our social and affordable housing in this province, so a number of them will have to be taken off stock and replaced or will experience major modernizations. I think thinking about those two barriers is certainly a priority as well as, of course, looking at community capacity and how we can increase that. Times are tough financially in this province. But as members have mentioned, if we don't make an investment in affordable housing, certainly, times will be tougher not just for those individuals but for our society down the way.

Thank you so much for the comments that have been made by members on all sides and, most importantly, to the member for bringing up this important topic for debate today.

The Speaker: Seeing no other speakers, I would invite the member to bring closure to the discussion.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the members who stood up and spoke to my motion. I'm so incredibly happy that every member here again is in agreement. It seems so. Thank you for that.

I also wanted to echo what the minister just said, that with me being almost recalled, I wouldn't have had this opportunity to present this motion and I wouldn't have had the opportunity to present my private member's bill that would help victims of domestic violence be safe. I just want to say how proud I am to be the MLA for Calgary-Bow.

Well, it's no secret that there is a housing crisis here in Alberta. With my private member's bill passing in the Legislature last session, we gave people hope for ending violence here in Alberta. It was a small step forward to end violence against women and girls and domestic violence in this province; however, we still have a lot of work to do. I would like to add that although this motion is specific to persons with complex mental and physical health needs, this motion is also to help all vulnerable Albertans, which also includes people who are affected by domestic violence.

Housing is a key factor in addressing the problem. Homelessness and domestic violence often go hand in hand. Frequently, domestic violence is a combination of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. Due to this, many vulnerable people, especially women, are leaving their partners to seek safety for either themselves or their children. Women that flee violence are forced to deal with many significant barriers such as inadequate employment opportunities, lack of accessible and affordable housing, and too often are discriminated against by landlords when they're just trying to find a safe home. Because of this, women and children are often homeless.

5:50

As I stated before, access to safe, secure, appropriate, and affordable shelter is a fundamental human right, and every Albertan

deserves a warm and safe place to call home. We as legislators owe this to the people here in this province.

Again, thank you so much.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 501 carried unanimously]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we've done a lot of very good work this afternoon, and I thank all members for their input into these important decisions and for their participation in these debates. As such, I'd like to move that the Assembly stand adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:51 p.m.]

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