



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, March 15, 2016

Day 5

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Second Session

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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

10 a.m.

Tuesday, March 15, 2016

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us bow our heads and reflect each in our own way. Hon. members, as we contemplate the matters before us today, let us be reminded of the importance of the impact of our decisions on all Albertans. Let us remember the children and families of our province, some of whom fear for their financial security.

Thank you. Please be seated.

The chair would recognize the minister of agriculture. I believe we have a request for unanimous consent.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm asking for unanimous and clear consent of the House to introduce a guest.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, it is my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly an energetic youth leader and her family. This young woman is in her ninth year as a 4-H member in the Irricana 4-H Beef and Multi Club and has been chosen as the recipient of the 4-H 2015 Premier's award. She has held numerous positions in her club, has attended numerous camps and programs, and has represented 4-H Alberta in various competitions. This fall she plans to attend the University of Alberta and is enrolled in the pre-vet program. I would like to ask Brennan Munro, her family, and friends to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you. Nine years is a long time. I still reminisce on why I had to sell Blackie, my 4-H calf.

The chair would recognize the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Member's Apology

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before the House deals with government business, I'd like to rise and make a brief statement regarding my actions on Thursday during debate on the Speech from the Throne. I want to make it clear to this Chamber that on Thursday I made an inappropriate gesture to members opposite, which I regret and for which I apologize. My actions were not befitting of this Chamber and the dignity herein. When this matter was raised at the time, I sought to minimize the matter instead of taking full responsibility. To be clear, my actions were not acceptable, and my apology and explanation were not good enough.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The member of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, thank you for recognizing me this morning. I'd just like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood. We accept the apology fully and consider the matter dealt with.

The Speaker: Thank you to all members.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 3

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2016

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and members of the House. It's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 3, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2016.

The supplementary amounts provided by this bill reflect the fiscal picture outlined in the third-quarter fiscal update, released on February 24. These amounts are necessary for the government to conduct business and fulfill its commitments for the current fiscal year. The additional amounts mainly relate to: first, support for the affordable supportive living initiative, ASLI; second, to support increased student enrolment for public and separate schools, private schools, and early childhood service operations; third, to support flooding mitigation in Chestermere, Langdon, and Rocky View county; next, to support salaries, particularly overtime for adult remand centre operations; next, to support labour market programs; and, finally, to support the horse-racing and breeding renewal grants program.

I respectfully urge my colleagues in this House to support this bill. Thank you.

The Speaker: I'll recognize another member with respect to this. The Member for . . .

Mr. Smith: Drayton Valley-Devon.

The Speaker: . . . Drayton Valley-Devon. My apologies yet again. My apologies.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, I guess I will start off by saying that if I had to pay a nickel for every student's name that I had not remembered over the years, Mr. Ceci wouldn't be having a deficit. I'm sorry. I apologize for using his name.

The Speaker: I'm pleased to see that one time, with humour, you call yourself a student.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, I know that today we're addressing the issue of the supplementary supply bill. I'll start off by saying that as the opposition, obviously, our job is to hold the government accountable for its spending and for the actions of this government. To that effect, there are some concerns that I have with this bill. We see and we believe that a government should not get into a habit, that it's not a good practice for a government to be asking for a hundred million more over and above the approved budget that they've received. This is especially problematic for me given that this government just passed the budget a little over or around four months ago. So there have obviously been some issues, miscalculations perhaps, perhaps some issues that have arisen that have had to be dealt with within this supplementary supply bill, but it's a concern.

On the other hand, as legislators and as a part of the opposition while we strive to hold the government accountable, we don't strive to simply oppose for the sake of opposing. We would believe on this side of the House and in this party that the services that the government provides for our citizens are of importance, of great importance. While I have concerns and while this sometimes places

me in an awkward position of having to decide just where we should go on this supplementary supply bill and while I do not support poor fiscal management, I do recognize that the government needs this increase in funding to provide services, especially in areas like health or education.

I suppose I should start this off by saying to the government – and I'm sure it will bring them a great deal of comfort – that I will be supporting this bill. Now, having said that, I do think that there are questions that we have to ask about the expenditures in this supply bill. It is a concern, I think, not only to this party but to Albertans with regard to the detail that is provided in this supplementary supply bill.

10:10

It's important to ask the questions. What's going to be funded, and what will the impact be on the lives of Albertans? More importantly, how are we going to know that these funds are actually going to make a difference? I think these questions, Mr. Speaker, need to be asked and the government be allowed to answer these questions.

In my area as shadow minister of Education: are there indeed fewer numbers of students in our classrooms as a result of this increase in funding? Are we going to see a benefit for the students? Do we have the evidence and does the minister have the evidence to be able to provide that? Are there enough aides in the classroom to ensure that we will have a truly inclusive classroom?

There are teachers in this Assembly. It's nice to have a fraternity of teachers here. We've been in that classroom, and we've seen the kinds of challenges that each of our students has had, Mr. Speaker, many of them unique. I know that in my 30 years I could name student after student that have had some very unique challenges. I have had students that have had no arms, and I have watched that student come into my classroom, shrug off his backpack, open it with his teeth, pull out his books, put a pen in his mouth, and write for 60 minutes with the pen in his mouth. I've seen students that have been blind who have brought their Seeing Eye dog into my classroom. I've had students that have had issues with temper and have sometimes had to have an aide there simply to guide them through the issues and the questions of the day that they sometimes felt frustrated over.

So I think it's important to ask the questions, Mr. Speaker. Is the money that's going forward into Education from the supplementary supply bill actually going to be spent on providing the aides and the resources that are necessary to help the students in the classroom? Are our schools being maintained properly? Is that plant operations and maintenance funding actually going towards helping schools maintain an environment for our students to be able to actually learn in?

Transportation: we know that that's come up in the news in the last 10 months that I've been in this House, busing. Are we providing reasonable distances for our students in the cities for them to walk to the bus, or are we asking five- and six-year-old students to walk many kilometres, crossing busy streets? Is the funding going towards helping that issue?

There are lots of questions that we could ask, and we need to make sure that this government is providing us with reasonable answers to those questions. More importantly, Mr. Speaker, if these are such priority issues to rate an increase of funding after less than four months after the budget has been passed, why did the original budget just not include adequate funding in the first place?

I guess, therefore, that on behalf of Albertans I'd like to ask some questions. Can we afford these increases? Is there no way that the government could have found some efficiencies in programming to reduce the increase in expenditures? Out of an incredibly large

budget, a hundred million dollars, couldn't we have found the efficiencies somewhere?

You know, we had an example I think last night in some of the questioning that I asked the minister with regard to the RCSD funding. We find that Education is asking for \$800,000 more, but the Health budget and the Human Services budget – at least the Health budget for sure – don't appear to be matching those funds. If Health could find the efficiencies in their budget to not have to ask for \$800,000 in RCSD funding, then why does Education have to? It's a question that I think Albertans have a right to hear and to understand and then to judge. Were there no places in the original \$4.3 billion Education budget where the government could have reduced spending to offset the increased costs?

That's an important question to ask, I believe, because the government is actually paying for the services that it provides for the people of Alberta using credit. At some point that credit is going to have to be repaid, and as with all credit it's going to have to be repaid with interest. I can remember having the conversation with my kids about the student loans that they've had to accrue as they've gone through university. No, dad's pockets couldn't necessarily pay for all of the university education that my kids have received. Yes, they worked very hard in the summers to try to save money and be able to afford that university education. Yet to the best of their ability, in all three of my kids' lives they've had to, to one degree or another, have several tens of thousands of dollars worth of student loans.

I can remember the conversation that I had: "Oh, dad, everybody takes out student loans." "Yeah, I know. Some kids do." "Dad, it actually makes financial sense because, you see, the government will actually pay down some of it. When I go to pay it back, they'll cut it down, so I'm actually getting some free money." "Yeah. Son, is that the way you really want to live your life? You know, if you borrow money, don't you think you should pay it back, all of it, with interest? You know, son, it's certainly a whole lot easier to borrow than it is to pay back." Is there anybody in this Legislature that doesn't understand the truth of that?

An Hon. Member: Just those guys.

Mr. Smith: Oh, I think they understand.

I guess the question that I've got that I'd like this government to consider is: when we are paying for government services on credit, how at some point in time are you going to pay it back? Is this increase in funding intended to meet the needs of Education until the end of this fiscal or until the end of the school year? In other words, will these increases see us through until June? A reasonable question that we wouldn't mind the government being able to answer.

I don't expect that we will get complete answers to these questions. Part of that will probably come as we begin to move through the next year or two, the budget estimates and the new budget, and we get to see some of these answers about how you're going to deal with debt and deficit, where that money has been spent and where you're planning on spending it again in this coming budget. But Albertans do have the right to have their concerns addressed.

I guess my major issue with this supplementary bill is not that the money will be used to provide for a solid educational foundation. I know that the teachers are going to work hard and that school boards are going to work hard and that they're going to try to make sure that that money is spent wisely and that it provides for a solid educational foundation. But I think that given the little detail as to what we know from the supplementary supply bill, we don't know how it will be spent.

10:20

For instance, nobody argues that we need plant operations and maintenance budgets. You're asking for more money for that. Well, it would be nice to know where or on what that particular budget line is actually going to be spent. Mr. Speaker, is there an updated list of the maintenance projects that will be completed through this infusion of cash? Have the allocation criteria been changed? Has the applicable per-student rate changed? How will this additional funding impact the coming budget estimates? It would be nice, before we had the chance to vote on this bill, if we had some of these questions answered.

The Minister of Education has said that the number of students is growing, but there seemed to be a little confusion yesterday when other figures within the government showed that the population isn't growing. We've got some confusion there. But even if we set that aside, Mr. Speaker, \$3.2 million is going towards class size initiatives. It would have been helpful for Albertans if they knew how that money was going to be spent. How did the government underestimate the funds required for ensuring that class sizes stay reasonably within the parameters set by the government when this budget was passed? Will this increase in funding mean that current class sizes are actually maintained? I'm hoping so, but I don't have the figures to be able to show Albertans that.

Although the class size funding is allocated based on a specific grade level or for specific CTS courses, school jurisdictions do have the flexibility to use this funding to hire or retain teachers at any grade level, based on local needs. That's one of the reasons why we have school boards, to make local decisions. Is this increase of over \$3 million intended to keep K through 3 classrooms within parameters? Has he had conversations with the school boards to decide just where that's going to go, or has he given them carte blanche to make those decisions?

Item 2.6 in this supplementary supply is equity of opportunity, and it includes a \$1.3 million ask. Well, are the per-student or density-and-distance allocations staying the same with this increase? How is it going to be split up? How will this increase impact students in the classroom? What additional supports will the school authorities expect as a result of this increase? See, we're asking questions that allow us to make an informed decision when it comes to this budget and to this supplementary supply bill.

Mr. Speaker, Wildrose has always supported the things that we hope this supplemental supply bill will provide for education. We've always supported the concept of small class sizes and reasonable and safe transportation for rural and urban students. We've supported small schools to ensure that their students enjoy the same opportunities as larger schools. We believe that secure funding is needed for independent schools and for private ECS operators.

Wildrose also believes, however, that even this NDP government should be able to find hundreds of millions in ineffective spending after a 44-year dynasty has left the government benches. This bill would be much easier to swallow, Mr. Speaker, if the government could show us that they had bothered to find some of that waste, if you'd eliminated a lot more than this hundred million or so that you're asking for above and beyond in this supplemental supply bill. The concerns of Wildrose that we've raised over the fiscal management of this government – they continue to raise red flags. But while we hope that these funds are used effectively for their intended purpose, it does not abrogate the need for this government to begin developing sound fiscal management policies. That would be our advice to this government as the Official Opposition.

While I said at the beginning that we will support this bill, we would encourage this government to ensure that when it comes to

the finances of this province and the taxpayers of this province, they are fiscally responsible and accountable for the decisions that they make.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. I will try and address some of the issues that were brought up. I do want to point out that on October . . .

The Speaker: Hon. minister, I thought you were speaking to 29(2)(a). Is that correct?

Mr. Ceci: Yes.

The Speaker: You're on 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Ceci: In terms of responding . . .

The Speaker: Hon. minister, my apologies. We need another speaker.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to address the supplementary supply estimates. We had an interesting discussion with considerable question-and-answer back and forth last evening. You know, I will say that I will pick up on the threads of some of that discussion from last night. Some of those same themes were developed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

My primary concern: I think or I hope, at least, that the Finance minister in his concluding remarks on this bill will take fuller opportunity to answer it because, you know, quite frankly, I found some of the answers from the ministers when I asked this question to be lacking. I was very pleased to see the efforts made by both the Minister of Finance and also the Minister of Education to find your savings and other parts of their budget that, in fact, balanced off some of the requirement for an additional ask: the \$17 million in the Education budget and, sir, I believe it's somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$9 million in your own budget. My disappointment, quite frankly, is that the other ministers were either not similarly diligent or not similarly able to find those types of savings. Quite frankly, I found the answers that they provided to be lacking and wanting.

You know, there are a wide number of reasons in business why you don't end up spending as much money as you had budgeted for. Sometimes certain initiatives that you'd planned on doing simply do not go ahead at that same pace. As has been noted in a couple of responses, sometimes you don't end up having as many staff members, or you have a larger number of vacancies and you don't fill those vacancies quite as quickly. There are a large number of reasons where cost savings can be found.

Sometimes they can be found not so much as a matter of good fortune but rather as a matter of good luck. Exactly. The Finance minister knows that saying that having to pay out less in agricultural insurance claims is somehow belt-tightening is almost akin to someone on a city council saying: we were careful stewards of the taxpayers' dollars because we made it snow less and our snow removal budget was lower than we expected. So let's not kid ourselves. Some of these savings are, in fact, more a matter of good fortune than good management.

I did want to mention one thing because this is something that the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon pointed out and I had this question as well, and that was with regard to the Education requisition for the \$33 million. Health made no supplementary

estimate requisition, and that means that Health must have done a very careful job in terms of managing resources. Well, it's a little bit of a nuanced thing, but, in fact, the Health department is needing more money – it's stated in the third-quarter fiscal update – an additional requisition or an additional amount budgeted of some \$147 million, roughly one and a half times the total amount of all the supplementary estimates. But it does not appear in supplementary estimates because it is additional funding for AHS. That's a subtlety. The Health minister was good enough to point that out to me in an exchange that we had.

10:30

Nonetheless, it shouldn't be construed that somehow the Education department did less work than Health or that the Health department was able to get right back down to budgeted levels because, in fact, the Health department, specifically AHS, will have higher expenditures than what was anticipated.

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, my primary concern with this is the failure of the various ministries that asked for additional funds to find savings within their department so that that additional ask would be unnecessary, and I pointed out last night the small percentage that we're talking about. In a couple of the departments it's less than 1 per cent of the overall annual budget, some .6 per cent in the case of both the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General and, I believe, the Ministry of Labour and 1.6 per cent in the case of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs.

You know, in business when you have an unanticipated expense come up during the course of a fiscal year, something that you hadn't really expected to come up, and if it comes up partway through the year, which is going to cost you more, you look for other savings that you can apply, other things that you can do to save that money so you don't have that additional ask. In a scenario, as the Minister of Finance has pointed out on more than one occasion, where we've had this precipitous drop in government revenues – and we'll leave the debate as to exactly why that's happening to another day – when you've had that situation come up, I think it's incumbent upon all of the ministers of the Crown to do a better job, a more diligent job of finding where those savings are.

Now, clearly, some of the ministers have done that. We only have roughly seven ministries that are asking for additional funds. For the remaining ministries, you know, I'm sure that some of their programs have gone over budget, but they found other programs that, in fact, are under budget or they've exercised the necessary restraint so that a supplementary supply request was not needed.

To me, the message that needed to be sent to Albertans was that we will not have a supplementary supply estimate request at all, that we don't need to ask Albertans, who are already suffering significant financial hardships, for yet another hundred million dollars. The fact that this government is finding itself in need of doing that and that the departments in question were unable to find the necessary savings is, to me, a great disappointment. I'm hoping that the same level of diligence is in fact not applied going forward in the preparation of the April 14 budget but that a much higher level of diligence is applied because, as the Finance minister was finally able to articulate late last night, we are looking at a \$10 billion plus deficit. That is a number that should cause grave concerns to all Canadians when one considers that the federal budgetary deficit, the budgetary deficit of the federal government in Ottawa, a budget that is many times greater in size than our provincial budget, is only going to be marginally larger than that \$10 billion. Well, I guess we'll never know. We won't know until March 22. It could, in fact, be considerably larger. I guess we'll see what happens.

Mr. Speaker, to me, successful stewardship of taxpayers' dollars could have been demonstrated by this government by stating: we have found internal economies and internal savings that make supplementary estimate requests unnecessary. As we see now, that in fact was not the case. We have seven departments that are requesting extra funds. As the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon stated, you know, we support a lot of the initiatives that are included within that. Certainly, the ASLI grants were something that we are absolutely in favour of.

In fact, our disappointment there was that there was a delay, and that delay will have not only cost additional funds but will have caused significant anxiety in the communities that had approved projects. I know that in Lloydminster with our Pioneer home project, which was an excellent project and was finally approved – and we're certainly grateful for that – we lost the better part of a summer construction season because of the delay. Really, that's not helpful at a time when we need to be as prudent with taxpayers' dollars as we possibly can. Now, we've been blessed. We've been very fortunate. It has been a relatively mild construction season this past winter, and there's been tremendous progress on that project, and I'm looking forward to the opening of the project perhaps later this year or early next.

So we're not against those, and because of that, like the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, we too will be voting in favour of supplementary estimates because these dollars are necessary. I understand that. But I guess I did want to make sure that we have on the record what I stated last night in Committee of Supply and that we have it on record today that as a caucus – and certainly I as an individual member – we are disappointed in the fact that we even have to have supplementary supply estimates and that we have to ask the taxpayers for an additional \$106 million. In my view, those are efficiencies that should have been able to be found. There's demonstrated evidence that some of the ministries were able to find those, and I applaud those ministers for their efforts, but quite frankly I think it should have been across the board.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise – sorry. I was chasing children in the new family-friendly environment. I'll catch my breath here.

An Hon. Member: Whose kids?

Mr. Cooper: My kids. Sorry. I wasn't chasing school groups, sir. I was chasing my children, and I might just add that it's a pleasure to see them. I know it's hard to believe, sir, but on days when the Assembly sits, I even beat the toddler out of bed. That means you have to get up pretty early in the morning to beat a three-year-old to work.

Anyway, let me get to the meat of the matter. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2016. Like my colleague, I just wanted to highlight a couple of quick things. We in the Wildrose caucus believe that we need to have world-class education facilities for our students to learn in. Our education system is building the future of our province, so it's important that we are ensuring that the resources are in the right places at the right times for the right reasons.

My colleague from Vermilion-Lloydminster mentioned the ASLI grants, another good, positive step forward for the province at a time when housing is desperately needed right across the province, including in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. Essentially, in every constituency there is a need that outweighs our dollars, but

we do need to be taking some proactive steps, so I look forward to supporting some of the measures in this legislation. Having said that, I do have some significant concerns about why and how we got here today.

Just over a hundred days ago – I know it might feel like an eternity – we were here, and the government’s budget was passed. I know that the current NDP caucus has some track record of blaming the former PC government for putting them in a bad spot, and I seem to recall some blame on the former government for the budget being delayed. At that time they didn’t want to rush it. They wanted to make sure that they’d made the appropriate choices. Just a little over a hundred days later here we are back in the House to require supplementary supply. I’m not sure if that’s because they rushed it or they didn’t get the decisions right in the first place or exactly what transpired, but I know, Mr. Speaker, that this is the exact type of thing that the NDP caucus, when they were the fourth party, used to stand in this House and express such displeasure about having to do.

Mr. Speaker, I will acknowledge that it’s possible that someday members in the Wildrose caucus may be there, and I will live to regret this particular statement in expressing my complete displeasure with the inability of the government to deliver a budget on time, to call the House back when the standing orders say and for whatever reason to continually delay the proceedings of the Assembly, not necessarily once we get here but certainly prior to arriving. The standing orders are very clear that the House should be reconvened in early February, and as you know, good sir, the House only reconvened last Tuesday, which is in March, which is not February.

10:40

It’s disappointing to see these patterns of behaviour emerging from the government caucus. This government was elected on a commitment to change, and so far we are seeing more of the same. We’ve seen that in delaying the budget now till April 14, and as a result of the government not finding efficiencies inside the existing budget and the delay in the upcoming budget, we’re here to debate this supplementary supply.

Now, the government of the day likes to rise in their place and say that these are within normal timelines. Yesterday in *Hansard* the Minister of Municipal Affairs said: “We are working incredibly hard . . . within the budget as we [will] present [the] budget . . . within normal timelines.” I’d like to just take a moment to talk briefly about what normal timelines look like.

Since 2000 only on three occasions in this Assembly was the budget presented after April 14, and on two of those three occasions, Mr. Speaker, there was an election that year. Well, this government has been in office for 315 days, and they continually try to blame the former government for our position. Listen, the former government was not very good, and now we see the Minister of Municipal Affairs making statements like: these are within normal timelines. We saw the Minister of Economic Trade and Development rise in this House just last week and say on a point of privilege that in comparing what they’re doing, it is basically what the last government did except maybe slightly better. Well, let me be clear. The last days of the former PC government are not the standard that we should be reaching for. We should be reaching for much better than that. That government ran on being better than the former PC government, but so far what we’ve seen is a lot more of what we saw.

Frankly, as an Albertan I’m disappointed. I know that many people in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills are also disappointed. They wanted to give the government a chance, and they’ve had 315 days. That’s a fair shake. Unfortunately, we continually see the blaming

of the former government or by saying, “We’re basically as good as they were” or by saying that these are normal timelines. Since 2000 this is the fourth-latest presentation of a budget that this Assembly has seen.

Mr. Speaker, this government has made some significant commitments on democratic reform, but just like we’re seeing here in supplementary supply estimates, with them doing exactly what they said that they wouldn’t do, we are seeing that in the area of democratic reform as well.

The Minister of Labour likes to talk about how awesome the Special Ethics and Accountability Committee is, but as I mentioned, we have now been elected for 315 days, and that committee, sir, that supercommittee that’s going to solve all of the ethics and accountability problems of this Assembly, has met a whopping five times. That’s approximately once every 63 days. Mr. Speaker, the former PC government had some significant ethical challenges and lapses of judgment, and meeting to try and correct 44 years of the pendulum swinging in the wrong direction takes more work than once every 63 days.

Just recently we heard the Premier speak about wanting the work of this committee to be done in the next 90 days, or by June. Well, Mr. Speaker, they’ve met five times in the last 300 days. To the best of my knowledge, there’s no scheduled meeting of that committee, as I stand in my place today. They’ve only met five times, and much of those five times, sir, were about the details around the next meeting. Not one thing has been heard from the public, just reporting from the legislative officers. Just like we’re disappointed about being here to debate supplementary supply, albeit some positive things in that, we are disappointed that this government is continuing to say one thing and doing another.

Mr. Speaker, the Wildrose believes in providing solutions, and we’ve been doing that. [interjection] While the government might think it’s funny, good sir, just today this side of the House presented a 12-point jobs action plan. So far on that side of the House what we’ve seen is a massive program that’s created one job and then was cancelled. We’ve seen the introduction of Bill 1, where the preamble is two-thirds of the total bill. If we learned anything yesterday from the Ethics Commissioner investigating this Premier, it’s that the preamble of a bill does not give any credit to the rest of the bill because if the preamble of the bill did, then she would have been able to use some significantly stronger language about the current ethics of this government.

So I think it speaks to a much larger narrative. What we’re seeing here in supplementary supply we’ve now seen in their lack of commitment to democratic reform. We’ve seen it in their ethics and accountability lapses. I mean, this former NDP caucus proposed amendments to legislation that would prevent announcements during by-elections, and then, Mr. Speaker, much to my disappointment and the disappointment of many Albertans who were expecting more from this government, we saw two weeks ago in Calgary-Greenway two separate funding announcements that took place in Calgary. This government used to criticize these very sorts of actions. They used to criticize the former PC government for selling access, for using government resources for partisan purposes.

Now, I will agree that the Ethics Commissioner has cleared the Premier, but the Ethics Commissioner also cleared former Premier Redford, using the exact same language in her ruling about how these types of behaviour are likely to raise questions of the general public. While she did not break the actual law, a case may be made that she broke the spirit of the law. The Health minister yesterday in a press conference said: we’ve been exonerated by the Ethics Commissioner.

10:50

I remember on many occasions from just down the aisle the current Premier, when she was the leader of the NDP fourth party caucus, rising in this place and saying that just because the Ethics Commissioner said it was right, it doesn't mean you did the right thing. Again, Mr. Speaker, I see the same sort of issue around supplementary supply. Exactly why this conversation relates directly to supplementary supply is because this is a pattern of behaviour that we're seeing from that side of the government. Albertans deserve better.

The last thing that I'll leave you with when it comes to this continual departure of saying one thing and doing another, in particular around supplementary supply, is that we're likely to see later this week the introduction of the essential services legislation, but we're also likely to see debate on second reading later this week. This is just another example of the type of things that this NDP caucus used to rail against.

Speaker's Ruling Referring to a Legislative Officer

The Speaker: Hon. members, I would like to remind you to keep in mind in your comments that when implying criticism of a legislative officer – it's certainly not in the standing orders, but it has been a matter that has been discussed and addressed in other Assemblies, and we all collectively need to be responsible and recognize that point.

Do you have another question?

Mr. Cooper: No. I just am happy to withdraw those comments if they were perceived as criticism of the legislative officer.

The Speaker: Thank you. Noted.
The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Debate Continued

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move adjournment of debate on Bill 3.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 2 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2016

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: We are on Bill 2, did you say? Thank you.

Thank you very much. It's my pleasure to open debate to briefly talk about the additional bill that we have before us now and to say that this one takes us further, of course, down the road with regard to second reading of Bill 2, the interim supply act.

The Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2016, will provide funding authority for the offices of the Legislative Assembly and to the government for the period of April 1, 2016, to May 31, 2016, inclusive. The approval of this act will provide the funds needed to continue the business of the province while the Assembly takes the time necessary to present, prepare, review, and debate the government's 2016-17 budget plans, which are further under work and discussion and development with respect to its presentation in this Legislature on April 14.

I would urge my colleagues in the House to support this bill. We are of course taking into account many of the views from groups, individuals, associations, and business in the development of this

Budget 2016, but to get there, we need the time. The interim supply act will allow us that time to ensure that all the important programs, services, and partnerships that can be funded through this Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act continue to happen.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to talk about this NDP government's lack of a financial plan, to talk about Bill 2, the interim supply bill, which asks this Assembly to approve \$8.7 billion of unbudgeted funds. This bill asks us to give this government free rein to do whatever they want instead of being held accountable to the people with a budget. Bill 2 includes no details explaining where these funds will be spent.

Wildrose reluctantly supported Bill 3, the supplementary supply act. While we were skeptical, we believe in the importance of the initiatives that the bill will fund. If this bill's \$8.7 billion has no specific funding direction, this government is looking for the authority to spend with impunity. With the looming deficit for the next year, the government needs to come clean about how much of this money will have to be borrowed.

You know, I also can't help but wonder if the real reason for this interim supply bill is because of the Calgary-Greenway by-election. Is this government trying to avoid being held accountable for their reckless spending? Is the NDP afraid that voters in Calgary would think twice if they were reminded of this government's true colours?

Spending like this isn't really news. It's just perpetuating the spending problem this government seems to have. How can it justify asking Albertans for their hard-earned money without providing a plan for how it will be spent? Albertans want to know they can trust their government, and reckless, unbudgeted spending is no way to build trust.

This government has a real problem that needs to be addressed right here and right now. Alberta already has the highest per capita spending of the largest provinces of Canada, and its spending is growing faster than inflation and population growth. This NDP government is out of control and is proving once again to Albertans that they cannot be trusted. With its economic experiments and reckless spending the NDP government will only further increase the risk for mistakes with this \$8.7 billion in interim supply.

The government has provided zero-detail plans to bolster their claims to be focused on job creation and to care about Albertans. Its lack of a plan betrays this government. It has clearly given no serious thought to the more than 80,000 Albertans who are out of work, no serious thought to the elderly who struggle to survive, just partisan thoughts on how to push an ideological agenda through on the strength of empty words.

The NDP claims to support job creation, but its \$178 million failed job-subsidy plan created zero jobs – sorry, one job – and its Bill 1 is void of any actual plan to help Albertans. The government needs to stop saying that Albertans must wait for its beleaguered and long-awaited budget for a jobs plan. Our economy is in a deep nosedive. Albertans need hope now, today. The longer you take to produce a plan, the longer Albertans are left scrimping and saving, trying to make ends meet while they look for work, wait in line at the food bank.

So why is the government so light on details? This interim supply has none. Albertans are worried about everything that is happening to our economy, and this NDP government can't take the time to create a real jobs program or outline savings to counter bloated spending. How much of this money that you have asked the

Assembly to approve will be borrowed money? Can you answer that one question?

11:00

You ask us to support a bill that provides very limited details. Wildrose will stand up for Albertans here today and oppose this bill. We and all Albertans know that you had plenty of time to bring forward a budget. The NDP government is hurting the economy, hurting jobs, hurting Albertans, destroying our province with its inefficiency, and it doesn't want to show Albertans its plan. It doesn't even know what it's doing. Who asks for an interim supply of this size without any explanation or accountability? Only a government full of a sense of its own entitlement would do such a thing, one that doesn't think about or truly care about anxious and worried Albertans.

An \$8.7 billion interim supply bill, advanced funds, with no detail of how much will be borrowed or details of what it will be used for: with this government's previous track record Albertans have every right to be anxious and afraid, and – believe me – they are. The Wildrose caucus is very concerned, concerned enough to ask questions and to oppose the right-to-spend bill. Wildrose will stand up for Albertans. We will stand up for the unemployed, for low-income seniors, and we'll offer them strong leadership, the leadership they so desperately need. We will stand up for them in this Legislature because no one else will.

The PCs won't. They've decided that instead of doing what is right for Albertans by uniting and parting with their pride, they would rather cause a further divide by attacking us in the House instead of rallying together to fight this untrustworthy NDP government. I sure hope they oppose you today. I sure hope they take a stand for Albertans, especially during a time of economic uncertainty, and show that they have changed their ways when it comes to spending.

How are we supposed to support this without a plan, without a budget? Of course, you know that even without our support, you'll ram this piece of legislation through without any thought of the repercussions to Albertans. How shallow, how thoughtless, and how needless, because didn't you just do this a few months ago? How is it that you have been in government for 10 months and still don't have a plan? Instead of the Premier going to spend time raising money for antipipeline NDP parties in other provinces, maybe she should stay home and figure out how to help her own people, maybe help put a budget together.

Just a few short months ago an additional \$5.9 million had to be added to the 2015-16 operating budget for the Ministry of Indigenous Relations, which, as you know, is a special interest of mine. Now, only a few months later you would like for us to give you free rein to run this ministry for two whole months without a budget or a plan. It's a small amount when you consider the other ministries but still too large of a cheque, in the amount of \$11.5 million, without a breakdown or a plan.

In a few short months this government has become arrogant and entitled to the point that it doesn't feel the need to explain itself. Where is the \$8.2 million that you have termed "financial transactions" coming from? From which account are you transferring these funds?

Albertans deserve real leadership, leadership that brings hope to a hurting people. This is something Wildrose will offer. Wildrose will continue to stand up for Albertans, to stand up and fight for jobs, fight for pipelines, for an efficient government, fight for strong communities, strong democracy and lead Alberta back to the prosperity it used to enjoy. This government hasn't been providing that leadership, and this interim supply gives no indication that they intend to.

Albertans have no interest in kowtowing to Quebec, yet our Premier seems to be more interested in defending Quebec's Premier than the interests of Albertans. Quebec's government doesn't have Alberta's best interests at heart. Shouldn't Albertans be making decisions that drive the province?

What this government is offering is not leadership. Do your job, the job you were voted in to do, that you claim to have been voted in to do. You were not voted in to produce bills like this, that reek of directionless entitlement. Please prove me wrong. Do your job. Explain the details of your plan to this Assembly. Doing so would be one step toward countering the fact that there is no accountability for this spending spree.

Wildrose cannot and will not support handing you a blank cheque so that you can further hurt Albertans with increased taxes to pay off the loan you are really asking for here. I implore all of you to do the job you were elected to do. This is not the time to be playing politics. This is the time when you are called to act responsibly and act like a government. Produce a budget and a responsible plan for this province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, thank you. I'd just make an observation that in the speeches where the phrase "you" is used, since you are speaking to the Speaker, you ought to speak in the third person, and I would remind all members of that.

I would recognize the Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for granting me the opportunity to speak on Bill 2, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2016. Of course, it needs to be said how disappointing it is that we have to be here discussing this very slim document. One of the most important duties of a government is to present and pass a budget annually. By all accounts, we won't be seeing the full scope of this government's plan until well after the end of the fiscal year. Whether this is for political reasons or simply due to a lack of preparation, it is very distressing that we cannot get this budget so much as presented before March 31. Albertans deserve to see exactly what they're being asked to pay for.

On both sides of the House we've talked about the importance of stable and predictable funding. I see nothing stable or predictable in what we're being asked to accept in this interim appropriation bill. Now, I know that government members will claim that this isn't all that unusual and fall back on the line that the previous government did it, too, but as I look back over previous years, I see that there was some interim supply that was not necessary. The entirety of the budget was passed on time. In many other cases, the House was asked to vote on interim supply, but they had also been presented a full budget for context. In those cases, the interim supply amount was pro-rated based on the fully costed budget. Even then I don't think that that was in line with the best practices, but at least it was something.

In any case, I find it a little rich that the government is now falling back on practices of the previous, now unseated government, especially since they never miss a chance to speak about the unique circumstances we're facing today. The severity of the times calls for action. At the very least it calls for transparency and clarity. When I look at this interim supply document, I don't see a steady hand on the wheel; I see a hastily drawn-up plan that comes up empty on specifics. Albertans are facing tremendous challenges right now. The government, which has grown completely unrestrained by even population growth plus inflation for years, is headed for a record-breaking spending spree, and is this interim document to be trusted? I don't think so.

Of course, I've heard the government's reply to this as well, that this is not just a straight appropriation. But if it's not simply prorated, then that implies a level of complexity that I think necessitates a full budget even more. There still is some confusion around these numbers, and that stems from not having a fully costed and transparent process. In the Health interim estimates, for instance, we heard that the number \$55 million was used, the per-day cost, which was then multiplied by 61 days to be covered. But last year's supply worked out to be less than \$51 million per day, so where is the difference coming from? The minister in that instance mentioned needing a bit extra as a cushion, but now that cushion is undecided. The Health minister mentioned that she didn't want to have to come back again and ask for more interim money. I have to question why that's a fear of theirs. Do they not see that this budget is getting passed by May 31 now? I should hope they do.

It doesn't sit right with me to allocate billions of dollars based on vague fudge factors. This is an imprecise way of conducting business. This is truly a blank cheque. The government has provided long-range budget estimates that the current interim supply estimates do not seem to jibe with. I believe it's only proper that we be provided with more information for these ministries than we can fit on a business card. We see that there's a ministry like Economic Development and Trade that has been created from a whole cloth. It's so new, in fact, that the minister apparently doesn't even have the mandate to do the job yet. Despite the lack of clarity, they ask for over \$200 million to do this role until a budget is passed.

Of course, we've heard a lot about the strain that this puts on municipalities and other local decision-makers. They must have their budgets drafted and projects planned well in advance of the construction season. This method of allocating funds leaves them uncertain and unclear about what the provincial government has committed to funding for the year. It's somewhat unfair that they should have to budget for their constraints and constituents and residents in a timely manner while this government cannot do the same for them.

11:10

This is just a sampling of ministry numbers, of course, but they demonstrate that this interim supply process is fundamentally flawed. The numbers are incomplete, vague, ill defined, and unjustified. That's not to say that the sum of the money is not well spent or needed, but no justification has been given for its use. The detailed line items that we typically expect to see in a budget process are absent here, and those line items provide justification to the Assembly. Out of respect for this House and the Albertans we all represent, I expect the government to present more detail or better explanations of its actions, especially when it requests \$8.7 billion from the public coffers.

In addition to basic respect for the House and for the process, we need a more thorough budget to ensure that good governance is there. During these economic challenges it's more important than ever for every single dollar to be scrutinized and well spent. We want to see an efficient, lean, well-managed operation, but that becomes so much more difficult when we have absolutely no metrics, targets, measures, or measurables to hold this government machinery accountable.

In the private sector when times are tight, it causes a renewed focus on deliverables. When there is no room for waste, one has no choice but to focus on clear, measurable outputs from the system. Right now businesses and households across this province are poring over their internal budget line items line by line, and they're measuring the usefulness of spending based on quantifiable

deliverables. They have no choice but to streamline their process through careful consideration. That consideration is noticeably absent from this bill at a time when we need it most. When I hear things like "a little bit extra," I can't help but think that now is not the time for being fast and loose with the province's finances.

In closing, I cannot support a bill that speaks so much in broad hypotheticals and undefined terms. I encourage the government to go back to work crafting a full, complete budget that outlines the money it intends to spend and the results it expects to achieve with our hard-earned tax dollars.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Nixon: No.

The Speaker: I'm sorry. Under 29(2)(a), were there any questions? Were there any comments with respect to 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Ceci: I wanted to share with the member the information behind the Treasury Board and Finance interim supply amounts that he was wondering about. The Treasury Board and Finance specific voted interim supply amounts allow my department to continue working on Budget 2016 as it co-ordinates program budgeting and fiscal planning across government. You're probably wondering about that. That's what the amount of money will assist with. It will allow my department to continue to manage the treasury, the borrowing – you asked about borrowing – issuing and collection of payments, and to ensure that payments are secure to protect Albertans, financial institutions, and the government. It will also allow us to provide the needed policy and regulatory oversight for the financial, insurance, and pension sectors, which serves to protect the economic security of all Albertans.

With regard to the total amount there are also flow-through amounts for the lottery fund in the amount of \$362 million, that end up providing a great deal of support to volunteer and community-based initiatives across this province.

Again, it's important to note that these are just interim amounts until the full appropriation bill can be tabled in Budget 2016, which is going to be on April 14. You know, that is after, of course, the fiscal year – you were asking about that – but I just want to point out that last April Joe Oliver brought in the federal budget on the 21st. We're beating that by a week. And the reason is the same for the delay. His delay was because of the significant drop in oil prices and the challenge that that posed to fiscal planning. That's the same reason we're bringing ours in on April 14, though we are beating his by a week.

In April this Assembly will have the opportunity to debate the full budget, where we will fully present our plan to responsibly manage public finances, invest in a greener and more sustainable economy, drive economic development and diversification, and continue to invest in jobs and 21st-century infrastructure for all Albertans.

Those were some of the points, I guess, that I wanted to clarify and provide you as you were wondering about the Treasury Board and Finance interim supply request. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think this will be any surprise to my colleagues across the way, but I rise most definitely to declare that I will be voting on behalf of the people, the good

people, of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre against this bill, and I encourage all my colleagues in the Assembly to do the same. There are several reasons, but a couple of the main reasons are that, first, it's a blank cheque, and that concerns me very much. There also is clearly still no effort by this government to find spending efficiencies, which is something I'm hearing from my constituents as one of the most important issues that they see with this current government and the current financial situation that we're facing as a province. I'm also concerned about the Alberta advantage.

First, let's start, Mr. Speaker, with discussing this blank cheque issue. This government is essentially bringing forward what I would call a blank cheque supply bill. They're asking us on this side of the Assembly to vote with them to approve \$8.7 billion – \$8.7 billion – without any adequate details of what it's for or what it'll do. After we debated Bill 6 in the last sitting and we went back to our ridings, I know I heard loud and clear lots of concerns about blank bills. I have to say as the elected representative for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre that I find it offensive that this government will continuously bring forward stuff that has no details and expect us to vote on it and support them. That's a blank cheque, and I don't think that's good management, and I know that the people that I represent are deeply concerned about it.

As far as spending efficiencies, Mr. Speaker, our province has the highest per capita spending among Canada's largest provinces. Last year we spent \$8 billion more on operations than B.C. did; \$8 billion more. I don't think the government could stand up here today and attempt to justify \$8 billion more and try to look Albertans in the eyes with a straight face and say that we receive \$8 billion more in services than B.C. We repeatedly come to this Assembly and we say: "Hey, we spend more than every other province. We have a spending problem in this province. We did when we had \$100-a-barrel oil. The old government had a spending problem."

Now, the response that we get from the government, Mr. Speaker, is, "Hey, you want to cut front-line services; you want to cut front-line jobs" when we talk about efficiency. Well, I'll tell you that the people in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre know that that's not what we're talking about. In fact, the government across the way, as you know, in my own riding just this last week ambushed the town of Sundre and laid off front-line health workers and shut front-line health care service beds, so I think they should probably look at themselves if they're concerned about who's going to be shutting front-line services or front-line health care or front-line workers.

Again, we spend more than all the other provinces, Mr. Speaker. As you travel around Alberta – and if this government would leave the Legislature a little more often and come and see some of the people throughout Alberta, they'd probably hear what I'm hearing, which is that the concern is about the bloated bureaucracy in our system, not about nurses, not about teachers. Nobody wants to fire nurses or teachers, but we have to get our spending under control, or it's going to continue to escalate. We're going to continue to have to borrow more and more, and in the end we're going to lose services because we can no longer afford to pay for them, and that's wrong. I can tell you that right now in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre that is the biggest concern. The number one thing that you hear is: "Go back and tell that government to get their spending under control. Go back there and tell them to deal with the bureaucracy. Go back there and tell them to spend our money better."

That's something that's also important, Mr. Speaker. This is not our money. We're the stewards of Albertans' money, hard-working Albertans, hard-working farmers, hard-working tradespeople, businesspeople, teachers, nurses. We're stewards of that, and what this government does with this bill is that it brings forward a blank

cheque and says: "Here. Just vote for that." I can't do that. I have to respect taxpayer dollars, and I expect everybody in this Chamber should do the same.

11:20

When we're looking at reckless, unbudgeted spending at the same time that a government has done tax hikes for businesses and families and has created instability in our energy sector through many ways, we have to discuss what happens if we continue to spend money in this way. Now, Alberta businesses have also asked for a moratorium on risky NDP policies. Again, I would suggest that coming forward with a blank cheque bill seems extremely risky over and over and over and disappointing.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I will say in closing that I hope that – I look at the government members across the way as I talk about what people are saying in my riding, and they seem to not agree. That's disappointing. Again, I just want to close with that I encourage the government members, I encourage the Premier, I encourage her cabinet to leave the Legislature. Come to Sundre. Come to Rocky Mountain House. Come anywhere in this province and talk to the people that are being affected by this and who do not find this acceptable behaviour, and I am sure that you will find what I have found, that the people of Alberta expect much better than blank cheque bills from this government, which is why I'll be voting against this bill, and I encourage everybody in the Assembly to do so.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any questions under 29(2)(a) with respect to the last speaker?

The chair recognizes the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the House. I will, by the way, do my best to recall the third-person approach to language. It is a bit of a challenge.

I have to say that while I desire to see the government function and I recognize the importance of ongoing supply and the importance of continuing the services that are so essential to our Alberta people, I guess my biggest difficulty with this question of interim supply is just, more than anything else, I guess, a disappointment that the government has not been able to provide for Alberta a budget that is in place on time. The practices of the previous government and other governments that don't attain that level: well, just frankly, they're not a good measuring standard. They're not a best practices standard. In this province the previous government was severely punished in the polls for some of their practices, and I really do believe that we should be reaching for and attaining a new and a better way, a much more professional way.

I guess my disappointment hinges on the fact that the budget was just done three months ago. It's not like it's something that has to start completely from scratch. I do recognize the realities of changing income with the oil industry would have impacts on that, but budgets are living documents. They're not started completely from scratch every time they're created. In fact, the reality is that many of the ABC agencies in this province that must report to the government on a regular basis are required in their legislation that governs them to actually provide multiyear – I'm quoting from legislation there – budgets, which contribute to the validity of living budgets and ongoing. Multiyear budgets: part of the point of them is to make it easier to produce the budget for the upcoming year. The reality is that most business plans build multiple-year budgets, and many of the NGOs in our province function on multiyear budgets.

I guess my plea to the government would be to try and raise the standard, raise the standard to best financial practices that are, in

fact, required by legislation of the agencies in this province. I think that as the parent agency of all of our province we should have no lesser standard for the government itself. Multiyear budgets and the ability to adjust them then and have budgets on time would be extremely valuable and something that I would encourage the government to consider doing. I just don't think that it's acceptable for the people of Alberta to have late, missed-due-date budgets.

When I was in high school – and I know times have changed; we have a much softer attitude toward accountability and responsibility these days – when I missed an assignment, it was not accepted. Now, today, I know, we're afraid we might hurt somebody's feelings and that it might wound them eternally. The reality is that at some point in life we have to learn accountability and reliability, and that's acceptable, for high school students to wrestle with that. But I don't think that it's acceptable for business, for nongovernment agencies, or the government itself to miss important due dates because they do have profound effects upon our province, particularly upon our municipal governments.

Our municipal governments need to know what's going to happen. Can they plan? What can they plan on? They don't even know when they can start to plan because the budget, which is essential to their ability to function and to represent their people and to serve their people well, is withheld from them when it should be given to them. So the municipal governments are extremely frustrated. I think we saw that just this last week in meeting with them, some of the frustration which, quite frankly, actually, is mitigating over to the side of anger. They need to know what the rules of the game are this coming year. So there are profound effects for municipal governments.

I would also suggest, Mr. Speaker, that there are profound effects, ongoing profound effects, for business and industry in our province. It just perpetuates and continues the uncertainty of them knowing what's going on. I've had three if not four – I don't quite remember – business members from my riding in the last week phone me and ask me, "When are we going to get a budget? We need to know what's happening, where we're going, what we can count on, what we can't count on," and this ongoing uncertainty continues to create the loss of confidence, the loss of investment, and ultimately the loss of jobs in our province because the businesses in my riding are not going ahead with many of their plans when they don't know what the regulatory regime and the processes and all the implications are going to be for them.

So there are profound effects that do affect the people in this province and their jobs and their livelihoods, and I just would plead with the government: if not this year then next year let's try and have it on time. The fact that there are no details – as a representative of my constituents I find it extremely hard to assure them that, yes, I voted for effective and well-managed spending. Therefore, I can't vote for this. I just can't do that and then go to my constituents and say: yes, I supported that. There is just too much left unexplained, unclear, and I would appreciate it – and the hon. Minister of Finance has made a bit of an effort at that, but even in more detail I would be interested to know: what are the process issues that prevent the preparation of an on-time budget, especially after almost a year knowing that this is coming? When did the budget process begin? It takes time and human resources and money to crunch the numbers and create an interim budget. Wouldn't it be more effective just to apply that time and money and resources to creating the actual budget and having it on time?

I think, Mr. Speaker, which is why I'm going to cut this short right now, that in a way we're wasting our time. We're wasting resources. We should stop doing stopgap budgets, and we should just do the real thing.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane. A question under 29(2)(a). Please proceed.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A question to the hon. member who just spoke there. He spoke about having uncertainty, the process being unclear about when the budget was going to be released. I know the Finance minister has been extraordinarily clear about when that process will happen, and he said April 14. I'm not certain why the member feels that there's some uncertainty, so I wonder if he might be able to address that.

He also talked a little bit about ambiguity, and he was wondering what the process is for the issue that caused the budget to, in his words, be delayed. I'd like to ask the member what the issue is from the Official Opposition, what the process problem is that they can't come up with a plan to show Albertans what a potential alternative is. We've been asking them to propose alternatives. They've even recognized that the role of an Official Opposition . . . [interjections]

11:30

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Westhead: The members opposite have talked about the fact that the role of an Official Opposition is to propose solutions and alternatives, and frankly, Mr. Speaker, we haven't really seen any of that.

I know that the hon. House leader a few days ago tabled what he termed a flimsy document from the Official Opposition's campaign platform, that showed that they were going to cut over \$9 billion in infrastructure spending. You know, these are the kinds of things that we're seeing from the opposition. It doesn't really present Albertans with an alternative. Clearly, on our side we're the ones that have the plan, and they don't. So I wonder if the member can go on and explain why it's taken them so long and they haven't even produced an alternative.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane to respond.

Mr. Cooper: Yeah, under 29(2)(a), questions and comments, I'm more than happy to continue adding some comments through you to the member with respect to – perhaps if there's time remaining, he can share some of his thoughts.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that when it comes to delaying the budget: in the year 2000, February 24; in 2001, April 24, an election year. Basically, this is the fourth-latest budget since the year 2000, so when it comes to delaying the budget, this current government is an expert. They passed a budget in December, and now they're going to pass a budget in May-ish. That's exactly what we've seen from the government.

With respect to the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka and some of his concerns, through you to him and around the House, I think it's critically important. When we look at a number of the things that the opposition has done, whether it's an actual jobs plan, that was released today, that is full and robust, 12 points, these are the types of solutions that we're happy to provide. The other thing I might add is that in all of the years . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I've seen the clock tick by, and I just was reading 29(2)(a) a little. It does say in closing, "to allow . . . each Member's questions and comments."

I'm wondering if Banff-Cochrane could address both questions or points raised. [interjections] The question was asked over here, as I understand it, and I was simply allowing for that member to answer, and there have been additional ones.

Proceed.

Mr. Cooper: Yes. I think that the definition of “briefly” included in 29(2)(a) presents a bit of a challenge. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I from time to time rise in this House, and brief to me is about 15 minutes, and here we have five minutes of questions and comments. I would like to be able to provide my comments in addition to the comments from the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, but in a spirit of co-operation, good sir, I will finish . . . [A timer sounded]

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to this matter? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m proud to rise today to support this bill, that the Finance minister and his team have worked so hard to put together. It’s something that is not unusual in the course of business in the parliamentary system, to have these types of interim supply bills come before the House. As I said, it’s consistent with previous interim supply bills, that this House sees on a yearly basis. It’s not unusual whatsoever, and it seems as though the opposition is making some inferences that the interim supply bill is out of the ordinary, in their opinion.

On the other hand, this legislation simply provides the spending authority to continue government operations beyond March 31, until Budget 2016 estimates are debated and approved. I’m sure, Mr. Speaker, that once the budget is tabled by the Minister of Finance on April 14, in the days and weeks that will follow the budget, the opposition shall take plenty of time to fully debate the main estimates when they come before the House.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the interim supply estimates speak for themselves. I’d just like to reiterate that we are being asked to allocate \$29.6 million for the Legislative Assembly, \$7.2 billion in expense funding, \$864 million in capital investment funding, \$164 million in financial transactions funding for the government, and \$363 million for the transfer from the lottery fund to the general revenue fund. In reality, Mr. Speaker, these amounts that I’ve just read will keep our teachers in the classrooms and will keep nurses in our hospitals, unlike the opposition, who would rather see those people let go.

These monies will continue to fund the government services that Albertans rely on as we all deal with the unprecedented decline in oil prices and its impact on government revenue and all Albertans. I ask everyone to support this interim supply bill until we have the opportunity to debate the full budget in just under one month’s time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think I may have been confused on the last point. I used the phrase “Banff-Cochrane.” I see that the Government House Leader has left. It was my intention to speak to the question there, but we have moved past that.

Now, is there 29(2)(a) for the Member for Banff-Cochrane?

Seeing and hearing none, the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to close debate. I don’t believe there are any other members.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. Just with regard to the interim supply estimates before us, you know, there were a number of questions with regard to: what will these additional monies for the two months actually do? What will they achieve? I would just point people back to the business plans and targets that were submitted to this House for Budget 2015 on October 27. If you follow those business plans for each of the ministries through, you’ll see that they identify what the minister and ministries have undertaken to do with the monies available, and that’s not changed, Mr. Speaker. They still have to achieve those targets that they laid out to achieve.

The other things that were brought up that needed some clarification, I think, were with respect to – now, it was on the previous supplementary supply estimates. But, you know, many of the ministers have found in-year savings, and we will be talking about those when we bring forward the full review of Budget 2015. We’ll show how they have done yeoman’s work, in my estimation, in reining in spending.

I just wanted to correct one thing that I heard during some of the debate. We will be bringing in expense spending that will be lower than population plus inflation. Somebody over on that side said that it was not, and that’s not accurate. We are ensuring that we follow through with the goals and objectives set out in the targets. We have reined in spending – and you can look at the Q3 update for some of those – in a situation where revenue has fallen dramatically. So we have done, we believe, good work on this side.

11:40

We have brought forward the interim supply estimates. As my colleague behind me says, this is a fairly regular action to continue the expenditures on important programs and services and to work with our partners all across this province while we look at the budget, take the time to get it right, bring it in, and have a fulsome debate with each other on all of that in the next few weeks.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance has moved second reading of Bill 2, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2016.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:41 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Goehring	Nielsen
Babcock	Hinkley	Payne
Bilous	Hoffman	Phillips
Carlier	Horne	Renaud
Carson	Jabbour	Rosendahl
Ceci	Kazim	Schmidt
Connolly	Kleinstauber	Schreiner
Dach	Littlewood	Shepherd
Dang	Loyola	Sigurdson
Drever	Malkinson	Sucha
Eggen	McKitrick	Turner
Feehan	McPherson	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Miller	Woollard
Ganley	Miranda	

Against the motion:

Aheer	Fraser	Schneider
Anderson, W.	Gotfried	Smith
Clark	Hanson	Strankman
Cooper	Loewen	Swann
Cyr	Orr	van Dijken
Drysdale	Pitt	Yao

Totals: For – 41 Against – 18

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a second time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to everyone in this House for doing good work this morning. I move to adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:59 a.m.]

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