



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, March 17, 2016

Day 7

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

9 a.m.

Thursday, March 17, 2016

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

I'd like to begin with a traditional Irish prayer.

May the road rise up to meet you.

May the wind be always at your back.

May the sun shine warm upon your face;

and rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again,

may God hold you in the hollow of His hand.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 2

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2016

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Again, it's my privilege to rise today and move third reading of Bill 2, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2016.

When passed, these interim supply estimates will authorize approximate spending of \$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.

These interim supply estimates provide funding authorization that will allow the normal business of the province to continue until the full 2016-17 estimates are approved before the end of May. These estimates also follow through on specific commitments this government has made to the people of Alberta.

Madam Speaker, once again I would like to emphasize that the estimates we are debating today will be included and fully debated again when the main budget documents are tabled in under a month.

Madam Speaker, I should also add that this bill is consistent with previous interim supply bills that have come before this Legislature time and again. As members know well from the discussion yesterday, interim supply bills are commonplace in Alberta. Over the past 15 years this Legislature has debated and passed interim supply bills in 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005 – Alberta's centennial – 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015.

In summary, Madam Speaker, approval of this bill pending the release and approval of the budget will allow the Chamber the time it needs to review and debate those plans in detail. Thank you.

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Once again I rise to speak against Bill 2, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2016. It may come as a great surprise to the members opposite, but the Wildrose Official Opposition cannot support this bill. As has already been said, this is an \$8.7 billion blank cheque for a government to do whatever it wants with for the next two months. The bill, unlike the budget that will be out in a month, contains no specific spending details on programs or capital.

Now, this is not to say that a future Wildrose government would never introduce an interim or supplementary supply, but this is to say that we would attach a budget impact statement. We would ensure in the event of interim or supplementary supply that the members of this Legislature, elected to represent all Albertans and protect taxpayers, would have the information in front of them to know what the impact will be on total expenditures for both operations and capital and to know what the impact will be on total expenditures and the deficit. This is basic information that members of this House should have in front of them before we responsibly vote on a piece of legislation empowering the government to spend another \$8.7 billion.

We don't know how much of this will be borrowed, debt taken on, and if that debt is for capital, operating, or both. We don't know how much is borrowed. I suspect that the entire amount is borrowed, considering the deficit we are expected to run this year. Alberta needs to get our spending under control. Spending has been out of control for a decade, Madam Speaker. The current government can blame the previous government as much as it likes – and there is lots of blame to go around – but it is their problem to fix now.

The problem is not revenue, because they'll never have enough revenue to satisfy their spending hunger, Madam Speaker. They will never have enough revenue to meet the NDP's ideological goals for the expanded role of government. We have had a spending problem in this province for a decade. We spend more than any other large province in this country. We spend \$8 billion a year more on operations alone than British Columbia, a province significantly larger than us, and British Columbia is no right-wing, neoconservative, feudal kingdom with no government. British Columbia has a well-functioning, rather large government, but somehow they manage to spend \$8 billion a year less than Alberta with an even larger population. This is a well-entrenched problem that we must get a grip on.

We heard just this week at the Public Accounts Committee, representing all members of this House, how government is losing money on its cash management. Hundreds of bank accounts all over the government are costing taxpayers money for no good reason whatsoever. Bureaucrats are forced to endure hundreds of hours of reconciliation using Excel spreadsheets in multiple departments. Can we imagine having separate bank accounts for travel, a separate bank account for telecommunications? We wouldn't pay our bills at home like this. I don't have a separate bank account for every single activity I engage in, but for some reason our government does, and they're using Excel spreadsheets to keep track of it. It's absolute madness, and it's costing taxpayers in this province hundreds of millions of dollars a year. It is money that we may as well put on a bonfire and light up. Meanwhile their colleagues in Service Alberta have a superautomated system that saves money, time, and manpower, an example to be followed.

Every time we run a deficit in this province – and we're going to be going on nine deficits in a row now, Madam Speaker – and take on more debt, we are taking money away from teachers, nurses, and doctors that could be hired to work. We are taking money away from critical infrastructure projects: roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, cancer centres. This might mean we spend more money right upfront, but in the long term we will spend less money on the critical infrastructure and programs in this province as debt interest payments begin to crowd out regular program and capital spending. Deficits and debt prevent schools and hospitals from being built, for no good reason. We will be paying billions of dollars a year in interest payments, and there will be no reason for it.

This is not akin to a mortgage, Madam Speaker. Most members in this House probably have a mortgage. I have a mortgage. A

mortgage is a reasonable financial program for you to take on debt to purchase an asset which can be sold at another time. You pay down the principal, and hopefully before you retire, you own your house at some point. On a mortgage we pay the principal. It is honest debt. We are obtaining an asset which can be sold.

This is not akin to the debt our government has taken on over the last decade. This is akin to buying yachts and airplanes for the people who loaned you the money. We have not paid a penny of principal on our debt since Alberta began going back into debt. We have been merely refinancing the loans. We take out more debt every year. This is akin to us not taking out a mortgage but taking out a new car loan every single year without paying any interest on it. The debt only gets bigger whereas our mortgages get smaller, and the asset we're obtaining at the end we'd generally expect to be able to sell at a reasonable price.

9:10

The vast majority of government assets that we purchase cannot be resold on the market at a reasonable market value compared to what we paid to build or purchase them. If we build a fire station, the fire station is critical and important, but I don't know many people in Strathmore who are interested in buying a fire station, Madam Speaker. Most government assets cannot be sold like a house or even a car, which would depreciate. Schools are important, but I don't know many people interested in buying a school. They might want the property to redevelop for some reason, but we are not going to be able to sell these assets anywhere close to the cost it took us to purchase the land and build it.

Comparing our deficit financing to mortgages is dishonest, and now we've gone beyond dishonest capital debt to dishonest operational debt. We are now borrowing on the credit card to pay for the groceries in this province, something we have not done since the early 1990s. In fact, our debt before the next provincial election, using the very rosy revenue projections in the budget, which they won't even come close to meeting – based on those rosy revenue projections, our debt before the next provincial election will be more than twice as large as the next-highest peak of our debt in 1992, our next-highest deficit. Our debt will be more than twice as large, Madam Speaker, and for no good reason whatsoever. They might tout the temporary benefits of all the money we can spend on different things, many of which are very positive right now, but in the long term we will spend less on programs and we will spend less on capital.

Now, to some members of the Assembly who style themselves progressive, debt is hope. No, Madam Speaker, debt is not hope. Debt is a ball and chain, and it is a burden that we place on future generations. It is an unethical thing for us to do to vote today to bind future generations with the taxes of tomorrow for the spending of today. But this is what we can expect from an ideological government that cannot be trusted to responsibly manage the finances of this province or to create the right economic conditions for growth and jobs.

I would hope that this government reads the Wildrose jobs action plan and implements the ideas that will get Albertans working again. I trust that my colleagues will vote against Bill 2 and stand up against unexamined, carte blanche spending bills like this. We wonder how we got here, where so many self-described progressives in this House consider debt to be hope. Well, we have a lot of hope right now, Madam Speaker. We're going to have about \$50 billion of hope before the next election.

How is it, though, that so many people who hold views so close to members of the government can even call themselves a conservative by any measure? Well, there's a bit of history in it. In 1942 the Conservative Party of Canada elected a man named John

Bracken, the leader of the Progressive Party of Manitoba, as their leader. Mr. Bracken had a condition for the leadership, and that was that the party had to change its name to Progressive Conservative. Given that party delegates had adopted some left-wing policies, this sounded reasonable at the time. Progressive Party members were generally disenchanted former Liberals with a populist flair. They supported things like free trade, marginal income taxes, and prohibition on alcohol. There was no party merger, just a party name change. In Alberta the local party followed suit with a change of name in 1943.

Fast-forward to 1991, when federal Conservatives were fighting in the PC-Reform battle. The PC Party of Alberta divorced itself from their federal cousins to distance itself from the federal civil war. Ken Kowalski said at the time: individuals in the province should be able to participate at a provincial level of politics that they want, and they should be able to participate in federal politics with the party they want. This sounds like comments to reconcile two factions on the surface, but in fact it was a welcome mat to federal disenchanted Liberals to join the PC Party of the day.

Who were some of those Liberals? Stan Woloshyn, Bridget Pastoor, and Gene Zwozdesky crossed the floor from the Liberals to join the PC caucus and cabinet. PC cabinet ministers Thomas Lukaszuk and Dennis Anderson openly supported federal Liberals like Anne McLellan and continue to do so today. What became clear is that the PC Party of Alberta was no longer a place for conservatives like myself and my Wildrose colleagues. It was no longer a conservative party any more.

An Hon. Member: Relevance?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam Speaker, the relevance is to the conversation around debt and how we got here today.

"I'm a Progressive Conservative," party members like the Member for Calgary-North West would say when they endorse federal Liberals in Calgary to help them defeat federal Conservatives, who will actually stand up for Alberta. In fact, it's happening today as we speak in Calgary-Greenway. All this means is: I'm a PC, but I'm no Conservative. Now, I've got some federal Liberal friends like Kent Hehr who are great people, but I would never think of trying to get the guy elected. There is nothing wrong with being a Liberal, but there is something definitely wrong with being a Liberal and running as a so-called Conservative just to get elected in Alberta. Political realignment is taking place right now in our province, Madam Speaker.

**Point of Order
Relevance**

Dr. Starke: Madam Speaker, point of order. Leaving completely aside whether this is even relevant to the debate – and I would suggest that the relevance is a stretch, shall we say – citing Standing Order 23(h), the hon. member has just made allegations against another member, specifically the Member for Calgary-North West. While I can understand a certain level of sensitivity this day, I would suggest that perhaps the hon. member would do well to confine his comments today to the matter at hand. Although this little trip down memory lane is certainly instructive and interesting to all of us, I would suggest that in terms of the consideration of Bill 2 this particular narrative that he has entered into, including the criticism of a member of this Legislature, is not in order and should be ruled out of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, you want to comment on the point of order?

Mr. Hanson: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I really didn't hear any severe allegations against the member that would constitute a point of order in this case. As for the matter of relevance, I believe we're only 10 minutes into the member's speech, and I'm sure that the relevance will be shown toward the end of it. I believe he's right, that this is showing a pattern of debt and, as was delivered by the Finance minister over the years, the delays in delivery of a budget. That doesn't justify this government or any government using that as an excuse to prolong or delay a budget, especially when a lot of the municipalities at this time of year are counting on those funds to deliver their own budgets. So on those grounds I don't believe that this constitutes a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know that the House leader for the third party does not enjoy trips down memory lane when we're talking about the record of the previous government. This is entirely relevant. We need to know how we got here if we're going to fix the problem. We have had a centre-left government in this province for the last three Premiers. We have had a government that has increased spending practically every year. We've had a government that tried to increase taxes on Albertans, and it's very relevant to how we got here. It's very relevant to the process of interim supply and interim budget measures, supplementary budget measures. It is entirely relevant to how we got here. We're discussing the process by which Alberta got to its current financial state.

9:20

Madam Speaker, it's a bit rich for a member of the third party to say that we are not allowed to point out an open statement and position held by the Member for Calgary-North West when the Member for Calgary-North West went on a vicious tirade against members of the Official Opposition just the other day. Members like to give it, but they don't like to take it.

The Deputy Speaker: Do any others wish to speak to the point of order? The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: For the sake of efficiency I will keep my comments very short. The hon. member is referring to governments of other jurisdictions. He's referring to governments of previous generations of other parties, not this one here and now. We're not here to grill them; we're here to take a look at Bill 2. If all of us narrow the focus on Bill 2, not things like by-elections that are occurring right now, as an example, because, let's face it, that's what this is about, then we would all be serving Albertans better. Let's keep the focus on Bill 2. Let's get on with the show.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Madam Speaker, I think members of the third party have made a good argument around the point of order. I wanted to stress that, you know, a member from the opposition is not debating the matter in question, and the arguments that they are making saying that he is flimsy at best, and I would very much like to move on with the business of the day.

The Deputy Speaker: Any further comments on the point of order?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to rule. We actually have two matters here. I would say that we don't have a point of order; however, I would caution the member that you need to stay on topic. You're straying into other areas that really are not relevant to the bill. You'll want to stay on the bill.

The other matter: we do have a long-standing tradition in this House that we don't make comments about another member who is not present to defend themselves. So keep that in mind as well.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would then ask that you would echo those very same comments to the member noted here regarding her comments towards members of this Legislature when we are not here.

Debate Continued

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam Speaker, it's been a long road to where we are today. Many Albertans remember proudly when Ralph Klein, one of the greatest Premiers this province has ever had, stood on the steps of the McDougall Centre and held a paid-in-full sign over his head. How proud Albertans were to be the only debt-free jurisdiction in Canada, a distinction which we held until a party that many of us were either members of or held a lot of affinity for went off the rails.

First, we began by drawing down the sustainability fund, which hit over \$17 billion in circa 2007. It was a massive fund designed for a rainy day, but we drew it down. We were promised that it would be temporary, it would not be permanent, and we would certainly never actually have to take on debt to finance the government. But the sustainability fund was drawn down year after year after year, and year after year Conservatives had to find a new voice in which to place their trust.

We are where we are today. We now have a debt that exceeds \$15 billion. The sustainability fund has virtually run out. Our debt will exceed \$50 billion, and we have no plan to get back even to a balance, let alone to pay off the debt. Madam Speaker, what we're dealing with today, an \$8.7 billion interim supply bill, is no trifling matter, as the members opposite would have us believe. We are staring down a financial crisis in this province. We are running the largest deficit in our history. We soon will have the largest debt in our history, and we have no plan whatsoever to even turn in the right direction. Our deficit is getting larger, not smaller.

Right now we have already run eight deficits in this province consecutively. We are staring down a ninth, and we will almost certainly run a 12th unless oil hits \$150 a barrel. That is no plan. In fact, it's been the plan of the government for about the last eight years to wait for the price of oil to continually go up and up and up to bail out the government. Well, guess what, Madam Speaker? It's not going to happen. A government that is responsible with the money that the people have entrusted to them in their tax dollars and their royalties would have a serious plan to get back to balance. We need to do it.

Madam Speaker, you will see from the Official Opposition a plan to reduce our expenditures in a realistic and timely manner to get back to balance in short order. We need to reasonably reduce our expenditures, focus on core, important front-line services. Things like the government's pitiful cash management program, corporate welfare schemes that are getting bigger, not smaller, overspending on the bureaucracy like appointing an AUPE union hack to negotiate with AUPE: those things will not bring down expenditures. The Wildrose Official Opposition will present a realistic plan to reduce our expenditures. We will produce a realistic plan to get us back on track and rebuild the Alberta advantage, that members of the conservative Wildrose Official Opposition believe we must rebuild.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to rise and to speak to Bill 2, the interim supply bill, on third reading. Yesterday the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort gave this Assembly an interesting lesson on dates the interim supply had been used in the past, and he did this morning as well. The minister stated, "For the record . . . if you look at the past 15 years, this Legislature has debated interim supply acts in 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015." While we all appreciate this history lesson, I would like to take this opportunity to remind the government that it came into power saying that they would do things differently, and rattling off these numbers to make the case for unbudgeted spending does not look like things are being done differently. It looks a lot to me like this government wants to use interim supply just as much if not more than the previous government.

In fact, financially I don't see a lot of difference between this government and the last one. We still have the same reckless spending and mismanagement, the same empty promises. Now, to be fair, I do suppose they are differentiating themselves by spending the majority of the time that they're governing using interim supply rather than budgets. I guess that's different.

Madam Speaker, I think this Assembly can tell that I'm against passing this interim supply bill, and I'll give you a few reasons why. I've never made it a position of mine to write cheques without knowing who the cheque is going to and for what purpose. When I used to broker deals in real estate, I was required to have a complete accounting of all the monies. I had to account for the asking price. In this case, I suppose, we do have that, and it's a whopping \$8.7 billion. Possession date or a date of transfer: well, I guess we know when they want this money for, which happens to be April 1. We have a couple of comparisons that are equal to that part of the contract, so I'll allow the government credit for that, too. It has told us how long they're asking for this money for, which happens to be one-sixth of the year, or two months.

9:30

How about the parties to the contract? Yeah, I'd say we're fine with that, too. This government requests permission to spend taxpayers' dollars, so the parties of the contract are going to be the government and the people of Alberta. What concerns me is that this difference from a normal contract is the bill's total lack of details to point out what Albertans will get in exchange for that \$8.7 billion. You know, I would like to ask this government: what are Albertans specifically getting for this deal? Your interim supply bill has left this area blank.

Imagine if I tried to sell a house and I told the buyer what street it was on but not the house number: "Well, you know, ladies and gentlemen, after you sign here, we'll tell you which house you bought." I don't think that's a good way to do a contract. I think that would get me into trouble. That important part that talks about what's included, you know, the chattels – a fridge, a stove, a washer, a dryer, anything that would go as part of the deal: all those specifics, those little details are important parts of the contract as well. Not only would my buyers tell me to take a hike if I tried to do that, but if by some miracle I did manage to make that sale but my books were later audited, there'd be heavy fines, and I'd likely be out of a job or perhaps serving jail time for that. Proper accounting is absolutely super important when we're talking about other people's money, and in this case Albertans' money is other people's money. We are accounting for \$8.7 billion, and we're asked to be done with that in a very short order of time and with very little detail.

But this is government, and as you can surmise from the Member for Calgary-Fort's laundry list of interim supply years, this is just

the way it's done. They want to carry on the PC legacy of having interim supply. In fact, we've already seen two. So this government is asking for \$8.7 billion – that's a staggering amount of dollars – to cover one-sixth of the year, and it's given us no details about how this money will be spent and what the results will be from it.

I believe that my constituents would share my concerns and would tell me not to hand out money willy-nilly. I've heard it before, and I would expect them to say: make sure that whatever money you're spending is being spent in the best interests of Albertans. You know, they elected me to stand up in defence of their hard-earned tax dollars, and they expect me to fight for the right to see that those dollars are not going to fund, say, NDP pet projects. Frankly, we don't know if it's going to pet projects, if it's going specifically to that or bad ideological policies or, as is really the case now, toward unknown, unbudgeted projects. That's what we're getting. We don't know what projects are budgeted for.

We don't want to have debt, as the Member for Strathmore-Brooks was talking about. Debt is a problem. It takes away the government's ability to run programs, extra programs. I know this government would love to have those extra programs, but the more that we're in debt, the fewer options we have for running other programs that are out there, programs that would be near and dear to your hearts. There are programs here that are near and dear to my heart, but every time we take on more debt, we have to finance that debt, and we have to pay that debt back. Every time we take on more debt, we shrink our ability to have extra programs. That, frankly, scares me.

You know, throughout my life I've tried to save money. Every month I tried to save a little bit more money and set money aside so that when the inevitable day comes when you want to retire, you have that extra money; you don't have to worry about it. In fact, I was able to go into a semiretired state about four years ago because I saved a little bit more money each month.

In this case, the government of Alberta has the same case in point. What they were doing, the previous PC government – and it was instituted by Lougheed, the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. If we had extra money, we would set it aside in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. Ralph Klein, in fact, had the debt paid in full in 2004, and in 2004 we were able to save money in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund.

It's very necessary to have our debt looked after so we can be able to have programs that Albertans want and need and have it in a sustainable, predictable fashion that is able to carry on from year to year. Madam Speaker, I would like to know what, if any, initiatives the government is putting in place to curtail spending. Or is this just going to be another spending spree, with no program parameters, no deliverables? In Advanced Education, the portfolio that I have, I'd like to know what exactly is being funded. Does any of this interim supply go towards operating grants? Does any of this funding go to universities to support their operating expenses?

I think that it was irresponsible to not be here in February, frankly, six weeks ago, to debate this budget, to go through estimates and generally get on with running this province. Frankly, this budget affects Albertans, all Albertans. Again, if you have debt, it's going to affect the programs that we are able to fund. Not having a budget done in a timely manner has put many of our municipalities behind on their infrastructure projects. Towns like Provost, who need to have their water and their sewer upgraded, are now going to be at least two months behind on their project because things just don't happen all at once. The town still needs to follow proper procedures to work and to complete their project.

Let's not forget that this is Canada. We have a small window of time during which we can count on good weather. Typically, you know, it can be June before the frost is out of the ground properly,

and then around June we can see the rains come. That is around the time that we get the majority of our rain in this province, so that puts us back a little bit more on the time for projects for towns like Provost that need to get into the ground, dig up the soil to be able to do this. If we had been here in February – the government knows full well that it's part of our orders, that this is when we should be looking at it – we wouldn't be two months behind on the budget negotiations and needing interim supply. But now we are needing interim supply because we weren't here in February debating this budget.

My riding is in central Alberta. You know, winter stays a bit longer there and comes a bit earlier than it does for our southern Alberta counterparts. This two-month delay will make a difference. Believe me. How can Albertans trust this government when it delays such important legislation as a budget for so long and then withholds information on how the money they need for interim supply will be spent? For instance, can the government give this Assembly any details about funding for capital projects for postsecondary institutions? Will this interim supply cover any of these projects? If it doesn't, then the consequence will be that the government will put capital projects, which postsecondary institutions desperately need, two months behind. Just like my analogy with Provost, we have a short window of opportunity to work in the ground to be able to do these projects. And you pay more to have projects done in the winter because there's just that extra cost to do work, to heat concrete, for example, for people to work outside. They can't physically work outside when it's 30, 40 below for as long as they could if they were working in the spring, summer, or fall, when the weather is predictably somewhere between 10 and, say, 25 degrees Celsius.

9:40

This government says that it needs to make room for more students in the province as a result of this economic downturn, which is an excellent point, but their actions have made it increasingly difficult to have more spaces open as we will now be two months behind in the construction of these schools. Postsecondary institutions need specific funding, and they need predictable funding, so even if there are token dollars for these projects here, these institutions can't know that because the details just, frankly, aren't in interim supply. At the end of the day, bringing in a late budget is not a stable, predictable approach to financing that these institutions need. They need predictable, stable financing.

So where are the details? If the government gives us simply no information . . . [Mr. Taylor's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I would just like to ask the Member for Battle River-Wainwright – we heard very clearly at the AAMDC meetings over the previous couple of days how they'll be affected by the delays in this budget. Can you just expand? You talked about Provost and how delays in the budget would affect their budget and their infrastructure projects. I was just wondering if you could expand a little bit more on how the delays in the delivery of this budget will affect the urban and rural municipalities in your area. Specifically, how will they be able to plan ahead, get their projects off the ground, get the bids out in time to take advantage of our very, very short season?

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you for that question. You know, the people from areas like Provost and throughout my riding have all come to me. They were very concerned about this budget. They

were concerned about, frankly, the last budget, that was delivered in the latter part of November. Now they are saying to me: when is this budget going to be coming down? At the time I had no answer for them. I can tell them now with reasonable certainty when this budget will be delivered and debated. For them, they need to have that money. They need to make sure of what they're operating with. They have so many different parameters in their town to have things done. They have projects that are going on and that go on every year. Again, they need the monies, and they need to make sure that there's an accounting for that money. They need to know how much they're getting and when it's going to be there for them.

Frankly, they are concerned. They keep asking me: when is this going to happen? And time and time again I have to say that I'm not sure because we're not the government, so we don't dictate the time that the budget gets to be brought down. The government, as it stands, has that option to be able to say when the budget gets to be brought down. It seems to me like we've run with interim supply, not the budget, for the majority of this past year, since the election, and that has made it very difficult for all the towns within my riding to be able to operate. I implore them to get their budgets in on time so we can debate them in a timely manner and help out all of the towns in my riding. They want a sustainable, predictable approach to finance in all of these towns.

Thank you for that question.

The Deputy Speaker: Any others under 29(2)(a)? Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I enjoyed the presentation by the member. One question I have – and I heard him elaborate a little on it, and I'm hoping he could expand a little bit – is on the difference in how much we spend compared to the province to the west of us, which is considerably bigger and spends about \$8 billion less.

The second thing, if the member could expand on, is what his constituents feel about the budgeting practices of the government compared to what they need to do within their own households. I know I hear from my constituents all the time a lot of frustration about the inefficiency that we see within the government of Alberta when it comes to budgeting. You know, I know in my household and in the businesses that are in my riding that if we followed those practices, we would be out of business. So I'd like to hear from the member a little bit more on that.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The first question was: how much more do we spend here in Alberta than the province to the west of us, referring to the province of British Columbia? Frankly, we spend \$2,000 more per person than the province of B.C. does. That province is able to get this money and be able to do it for that much less than we do, and if they can do it for that much money, why can't we? Why can't we find efficiencies in this government in our interim supply budgets, in the budget itself to be able to operate at \$2,000 less?

The Deputy Speaker: Next on my list is the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'll echo my comments from second reading and ask the question: why are we here? Why are we here debating interim supply? The Member for Battle River-Wainwright, I think, has covered a lot of the same question that I have, which is: just because it was done in the past, it doesn't mean it should be done now. In fact, I would have thought

that with a new government we would have the opportunity for a breath of fresh air, for a new approach, for a different way of doing things. I think that's what Albertans at least thought they were voting for on May 5, but apparently not. And it's not just a simple technical matter. As I asked the other day in the House, I wonder why it is that we're here.

There is a by-election going on, and there is, I suppose, a natural political instinct to try to defer what's likely to be not a good-news budget beyond that by-election. I understand that, and I can actually appreciate why this government would want to wait until after the federal budget to propose their budget . . .

Mr. Rodney: Will you have a candidate in the by-election?

Mr. Clark: Yeah, it's a fair question, a fair question. You just wait. You just wait. [interjections] That's right. It's all part of a bigger plan. Trust me.

. . . to find out exactly what the federal budget is going to offer to Alberta, and I sincerely hope it is a substantial amount of money, far beyond what our population is. But I really worry that the budget is coming down in the middle of April, on April 14, and not in the very first week of April, when we're back after this upcoming two-week break. When I asked myself why that is, I discovered, of course, that the federal NDP convention is the weekend of April 8, 9, and 10 here in Edmonton. And that's curious, Madam Speaker, that the party across the way here would defer the important business of this House, would delay letting Albertans know exactly how they're going to address the incredible challenges facing our province, for simple political reasons. It should always be province above party and not the other way around.

9:50

When I look at the interim supply bill itself, I see the continuation of an upward trend in spending that started in Budget 2015 and, without question, started in previous budgets as well. But we see our revenues falling off a cliff. Our revenues have gone down substantially. While the Finance minister may have mused yesterday at AAMD and C that certain new revenue streams may be an opportunity for the province, even then I don't think that Albertans will be able to smoke their way to prosperity.

What I want to see out of this government and what I want to see out of this next budget is more than just simple spending restraint. I want to see more than just nibbling around the edges. I want to see a government committed to innovation in the public service, not to massive salary cuts, not to massive service cuts, not to uncreative ways that these budget challenges have been handled in the past. What I want to see is a government committed to true innovation in the public service. I want to see the entrepreneurial spirit that exists in our province to exist in our public service and in our public services.

I want to see our health care system be truly innovative in its service delivery, truly focused on patients and end-users and not focused on empire building, on bureaucracy, on clipboards and checklists. I want to see it focused on people. I want to see a system that listens to those on the front lines. It's not just about the next incremental dollar in the system; it's about delivering proper health outcomes to Albertans. In education, the same thing. In the public service, the same thing. We have that opportunity because that's who we are as Albertans. We have the opportunity to build an entrepreneurial culture, but I see absolutely no effort or interest or instinct from this government to do that. That results in the continuation of an upward trend in costs even at a time when we are facing significant – significant – pressures on the revenue side.

What living within our means means is that we have to be realistic about the cost of delivering services and we have to be

realistic about our revenue and our ability to actually carry that cost. We've heard that the province of British Columbia, to our west, has substantially lower costs and a substantially higher population. This government needs to be truthful with Albertans to either reduce the cost of providing services to Albertans, to reduce the level of service it provides to Albertans, or to increase the revenues to pay for the services provided to Albertans.

None of those things is happening in this budget, in interim supply. Maybe it's going to happen in the budget. We don't know – we have to wait another month to find out – but none of the indications so far are positive. I worry that this government is going to simply drop back and punt for another year, borrow tremendous amounts of money with no real plan to get Alberta back to balance, and it's not easy. It's not easy, and I don't deny that it's not easy because it isn't.

We've put out a plan. The Alberta Party caucus, mighty MLA of one so far, has put out a plan, and we'll put out another one. I'll tell you here and now that we will put out another detailed shadow budget to tell Albertans exactly how we would address the challenges facing our province. I challenge again each of my opposition colleagues to do the same thing, to tell Albertans in precise detail how exactly you would make the tough choices required to get Alberta back to balance without impacting our entrepreneurial spirit, without unduly impacting the business community or Albertans as individuals.

These are very, very challenging times that we face in this province. What I want is a public service that has a clear strategic plan. I want to see a clear strategic plan from this government. In Bill 2 I don't see a plan. That's what interim supply is, just simply a continuation of the line that we had before. I want to see priorities from this government attached to that plan, real priorities, and I want to see those priorities flow down to each and every department.

I want to see this government, the front bench in particular, to rethink how the public service operates, to think creatively about that, to challenge some of the things that you're being told, to make personnel changes where required, and to truly innovate, to transform the culture of Alberta's public service to better fit who we are as Albertans; and that is, builders and innovators and doers. We do more with less in this province, at least we do in the private sector, at least we do in the not-for-profit sector in this province.

The only place that I don't see an effort to do more with less is the provincial government, and that, my friends, is on you. In this interim supply bill I see exactly the continuation of that model. I see a government with its head buried in the sand, and I see a continued spiral of debt with absolutely no plan to get out of it.

With that, my friends, I will cede the remaining time and indicate that I simply cannot support the interim supply bill. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, I'll call on the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak. I consider it a privilege to be able to participate in this debate. Of course, funding the government and all of the services that we provide in care for people is an extremely important issue, something that we never need to lose sight of. But this really is a very big request with very little detail, and that really is, I guess, the thing that challenges us.

We have to be able to go back to our ridings and say to people: "Yes, we voted for 8 point whatever billion dollars, almost \$9 billion, worth of spending by the government. But, well, sorry; we really don't know quite where it's all going, and we definitely don't know where it's going to come from." That's the one question we

get all too often: where are they getting that money from? It makes it extremely difficult for us to vote with confidence that we can actually answer those questions. That, quite frankly, is a very clear part of the reason why we will find it extremely difficult and will not vote in support of the principle of interim supply, not necessarily the fact that the government needs money to operate. We just question how it's being handled, and the fact that there aren't enough answers involved. As I said, it's an extremely large amount.

I've had the opportunity in the past, actually, to do a little bit of work in the area of credit and credit counselling with people and their family spending. One of the challenges in our modern society is the fact that as the cashless society comes upon us, there's a principle in which the awareness of spending becomes more and more difficult for people to realize. You know, it's credit cards, and now you don't even have to hardly use your credit card anymore. There are Flash payments. It goes out so quickly and so easily that people don't have a realization of how much money they actually are spending. As a result, we're seeing increases in the need for nonprofit credit agencies and debt assistance agencies and all those kinds of things. Quite frankly, I think that principle is a little bit at work here in our government.

First of all, this isn't our own money, which always, with all trusteeship, seems to make it a little bit less urgent for us to be careful with it. Secondly, because it's just numbers on a page that somebody else planned and it goes somewhere else and we never see it, we never feel it, we never touch it, we don't have a sense of how much money we're actually talking about here even for the interim supply.

I tried to do a little bit of research on how much \$8.7 billion in interim supply actually looks like. It's quite a staggering realization, actually. I'd encourage members to google it. So \$8.7 billion – well, make it simple: start with \$1 billion, and visualize the equivalent of 10 fork-load pallets neatly, tightly stacked four feet high, and they are approximately four feet each side, not quite, usually 42 inches on a pallet. We're talking about 10 pallets stacked four feet high with \$100 bills. There are 16 desks across that row there. I think it's 16. I did a really quick count. If we were to take \$8.7 billion, we're looking at 87 pallets stacked on the floor here. They would be over five rows deep, the full length. They would not fit in the aisle.

It's a massive amount of money that we're talking about, with very little accounting for, very little detail for, and the people are not likely to trust us that literally by the semi load full of hundred-dollar bills we just casually pass it and move on. I think that as trustees here we really do need to wrestle with: how much money is this? The numbers have become so big these days that very few of us – I find it a hard time conceptualizing and even imagining how much money we're talking about. As a result, we end up in our world with increasing numbers in credit counselling and increasing need for credit counselling in our society, and it is a problem.

10:00

I went back to my credit counselling days, and I just would like to remind us as a people – I'm not trying to take shots here or be partisan; I just am cautious – of warning signs of debt for an individual, for a family. There's a direct application to us here as trustees for our people. A warning sign of debt when you're getting in trouble with debt is living on overdraft, lines of credit. When we have to rely on that for our funding, we're in trouble. Spending more than your income: we are doing that with this interim supply, and as the Minister of Finance pointed out to us, it's just the precursor of what the actual budget will bring to us, so it's the same thing in a way. Not paying credit in full every month: we're going to be paying on this for decades. Impulsive spending due to money

worries: a sign of credit problems. When we just throw money into our economy because we're afraid of what's happening, it's actually a sign of debt problems. Declined by your financial institution: we've already had one downgrade in credit. There are others. I could go on.

There are warning signs here about the amount of money we're spending, and that is our concern, not just the interim supply and the fact that we need money to keep the government running. Yes. But the reality is that this is the precursor, as we have been told, of the budget that we're going to be having. There are warning signs all over the place here. At least, there would be for individual Albertans and families, and I don't see how it should be any different for us at the provincial level.

I just think we need to really, really take a look at our spending issues, our spending problems. I mean, it's been spoken of over and over, and I'm not going to repeat the aspects that have already been said, but we are spending significantly more than the others around us and spending too much. Because of that, when regular Albertans have to live in reality and the province doesn't seem to, it really, really impacts the hope of the people around us. They look at the fact that we're going to be under debt load for decades, and their hope is declining. As we've listened to both industry and business and the municipal governments in our province, the sense of hope is leaving them.

I'm reminded of a famous quote, that I often revert to in my own mind, from Oliver Wendell Holmes, who says, "Beware how you take away hope from another human being." You know, I understand that the goal here is to give hope to people who are in need, to people who are struggling, to try and keep the economy going, but we need to be aware that the countereffects or the side effects take away other kinds of hope. Too much spending has that profound effect on our entire province, so I would just challenge you to be careful about that.

In that regard, there was a recent submission just presented to a couple of your ministers. The initial letter was sent out March 8 from the Alberta Chambers of Commerce. These are the people that seek to actually create businesses and create employment and give jobs. Their most recent survey, which was taken just in February, is a bit of a report card on some of the current financial practices and principles that have been taken in the last few months. For them to measure the results of some of that intended spending – the employment outcomes in much of Alberta for minimum-wage earners have actually been decreasing. There's been a tremendous setback for businesses, and they detailed that. I'm not going to go into all those details, but what I do want to point out is that they detail in their letter that the issues in the province in the last little while have cost on average \$21,456 to each business in our province since the election. These are tremendous barriers to business, to their profit lines.

I did some quick research with Stats Canada on the number of small businesses in Alberta. In 2014 they report 158,000 small businesses in this province. If you multiply that by their reported \$21,456 cost due to recent legislation and decisions at the provincial level, Madam Speaker, that adds up to \$3.39 billion. It's a lot of money. That's a business hurdle, a hurdle or barrier to the survival of business in this province. It's small businesses that create jobs. It's businesses that allow people to be employed. If we had businesses and principles that were actually creating jobs and providing work for people, we maybe wouldn't need to be spending as much as we're spending at a provincial government level.

There's a real impediment to the survival of business in our province. As a result, the small businesses of Alberta – this is from a news release from March 14, so it's pretty current – simply say: what job creators most need right now is not to deal with further

burdens preventing them from doing what they do best, which is to create small jobs; a general policy of do no harm by government right now could be the best approach to help improve the labour market and the business market for all Albertans.

I just caution the government to be very careful about how they spend money, how they panic-react to spending money. The size of the interim supply is huge. It's a foreshadowing of a budget that's going to be huge, of debt that's going to continue to pile on and continue to hamper our province in massive ways. Recently a \$3.3 billion barrier to business, that they have to earn before they can even survive, is a huge impediment to business in this province.

Now, I'll change gears slightly and speak specifically about the interim supply for Culture and Tourism. The best place to start for future budgets is to look at past expenditure reports, comparing the expenditures that have been with the budget forecasts that are in the interim supply. Taking that as two-twelfths of the total amount, I see that there is a significant jump, a 40 per cent increase, in the Culture and Tourism budget. That concerns me. Is that reflective of the budget that's coming? I mean, it's almost a quarter of the budget for the year, now to be expended, supposedly, within a two-month period. I trust that this does not foreshadow the actual increase in the budget that might happen.

I do credit the government for having been able to save. Again, I'm looking back to the third-quarter report. There are some areas where some money has been saved – kudos to you for that, a good try, a good effort – but I'm quite concerned about what's coming forward, and the fact that I don't have the details makes it impossible for me to vote for this in principle. I could not defend myself before my constituents if I did.

Madam Speaker, I cannot vote for this measure. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, I will call on the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to this bill. I understand the need for the interim supply. The province needs to fulfill commitments until a budget is approved. I get that – we all get that – but what I don't get is why it is so difficult for the government to produce this budget on time. I would expect that there will be very little change in the coming budget from the one this government passed less than four months ago, other than another \$10 billion added to the deficit column.

Last year we waited, Albertans waited, only to hear: be patient; we're working on it. Madam Speaker, after waiting for six months, six months of uncertainty and a growing economic crisis, we received a budget very, very much like the spring budget that was delivered by the previous government. Why the six-month delay? Now, again, the budget is not ready on time, and again, like the last time, this budget will probably read just like the last one.

10:10

While we wait, we get not only the interim supply bill, which will keep the government functioning until the new budget comes out, but we will also get the supplementary supply budget, which asks for more money on top of the existing budget. Part of my concern with this whole process is that Bill 2 gives no details, simply amounts of money.

Transportation and Infrastructure show a total of \$288,715,000 in expenses for a two-month period, with, again, no details. The same two ministries have a combined capital investment supply of \$285,628,000. Can't we get some detail about what will be funded with these amounts of money? That's a lot of money. What are the

costs? Where will this money go? Who will benefit from these expenditures? How will Albertans know if the expenditures make a difference to their communities and to their lives?

Yesterday at the AAMDC the minister announced that the government would be cutting two major highway maintenance budgets, crack filling and weed control. Crack filling and weed control. That was very concerning to me and, obviously, to a lot of the other people present. The response was a lot of groans from municipal leaders. There was absolutely no applause for that answer. As a matter of fact, I didn't hear much applause for any of the responses to any of the questions from the ministers present.

The reason the delegates were so unhappy with that particular announcement is not hard to understand. Municipalities know the value of maintenance to infrastructure. Just as an example, there are sections of highway 28 that I have seen and, indeed, there are probably many other highways across the province, I'm sure, that are in dire need of repairs. I've seen cracks and potholes on the shoulders of highway 28 that are over 20 feet long, over six inches wide, and up to six inches deep. Just imagine swerving to avoid an obstacle and hitting something like that with a small car. How we haven't seen a major wreck on this highway as a result of these poor conditions of the road is beyond me. I only hope that drivers that drive these roads often enough to know that there are issues there continue to be extra cautious.

The problem with neglecting this type of repair is that the longer you wait, the more the water infiltrates the road base. With the freeze and thaw that we experience here in Alberta, the destruction to the road base is severe. By neglecting crack repair or the actual resurfacing to keep the highways viable, the weathering necessitates tearing up the highway and rebuilding the base. This is so much more costly than following a regular maintenance schedule, and it is extremely expensive and terribly disruptive to the very high volume of traffic we see, especially on that highway.

It doesn't make sense to me to neglect highway maintenance now in the interest of cost savings, that will lead to much higher costs later. This is not the place to be saving money. But the more important point is that we do not know in this interim supply bill what the funds are for. If I hadn't heard the announcement at AAMDC yesterday, I still would have no idea that this government is going to defund crack repairs. Why did I have to get that information from a Q and A session at AAMDC? Why is that information not included in the interim supply? It was obviously on the minister's mind.

Municipalities are very concerned about the delay in the release of this budget. They have infrastructure projects that need to be tendered for bid so that they can take advantage of our very, very short construction season, which was alluded to by my fellow member from Battle River-Wainwright. They're facing reduced revenue from defaults on linear taxes. They're very concerned about the uncertainty they continue to deal with under this budget process. They need stable, predictable funding, much like the Wildrose's 10-10 MSI plan would provide. They need funding that will allow them to plan and deliver services to the residents of communities in their areas. The lack of a budget does not allow them to do so.

Madam Speaker, the government delayed the spring session, and now we are delaying the budget again. This all adds up to uncertainty at the municipal level and all over the province. Many people have asked me: why are they delaying the budget? The only answer I can come up with is the possibility that it has something to do with the upcoming by-election in Calgary. I realize this is only speculation, but based on the delays last fall until after the federal election, people seem to be making this assumption on their own.

Albertans, municipal governments, both rural and urban, are very concerned about the direction or, actually, the lack of direction from this government. Generally and with respect to this interim supply bill specifically, Albertans are worried.

Madam Speaker, for all the delays, for all the lack of information, for the lack of accountability, for the lack of uncertainty, and for the pattern of political game playing with budgets I cannot and will not support this bill.

Thank you very much.

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

An Hon. Member: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing none, it's the close of debate. I have a call for the question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:16 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Fitzpatrick	McPherson
Babcock	Ganley	Miller
Bilous	Goehring	Payne
Carlier	Hinkley	Phillips
Carson	Hoffman	Renaud
Ceci	Horne	Schmidt
Connolly	Kazim	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Kleinstauber	Shepherd
Dach	Loyola	Sigurdson
Dang	Luff	Sucha
Drever	Malkinson	Sweet
Eggen	McCuaig-Boyd	Westhead
Feehan	McKitrick	Woollard

Against the motion:

Aheer	Hanson	Schneider
Clark	Loewen	Starke
Cooper	McIver	Stier
Cyr	Nixon	Swann
Drysdale	Orr	Taylor
Fildebrandt	Rodney	

Totals: For – 39 Against – 17

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a third time]

Bill 3 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2016

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today and move third reading of Bill 3, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2016.

When passed, these supplementary supply estimates will authorize an approximate total increase of \$106 million in expense funding for the departments of Education, Justice and Solicitor General, Labour, Municipal Affairs, Seniors and Housing, and Treasury Board and Finance. As we have discussed previously during the debates, these estimates will ensure that enrolment in our schools is fully funded and that the affordable supportive living

initiative has the capital grants it needs to develop long-term care and affordable spaces across our province. These supplementary supply estimates will also transfer \$25 million of the previously approved capital investment vote to the expense vote within the Department of Environment and Parks to provide funding to the town of High River for important flood mitigation work that they will own.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, I look forward to this Chamber's support of these supplementary estimates so that we can deliver on our promises like fully funded school enrolment and other things. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Little-Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise in the House today and speak to the government's Bill 3 on supplementary supply. I with many of my colleagues am here to say that, yes, I too am disappointed that we have to vote to spend more money for the 2015-2016 fiscal year, that's about to end, given that this government passed a budget less than four months ago. But there are some good initiatives here that require funding.

Now, it should not come as a surprise to anyone here if I were to suggest that I and my colleagues don't always see eye to eye with the government here, but I think that we can both agree that there was no shortage of waste or inefficiencies left behind by the previous government. That's why I find it odd that the new government somehow needs new, unbudgeted spending approved. Just last week I stood here and was critical of Bill 2 and the interim supply. Those criticisms of unbudgeted spending are just as valid in regard to this bill as they were to that one.

These are important initiatives in the supplementary supply – I have no doubt about that – but it was only a few months ago that we stood here and approved the last provincial budget. It's not readily clear to me why these important initiatives were not designated priorities by the NDP government in that budget.

I just want to talk about Seniors and Housing and Infrastructure. Why are these listed in supplementary supply, only afterthoughts set to receive unbudgeted funding that was not being offset by efficiencies in other areas? For instance, there's a sudden \$50 million transfer from the capital plan to Seniors and Housing. Just last week I stood here and noted that Infrastructure had lapsed, the massive \$1 billion last year, even though there's no shortage of much-needed infrastructure in Alberta. Despite that lapse there was a request in the interim supply, and suddenly, as noted here in supplementary supply, they found a \$50 million efficiency in Infrastructure to transfer to Seniors and Housing. That one I have a little trouble with. I would hope that there's a fair explanation for that forthcoming. Perhaps it's an accounting error.

Now, the more important questions are these. How many spaces for seniors will be created with this \$50 million? Let's not forget that Alberta seniors built this province. The government needs to ensure that it's not just throwing unbudgeted money around with no clear goals, no clear indication of how outcomes will be measured. That's important. It seems to be lacking.

That said, I'll admit that I'm glad to see here in the supplementary estimates that the government is taking action to protect Albertans in High River by transferring funds already budgeted to make sure that a berm is built. But I do have to say that I am perplexed as to why this is happening now and not several months ago.

As far as the debt is concerned, again, I want to preface these next comments by saying that we recognize that there are important items in supplementary supply appropriation, but this remains unbudgeted spending. Supplementary estimates are, of course, not

uncommon for any government at any level. This wouldn't be as unusual if the budget and subsequent main estimates had appeared in the spring, but that only came in November. I would add that we are discussing and voting on this in mid-March, at a time when we should be discussing an actual proposed budget.

Again, I have to ask: why didn't the government just take the time and effort and finally just release a budget? Look at all the departments that had to work and how much untold work went into interim supply and supplementary supply budgets. How many untold hours were spent creating those two documents? These same departments are now converged and working on the budget for this spring, that's going to be put out on April 14. Again I ask: why didn't the government just take the time and effort to just release a proper budget?

10:40

Now, I gather from the government's responses in recent days that there is a reasonable explanation for why some of these items could not be included in the previous budget. But even the government should recognize that it's somewhat ridiculous to need both a supplementary and interim supply appropriation only four short months after a proper budget was introduced in November. It's my sincere hope that in the next fiscal year the government will do a better job of trying to get their fiscal house in order.

My colleague made a good point about the difference between a million and a billion, and I had one that I remembered that was brought to my attention 30 years ago, and it always stuck with me. A million minutes ago it was 2014; a billion minutes ago Christ walked on the Earth. The difference between a million and a billion is so staggering that it becomes hard to remember and recognize what those numbers really are. My colleague also made a good point about the situation Albertans find themselves in with their own households. They have to make difficult decisions. In their businesses they have to make difficult decisions on those. They're now asking: why isn't my government being more responsible with my money and my children's future?

I'll just touch on jobs and labour. In fact, what's most disappointing about discussing a supply bill instead of an actual budget is that it means it's much longer before Albertans actually know what the answers will be that they've been asking for. Take jobs, for instance. This government seems to have diverted any substantial detail, any initiative that can actually help Albertans facing hardship in the economic downturn, with mere quips about waiting for the budget, which comes out on April 14.

That's a whole calendar month away, Madam Speaker. For Albertans unemployed that's one more month of trying to make ends meet, hoping that their savings can last at least that much longer. It's one more month for municipalities in my riding and ridings around this province to understand where the MSI funding is at so they can have some rock-solid decisions made here that they can build their budgets on. They rely on that money. While I'm talking about that, I would congratulate the former government. I wasn't a councillor at that time, but I became a councillor shortly after that program was brought in. I'm glad to see that this government is continuing with MSI. That is very important to those that require it in municipalities.

The supplementary estimates allocate \$3 million to labour. Allegedly, these are for labour market development goals, but they're not specific at all. What programs are they going to? There's no detail. How many Albertans can expect training? No detail. What is the cost per Albertan helped? No details there. In fact, it's not readily clear that this allocation will help Albertans based on the lack of information. Skills training and labour market development are important now more than ever. That's why it's

important that the government speak to actual numbers, actual assessments that anything they're doing is helping.

I know that my colleague from Cardston-Taber-Warner asked the Minister of Labour a series of questions earlier this week inquiring about the surprising explanatory note on the labour increase. There didn't seem to be a ready answer. Specifically, the government claimed that the \$3 million would be offset by a federal transfer from the Canada-Alberta job fund for labour market development. Well, that's an existing agreement. It's been on the books since 2014. There's no reason the government wouldn't have known about it. So, really, if it's an offsetting supplementary increase, doesn't that really just mean that existing skills training and transfer wasn't being used? I think that's problematic because in this economy skills training is more important, more now than ever, with Albertans out of work.

Madam Speaker, the facts of this request for \$3 million tell Albertans nothing about how the money will be used to create jobs, provide skills training, or support apprentices. Alberta's unemployment rate is continuing to go up. Now it's 7.9 per cent at the end of last month. The government's failed job subsidy program has already cost Albertans \$178 million and created no jobs. The government has so far been shockingly vague on its further plans for supporting job creation. You know, Bill 1 is just a shell that proposes no concrete solutions, no specific programs, and no real path to job creation. So, yes, while we support labour market programming, there's some skepticism on this side of the House about what results this government is getting.

The government needs to outline which programs it will direct this funding toward and how it will be reporting on the successes of the programs. That's the part that's so important, how we report to Albertans on the success of each and every one of these programs. Success in this instance needs to be measured in jobs created, not just money spent. This doesn't mean we won't support this bill in principle, but I do hope for the sake of unemployed Albertans, good hard-working people around this province, that they have some specific goals and targets that they can share with all of us.

Just a comment on protecting front lines. You know, what strikes me as the most bizarre is that this government somehow has the audacity to accuse us of wanting to cut front-line workers, as if any level of constructive criticism about their massive overspending is interpreted as being a call to cut from front lines. No. Finding efficiencies is profoundly different from cutting front lines.

This accusation comes from a government that itself is cutting front-line workers. Last week it was announced that long-term care beds in Sundre hospital would close. My colleague at the front took exception to that, made everyone aware that that closure could result in anywhere from 18 to 36 long-term beds closing. Front-line workers would be losing their jobs. Vulnerable individuals would be moving away from their community, the community that they know. This government is at least \$10 billion in debt – yes, that's billion, with a “b,” the difference between an “m” and a “b” – and is still requesting more unbudgeted spending. Yet they find the time to cut front-line workers. That speaks volumes about the government's ability to manage our provincial finances and set priorities.

Madam Speaker, again, my colleagues and I recognize that there are worthwhile initiatives in the supplementary estimates, but my colleagues and I are strongly skeptical that this particular government was unable to find efficiencies in the last budget to cover the costs of these worthy initiatives. More problematic is that these important initiatives were not designated priorities by the government in their budget, which was only four short months ago.

Albertans are already hurting in this economy. Many are struggling to make ends meet while looking for a new job. We here

owe it to them to ensure that their tax dollars are spent wisely. For example, once again, I don't think anyone here is opposed to investing in labour market programming in a time like this, but in their last budget that department committed to spending nearly a hundred million dollars in workforce strategies, and Albertans should know what they have to show for it. Unless this government is capable of answering how many jobs they specifically anticipate creating and can fully defend those programs in working to the fullness of their ability in the current situation, then all they're really doing is racking up more spending.

I know some of my colleagues have already asked the same question, but, you know, there hasn't been a consistent answer, so we continue to ask. Regrettably, the government's request for the supplementary estimates looking to increase labour market spending somehow offset by a federal transfer via the Canada-Alberta job fund just raises more questions than it answers. Why isn't that transfer already being used for skills funding and skills training? Are these skills training and labour market programs actually working?

I think I speak not just for the constituents of Little Bow but for many across Alberta, Madam Speaker, when I say that I do hope this government has an actual answer for what they're doing here with this supply bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

10:50

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Happy St. Patrick's Day to everyone who's in the House. Before I dive in, I'd like to read an Irish quote that may be very relevant to what we're speaking about today. "A handful of skill is better than a bagful of gold." To that, I'd like to address some issues of supplementary supply.

Madam Speaker, like my colleagues, it's with dismay – and I can't help but remain skeptical about the government's inability to find any financial efficiencies within the bloated budget of the previous session. Albertans, quite simply, deserve better. Albertans deserve to have a detailed breakdown of exactly where their hard-earned tax dollars are going. That is their right.

Throughout the supplementary supply debate the government did identify many important sources of expenses that led to . . . [An electronic device sounded] Wow. Isn't that nice? My phone is talking to me. Sorry. There's a ghost in the House, too.

An Hon. Member: It's the Irish.

Mrs. Aheer: It's the luck of the Irish.

An Hon. Member: There's a wee leprechaun under your desk.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. I don't know. Well, at least she told me that I said it nicely. That's good, hey?

Sorry about that. I'll continue on. Sorry, Madam Speaker. I apologize for my phone.

Albertans deserve to have a detailed breakdown. Like I said, that's their right. Throughout the supplementary supply debate the NDP did identify many important sources of expenses that led to a qualified need for some additional funds, and we support that because these funds will go towards front-line workers. We, however, remain skeptical because the government outlined things that all parties can agree are priority for Albertans, yet strangely enough, Madam Speaker, the government didn't prioritize these things. I would have to think that if you deem something a priority, if you deem it important, you would also prioritize this. You would

make it known to Albertans, to the opposition, to everybody who's involved what that priority list is and how you're going to allocate those funds.

The fact is that supplementary supply allows the government to ignore the base cost. Madam Speaker, in any business we start out with that base cost, and it's really important as a business owner that we allow people to know what that's going to cost. If we're nickelling and diming them along the way, it becomes very apparent that we as businesspeople don't understand the function of our business, that we don't understand the costs involved, that we don't understand how it is to bring together a plan to make sure that that person is receiving the service that they asked for based on a cost that we actually understand as a business owner.

When running the ministries, we want to see them focusing their attentions on the members of this House and the policies and the measures that require those additional funds. We need to understand that, and so does the government. All Albertans deserve that transparency to understand what those base costs are going to be. It's a simple, simple request. For any businessperson this artificial separation of cost is difficult to swallow.

One of the issues, Madam Speaker, with supplementary supply is that it fails to produce a holistic look at a department. What that will do is that it will clarify for Albertans what the possible trade-offs are. Within a full budget it makes it clear that there may be more money on one item and relatively, maybe, less money on another item, and it becomes clear that more money for a specialized program means less money for another. By using supplementary supply, you've prevented the opposition members from conducting a complete assessment of where the potential efficiency gains can be made.

Having pored over the budget from the previous session, Madam Speaker, and being acutely aware of the significant number of expenditures included within it, I find it alarming that the government was unable to find efficiencies: efficiencies that Albertans deserve, efficiencies that are demanded by the opposition, and efficiencies that would just make the running of the government better. It would bode well to the people of Alberta to see that the government has their best interests, that they're watching out for the purse, that they are seeing that these things can be done with an overview of understanding where they can also save and then, potentially, have that money for any other special projects that may come up or put it away or whatever the government sees fit to do with that. Albertans are left wondering if this government has any intention of prioritizing these expenses. There continues to be very little regard on the government side of the House for the value of a dollar.

Madam Speaker, it's very hard not to look around right now and see what's happening in Alberta, what's happening to our friends. My best friend just lost her job yesterday, and she's one of hundreds of people that I can state that, quite honestly, are losing their jobs hand over fist. They're suffering from depression. They can't put their kids into hockey or into music.

An Hon. Member: Aw.

Mrs. Aheer: And those kinds of comments are exactly why I'm asking about this, the fact that somebody across the way would actually have a comment and actually behave in such a manner towards people that we all love and know in this province, that are suffering. I'm sorry if extracurricular activities aren't important to the members across the way, but it's actually what defines people and their families and what keeps families growing and happy. Quite frankly, I'm appalled by the sounds that are coming from

across the way, but that's maybe just not a priority for our government at this time.

To continue on, Madam Speaker, Alberta families are struggling, and every additional dollar counts to a family – for example, when a layoff has occurred – and we still don't see respect for the difficulties of Albertans, as has just been proven. We still have MLAs that laugh and heckle when faced with the fact that Alberta's government is simply unsustainably expensive. The government needs to look at these programs, not only to get them started but to have some longevity, to create something that will actually last and stand the test of time far beyond any of our time here, and to think to the future of how that program will look in 10 years. Or are we just going to expect somebody else to pay that off?

Albertans spend \$2,000 more per capita than British Columbia for health care – and I know we've said this a thousand times, but repetition is key – and on far too many public services Albertans face a higher bill than our fellow Canadian provinces. Wildrose laid out its priorities for the province of Alberta to much acclaim. Again, if I could say it, Madam Speaker, programs start with a vision and an idea, but they have to have follow-through, and we have to understand how we're going to sustain them. There are some great ideas for programs – all of us can agree on that – but we'd actually like them to be more than a one-hit wonder. We'd like to see those be able to be sustained and carried through so that future generations are also able to benefit from programs that are close to all of our hearts.

We support worker training for individuals, Madam Speaker, that want to acquire new skills. We have been emphatically clear in this House that Wildrose itself would make only a modest cut of two pennies for every dollar. I'll say it again just in case you haven't heard it before: two pennies for every dollar. In doing so, we will protect our front-line workers, our teachers, our nurses.

Seniors' protection and support is of the utmost importance. We continue to advocate for victims of natural disasters in Alberta and the constituency of Chestermere-Rocky View.

We are supportive of a handful of policies that would see protection and relief brought to those impacted by the 2013 flood. Madam Speaker, I was there. Like many people in this House, we volunteered to help out during that flood. We saw the devastation. We know what occurred in many, many areas. It's absolutely a priority for this side of the House and, I'm sure, for the government side of the House as well. We will continue to fight for appropriate mitigation that will protect the most communities. The difference is that Wildrose would find support for these programs by properly identifying priority initiatives, something that this government up to this point has failed to do.

Madam Speaker, we need to identify what is most important. Then what we would do is find the money to make that budget work. That's the whole point of identifying their priorities. Then you have a base to go on, and you can find where that money is going to go and make that work out. Like Albertan families and businesses, we know that when we have fewer dollars that are coming in, we need to be more careful about what's going out. Every Albertan right now is tightening their belt. Everyone. The government has to be the first one to show that they're capable of doing that as well and to find ways of efficiency, especially in these hard times.

This isn't going to change overnight, Madam Speaker. This path that we're on right now: we're in this for a little while. We really, really need to show to Albertans that we have their backs when it comes to this and show them that not only do we care about the programs that we want to put forward but that we have a vision and a plan for how that's going to happen and that it's not going to be something that gets pushed down to another budget or other

supplies or deficits that come down the road. We need to actually show them how we're capable of handling that right now. The simple fact is that not everything that this government spends is done with a mindset of efficiency or an attempt to obtain the most value for our dollars. There is waste, and there are trade-offs to be made. Wildrose knows that Albertans want as many of our province's dollars directed to the front-line services as possible. That is a priority of Albertans, and we will continue to defend that in this House.

11:00

Where the skepticism arrives, Madam Speaker, however, is when the government is asking us to support a supplemental funding request for more front-line workers while firing nurses in places like Sundre hospital, as we've heard in previous days. This move seems entirely political, and I know that there have been some issues with speaking about the by-election in Calgary-Greenway, but it makes you wonder what the agenda is of those kinds of things. Albertans are left not fully understanding the extent to which this government struggles. They're blocked from understanding these budgetary matters, and I think that's disrespectful to Albertans, and they deserve to have that transparency.

I will support this request but with the hope that now, having done multiple budgets, the government has a sense of how long it takes to put a budget together and will plan appropriately in the future. I know that I can speak on behalf of the Wildrose Party, that we are very, very frustrated and dismayed by the lack of transparency in the budget. The interim and supplementary supply must not become a fixture in the future.

Thank you so much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, I'll recognize the leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll be brief, but in the spirit of St. Patrick's Day, to my colleagues I will say: may the sun shine gently on your face, may the rain fall gently on your fields, and at the end of your trip here may you be in the Lord's vest pocket half an hour before the Devil knows you're dead.

Now on to the business of the day. Madam Speaker, it's regrettable, in my opinion, that the government has not made their case to ask for more money from the taxpayers. We've had quite a bit of debate in the House, and – you know what? – it's unfortunate, because the government has had lots of time on this particular bill to actually defend it, and they just haven't done it, at least not effectively. They've talked about how they've made efforts to have savings. I think the number was \$463 million in savings, where they have gone to the wall to save the taxpayers money, but it turns out that it hailed less and the insurance claims were lower, so that doesn't at all reflect the government saving any money.

I stood twice in this House previously during the debate, and I focused on capital. All the dollars, capital and operating, are important. Every dollar is just as important as the other dollar, but the reason I focused on the capital, Madam Speaker, is because I wanted to give the government a chance to defend what they're asking for. What I mean by that is that operating is not always quite so straightforward because its biggest part is paying people's salaries and wages, and sometimes people get shifted between doing different things in the department and one thing and another. So that can be, in fairness to the government, a little bit harder sometimes to explain although I didn't think that the explanations that they tried to make were as fulsome as what the taxpayers deserve.

But on capital: the reason that I focused on that – and I'll mention it again this morning, Madam Speaker – is because when you're asking for more money for capital that's to build things, to buy things, you should actually be able to tell the taxpayers what you're building and what you're buying. You should be able to name every school. You should be able to name every section of road you're paving. You should be able to name every hospital you're building. You should talk about what the computer program is you're doing in each department. I asked twice for the ministers to do that, and we got very thin explanations or no explanation at all. In several cases ministers who were right there in front of me when I asked chose not to get on their feet at all and give any explanation.

Now, it's okay for the government to not answer my questions although, you know, I and my colleagues in the PC Party are here to hold the government to account. What's more troubling is that it's disrespectful to the taxpayers, Madam Speaker, because it's the taxpayers that they're getting the dollars from. As I pointed out before, and I'll do it again now, the excuse, "The budget isn't out yet, so we can't say," doesn't hold because this is funding outside the budget. This is funding that the government is asking for right now from the taxpayers. Well, if they're asking for the government right now from the taxpayers, they ought to show the taxpayers the dignity, the decency, the respect to tell them what they need money for, and they have been asked repeatedly.

Again, I'm giving the government as much credit as I can. I'm saying that operating is a little bit harder to get right down to the penny on explaining it although they should give a good explanation on that, too, but on capital there is no excuse not to get right down to the penny. If you can't tell the taxpayers which school, which road, which hospital, which IT system, which desks, which chairs, which buildings you're going to buy, then you shouldn't ask for the money. They have chosen to ask for the money, and they have chosen not to give any explanation, so that level of contempt and disrespect for the taxpayers does not deserve support, and it won't get mine.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We've already debated interim supply, and we know, obviously, that we're going into this next year. I have several questions about the six areas for which the government is asking for supplementary supply. If we're going to go to interim supply, which we've done, we obviously need to fund priority areas, and certainly some of the areas under debate here fall into that category.

Educational growth: there's no question that we need to ensure that our students have appropriate resources, have classrooms to go to, have teachers to teach them. I am curious about whether or not these numbers will in fact be what the final tally looks like given recent reports of net out-migration from Alberta for the first time in a very long time. I very much worry that that trend will continue. It's not a positive trend for this province.

I continue my concerns that I raised previously about an inability or an unwillingness by this government to truly transform the public service, to truly transform service delivery, to find efficiencies. Finding efficiencies is easy to say and hard to do. I don't suggest for one minute that it's an easy thing to do. It's tremendously challenging, but you know what makes it even harder? When you don't even try, when you don't even try to transform the public service, you don't even try to transform service delivery. You don't ask the question: if we didn't do anything at all right now, how would we do it? Take it back to fundamental principles, and stop nibbling around the edges, and actually look at fundamentally

transforming how the government of Alberta operates. It's long overdue, it's badly needed, and I worry very much that this government is not up to that task.

Having said that, given the trajectory that we're on, funding educational growth make sense.

On the Justice and Solicitor General file, the remand centre correctional workers that we're being asked to fund: their work is very important and often forgotten by Albertans. If they do their job, we never hear about it. Their work is thankless, and it's dangerous, especially in the remand centre, so I have no quarrel at all with the folks who work in corrections. In fact, I have a tremendous amount of respect for them. I do however have concerns when what we're funding is overtime. That's a simple managerial question: do we have the human resources that we need to do the job? We need to make sure that we hire sufficient people, that we train them appropriately, ensure that they're safe and well-trained, and that we're not having to rely on overtime.

That, I know, has been a tremendous challenge in health care as well, not just in Justice. In health care I know that that's also a challenge in terms of staffing. The set-up seems to reward those who find a way to work overtime as opposed to working regular shifts. Those are challenging managerial conversations that are important to have, especially in this time of significant impact to our revenues, so I would certainly press the government to have those conversations and do that hard work to ensure that the money we're spending is on regular-time salary as opposed to overtime.

11:10

On Labour: the relatively small amount we're being asked to approve here, I understand, matches a federal program. There is a bigger discussion here around workforce training. Again, with our delayed budget that we're dealing with here, we won't know what this government's plan is for workforce training. They seem to bounce around. They had one idea, around the \$5,000 job-creation grant, that seems to be going by the wayside. I don't know if I've heard that it's officially cancelled. It seems like it's all but cancelled, as well it should be. As well it should be; it was not a very effective program. Many business owners and chambers of commerce, economists around the province have commented that that was not going to be a very effective program, and I absolutely agree with them.

My strong preference is not only for a small-business tax cut but an investor tax credit. The Calgary Chamber of commerce has called it a growth credit. I think that that would be much more effective. It would allow businesses to decide exactly how best to deploy that capital. It would be deployed perhaps in hiring, perhaps in buying property, plants, and equipment, perhaps in acquiring another business. That would create growth, and that growth will create jobs. Alberta entrepreneurs, I think, should be the cornerstone and always will be the cornerstone of economic growth in this province, something that the government would do well to remember.

On Municipal Affairs, the DRP: the \$9 million allocated for the flooding in Chestermere absolutely should be allocated to the people and the municipality in Chestermere to address the flooding that happened last summer. I have absolutely no problem with that. I reiterate my concerns with the DRP administration itself. I continue to help my constituents wrestle with this system, a system which is still broken and will not be fixed simply by hiring a few project managers and rolling out a computer program. There are fundamental problems within the senior leadership of the disaster recovery program. I do look for fundamental and significant change, which echoes my call for an overall rethink of how we deploy public services in this province.

I fully support the \$50 million ASLI grant for seniors' housing. In fact, I think it's something that we need to do more of. If we're going to be funding infrastructure projects and we're going to be borrowing capital dollars to do so, I think that funding seniors' facilities of all types, allowing people to age in place as best we can, and then stepping up that scale of acuity for people who need that supportive living or long-term care are very important. It's very important for the quality of life of Albertans. It's an area where, unfortunately, we've fallen behind, and it's an area where we will not only find an increase in quality of life, but of course we will find a decrease in our health care costs. People will not be stuck in hospital anymore. So I certainly will speak favourably of those sorts of investments, and I sincerely hope that as this next budget eventually rolls out, we see more of that.

On the Treasury Board side, I'll take this opportunity again to express my concern about further credit-rating downgrades and the risk of that to our province. I express my concern again that this government doesn't seem to want to do its homework on what the cost of those downgrades would be although we've calculated that to be in the neighbourhood of \$600 million or \$700 million over the life of the dollars that you're borrowing. Even a few points of interest, even a few hundredths of a point of interest will add up over time and will compound over time, and if you don't have a clear plan to ensure that that borrowing doesn't get out of control, the costs for debt service end up taking a greater and greater portion of your budget. It creates that debt spiral that I don't think any of us want to be in. But, again, I see very little in the way of a plan from this government to address that.

I will predict here and now on the record that the remaining two credit agencies that have not yet downgraded Alberta will downgrade Alberta. That's my prediction, and it's a real concern that I have based on the lack of action here on the fundamental cost structure of government and the fact that this government seems to have no plan to get out of it in any meaningful way any time soon.

With that, Madam Speaker, I thank you for the time and will retake my place. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments? The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the member for his comments. Something that I am working with – and it is a fluid thing, but what I've seen through the 61 school boards that I work with and then the Alberta Treasury Branches as well: the statistics on population would suggest that we're still seeing population growth. While it's perhaps uneven in some places and some boards see flat or some diminished school populations, my overall numbers from most all school boards and then the recent numbers from the Alberta Treasury Branches would suggest growth, so I'm just curious to know from the hon. member where he was getting that information showing a net population decrease here in the province.

The other question and comment that I had were in relation to, you know, funding for enrolment and the extension of that to school capital and building and so forth. I appreciate your comments around the necessity to fund for enrolment. It's something that we believe in very strongly. Of course, on the capital side – it's perhaps the leader of the third party that had this in his comments – we were not asking for supplementary supply for capital. I've built together with Infrastructure and our team a sort of pay-as-you-go system that reflects the needs of each project as they need more money to move forward on their projects. That has given us a great deal more efficiency, that precludes us from having to ask for any

supplementary supply whatsoever for capital projects in Education, for building the schools, I should say.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much. My source for that is Stats Canada CANSIM 051-0017, which shows that in the fourth quarter of 2015 net interprovincial migration to Alberta dropped to negative for the first time since the first quarter of 2010. I'd be happy to table that, Madam Speaker, at the appropriate time. Now, the overall population is still growing, and of course that's because people continue to have children. Those children go to school. I acknowledge that. But this trend – and, again, I'll happily table this chart – drops off a cliff starting in about the second quarter of 2015. It's obviously a troubling trend. Again, I'm more than happy to table that at the appropriate time. Again, I guess it just speaks to the need for, you know, the Minister of Education and others to be aware of that as you plan for this next budget and be mindful of the impacts of that net population growth or not.

Of course, I think that all of us here, just to be very clear, are certainly not cheering for population declines. You know, we're not cheering for negative growth. We're cheering for – I'll tell you what. In this part of the House I'm certainly cheering for Alberta. I want people to come to this province and help us build as they have for generations, and I want there to be opportunity for those already here. That's, I think, what we all ought to be striving for.

I'll happily print out the appropriate number of copies and table them at the appropriate time. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Happy to rise and speak to supplementary supply. I preface my remarks with the comment that these are difficult times. I think that most of us, if not with family, have friends, connections that are suffering through these times. I would acknowledge that everyone on the front bench is doing their utmost to look at ways and means to reduce costs and improve effectiveness, efficiency and get the services and the infrastructure that this province desperately needs to provide for our short-term and, perhaps, longer term future.

Also, there's no question that we all want the best for Alberta. At the same time, we're challenged by a situation in which we have not had, as I have heard, independent reviews of these ministries. That, to me, should have been the first order of business with a new government coming in, an independent review of each ministry to identify strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, spending and management issues and to look for significant strategic weaknesses in the ministries.

The second thing that I haven't heard the recognition of is that every public service has opportunities for efficiencies. I'm most aware of health care, where I hear from colleagues regularly about lost efficiencies and waste, frustration, duplication, lack of communication, silo practice and silo thinking, and a failure to take advantage of opportunities.

11:20

So, I mean, if we heard more from the government on those two things, independent reviews of your ministries and independent assessment in each of these services around where there could be efficiencies, I think we'd feel a lot better about these supplementary supply numbers.

Delaying the budget, of course, means drawing down additional debt for operational budgets, and it does send a troubling message

about the commitment to prudence and the debt servicing that will go well into the future. I would certainly like to see more indications of how this government plans to deal with it, whether it's in relation to bonds, in relation to the various diversification plans that they have or printing more money with the federal government. I don't know how that's going to work.

I am pleased to see that federally there is a more positive relationship between federal and provincial governments and more common values between these two governments around issues that I care a lot about: First Nations, health, environment. These are encouraging.

The areas that I am aware that I can support some changes. Environment and Parks got an extra million dollars, which is largely flood mitigation. Unfortunately, it ignores some of the critical deficiencies in our environment department today: their lack of technical expertise, their lack of resources to do proper monitoring, their lack of enforcement capacity, and certainly their lack of any clear commitment to the Castle-Crown parks area. How are they budgeting for the kinds of changes that are coming to that park, with roads, with campgrounds, for any serious commitment to really bringing tourism, the tremendous opportunities of tourism, and attracting our own people to this wonderful new park that they have identified?

The second area that I can obviously support is Education. We are way behind in schools. There's no question that we need more teachers, and I applaud the government for stepping up with the needed teachers this year. Early childhood services: clearly a deficit. We are creating problems for the future if we don't identify children with learning needs, emotional needs, behavioural needs early, get them the supports they need, the families the supports they need, and gear them up for success.

The third area that, with reservations, I can support is the ASLI grants, the affordable supportive living initiative. Unfortunately, the conundrum there is that this government has repeatedly said that they do not support private long-term care, and here they are continuing the grant program to private alternate seniors' care, which has been shown to be of less quality and have standards that are not consistently met in terms of staffing – I mean standards of training for their staff – and quality of care. There are, obviously, some questions I have about a government that says in opposition that they don't support private alternatives to seniors' care, and here they are continuing the ASLI grants. So I think that needs to be looked at.

Overall, I feel the same as I do about interim, that there has been a lack of evidence that we've done the homework that we need to do, that we've limited, especially in operational budgets – it's something that's been raised again and again, but it needs to be said. If we're not prepared to do some of the tough work of limiting operational budgets and living within our means, then we're sending a very difficult message, I think, to our ratepayers, our taxpayers, and I can't support that at this time.

Thanks very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments?

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and good morning, all. It's great to see you here this morning. I have a few comments put together here regarding the supplementary supply bill. It's a fairly important document that we have to be looking over once again. I think that it must be looked at in some detail. It requires, therefore, I think, a full debate to reveal exactly what the line items are going to be used for, as many people have said today. I

certainly agree with that. Like any other budget, it requires a lot of diligence and scrutiny to ensure that proper use is being made of public funds.

While I understand the need for supplementary supply, you'll have to forgive me for being a little skeptical, really, as to why the government needs the extra money when they could have simply budgeted better in the fall or at the very least have found some minimal efficiencies in some part of their operations. I hope that this does not develop a precedent of the government of continually looking for supplementary funding at the end of intended budget cycles.

Instead, I think that we would all like to see a government that is capable of creating a budget, sticking to it, and steadfastly working on finding ways to save money within each respective department. I'd like to emphasize that any organization, especially government, should always be working towards finding and eliminating waste in all parts of its operations, but when we look at Bill 3, it's obvious that the NDP government does not share that sentiment. It's unfathomable that the government couldn't find \$106 million in efficiencies to cover these costs. It begs the question: has the government done anything at all to find efficiencies? For the record I will support, reluctantly though, Bill 3 and only do so out of necessity. I want to make clear a delineation between agreeing to setting precedent for governments blowing their budgets and agreeing to a short-term budget.

Now, I see some of the members on the opposite side rolling their eyes and laughing some of this off, I suppose, but this really is something we need to be cautious of.

An Hon. Member: You must be hallucinating that.

Mr. Stier: I'm not always hallucinating, hon. member. I have seen some people questioning what I'm saying.

As an Assembly we have to decide on the habits that we choose to adopt in order to prudently manage public dollars. Overspending and taking on more debt is not a habit that the people of Alberta want us to develop. Believe me when I say that spending practices and this kind of spending practice become a habit.

Madam Speaker, I want to emphasize something. Supporting our community's seniors, our teachers, our front-line workers as well as those who have been unfortunate enough to suffer from natural disaster and from the economic times we're experiencing these days is a big priority for Wildrose. It always has been. That is why, again, I've decided to support, reluctantly though, this bill.

I'm concerned, though, that this government has also made a habit of breaking its promises, as we've spoken of many times. Can we be certain that Bill 3 will be used for our front-line workers, or will it be used to feed the bloat that has been growing for decades in the province's bureaucracy? Even the members that I served with, as I got to know them, and my colleagues from the past term spoke of the same thing: the province's bureaucracies and the bloat that is there. I strongly urge the government and its ministers, therefore, to prioritize this money for front-line service delivery and not use it to hire more people in the already overloaded areas like communications or in special pet projects that do little to support our hard-working front-line employees.

When we put the resources directly into our front lines, it allows for public service to have deeper and more meaningful impact. When a teacher has a smaller class size, it benefits both the teacher and the student alike, for example. Alberta is the envy of the world for its thinkers, and to ensure that this tradition is upheld, we need to make sure that Alberta teachers and teachers' aides are getting the support that they deserve. Funneling money into already overgrown bureaucracies, though, where managers are managing

managers, does not accomplish that goal. This, too, is a habit that I hope this government can kick.

We need to push the government towards developing better performance measures so that the people of our province can see that their hard-earned tax dollars are actually going towards teaching their kids, healing their loved ones, and providing world-class care to Alberta's seniors. I can't emphasize that enough. Seniors are the vulnerable, and we need to ensure that we're looking after that file, most importantly.

11:30

We've seen the government fail, though, to deliver on its first jobs plan, and now we have Bill 1, which seems more like a listing in the classified section of the newspaper for my friend and colleague across the way, the new minister of economic development, rather than a bill that's going to actually get Albertans back to work.

Included in Bill 3 is a request for an extra \$3 million in a labour-related fund. When we are looking at multibillion-dollar budgets, it may seem simple for this government to overlook this money, but \$3 million can do a lot to help skilled tradespeople across the province. Is this money going into developing more training spaces for apprentices across the province, as an example? Is it going to raise awareness about the RAP program or to bolster the program completely? Does this government even have a plan for getting more Albertans into high-skilled, high-paying jobs? These are the jobs that we should be fighting for, ladies and gentlemen.

It's important that the government realizes that the success of a jobs plan is measured by how many Albertans it puts to work, not by how much the government spent on the program. The \$178 million flop of a jobs plan from last session is far from any measure of success. It is also important to consider, Madam Speaker, how this money will impact the lives of Alberta seniors, as I've mentioned before, the people who turned this province into the place it is today.

As I look around the Chamber most days, I can assume some of you may have parents and grandparents that have needed the top-quality care that our province could provide. During the later stages of people's lives it is important that they are able to stay in the

community, where their families and loved ones are. I'm wondering how much of the 50 and a half million dollars will actually go towards making sure that seniors can stay close to home and that they're not moved to communities that make it difficult to keep families united and allow for seniors to get the much-needed support of their families.

Madam Speaker, as I've said previously, I believe that much of this debate boils down to what kinds of habits we want to set for ourselves. Do we want to make a habit of passing budgets only to go over them at the end of the cycle once again? Do we want to make a habit of spending hundreds of millions of dollars on jobs and programs that fail to create? Do we want to keep feeding the bloating bureaucracy we have, that has been developing in this province, or do we want to put meaningful resources into our front-line services? Do we want to help families stay close together when they have an aged loved one? These are all questions that we need to decide on very quickly.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, while I will be reluctantly supporting Bill 3, I hope that this government can go back and have some reflection on some of the questions that I've asked here today and choose what kind of habit it wants to have for the next three years.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, does anyone from the government side wish to close debate?

If not, I'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to everyone in this Chamber for the hard work that was done this morning. With that, I'd like to move that we adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:35 a.m.]

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