



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, April 11, 2016

Day 12

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Second Session

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

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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)	Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
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Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader	Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
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Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)	Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
Kleinstauber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)	van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
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Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)	Vacant, Calgary-Greenway

Party standings:

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

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 11, 2016

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Bow your heads, and let us reflect. As we reflect, let us commemorate the 99th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge on April 9, 1917. Life is precious. When it is lost, we are all weaker. On this day I would ask that all members of Alberta's Legislative Assembly reflect upon the lives of Canadian military personnel lost in service. When we think of them, let us remind ourselves that war is sometimes the result when we fail to reach agreement through dialogue and diplomacy.

Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a very special guest who spent many years serving Albertans. Mr. Denis Ducharme is the former MLA for the constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake, which he represented from 1997 to 2008. During that time he served as whip and as Alberta's minister of community development. Mr. Ducharme also sponsored the Fair Trading Act, and he is here today to listen to the debate on Bill 203 as president of the Motor Dealers' Association of Alberta. My guest is seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I ask him to stand and accept the very traditional warm welcome from this House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly a school group from Sherwood Park, Our Lady of Perpetual Help school. I have a very special place in my heart for this school because it's a French immersion school, and I had an opportunity to talk to the students, and their French was very good. Alors, félicitations à tous les étudiants. I would like to ask them to rise and to receive the customary welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Environment and Parks and minister responsible for the climate change office.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you Mr. Glen Metzler, president and managing director of API Labs, and members of the board of directors, including Blaine Takeda, operations manager and director, John McFadyen, and David Mercer. API Labs is an early stage pharmaceutical fine chemicals processing company establishing the groundwork to create a poppy industry in western Canada. The development of this industry will provide opportunity for agriculture, processing, and research in southern Alberta, creating good jobs and diversifying our economy. I ask that our guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three people helping to diversify our economy and create jobs right here in Alberta through a partnership between Alberta Garment company and Olds College that has resulted in the creation of the Apparel Innovation Centre, that we'll hear more about today. Adrian Bussoli is president of Alberta Garment, Michael Bussoli is general manager of the Apparel Innovation Centre, and Tammy Forbes is the associate vice-president of external relations at Olds College. I ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three wonderful people and business owners from my constituency of St. Albert: Anna Gimpel, Sabrina Roy-Westra, and Jennifer Thomson. All three have a wealth of knowledge and experience in midwifery, and together they own and operate the St. Albert Community Midwives, which opened in 2015. I'd ask them to rise if they're here, unless they're out helping someone give birth. There they are.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House guests who have come to watch the proceedings this afternoon on Bill 203: Sheldon Seefried and Mark McKeown from Fountain Tire, Pauline and Jessica Andruik of Superior Automotive, that's NAPA Autopro, Rita Kause of Mewassin Automotive and the Canadian Independent Automotive Association, Ian Hope of the Alberta Automotive Recyclers and Dismantlers association, Biju Abraham of Speedy Muffler, Peter Finstad of Tirecraft, Garth Hough of West End Tireland, and Terry Dulyk of Dulyk's Automotives as well as Rick Schwabe of Schwabe's Automotive Centre, and John Schmidt of Smitty's automotive. Mr. Speaker, my guests are seated in the members' gallery. I ask them to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly

our guests from the Camrose primary care network, who exist to meet the primary health care needs of Camrose and area through collaborative, comprehensive, team-based patient care, and they are here as part of their team. If you would rise as I call your name, I'd like to introduce Stacey Strilchuk, the executive director; Colleen McKinstry, clinical director; Pamela Fankhanel; Eryn Petiot; Colleen Lindholm; Stephanie Loosemore; Pamela Sherman; and Alysa Bartman. Yes, you've risen, and if everybody could give them a warm, traditional welcome to the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly three Albertans engaged in driving our economy forward and supporting our not-for-profit sector. Robbie Kreger-Smith, Trevor Aboussafy, and Jason Gold are also stalwart members of the Alberta Party and part of our Edmonton regional organization team helping us put together a fantastic event this coming Thursday evening. I'll ask Robbie, Trevor, and Jason to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Highwood.

1:40

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a number of automotive industry stakeholders here today to witness debate on Bill 203. I ask that they stand when I call their names: Nancy Suranyi, owner of Namao Automotive Repair and board member of Alberta Independent Automotive Association; Simon Weller, vice-president of sales and marketing in Canada for NAPA Auto Parts; Troy Sawada, director of national accounts, west Pacific, for NAPA Auto Parts; Alvin Chibi, general manager, NAPA distribution centre here in Edmonton; Duncan Dalzell, owner of Dalzell's automotive; Bruce Church, owner of Tristar Collision; Scott Shewchuk, owner of Fountain Tire; Dale Meyn, general manager of Midas auto service; Kent Asselstine, owner of Legend automotive; Bruce Stewart, owner of Bruce Stewart's automotive; and John Fisher, owner of Midas auto service. I ask that the House provide the traditional warm welcome. They're sitting in the members' gallery.

The Speaker: Welcome

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you three guests. Two are senior executives of British Petroleum, or BP Canada, headquartered in Calgary. They are Stephen Willis, president and chairman, and Anita Perry, vice-president, communications and external affairs. Joining them also is Del Robostan, senior vice-president of British Petroleum oil marketing for BP's global oil Americas division. British Petroleum Canada is a valued partner in developing Alberta's energy resources and is a significant investor in our Alberta oil sands. The company holds interests in three oil sands assets in the Athabasca region of northeast Alberta: the Sunrise, the Pike, and the Terre de Grace projects. If Stephen, Anita, and Del would please rise, I would ask you to give them the warm, traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, M. le Président, it is my honour today to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the House three visitors from Quebec. They are staff members with Members of Parliament in the House of Commons in Ottawa. I would like to introduce Charles Chateauvert, Julien Fournier-Dorion, Helene Gagnon. Helene Gagnon actually works for the Member of Parliament for Edmonton-Strathcona. I will ask them to rise and receive the customary welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, to you and through you I would like to introduce a very dear friend and a colleague who sat with me on the Alliance executive and the national board of directors of the Public Service Alliance of Canada from 2008 until 2011, M. Jean-François Des Lauriers. In the gallery, if he would please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other guests? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the chief executive officer of Parkinson Alberta, John Petryshen. He is joined today by members of the Parkinson Alberta board, clients, and care partners. Today, on World Parkinson's Day, we draw attention to the second most common neurological disease affecting 10,000 Albertans. April is Parkinson's Awareness Month, a time when we shine light on the great work done year-round for Albertans living with Parkinson's disease. Last fall Parkinson Alberta moved into a new home in Edmonton, the Buchanan Centre for Parkinson's. This one-of-a-kind facility in Canada is located in my Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood constituency.

The tulips we wear today symbolize that hope will bloom this spring. This spring Parkinson Alberta brings hope to people across the province. Helping those living with and affected by Parkinson's through support services, programs, and educational opportunities is key to living with the disease. It is Parkinson Alberta's main focus. Today we applaud the important work of Parkinson Alberta as they rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Apparel Innovation Centre

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm happy to be speaking about a great Alberta company, the Alberta Garment company, and its new state-of-the-art garment testing facility, the Apparel Innovation Centre. The Apparel Innovation Centre is a partnership between Alberta Garment and Olds College. Olds College has a fashion marketing and apparel technology program, so it was a natural fit. It is western Canada's first apparel and research facility, and I'm proud to say that it is located in Alberta's greatest constituency, Calgary-Klein. The facility boasts such state-of-the-art machinery as a hot liquid and steam protection testing chamber and a thermal comfort testing chamber, that allow

designers and entrepreneurs to test prototypes for protective gear to be worn by workers in the oil patch and other industries. As the only facility of its type in western Canada, Alberta designers no longer have to use similar facilities in Montreal or the United States. Instead, they can design, test, and cost their visions right here in Alberta.

Since opening the facility in January, Adrian Bussoli, the president of Alberta Garment, and Michael Bussoli, general manager of the Apparel Innovation Centre, have already had many established brands, established businesses, and new designers taking advantage of the facility's unique opportunities. What's more, they are a bright light in today's otherwise challenging economy, with many new hires in the last few months alone. Having had the pleasure of touring the facility, it is an impressive facility, and it shows the hours of testing, design, and manufacturing that go into the garments that keep Alberta's workers safe and warm on the job, and it really is a facility that fuels more innovation and entrepreneurial spirit right in our own backyard.

Congratulations on the new facility, and I look forward to Alberta Garment's future endeavours and the possibility of more partnerships.

Thank you.

Energy Policies

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, let me take you down memory lane. Just a few years ago, in fact, the Premier was standing outside taking pictures at antipipeline protests; the Education minister was chanting, "No new approvals"; and the environment minister was penning a how-to guide for anti-Alberta protesters. But then something happened. They stumbled blindly into power. Now they want us to believe they're not the same radicals who have been a thorn in the side of our province for years.

But Albertans aren't fools. No one was surprised to see the NDP vote to shut down the energy sector this weekend. The Leap Manifesto is the embodiment of everything the NDP, including the members opposite, have espoused for years. The ideas contained in this radical manifesto are in the DNA of every single member across the aisle. They call our oil dirty. They demonize our energy workers, and they tell them to take a hike. They hold our energy communities hostage to their extreme ideologies. Sure, they're being very careful to say the right things now, but the fact is that their past actions are in perfect harmony with every paragraph, every sentence, and every word contained in the Leap Manifesto.

This manifesto didn't come out of nowhere. It was released during the last federal election, when the members opposite were ignoring their jobs here and working to elect anti-Alberta candidates in other provinces. This manifesto serves to remind us, however, that this government is fundamentally un-Albertan. This government does not represent our hard-working people. This government cannot be trusted to do the right thing at the right time for the right reason.

The Wildrose is proud to stand up for the values of Albertans. We're focused on stopping these radical members from killing jobs. We will proudly be Alberta's voice until this government and the manifesto it rode in on are nothing but a bad memory.

Thank you.

The Speaker: A point of order by the Government House Leader. I've been advised of that.

Oral Question Period

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

Energy Policies

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2014 there were 375,000 Albertans whose livelihoods relied on the energy sector; 100,000 of those jobs have disappeared in the last year. But that's not enough jobs lost for the Premier's friends, friends the Premier's cabinet campaigned for, friends the Premier herself has fundraised for. The Premier promised that by taxing families with a \$3 billion carbon tax, by shutting down coal in Alberta, and by capping oil sands growth, Alberta would get a pipeline. Not even her own party members are buying that, however. How does she expect Albertans to actually trust this government?

1:50

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I find it a little bit ironic to have the member opposite asking about trust given that just last week your own supporters said that building a pipeline was a, quote, doomsday scenario that might possibly result in support for our government, and you are ready to put your party's interests over that. So who should Albertans trust? Who should Albertans trust? Not those folks over there.

Mr. Jean: The Premier can't do \$10,000 fundraisers for NDP members who back radical anti-Alberta manifestos and then pretend that she has nothing to do with it. The Premier stood with ForestEthics just in November promising that her own manifesto against our energy sector would build pipelines. It turns out ForestEthics is actually a founding signatory on this NDP Leap Manifesto. So is Public Interest Alberta, a group with very close ties to the Premier's own cabinet. Why should Albertans have to pay a \$3 billion carbon tax when the Premier's own friends don't support our energy sector?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, let me be perfectly clear. If you didn't happen to see it on Saturday, let me do it again. Our government completely repudiates any part of that document's reference to the energy sector and pipelines. We will continue to work hard to get to a pipeline, and I will not be lectured by somebody who stood in government for 10 years and couldn't get it done.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta NDP has done everything possible to make life harder in our energy sector. They raised business taxes and taxes on heavy emitters, they are shutting down coal, they are capping growth in the oil sands, and to top it all off, they are asking Alberta families to pay a \$3 billion, uncampaigned-for carbon tax only to have the Premier's closest friends vote to shut down our energy sector altogether. Will the Premier back down from her own risky manifesto, seeing as she has failed to get Albertans the social licence she promised this would?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again I'm hearing from a former MP who sat in government for 10 years and failed to do anything to build a pipeline. We have no lessons to learn from this hon. member, who accomplished nothing while in government on this issue, and what the member is now asking us to do is to return to a policy of science denial and climate change denial and do nothing for another 10 years. We will not do that either.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Mr. Jean: Oh, Mr. Speaker, that's funny. The Leap Manifesto is a complete rejection of the energy industry and resource development in Alberta as a whole. The manifesto calls for a total moratorium on pipelines and oil sands development. Albertans know that it is a radical set of policies that would shatter our way of life and our quality of life. Albertans also know that the members across the aisle would have been voting for this manifesto if they were still in opposition. Does the Premier not recognize that part of the reason she didn't sway her party members is that they don't believe she's actually sincere about it?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are clear. We must get to yes on a pipeline, and we will repudiate again the suggestion that we would ever stop building energy infrastructure in Alberta. But what I want to know is this. Supporters over there called building a pipeline a doomsday scenario. We've repudiated our problem. Have you repudiated yours?

Mr. Jean: It's true, Mr. Speaker. Even NDP members are now supporting the Wildrose.

The Leap Manifesto isn't just against pipelines; it also opposes trade agreements. It thinks that trade agreements are wrong because they might "stop damaging extractive projects." The Premier might have more credibility in her opposition to the Leap Manifesto if she actually supported the trans-Pacific partnership or even the New West Partnership, but the Premier has opposed international trade agreements and even interprovincial trade agreements. Will the Premier take a stand today against the entire Leap Manifesto by recommitting Alberta to the New West Partnership?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I've already answered this a couple of times now. Our government absolutely repudiates the manifesto. We will not support that part of it that talks about energy infrastructure because we are committed to supporting a progressive, sustainable energy industry in this province, supporting the workers that that supports, and moving forward on responsible environmental development, including the climate change plan, because that's the way to move forward. You don't look backwards. You don't look at the dinosaurs. You don't stick your head in the sand. You actually take responsibility for the future when you're asked to govern.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Mr. Jean: I think supplementary 2, Mr. Speaker.

The Leap Manifesto calls for adopting an iron law of energy development. If you don't want it in your backyard, then it doesn't belong in anyone's backyard. Think about that. It rejects pipelines and mining of all resources. It makes NIMBYism the law of the land. Reasonable people know that that sort of policy is just crazy. Albertans know that lots of government members and many of their senior staff are on the record supporting crazy ideas just like this. Will the Premier purge her government of this type of crazy antidevelopment ideology?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, what could be helpful is if we all actually work together to get the pipeline that members across say, some days, that they want. You know, their supporters are out there saying that they don't want a pipeline, that it would be a doomsday scenario. I suggest to the member opposite that instead of hoping for failure, they come together and work with us to get that kind of energy infrastructure in place. He spent 10 years not doing it. Maybe if we work together, we could actually see success.

Government Policies

Mr. Jean: Today the government had a jobs plan announcement. Albertans were hoping to actually hear something positive or productive. Maybe the government might even act on one of our, you know, great ideas in the jobs action plan. Instead, the minister announced the cancelling of their failed job plan. In their winter newsletter to NDP members just a couple of months ago this government listed the jobs plan that they abandoned today as one of their top three accomplishments. How exactly does a failed program get listed as a top government accomplishment?

Ms Notley: Well, first of all, I would ask the member opposite to read the documents he is receiving – strangely, as a member of our party – a little bit more carefully. Today what happened was that the minister of economic development, in talking about one small part of our jobs plan, did something that I know the folks over there would find difficult. After doing the research, after looking at the evidence, we decided that there was a better way forward, so we acknowledged that there was a better way forward. We made a different plan because that's what you do when you're trying to do the best thing for the people who elected you. You go with the research, you go with the evidence, and if you get it wrong, you admit it and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, Madam Premier.

Mr. Jean: I will stay on failed programs. The opposition and business groups spent the fall telling this government that their job subsidy program would not work. Time and time again the Premier and ministers rose in this place and said that it was a great idea. The NDP listed it as one of their top three accomplishments in their January newsletter to members. Today they acknowledged the truth and killed this program. Let me save the Premier some time and trouble. Her carbon tax, the evidence clearly says, will also be a failed program, and she will have to kill it. Will she save Albertans the expense and abandon the carbon tax today? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, when you're asking questions, please listen.

Madam Premier.

2:00

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the contrary, our government is very proud to be moving forward with a climate leadership plan that will lead the country in making progress on greenhouse gas emission reduction while repositioning ourselves for better economic diversification and for a more progressive, sustainable energy industry in the future, where we will be more effective at exporting our resources, not less. That's what good governance is about. It's not about denying climate science. It's not about challenging whether the dinosaurs walked with us. It's actually about using the research and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: This weekend the agriculture minister was talking about opportunities in agriculture. Apparently, he is really excited about having more greenhouse businesses to grow locally produced vegetables. This might be a good idea if it wasn't contradicted by the government's other bad policies. Last fall Hotchkiss Herbs & Produce greenhouses of Calgary announced that the carbon tax, this carbon tax that the NDP likes so much, was going to put them out of business. Owner Paul Hotchkiss listed several NDP plans that hurt greenhouses. Will the minister acknowledge that this government's carbon tax will kill more greenhouses in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I found it interesting at the time that a carbon levy which was about 14 months away from being introduced was actually killing a business right at that point.

But, no. What we will do is that we will work with all Albertans. We will work with industries that are particularly impacted. We will also ensure that we're able to move forward in a way that is sustainable. At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, we have an obligation to future generations to reduce our emissions in this province, and we have an obligation to future generations to lead climate change action across the country. That is what our government is doing.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Energy Policies (continued)

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend the government's parent party, which they belong to, advanced support for a halt to pipeline construction and an end to all fossil fuel use by 2050. Since the NDP ideology includes putting Alberta's largest employers out of business, for many Albertans this may be the last straw that will break their family's back. To the Premier: although a select few of your cabinet may now be half-heartedly speaking out about how harmful NDP policies are, where were they this weekend, when it mattered for Alberta?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to refer the member opposite to the link that actually showed where I was. I was at the convention on Saturday, giving a speech about where we stood in Alberta on the issue of our energy industry. I was proud of that. I was proud of our members. Again, as I've said, we've completely repudiated that part of that document. It is not going forward. Albertans can trust us to have their back.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have had difficulty hearing the Premier's remarks, as has the rest of the House. Would you ensure that you keep your applause so that I can hear them.

First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also saw that the Premier was in Jasper on Sunday, when people were voting on this.

Last week the Deputy Premier said: "certainly be talking about opportunities to move our products east and west with our colleagues from across Canada over this very weekend." Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans who watched the NDP convention did not see much of that minister on the microphone in their defence. To the Deputy Premier: what changed over the weekend, and why did you not speak up for Alberta when you had the chance?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to address the question. Certainly, I was at the convention. I was working the floor. I was meeting with people who'd signed on to Leap and explaining to them exactly how important this was to our whole country's prosperity, not just Alberta's. I find that I've made a lot of progress in those conversations. I was also addressing national media and making it very clear that our entire government, Alberta government policy, our party, are opposed to this, we repudiate it, and we are continuing to move forward to get a pipeline built.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's no record at the convention of what the minister said, so it must have been voice mode.

Just before today at noon in a media conference the Premier called the Leap Manifesto thoughtless, naive, and tone-deaf and also said: it's not about how I feel. I think that Albertans may think it is about how you feel since it's the most important thing to them. And then the truth. The Premier said: I haven't read it. Premier, will you read the document so you can defend Albertans and actually stand up for them in Alberta?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I believe, again, as I've already stated, that I have a clear record of standing up for the interests of Albertans on this particular issue, and I'm very proud to continue doing that because I'm fully aware how important it is to Albertans. When I said that it's not about me, the point was this. It's about how we help Albertans and Alberta families and those people who have lost their jobs and those people that are looking for jobs and those people that are building businesses and new businesses. That's what our job as government is, that's what we will focus on, and that was what my point was.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation Communications

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's been four months since the acrimonious passage of the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act. While the benefits to the workers themselves are obvious, there remains misinformation and confusion about the benefits to the farm and ranch owners. Not only does the bill bring Alberta practices into line with the rest of the provinces in the country; the bill is essential to honour the Canadian Charter, our international obligations, and Albertans' opportunities to sell to international markets. To the minister of agriculture: given that the bill was passed in December last, when will the minister communicate more clearly and convincingly what the benefits of the bill ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It happens to be a very good question, a very timely question. We're still in the process of tweaking the membership for the technical working groups. It is important to remember – and I'm sure the member would agree – that this is about protection for farm workers, for nonfamily wage farm workers, and making sure that that remains the focus going forward, to talk to all working groups, for sure, getting input from the farm and ranch employers as well but making sure to remember that this is about the workers themselves. I'm very much looking forward to those technical working groups and their recommendations.

Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Again to the minister: given that Bill 6 protects farmers and ranchers against lawsuits, protects against criminal liability, and meets increasing international trade obligations around health and labour standards, when and how will the minister counter the misinformation with accurate public information on the benefits to farm owners and ranchers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. There has been a lot of communication. I've had the opportunity to go to many different meetings, talking with many different stakeholders, some who were quite interesting, but, you know, going to many different stakeholders, talking to them as much as I possibly can to ensure that they know the benefits to them around WCB, around how the upcoming regulations will benefit their operations, will give them additional social licence so that they can market their goods worldwide that much more easily.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Labour because this is fundamentally a labour bill. What support is available to enable vulnerable paid agriculture workers to participate meaningfully in consultations, especially when many of their bosses oppose the changes?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are committed to supporting our farm workers. We know that farm workers are already benefiting from the passage of the farm and ranch worker enhancement act through the WCB system. As of March 19 106 farm workers had injury claims approved by the WCB, more than double the 49 approved claims throughout all of 2015. Of those approved claims, 45 were for lost time, meaning that those workers were compensated for an injury that took them off the job, where they could no longer work. We will continue to engage with farm workers and include . . .

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

Education Concerns

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that Alberta schools play a critical role in shaping Alberta's next generation of leaders. We know, too, that our students will continue to require an education that prepares them for their careers in a diversified economy. To the Minister of Education: what is being done to support our students?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. You know, we are all living in very difficult economic circumstances here, but our government is committed to public education from K to 12, funding for enrolment, and making sure that all of our kids get the education that they deserve. We do not depend in Education on the price of oil but, rather, on a moral obligation to make sure that kids get the education that they need. We're working with dual credit programs with our colleges across the province. We're working with career and technology models so that we have different possibilities for kids to make sure that they get the education they deserve.

2:10

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given the economic difficulties facing our province, have we seen more families moving out of Alberta and a reduction in student enrolment as a result?

Mr. Eggen: That's a very good question, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, our ministry is monitoring and each of the school boards across the province are monitoring their enrolment very carefully. Of course, that's how they fund each of their 61 school boards. We are watching. We saw in this last year – we were estimating for about 1.5 per cent enrolment growth. Instead, we saw 2.7 per cent enrolment growth, which is very healthy. It's an indication that people are here with families. They're staying here. We're building the infrastructure to have our students in the facilities that they need and have teachers in front of those students as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I've been hearing from parents in my constituency that they are worried about their children's job prospects when they graduate, to the same minister: what steps are you taking to prepare students for success in a diversified economy?

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you for the question. Certainly, it's important for us to be creative, to have those links between postsecondary education and our high schools. In fact, we've expanded that now in a more broad way for career and technology foundations for students between grade 5 and grade 9 to have some fundamental interaction with the possibilities for different jobs in the future. We want our education to enrich the lives of each of our children, but we also want them to have a clear understanding of where that can take them in regard to the career in the future working world in which they will live.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Environmental Policies

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recently had a member's statement in this House titled I Told You So, and unfortunately that's a message that I'm going to have to bring up again. In July 2015 the Alberta Conservation Association informed Environment and Parks about certain legal liabilities regarding the aeration of about 20 lakes in Alberta. Environment and Parks came up with a last-minute, haphazard plan for aerating these lakes this winter. It was a disaster. To the minister. A lot of those lakes have had massive fish kills, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of fish, possibly entire fisheries. Will the minister stand up and accept responsibility . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Is there a minister that will take the question? Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am aware of some of the challenges with lake aeration this past winter, and we are examining the matter. We are taking it very, very seriously, and Environment and Parks will be working with the Alberta Conservation Association to get it right.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the minister assured us in this House on October 27 and again on November 18 in estimates that the matter was taken care of and given that the minister stated, "Of course, the Alberta Conservation Association is a delegated administrative authority of the Department of Environment and Parks" and given that it may take decades for a fishery to recover, to the minister:

what plans does she have to fix this ecological disaster and ensure the survival of these fisheries for future generations of Albertans?

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. Of course, one of the first ways we're going to do that is to ensure that we do not cut the heart out of environmental budgets in this province. We are going to ensure that we've got the resources in place to protect our air, land, and water for future generations, which is not something that you can do with multibillion-dollar cuts.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, this government can't seem to get anything right. Given the failure of their farm safety bill, their job-creation program, their oil projections, and the recent Balancing Pool fiasco and given this government's inability to simply keep fish from dying throughout Alberta, to the minister: how can Albertans trust this minister to manage Suffield elk, grizzlies, bighorn sheep, or any of our resources in light of this most recent environmental disaster?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we will be working with the department scientists and the ACA on this matter of the fish and fish hatchery resources.

Now, I know that the hon. member opposite takes a personal interest in hunting matters, being that he was an outfitter, so certainly I'm surprised that I'm finally getting a question on the environment. I'm not surprised that it's exactly within his personal interests, Mr. Speaker. We will be moving forward with a number of different initiatives over the spring and fall, and certainly conservation is a big part of that.

Thank you.

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

Child Care Supports

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has one of the youngest populations in Canada. Working families are the key to the Alberta advantage, but with the economy in the state it's in, they need a government that's going to be there to support them. With a \$3 billion carbon tax, job losses piling up, this government needs to take serious steps to make sure Alberta families are taken care of. One clear way is to support families and ensure access to child care and early childhood learning for children. To the Minister of Finance: will the 2016 budget contain the funding and planning for child care that your government promised back in May?

Mr. Ceci: We have a budget coming out in just a few short days. There'll be everything laid out there, including where we are in platform commitments, which I think is what the hon. member is asking about.

The Speaker: Supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the previous Alberta government created over 10,000 child care spaces with the intent of broadening Alberta's workforce and providing parents with the security they need to work and contribute to Alberta's economy, to the Minister of Human Services: what is your targeted goal for opening affordable child care spaces?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. As a government we recognize that providing affordable, quality child care is important from many different angles, for the better development of the children and for the better participation of women and parents in the workforce. We will make sure that with the coming budget we include plans that provide for these opportunities.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With all due respect, I wondered how many. We all know how important it is.

Given that since the October budget the Minister of Finance has backpedalled on commitments made during the election and given the silence of the government on child care, we need assurances that Albertans won't have to choose between child care and feeding their kids. To the Minister of Human Services again: what steps will you be taking to alleviate the financial burden on families with low incomes, families who rely on child care to work?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to assure the member opposite that, unlike their budget, we will not be further cutting from Human Services. The second thing: what steps we will be taking will be laid out in the budget, and I say, "Stay tuned."

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

Charter Schools

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I asked the Minister of Education why the ReThink charter school application was not approved by his ministry. The application met the requirements of the previous government, yet this minister replied, "Based on the way that we went through the process, some charter schools did not make the grade." Apparently, the ministry has made some changes with respect to charter school regulation. To the minister: what changes have been made to the regulation, and what made you decide that this charter, designed specifically for students with special learning needs, did not make the grade?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Certainly, our government has a wide range of different choices for education, and they all provide some value across the province. No, we had not made any changes to regulation in regard to the application of new charter schools. Rather, the previous government minister made a presumption, leaping over the regulation to make a promise for that particular school. Then with the proper application of the regulation, it was found to be wanting.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister stated last week, "We can reach out more to ensure that all students and their families in the city of Calgary and right across the province as well have all of the different opportunities available to them," when will this minister's rhetoric be matched by action? Will the minister contact ReThink charter administrators and work with them through the regulatory process so that parents can access this unique stand-alone and critically important special-needs program?

2:20

Mr. Eggen: Thank you for the question. Certainly, we've seen over the last number of years a dramatic increase in the breadth and the scope of our public schools in Calgary and Edmonton to provide unique programming to meet the needs of students in our school system in Calgary and right across the province as well. Mr. Speaker, this is part of the criteria that we use in regulation. Does the charter school provide unique programming that's not available in a public school or a separate school across the province? That was one of the reasons that, in fact, this one didn't make the grade. In fact, the public schools are . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that one charter school in Calgary has reported that, quote, we have 11,000 additional children waiting to be admitted into our school, end quote, and since Albertans obviously want the alternative charter schools and given that there are two spaces for charter applications to be filled, will the minister support the right of parental choice and allow Albertans, including ReThink charter school, access to this valuable educational alternative?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I think perhaps the hon. member is mixing up the idea of the right for people to choose and the right for charter schools to impose that they somehow have a right to have a new application come through and be approved just like that. There was confusion from the previous government because there was some leaping over the proper regulatory procedures. We do follow the procedures, and we continue to do so. We know that public education is serving a vast majority of parents and students very well – thank you very much – in this province, and there is choice . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Transportation Infrastructure

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP's recent Leap Manifesto dreams of uniting every community with high-speed rail powered by renewables, but we need this government to come back to reality and ensure our current transportation infrastructure is properly maintained. Albertans need a safe and reliable transportation network both now and well into the future. Will the Minister of Transportation commit to restoring the necessary operational funding for proper crack sealing, grass mowing, and ferry operations?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would just indicate to the hon. member – and thank you very much for the question – that we are facing difficult economic times in our province, and the financial position of the government has deteriorated with the international price of oil, as the member is well aware. The reductions in last year's budget were unfortunate. We would have preferred not to have done them, but the opposition is constantly asking us to find reductions and to find cuts. Any cut is something that they will challenge, yet they'll want us to cut . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that farmers in my constituency have been informed that the Klondyke ferry across the Athabasca River may open late and close early this year due to budget cuts and farmers need this ferry to safely move their equipment, which cannot fit through the truss bridge at Fort Assiniboine, does the Minister of Transportation intend to keep this road closed unnecessarily, or will the Klondyke ferry on highway 661 be launched in time for seeding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I will take that under advisement, and I will get back to him.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Speaker, we all care about safety, and what we need are common-sense plans that help Albertans on a daily basis. Given that the 2015 budget cut operational funding to maintenance and preservation of the provincial highway system by almost \$50 million and considering we saw accidents and close calls occur with wildlife and other vehicles due to reduced summer maintenance and grass mowing, can the minister advise when the summer maintenance directives will be given to the highway maintenance contractors so they can prepare their work schedule for the summer?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Well, as I indicated earlier, we have a difficult financial position in this province as a result of the drop in the price of oil. The difficult financial decisions that the government has to make pale in comparison with the difficult decisions that would have to be made if that party cut billions of dollars from our budget.

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

Mandatory Country of Origin Labelling for Lamb

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard great disappointment from the Alberta Lamb Producers, which is one of Alberta's many sustainable and thriving industries. In December of 2015 the United States repealed COOL legislation for beef and pork but not for lamb. The expectation of Alberta's livestock industry is that the federal and provincial governments would fight for the U.S. to repeal COOL and settle for no less than its removal from the entire industry in Canada and Alberta. To the minister: what are you doing to ensure that Alberta's lamb producers are no longer legislated by COOL?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. You know, it gives great pleasure to know that the repeal of COOL was a great victory for Alberta, a great victory for Canada, and a victory for our livestock industry. It helps enhance our mutually beneficial trade between the two countries, it helps restore those markets for Alberta's producers, it helps agricultural products. It's important to note, Mr. Speaker, that agricultural products are our second-largest export sector, and the United States is our most important trading partner.

Repealing discriminatory labelling requirements was a good step in the right direction, and I believe we're working with our federal government on looking at other – thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's lamb producers sought help of not only their MPs but of their Alberta MLAs and given that they were still included in the country of origin labelling, to the minister: how are you advocating for Alberta's lamb producers, and when will you listen to their concerns given these tough economic times?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It was my understanding that the Alberta sheep producers first raised concerns to our federal government about their requirements under COOL in 2015. At that time it was not legally possible for the lamb producers to get their concerns into that case for COOL. So I do, you know, encourage our lamb and sheep producers to contact the national Sheep Value Chain Roundtable and the Market Access Secretariat so they can address that very valid concern.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that COOL continues to discriminate against Canadian lamb and that this decision to repeal COOL for only beef and pork isolates the sheep industry as the sole livestock sector to be subject to country of origin labelling, which undermines the industry's position with the Canadian livestock sector, to the minister: what are you doing to re-establish equitable trade agreements with our U.S. trading partners?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It's important to remember that labelling requirements are still in place for poultry, lamb, and venison as well as fruits, vegetables, and certain nuts, you know, produced in Canada, so it's important that we continue working with our federal government to address those concerns. I couldn't agree more with the member that we need to do more for our lamb producers. It's also important to note that our sheep producers last year had one of the best years that they've ever had, and I hope that this year they continue to grow their industry both domestically and internationally.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Postsecondary Institution Governance

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard from many postsecondary students in my constituency regarding concerns about their institution's governance. An institution's board of governors plays an essential role in the guidance of Alberta's postsecondary institutions, and their role as a public body only increases that accountability. These boards have also become essential in allowing institutions to meet the educational needs of Alberta's diverse population, yet there are dozens of vacant positions on these boards, including those of public members and board chairs. To the Minister of Advanced Education: why haven't these vacancies been filled yet?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank my hon. friend for giving me the opportunity to address this issue. It's no secret that our government intends to reinvigorate public boards. There's a thorough process in place for applications, in which there has been significant interest. It's important that we take the time to understand the needs of our colleges and universities to ensure that board members have the appropriate expertise to meet those needs, and we're working closely with colleges and universities to find and interview the right people to serve in those critical roles.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Minister, for that answer, and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Given Alberta's diversity and unique needs of students and given that part of the government's mandate is to enhance the diversity of postsecondary boards, can the minister tell us what this means in a practical sense?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My friend is right in saying that we want to encourage more diverse perspectives on our postsecondary boards, which flies in the face of the past government's practices of only offering these appointments to their friends. Our government believes that these boards should represent the gender, social, and cultural diversity of our college and university students and that of all Albertans, and we remain focused on appointing the best people for the job. That's why we're taking the time to interview qualified, respected candidates for these crucial positions.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the governance role these boards have, again to the same minister: how can Albertans be assured that public members appointed have the right experience?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my hon. friend for this excellent final question. During our thorough interview process we assess four core competencies for all board opportunities, including senior leadership and governance, and then we assess additional competencies specific to the needs for each opening. Each and every applicant is assessed against these identified criteria. This is important to our government because postsecondary boards are responsible for guiding the future of our colleges and universities.

The Speaker: The Member for Airdrie.

Midwifery Services

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very pleased to see the Health minister respond to the Wildrose's call to recognize the importance of midwifery services to families and our health care system. However, midwives operating in clinics in places like St. Albert, Lac La Biche, and Cochrane are still worried. They need real evidence that there will be stable funding, not vague platitudes from the minister in the face of a late budget. Midwife clinics hang

in the balance. Will the minister be straight with Albertans and commit to removing the cap on access to midwives and implement a stable funding model?

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We value the role that Alberta midwives play in our system and the important role they play in the health of mothers and their babies. We're very pleased to be meeting with midwives across the province and mothers both here in Edmonton and in Calgary on various events that have happened in the last little while. This last year our government invested an additional \$1.8 million for midwifery services, funding up to 400 more midwifery-supported births than the year before, and we continue to work with our partners in midwifery.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Associate Minister of Health says that the government is still working on the details of what funding for midwives will look like in the budget and given that the NDP Member for St. Albert has reportedly been requesting a meeting with the Minister of Health on the St. Albert midwife clinic for weeks, how can midwives and families trust that the minister's claim to be listening to midwives on this issue is genuine, and has the minister even met with her own NDP MLA to hear the clinic's concerns yet?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. As a matter of fact, I regularly meet with my colleagues on any of the issues that are a concern for them, and I am pleased to report in this House, particularly given our guests here today, that the Member for St. Albert and I have met and had a thorough discussion about this issue. As I said, we are continuing to work with our partners in the midwifery college, within the Alberta association of midwifery, as well as with practices across the province.

Thank you.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given the simple fact that midwifery care saves money and given that families deserve to have the option of midwife services and that there are 1,800 women waiting for a midwife right now, adding a mere 400 courses of care last year was just not enough. Does the minister recognize that she is breaking Albertans' trust by refusing to save taxpayer dollars and ignoring the growing demand for midwifery care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the member for the question. Both myself and my hon. colleague the Minister of Health have restated our position that we are continuing to support choice for Albertans in childbirth. We have some good news coming in the upcoming budget.

I have to say that I find it very interesting that the opposition Health critic will tell one audience that his party would provide unlimited funding for midwifery clinics while at the same time their Finance critic constantly talks about cutting billions of dollars from our public services.

Foreign Trade Zones

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, under the previous federal government Port Alberta and the Calgary Region Inland Port were designated as foreign trade zones. By positioning these two cities as major international trade hubs, we can attract and leverage significant capital investment while allowing potential international partners faster and more efficient access to western Canada. To the minister of economic development. Preserving foreign trade zone status is integral to Alberta's competitiveness on the global stage, allowing greater opportunities for economic diversification. Given this announcement is less than one year old, have you received a firm commitment from your federal counterpart on Edmonton and Calgary FTZ status?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the hon. member for the question, a very good question at that. I am having dialogue and conversations with the federal government. At this point in time, to answer his question directly, no, I have not heard back yet.

But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that trade is very, very critical not only to Alberta but also to our country and to our government. We take it very seriously. That's why I recently returned from a trade mission to China and Korea, where we are looking at opportunities to leverage our successes. We had a number of concrete, tangible outcomes, that I'm happy to talk about momentarily.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the aforementioned authorities, Port Alberta and Calgary region, are noted experts in attracting and sustaining international investment and trade and given that their initiatives and strategies are integral to building the relationships we need to access global markets for a variety of our products, including oil, again to the minister: are you working with these authorities to develop an Alberta-wide plan, part of our engagement strategy, which seeks to leverage the strengths of both groups to maximize Alberta's competitiveness in the global economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question and remind the House that, again, you know, market access is a key priority for our government. This is why our Premier, our government created this Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, to have a focus on working with the private sector, the job creators, but also looking at opportunities to increase our trade opportunities. We will continue to do that.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll take it that that means you are meeting with those organizations.

Given that the minister was recently in China and Korea for 14 days and given that these are the very destinations to which we need to market and sell these two ports, again to the minister: during your trip to Asia did you mention these two entities and their status as foreign trade zones, and did you seek feedback on how your government can assist in making Alberta even more attractive as a place for international business community investment?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and again I'll thank the member for the question. Trade is absolutely critical and a high priority for our government. I can tell the House that, quite frankly, this trade mission to China and Korea was my first trade mission outside of North America. It was very intentional to go to our second- and fifth-largest trading partners for the province of Alberta. We recognize that there are incredible opportunities to increase trade, whether we're talking about agriculture and agrifood products, forestry, looking at our energy sector, as well as looking for opportunities to leverage tourism. Quite frankly, we were quite happy, and I was proud of the culture minister for announcing . . .

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

Child Benefit Program

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a community advocate for more than two decades I have heard and witnessed the effects a tough economy has on children, families, and communities. Given our government's commitment to stand up for Albertans in need, could the Minister of Human Services please update the Chamber on what our government is doing to support children and families in need throughout Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Our government knows that Albertans are feeling the shock of low oil prices. In tough times Albertans pull together. Our government has made a commitment to help Alberta families who are facing financial hardship. That is why we have created the Alberta child benefit, a new program that provides financial support to lower income families. The Alberta child benefit will help families make ends meet, support a better quality of life for children, and ensure every Albertan has the resources they need to reach their full potential.

Loyola: Thank you for the update on this initiative.

Given the current economic challenges my constituents will be pleased to hear that our government is being proactive to address economic hardship. To the same minister: could you elaborate further on what impact the Alberta child benefit will have on Alberta's children and families?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. The Alberta child benefit will improve the lives of 235,000 children in 130,000 lower income families. The ACB, Alberta child benefit, will provide \$195 million in annual benefit to Alberta families in need starting this August. All Alberta families earning less than \$41,220 will be eligible for this benefit, including those families on AISH and income supports benefits. The maximum annual benefit . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents, especially those with difficulty accessing financial resources, have been in my office and have asked how they can receive the Alberta

child benefit. Again to the minister: how can families take advantage of this important program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are basically four requirements: first, they have been living in Alberta for one month; second, they have at least one child under the age of 18; third, they have filed their tax return; and fourth, they meet the income threshold of \$41,220. I would encourage all eligible parents to file their tax returns to CRA. There are many community organizations here in Alberta who provide free tax-filing services.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 15 seconds we will move to Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Environmental Monitoring

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans agree the environmental impact of the oil sands must be effectively tracked and monitored. The previous government took steps to enhance oversight and ensure appropriate stewardship by creating the Alberta Environmental Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting Agency, or AEMERA, which was charged with the oversight of key air, water, land and biodiversity indicators. Establishment of this truly arm's-length, independent body removed potential for and optics of ministerial interference. In the House during debate one opposition member was particularly passionate and steadfast in calling for this independence. Was that just any MLA? No. It was the now minister of economic development. The minister was correct then, but can we count on him now to implore his own government to do the right thing by saving AEMERA, thereby reaffirming his principles?

Now, the government would have us all believe that AEMERA was a bureaucrat-heavy nightmare which accomplished nothing, except perhaps turning the environmental reins over to seasoned professionals and qualified independent scientists. They will tell you that an integral responsibility was offloaded and that by moving it back under the minister's control, they are doing Albertans a service. They've said again and again that they are on the side of science. Is this subjective ministerial science, characterized by the stone cold facts of the questionably funded Pembina Institute? Ten internationally recognized scientists recently signed a letter which says that the environment minister was naive in her conclusions, pointing to multiple inaccuracies in making this rash decision. This government has again put ideology ahead of objectivity, rejected professional stewardship, and it is revisiting the tired drone that all decisions of the previous government were bad, instead of doing what is best for Albertans.

As my colleague from Calgary-North West stated just last week, opposition does indeed have some valid perspectives and good ideas, and as right as your minister was in 2013 . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Silver Springs Community Activities

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise in this House and speak about Silver Springs Botanical Gardens Society and the Silver Springs Community Association, two great organizations in the best constituency in Alberta, Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Speaker, we say that April showers bring May flowers, and for these two organizations 2015 applications brought 2016 grants. I want to congratulate the Silver Springs Botanical Gardens Society for receiving a community initiatives program grant so that they could conduct renovations and buy new gardening equipment and the Silver Springs Community Association for receiving a community facility enhancement program grant to improve the conditions of their community hall so that they could keep holding unique community events like the Silver Springs family barbecue, Christmas craft fair, and, my personal favourite, the annual Lego building competition. The community of Silver Springs and the Silver Springs Botanical Gardens are truly hidden gems of Calgary.

I had the pleasure of touring the botanical gardens just a couple of weeks ago and was able to see first-hand the incredible work that the volunteers have been able to accomplish in just a few years. As someone who loves literature, my favourite area is the Shakespeare garden, which features quotations from some of Shakespeare's greatest works, my favourite being the quotation from act 5, scene 1 of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which was my line when I was in the play in high school and reads, "O Wall, sweet and lovely Wall," placed beside the sound barrier that divides Silver Springs and Crowchild Trail.

It's these little heritage points that make Silver Springs so special. Silver Springs is one of five vibrant communities in Calgary-Hawkwood where neighbours and families work every day to make our little corner of Calgary beautiful. Due to the hard work of volunteers in the community of Silver Springs, everything is coming up roses. Mr. Speaker, April 10 to 16 is also National Volunteer Week in Canada, and I am proud of what these two organizations have managed to achieve for our community through dedicated volunteering.

Thank you.

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

St. Albert Community Midwives

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and recognize a new midwifery clinic in the community of St. Albert, as my friend across the way mentioned. Midwifery is a holistic and science-based practice, based on the belief that pregnancy, labour, and birth are profound experiences for women and their families. Currently there are 85 registered midwives in Alberta.

In September of 2015 three brave women left their jobs at an Edmonton clinic to open a new clinic in St. Albert called the St. Albert Community Midwives clinic. One of these women, Jennifer Thomson, practised in the United Kingdom before moving to Alberta and starting her practice. It was very interesting to hear that midwifery in the United Kingdom is essentially a given. Any woman that would like to use a midwife has access. I hope that one day Canadian women will enjoy the access to midwives that women do in the United Kingdom. When I asked Jennifer why she chose midwifery, she simply said: it's all I ever wanted to do; it's not a job; it's my life.

Anna Gimpel, originally from the Ukraine, trained and practised as a midwife in Israel before coming to Canada.

Sabrina Roy received her education in Canada and practised in Ontario before setting up shop in Alberta. Sabrina is a brand new mom to the very beautiful Anja, who also happens to be the great-great-granddaughter of Tommy Douglas, father of medicare in Canada. So, of course, I'll use this to, you know, segue into one of my favourite Tommy Douglas statements: social justice is just like taking a bath; you have to do it every day or you start to stink.

Between them these three women have 32 years of experience in midwifery, and we are blessed to have them in St. Albert. I hope they'll be there for many years to come.

I am proud of our government's commitment to midwifery and empowering women to choose what is best for themselves and for their families.

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

Olds College

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Formal education is much different than real life. In formal education we learn our lessons to prepare for our tests. Meanwhile in real life we get tested and learn from those lessons.

Last Thursday my colleagues and I had the distinct privilege of attending the Olds College black-tie gala. For the unfamiliar, Olds College campus is a historical landmark dating back to 1911, when it was a demonstration farm. Two years later it opened and became known as the Olds school of agriculture and home economics. This college has gone from humble beginnings to becoming a world-class facility, developing hands-on training, applied research, and innovation. The scope and breadth of programs there has expanded to the fields of fashion, hospitality, and agribusiness. They recently added a brewmaster and brewery operations management course, where students have hands-on brewing experience. They also have their own retail store and market these fine craft beers.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, I was absolutely enthralled with these students' entrepreneurial spirit and the confidence that they exuded. It speaks to the very core of the agricultural sector. At a time when many young men and women are leaving the family farm, it really gladdens this farmer's heart to see such passion and self-initiative.

These qualities are exactly what Olds College is all about, from a small-town agricultural college to a modern, high-tech institution that all Albertans should be proud of. Like a family farm, it has grown and prospered in no small part through the perseverance of its students, faculty, and alumni. My colleagues and I were truly honoured to attend their gala and wish them another 100 years of continued success and tradition.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 204 Alberta Tourism Week Act

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 204, the Alberta Tourism Week Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices and in accordance with section 4(5) of the Election Act I would like to table five copies of the following report, the Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the Provincial General Election, May 5, 2015. Copies of this report will be provided to all members.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there were two points of order I noted today, raised by the Government House Leader. The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think with respect to the first point of order that it was in regard to a member's statement. I understand that a point of order may not be permitted with respect to a member's statement, in which case I would withdraw that one.

The Speaker: The second point of order.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During question period one of the hon. members opposite made a statement which I believe violates Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j), and that was – and I don't have the Blues in front of me – to the effect that all hon. members on this side would have voted for the Leap Manifesto or would have voted to shut down the oil industry had we not been in government. That is completely untrue. That is a smear upon the members on this side, on all of us, whether we're in cabinet or members of caucus.

I want to bring to the attention of the House and to your attention, Mr. Speaker, that since 2008, when I was the leader of our party, we've had clear policy in place to support the orderly and responsible development of the oil sands. We have spoken in this House on many occasions, in public on many occasions, and at our conventions through the passage of motions and the debate thereof to the effect that we support an orderly and responsible development of Alberta's oil sands and that we support pipelines that meet the criteria set out for environment, for agreement with First Nations and that we further support the maximum upgrading of products here in Alberta to create jobs.

For the member opposite, throughout question period and in Members' Statements, to use such provocative and insulting language, to impute motives to this side of the House is quite frankly a clear violation of the standing orders and the standards of dignity and decorum that have existed in this House. Moreover, Mr. Speaker, it is an attempt to mislead the public as to the position of this government and this party over many years. We are clear on the record. We were supporting the orderly development of the oil sands and access to tidewater before their party was even a figment of someone's imagination.

Mr. Speaker, they can attempt to smear us, they can attempt to mislead the public as to our positions, but they can't do it here in direct violation of the rules of this House. I ask that you would rule that there is a clear violation of sections 22(h), (i), and (j) in this case.

The Speaker: Could I just clarify with the Government House Leader that when you said section 22, you meant 23?

Mr. Mason: Yes, I did. Sorry. I misspoke.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and continue what clearly is a matter of debate. There are many things that happen in this Assembly and a wide variety of opinions. Not very long ago you rose in this place and gave the government permission to call this side of the House climate deniers. There is a wide swath of what should and should not be able to be spoken in this House. As shocking as many of the ideas may be to most Albertans, the Leap Manifesto and the ideas behind it are nothing new to NDP policy. The fingerprints of many in the NDP government can be found all over the ideas of the Leap Manifesto.

While the government would like to distance itself from itself, the Premier's chief of staff ran for the leadership of the federal NDP on a plan to end the use of fossil fuels right across the country. Our own environment minister here in Alberta sought and received the endorsement of the main author of the Leap Manifesto, Avi Lewis, prior to her election last May. A number of former anti-oil and antipipeline activists currently work in the minister's office, and that's been well documented both here and outside of the Chamber.

The Speaker: Hon. member, can you focus your attention on the government rather than the party.

Mr. Cooper: My point, Mr. Speaker, is that what we have here is a matter of debate. This side of the House has presented one perspective of the facts. While the hon. House leader may disagree with those facts, that is exactly what they are. We have this sort of back and forth all the time. In fact, on the 15th of March, at approximately 5:15, the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, as part of his maiden speech, stated that he'll be writing a book on his time here and said: if the Wildrose will stop lying about the NDP, he will not tell the truth about the Wildrose.

This is the exact challenge, Mr. Speaker, that they believe one thing to be true and we know another to be true, particularly around the issues that were debated here in the House. It's been well documented that if you are a member of the provincial NDP, you are a member of the federal NDP. We are merely discussing those important issues as they are important to Albertans, and they need to understand the nature of this government.

3:00

The Speaker: The House leader for the third party.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to offer some comments on this particular point of order. Very clearly, this is not a point of order. This is a matter of debate, and it's very clear within our standing orders and indeed within the traditions of parliament that the standing orders and the rules of procedure within our parliaments are not to be used to somehow shield or protect the government from issues that are to be debated within the House. The reference to the various standing orders in section 23, quite frankly, do not hold in this matter. They are clearly a matter of disagreement and not a matter of an infraction of any of the rules.

You know, it's interesting to me that one of the burdens of governing that the government is learning, one would hope – and they'll learn more as they go along – is that you have to become a little more thick-skinned. I find it actually curious that the Government House Leader is so vociferous when he himself would regularly participate in exactly those kinds of comments, and we had to just sort of sit quietly and take it because it is within the rules entirely. As long as we're borrowing Shakespearean phrases here: it's part of the slings and arrows of office. This government would do well to learn to accept the responsibility of the slings and arrows of office and to accept the fact that you will be criticized. You have to accept that criticism and defend those critiques rather than simply try to hide behind the rules of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Government House Leader, you had something you'd like to add?

Mr. Mason: I just wanted to add one thing, Mr. Speaker. I wrote down the quote, and you can check it against the Blues. It's specific to members, and it says: all members opposite would have voted for this had they not been in government. It's absolutely unfair and untrue.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have looked at the Blues. I also anticipated that 23(i) through (j) would be referenced, and in addition to the Blues, I also was listening carefully. I found, as has been mentioned, that the practice is to give "considerable leeway" to members, the widest latitude, as I recall a ruling by Mr. Zwodzesky in 2012. I would also draw your attention to page 510 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. There is occasionally disagreement on facts, a difference of opinion. I think in this particular instance that there is no point of order. However, I would draw to the attention of the members yet again that the intent of section 23, those specific references – you are causing emotion in the House which is not necessary to the important substance of the debate. I would therefore rule in this particular instance that there was no point of order.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 202

Alberta Affordable Housing Review Committee Act

[Debate adjourned April 4: Mr. Cooper speaking]

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the few minutes I have left today on this piece of legislation, Bill 202, to just wrap up a couple of quick final thoughts for the Chamber on our roles and responsibilities when it comes to this important issue. There are many great issues that are facing us today. Certainly, Bill 202 touches on some of those very, very important issues when it comes to affordable housing – when you wrap that into some of the great organizations right across this province of ours that provide these sort of services to those in need. There is often no better solution to the issues of poverty and those that affect children than providing a home.

Let me be clear that my desire is to ensure that we can do the most possible when it comes to providing affordable housing.

Mr. Speaker, what folks in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills don't need is another study. There have been many studies brought forward to this place, a number of them very extensive, comprehensive, and all of those studies call for action. It's my hope that the government, upon the passing of a motion very similar to this piece of legislation and upon hearing the desires of the House, will in fact move on the issues surrounding affordable housing. But it will be difficult for me to support such a piece of legislation that will delay this important work. As I mentioned earlier, in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills there are 20 available residences that are managed by Mountain View Seniors' Housing, 13 of which are not currently in a state that can be inhabited because of this government's and the previous government's inability to keep those up. What the people in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills want is for those 13 properties to be repaired and provided to those in need.

While I appreciate the hon. member's desires for this piece of legislation, while I appreciate the hon. member's intent in trying to move the needle, what the government needs to do is to take this intent, take this desire, and act upon the things that need to be done to ensure that there is appropriate affordable housing available across this province. It is with some sadness that I won't be supporting this piece of legislation in encouraging the government to do the right thing in the area of affordable housing.

The Speaker: Does 29(2)(a) apply here? Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and speak on a topic which is close to my heart, that of affordable housing in this province. It is a subject which is on the minds of many of those stakeholders within the industry as well as those who are providing housing to individuals and families in support of families-first housing and affordable housing for seniors all across the province in different jurisdictions. The province's desire, of course, is to act on affordable housing.

The Speaker: Hon. member, it's been pointed out to me that, in fact, you have already spoken to Bill 202. You cannot speak again.

I would therefore recognize the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise today to speak to Bill 202. I would like to say that I would like to commend the member for both the intent and the objectives of this bill. Of course, it's an important issue for all Albertans. It is about politics, of course, but it's not only about politics. It's not about partisanship, and it's not about pushing forth competing ideologies. It's really about people. It's about their lives, their stability, and their futures.

Often a key component and arguably one of the most important factors for all Albertans is safe, affordable, and appropriate housing for today and into the future. So we need to get on with that discussion, with developing viable, sustainable, solutions, not Band-Aids, not more talk when we need action, not controls, and not investment-killing measures. Let's strongly consider the opportunities that may lie ahead with respect to federally, provincially, or municipally owned lands that could be brought to the table to help to solve this problem, one of the other investments that the public sector can bring forth.

3:10

Is housing security a basic human right? Is 30 per cent or more of income onerous? And should we be only helping those that fall below the core need income threshold? These are many questions that are being discussed, as we speak, in the housing community. I would assert that bringing innovation, creativity, and collaboration to bear to address what I think of as the elephant in the province – having spent over a dozen years in the building industry myself, also engaged with both affordable housing and attainable home ownership, housing affordability is not just about homelessness. It's not just about low and middle income; it's actually an issue for all Albertans.

Does the government want to solve this problem? Is the government prepared to invest in, to plan, to build, to own, and to operate an adequate supply of affordable rental housing? Can the public purse meet these demands? I would suggest that that's not the case. I believe in what I often refer to as PPNP, public, private, and nonprofit partnerships, to leverage public investment from the various levels of government, not heavy-handed, ideologically driven controls. Those don't work. But we have a public responsibility, and there is an opportunity there. The public responsibility is there to invest in housing for our vulnerable and for all Albertans. The private sector brings forth capital and

expertise, which is much needed and which we can leverage against. I found that the nonprofit sector brings passion and a lean-and-mean operating environment to assist with addressing this issue.

So I would assert that we need to find innovative ways to create more inventory – that’s what this is about at the end of the day – but not only to create more inventory. We actually create more inventory by creating movement through the housing continuum, closing the gaps and reducing the barriers efficiently in cost-effective ways to leverage public investment, to help people to move through, which allows people to move up through that continuum as time goes by. Rent controls will further limit supply. I’ll talk to that a little bit later, but it is proven that that is very often the fact.

I agree with investing during this economic downturn to maximize returns on the public investment and, as importantly, to stimulate job creation. Having been in that industry for many years and having watched the houses go from excavation to forming to foundations to framing, residential construction creates probably more jobs per dollar invested than almost any other type of infrastructure investment. Therefore, I would advocate and hope that both our Finance and Infrastructure ministers will put a significant percentage – 5 per cent would probably be significant – of the \$4.3 billion of slush that we’ve heard about towards not only the huge economic stimulus that that would create but the delivering of much-needed housing stock and jobs.

The previous government had some good plans in place. I was able to actually engage in some of that, in some affordable housing initiatives, highly successful capital grants to stimulate affordable rental and ownership development for not only low- but middle-income working families in Alberta, who are sometimes forgotten in this discussion and in this argument. I think we need to take that into account here, that it’s not just those that are homeless and low income but it’s middle-income workers who are just scraping by and just going paycheque to paycheque who often need our assistance and are also those people who we need to attract here when we’re lucky enough to have a robust economy.

Those are some of my key concerns. But with respect to the bill itself I do have some other concerns that I’d like to bring forward. One is that there is no specification that this is an all-party committee, and that concerns me.

Second, it’s meant to include members of the public and specified stakeholders. If so, what is the representation? How many? How many relative to the – I’m hoping – all-party MLA members? How will we ensure transparency and accountability? Public stakeholder groups: assuming that public, private, and nonprofit representation will be included on that committee, how will they be chosen? What roles, authority, and responsibilities will they have? How and how much will they be remunerated? The cost of the committee administration is in the bill in remuneration for nongovernment members and travel and other costs, but they’re not clearly specified, so we don’t really know what the cost of this initiative is. All the costs will be borne by this Legislature, and the people of Alberta will demand transparency. Is this just to become another agency or board, and if so, why is it not just under Seniors and Housing as a permanent working group?

I have some other concerns. There is talk of rent regulation, rent subsidies, security deposits. I do not see any mention specifically for seniors in this plan. I’m concerned that this bill currently focuses on the symptoms rather than the root causes, not focusing, really, on the long-term, sustainable solutions that we require in this province.

Missing from the list of included representatives are developers. Anybody who’s been in the business knows that there is a distinct

difference between builders and developers in the building community, their focus and operations often significantly different.

The question of social engineering. Has this gone awry? Is it not meeting the needs of the community without significant and unjustified public investment?

Then I hear about rental caps and rental controls. I’ve got a document, which I’ll table tomorrow, called the international experience with rent controls: a summary of studies and experiences. In short, it says that rent control inevitably leads to a rental housing supply shortage, rent controls make a short-term housing supply shortage permanent, overall supply of rental units to the market drops, and as we all know, units get converted to other uses, condominiumization. The other thing that can happen on the development side: demolition and redevelopment is accelerated because of the opportunity to move more profitably to other forms of use of the same land.

The other issue, of course, is security deposits. I agree. Let’s put in a mechanism to protect against a few landlords who might abuse the system, but I can’t condone putting in place a policy or law that protects or limits liability on those that may wilfully damage other people’s property.

Failure to return damage deposits, I understand, is a Service Alberta complaint, but I’d like to know what that percentage is of the total number of rental units. Is it significant enough to put in heavy-handed legislation for? Anecdotally, from the Calgary Residential Rental Association: in a 2013 survey of 103 members there were \$367,000 in landlord damages, increasing in 2014 to \$492,000. If you’re a small, independent landlord and you suffer one of those losses, that can wipe out that entire often not even a return on investment as we know that many of those people buy that property for long-term appreciation.

Inclusionary zoning is mentioned as well. Usually that’s a 10 per cent requirement and a major initiative pushed by many whom again I would characterize as social engineers. This encourages meeting quotas, not developing the best and most innovative affordable housing stock within an integrated community, and may lead to ghettoization for low-income renters and owners. I don’t think that’s the way we want to go.

To me, innovation is key, and as we have hinted in our Engage document, we believe that co-location of seniors; affordable, attainable, and market housing; possibly along with services such as day care could be the wave of the future in innovation and in creating community hubs for housing and services not only for seniors but for families.

I have a motion coming down the road which I think is a little more prescriptive than what this bill is in terms of what the stakeholders are, but I can tell you that I think the best recommendation – and I was lucky enough to have spent some time with the Minister of Seniors and Housing this morning – is to create a permanent working group, which would include members of the private, public, nonprofit organizations, AAMD and C, and AUMA, to develop, really, initiatives and a direction for seniors’ care issues and other identified affordable housing needs across this province, looking at demographic and geographic issues, doing the studies about where that inventory needs to be, and to put that in place with the leaders of this industry as a permanent working group.

Again, as I said, I am very appreciative and thankful for the member bringing forward what I think is a very noble initiative and objectives, but given the shortcomings there and the opportunity to create this within the ministry, I will not be supporting this bill today.

Thank you.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not stand to support this bill. As a number of my colleagues have said, this is one of the top issues from their constituents and certainly from my constituents. I would offer the following two stories. The first is about Daniel and his wife. They were thrilled to learn that they were to be parents. The baby was born, and they were so excited. They came home only to receive a notice of eviction in 30 days because it was an adult-only complex.

3:20

The second story is about Tim. Tim, 68 years of age, who's wife had recently passed away, received notice that his rent was increasing by a hundred dollars per month. That might have been fine except that it was the third increase in 18 months. He worked all his life at survival wages, but he worked, and he paid his bills, and he survived. He was receiving OAS, GIS, and a very small pension of a hundred dollars per month. While his wife was alive and also receiving a small amount, they could make ends meet. Now with the rent increase he had to make a choice about paying rent or buying some groceries.

It is for these constituents that I must stand and support this bill. No one in Alberta should be left in this position. Thank you.

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

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support Bill 202. As mentioned in my motion, housing is a fundamental human right, especially appropriate and affordable shelter. We need to make sure that all Albertans are looked after. I'm so proud of the fact that this government is protecting the most vulnerable even in these challenging times. What can be considered decent housing for one person is not necessarily for another. Without proper support systems in place many vulnerable Albertans are at risk of becoming homeless.

I would like to echo some of my colleagues with the latest census data from 2011. It found that over 23 per cent of renters in the province were in core housing need, that 10.7 per cent of all Alberta households, or 137,485 households, were in core housing need, and that some populations are more affected by housing challenges than others. Indigenous people and newcomers make up a higher percentage of renters in core housing need.

I also would like to address the issue of survivors fleeing from domestic violence situations. Of 3,631 women housed from April 1, 2011, to September 20, 2015, 49.9 per cent self-reported being exposed to or fleeing from a family violence situation.

You see, Mr. Speaker, housing is so fundamental, and it's just so important that we have adequate housing for our most vulnerable people here in Alberta. This is why I will be supporting this, and I encourage my other colleagues in this House to do same.

Thank you.

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

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly my pleasure to rise today to talk about Bill 202 before us, the Alberta Affordable Housing Review Committee Act. I'll echo some of the comments of the other members of the House. I'm sure that the intent of the act is good. Affordable housing is a big issue. It's not a now issue; it's an always issue, and it always will be. It's something I'd like to think I know just a little bit about. During my time on Calgary city council I spent three of those years as chair of the Calgary Housing Company, which is the largest landlord in the city of Calgary. It was then, and I believe it still is now. At the time that I chaired the Calgary Housing Company, there were about

10,000 units under our care and about 25,000 people in those units under our care.

From that, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I know that this is a complex issue. One size does not fit all. Of the people that need help with affordable housing, there's probably a different explanation for every single one. Some just don't make enough money. Some have had a difficult event in their life. It could be a job loss. It could be an injury. It could be a mental or physical breakdown. It could be a family breakup. The point is that it's not entirely that simple to solve the problem.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, we need to try. When I was on city council, we did launch at that time – it was about 10 years ago now. I guess I know that because one of the police chiefs was talking about it today. We launched the plan to eliminate homelessness. That was a well-intended effort that, with the help of a lot of people, has put thousands of people in a position where they have roofs over their heads, and that's pretty important.

In fact, I believe that the housing first plan is one that is certainly well worth supporting by us. Not only is it good on the human side, in that it looks after people; interestingly enough, as a fiscal conservative, it's actually good business. Mr. Speaker, not only does it give people more dignity to have their own address and a place where they can go at the end of the day and a place where they know they start from at the beginning of the day, but for those people that need extra help to maintain and improve their lives, it actually allows society to help them.

For those that might need financial support, it's a place to deliver the support to. For those that might need mental or physical counselling or help or other types of wraparound supports, it's a place to go to deliver those wraparound supports. In some cases it's a place to pick the people up from to take them where they can get the help. The point is that you can't help people if you can't find them, and giving them a home is the best way to be able to find them so that you can help them. Some people, Mr. Speaker, just need to get temporarily past the situation.

I will echo some of the concerns. The bill, while I'm sure it's well intended, falls short in some pretty important areas, Mr. Speaker. There is no indication that it would be an all-party committee. Affordable housing is not a left/right issue. It's not a Conservative versus a Liberal issue versus an NDP issue; it's a human issue and one that I would like to think that people in this House would want to work together on. I would like to think that looking after people that need housing doesn't belong to any particular section of the political spectrum. I think it's something we should all turn our minds and our efforts to together.

Mr. Speaker, this bill doesn't do it. Just the fact that the number of people on the committee doesn't allow for contributions from all parties: that's a concern. People that need homes should not be made a political football; they should be made something that we should all turn our efforts to together. Unfortunately, this bill doesn't really allow for that.

I'm a little concerned with some of the text in the bill. I can tell you, as one of my colleagues talked about, that rent controls – I think it's called "rent regulation" here in (2)(a) – typically make the problem worse. Rent controls can sometimes temporarily make the situation better, but where studies have been done, over time it takes away the incentive for investment.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I would

invite the hon. Member for Calgary-East to close debate on Bill 202.

Ms Luff: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to all my colleagues who took the time to stand up and speak to this bill in second reading. I just want to quickly reiterate the purpose of the bill. The purpose of the bill is simply to create a committee that will look at solutions for affordable housing in Alberta. I think everyone in the House has agreed that affordable housing is an issue, that it's something that we need to address, and it's something that we need to address quickly. I don't think anyone disagrees on those facts.

The bill does leave it open in terms of the membership of the committee. It says it can be three members, but it could be more than that. I'm willing to look into that if that is a concern that folks have.

However, I do want to address some arguments from the opposition. When the official opposition was advocating their point on this bill, they accused me of not consulting on a bill that's about consulting, and then they said we didn't need more consulting. So you'll forgive me if I'm a little confused about what their points were. Really, all I want to do is to get people together who have the expertise to make good recommendations to this government to solve a problem that is a critical issue.

3:30

The other party has also accused me of, you know, ideologically driven social engineering. The topics that I included in this bill were topics that were drawn from the most important people to me, and those people are my constituents, Mr. Speaker. I would argue that opposition to a bill that seeks to provide solutions on affordable housing simply because it includes rent regulation would indicate to me that you are more ideologically driven than you're accusing me of being.

Mr. Speaker, I have a science degree; I was a science teacher. I am someone who values research, who values actual solutions that are proven based on research and evidence, and I believe that that is true of everyone else in this government. Now, I pride myself on being open minded, and I'm open to any solutions that the committee may put forward. That actually doesn't really have much to do with me; these are just issues that folks in my community wanted me to work on.

In terms of concerns, there were some concerns brought up surrounding the timeline. When I did speak with some groups, including the Calgary Housing Company, they felt that nine months was already quite a short turnaround and that three months would probably be entirely too quick. This committee's recommendation should certainly not be seen as something that's doing the work of the ministry. It does not in any way prevent the ministry from moving forward with actions and programs to improve the housing situation in Alberta. It should be seen as an opportunity for the public to engage with the government on a crucial issue, and recommendations the committee makes can support the ministry moving forward. But it's something that supports the work of the ministry; it certainly does not replace the work of the ministry.

I did hear today that the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation is starting work with federal colleagues on undertaking broad-based consultations on a national housing strategy, and this is good news. This is something we haven't had in a very long time, and it's something that I think we're looking forward to working on with our federal partners in coming up with some solutions.

I think everyone in this House, Mr. Speaker, agrees that affordable housing is a critical issue. I would argue that I have

consulted with my most important stakeholders, as I have mentioned, who are my constituents, although they are not the only people that I have spoken to. They have inspired some of the provisions included in this bill. I also know that there are solutions out there. I know that there are plenty of people working on solutions every day in communities all across Alberta, and this bill is an opportunity for government to hear those solutions.

Mr. Speaker, given that every Albertan absolutely deserves a safe and secure place to call home, I would ask my colleagues to support this bill. Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a second time]

Bill 203

Fair Trading (Motor Vehicle Repair Pricing Protection for Consumers) Amendment Act, 2016

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

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy today to introduce debate on second reading of Bill 203, the Fair Trading (Motor Vehicle Repair Pricing Protection for Consumers) Amendment Act, 2016.

Other than buying a house, the purchase and maintenance of a vehicle is often one of the biggest investments a person can make. We need to ensure that we are doing everything we can to protect Albertans from undue and unanticipated costs. We can do this by enhancing consumer awareness and consumer rights as well as supporting all players in the industry.

We know that this is a competitive industry and that many business owners take great pride in doing things right for consumers. I am pleased to have met with several of them over the past weeks, and there is certainly agreement from them that consumer protections are important. There is, however, also concern that not every business is operating at the standard, and in fact these businesses that are lagging behind and not keeping pace with industry standards are causing harm to the reputation of the industry as a whole. This is causing difficulty for consumers when they are choosing where to have their vehicles repaired. I believe that consumers should never have to worry about being taken advantage of, especially when they may be in a position of financial vulnerability.

I've had many conversations with people in my community who are asking questions. I think there are a lot of additional avenues that can be explored to increase consumer protections in this area, but these are outside of the scope of this bill here before us. This bill will establish guidelines that increase transparency, accountability, and peace of mind for both consumers and business owners. With this bill I am working to ensure that these consumers are protected against potential unforeseen financial stress should they need to repair this important investment. The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that this bill is about consumer protections. I hope that the debate here today will be the start of a larger conversation about the need for increased and updated consumer protections here in Alberta.

Bill 203 takes steps to make sure all Albertans have the information they need about their rights as consumers when it comes to automotive repair. This bill creates a framework for both the consumer and the business that will reduce the potential for conflict between these two groups. This bill will establish a process that both parties can understand and can rely on and will provide consumer protection and a process that is easy to follow.

Both prior to and since the bill's introduction I have received a lot of positive feedback, and I certainly continue to welcome any and all

input on the bill and look forward to additional suggestions for areas that might increase consumer protections. The goal here is to ensure that consumers have the greatest possible protection and to ensure that they have clarity and confidence that they will not be taken advantage of.

Mr. Speaker, I have met and continue to meet with a number of stakeholders in the automotive repair industry. It's been great to hear their perspectives on the proposed legislation, and I look forward to hearing more from them as we move through this process. I've had great discussions with organizations like AMVIC, who is the regulator for the auto industry here in Alberta, the AMA, the Canadian Independent Automotive Association as well as individual business owners and consumers alike.

My consultations with AMVIC have been extremely positive. We've had numerous conversations about this bill and how it would affect the industry and what we could potentially do to further strengthen the consumer protection efforts within this bill. I've had excellent feedback from the industry and have heard several suggestions on where we can strengthen this bill and areas where there is opportunity to create clarity.

I've also had very positive conversations with the AMA, who have been very supportive of the bill to date and have offered invaluable insight throughout this process. I'd like to point to a quote from an article in *Collision Repair Magazine* that I think really emphasizes what I'm trying to accomplish with this bill.

The move to pass bill 203 is a step in the right direction, according to [AMA] Senior Policy Analyst, Scott Wilson.

"It's an appropriate direction and echoes some of the provisions in other jurisdictions, which is what I think they were trying to achieve," said Wilson. "I think anytime you can provide a consumer with a little more certainty around a transaction at a collision repair facility, it's a good thing."

At the end of the day, this legislation simply will allow consumers and automotive repair shops to come to a written agreement on the estimated cost of work before it's started. Before a repair shop does any work, the business must offer to give the client a written estimate for the total work expected, and the client must sign off on the estimate before work will begin. In keeping with practices already followed by businesses in Alberta, the final cost charged can't be higher than 10 per cent of the quoted price unless the consumer specifically agrees to the new cost. Many repair shops already follow the practice of offering to provide an estimate to their customers. This just ensures that everyone is playing by the same rules. By asking every business to provide an estimate prior to work starting, this will help reduce the potential for conflict between consumers and businesses. Consumers will know up front the expected costs of the work, and business owners will have protection since the customer will have signed off on the cost before work has started.

After work is complete, the consumer will be provided with a clear invoice that explains all charges and costs. This will help customers feel confident that the work they were charged for was not only fair, but they will have a better understanding of what exactly was done and what the associated costs were. The intent is that this bill will help both consumers and business owners know what is expected of them during their transactions and will ensure clarity in the process.

Further, this bill will ensure that consumers' rights are posted in all repair shops as well so that parties know what exactly is expected of each of them. This is something that people have been very supportive of throughout my consultations.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, this bill builds on the best practices already in place in the industry both here in Alberta and in other jurisdictions like Ontario and Manitoba. Many repair shops are already following many of these initiatives laid out in the bill. By enshrining best practices into legislation, we're strengthening their effectiveness and strengthening consumer protection efforts here in Alberta. The hope is that this bill will be the first step in an ongoing discussion around consumer protections in Alberta, and I look forward to the opportunity to continue the debate about consumer protections here in the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sorry, but I must have missed it when the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark did all of his introductions earlier and introduced all of the stakeholders. Maybe I just happened to miss that.

It is with mixed feelings that I rise today to speak to the second reading of Bill 203, the Fair Trading (Motor Vehicle Repair Pricing Protection for Consumers) Amendment Act, 2016. First off, I guess I'd like to thank the representatives, those who are the stakeholders in the auto industry, for attending this discussion on Bill 203 here today. It is critical that Albertans feel confident that when they need the service of repair, they will get it in an open, transparent, and honest way.

Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the member who is moving this proposed bill, the current Fair Trading Act, specifically section 12, automotive business regulations, positions Alberta as a leader in Canada and is certainly superior to that of Manitoba and Ontario, where it is clear much of this legislation has taken its inspiration from. Alberta is the only province in Canada with a regulatory body, the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council, AMVIC, to monitor repair services by operating under designated provincial legislation.

Before I get into the meat of what I want to say, I just want to touch briefly on the number of complaints the industry receives. From June 30, 2014, to July 1, 2015, the motor vehicles association of Alberta recorded only 45 consumer complaints that were submitted to AMVIC, and none of these resulted in any charges or fines. So let's put this in perspective, Mr. Speaker. This is 45 of over 5 million vehicles serviced. That is an absolutely minuscule number. Furthermore, throughout the 2015 cycle the Canadian Independent Automotive Association has outlined that AMVIC received 251 complaints specifically relative to the independent service and repair sector. This resulted in only 12 undertakings and no administrative penalties or warnings. Again, putting it into perspective and context, another minuscule number.

Mr. Speaker, this all tells me that our system is designed very well indeed. I am not one of those folks that will say, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" because I'm a firm believer that things can always be improved. As legislators we should always encourage each other, especially Albertans, to do better and to always try and get the job done. This being said, I want to break down this legislation so that we can all see the faults in what is currently before us and so that we do not turn a system that is working relatively well into one where there is heightened confusion and unnecessary angst.

Let's start with the estimate fee section. Under the current Fair Trading Act repairs may not exceed an estimate by "more than 10%, to a maximum of \$100," and consumers must be informed and consent given in advance of the fees that are going to be charged.

The proposed section 57.3 of the bill will mean that an estimate fee cannot be charged if the consumer agrees to and authorizes repairs because the definition of “estimate fee” is not clearly defined to distinguish between inspections and diagnostic services. One or both of these fees would have to be waived by the repairer.

Furthermore, an estimate fee should not be subject to a government-prescribed maximum. Repairers invest a considerable amount of time and money into equipment and labour to be able to diagnose and inspect vehicles simply to determine the cause and course of action to complete the repairs. Diagnosis requirements are so vast in scope that to prescribe a maximum would be illogical.

Again, to put this in perspective, the people that work on your vehicles are not mechanics; they are technicians. They are highly trained individuals that have to figure out what a problem is. To understand the vehicle is to understand that some vehicles have miles, if not several miles, worth of wires, and it is not a simple fix when we’re fixing the vehicles that we currently have on the road today.

Consider this, for example. A vehicle has an electrical issue and requires six hours of diagnosis time by a skilled and highly trained technician with high-tech equipment. A broken wire is found to be the problem, and 10 minutes of repair is then required. As this section of the proposed bill currently reads, a repairer could only charge for the 10-minute repair time, not the six hours of diagnosis time. Again, very illogical. This section must be taken back to the drawing board as to retain the current Fair Trading Act intent and to ensure that the language used to describe estimate fees clarifies that all fees that are going to be charged receive consumer consent prior to commencement.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on about other flaws that are evidenced in this proposed bill, and there are clear problems with section 57.7, additional work, as well as 57.9(3), return of parts, among others. However, in the interest of time and seeing that I am entering the end of mine, it is important I talk about the section of warranty. Currently, government does not impose mandatory warranties, but if a repairer extends a warranty and does not provide what they promise, they would then be in violation of the Fair Trading Act, and action from the consumer could be taken against them. This proposed bill looks to create a mandatory 90-day, 5,000-kilometre parts and labour warranty on all repairs, including new and reconditioned parts. The repairer will also have to compensate the consumer for towing costs when the warranty is applicable. The consumer will be able to take the warranty repairs to another shop if deemed reasonable, and the original repairer will have to compensate the consumer. Suppliers under this proposed bill will be responsible to the repairers for, quote, retail warranty reimbursement amounts.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the intent of the bill is to protect the consumer. I get that, and I agree with this notion in principle, but there are many complicated issues that contribute to the argument that the application of these laws in practice would be supremely detrimental. If we look at the current situation – we’ll take the example of a new vehicle manufacturer’s replacement parts, new or reconditioned. These parts are warranted for, in most cases, two years. With unlimited kilometres, parts, and labour included, it is necessary to put an additional layer of red tape on this that would yield no positive results. Again, illogical. When other types of parts are used, whether they be used parts or jobber parts from other jurisdictions, it becomes vastly more complicated. There is already an element of risk for the consumer using, quote, used parts, and a judgment call is made by the consumer when balancing against the price. By putting arbitrary warranties across the board on these

parts, we may in fact sacrifice safety of the consumer as more and more used parts are put back into service under perceived safety and warranty. Furthermore, how do we enforce compliance on warranties of parts that are made and constructed on other continents – again, something that is completely illogical – when their warranties are only good, for example, for 30 days?

Mr. Speaker, until more public consultation and industry input is considered, I believe that the future of this proposed Bill 203 is indeed very bleak. It would have widely felt negative repercussions that the member has clearly not anticipated, and I cannot support this bill in its present form.

Thank you very much.

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

3:50

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am here to speak in support of this motion. I believe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has done some great work on this bill consulting with various organizations. I’d also like to thank the various members of some of those organizations that are here today. He has been going out and listening to feedback throughout this bill process, and his goal is to strengthen and improve the current regulations as set out in the Fair Trading Act and the automotive business regulations.

Now, as some of you may know, I have a mechanical background. I am both a car enthusiast and have worked in the industry. I just wanted to point out for some of the guests here who are mechanics as well that at this particular stage of the legislation we cannot do amendments. We are here just to speak on our thoughts of the bill.

Now, with that in mind, one of the goals of this is for peace of mind for the consumers. When a customer comes into a shop that is reputable, the customer is paying for the expertise of those mechanics or heavy-duty mechanic, whoever it may be, to solve the particular issue they are having with their car or whatever mechanical difficulties they may be having, in a quick and cost-effective way. That is the difference between a do-it-yourself mechanic, who may enjoy doing that in their driveway but would take a long period of time or may not have the resources to properly diagnose the problem. It is important that customers feel confident that the advice they’re getting from their mechanics about what the problem is is there for the customer.

However, when I worked in the industry, I know it annoyed me and my co-workers when we heard from customers of shops that were not being honest, stories of consumers who’ve gone to a shop, for example, had something wrong with their car that, to somebody who was a mechanic, had a very simple solution that should have been solved in a short period of time, and our friend comes back to us and says: oh, I took it in for an oil change, and they told me that there was a problem with my starter and some, you know, large amount of money later I also have a new rear axle in my car.

Now, stuff like that was annoying because it hurts the trust of the industry. For example, the Better Business Bureau: the list of their top 10 complaints actually goes toward automotive repair shops. Now, one of the other members brought up AMVIC and the complaints they had, and I don’t at all dispute that number. However, I would think that the general public often thinks of the Better Business Bureau first when they think of complaints as they result to the automotive business.

Now, this is not at all to knock on the integrity of good shops out there. As an automotive enthusiast I will be the first person to sing the praises of a shop. I can think off the top of my head of transmission shops, custom car shops, muffler repair, brake repair,

and tire shops that I would not hesitate in a second to send any member of this House to should they happen to have car, brake, transmission, exhaust related issues in their car if they happened to be visiting Calgary-Currie.

What this law strikes to do is to normalize best practices. We've heard a lot of talk on the bill about estimates for repair. I will note that in the very first line of this bill it quotes "estimate" as meaning "an estimate of the total cost of the work to be performed on and repairs to be done to the motor vehicle being repaired." There was some concern from another member that perhaps that left too broad a definition about diagnostics. My interpretation of the word "estimate" is that it's indeed that, an estimate for the cost of repair.

In my experience in the shop I worked at, an estimate for repair usually came after some sort of diagnostic work, once we had an idea, potentially, from the service writer. Usually that's what I do, report to the service writer and say that I think this is wrong with said person's car or industrial engine, which was the field I worked in. They would go to the customer and provide an estimate of repair. It's going to cost X amount of dollars because your starter is gone, and that's the problem. That is normal, and that normally comes after some diagnostics.

If we had a situation where somebody came in and, frankly, it's not obvious what the problem is – as mechanics we've all had situations where somebody comes in and they're missing a driveshaft or their brake rotors are ground down to practically the venting fins, where the diagnostic work is: "Hey, look. It's broken. We know what the problem is." So it's easy to do an estimate. But when we have situations where, you know, perhaps it's a whistling sound, a ticking sound, the proverbial "it doesn't feel right," it makes sense that a diagnostic would have to take place that would take a meaningful period of time. It is true. As a mechanic I myself own several diagnostic tools. I have several tens of thousands of dollars' worth of tools in my tool box from when I worked in that industry. Those diagnostic tools are important. In that case, you know, the best practice would be that you let the customer know that there are going to be some diagnostic costs. I don't believe that this bill would be counter to that normal practice.

Now, one of the other things that this bill seeks to do is to have some signage in the shops so that those particular customers would know what their rights are. Often for most people who are coming to a repair shop, mechanics is not their specialty, so it is important to have that there so the customers are aware.

I'm going to go with another story about the importance of estimates. As somebody who, like I said, is a car enthusiast, I've had experiences where when I've gone out to a shop, it is always worth while for me, especially when I was new – I may have an expensive repair. I'd often ask the shop, "Hey, my budget for fix this is going to be this. I am fine with you taking a look at it, having a diagnostic, but if it's going to go over a certain price, that is just outside of the range of my budget for that particular car," especially when the car is older and more used and it may not be worth it to do an extensive repair on that. That is perfectly reasonable.

Again, going back to that idea that there are some shops that would take advantage of somebody by not giving an estimate, not letting them know how much it's going to cost because they think, "Oh, that \$600 repair for front CV joints on a Honda Civic is going to be no big deal for that customer," well, for that customer, depending on their budget, that may be a lot of money. It is important that the customers have those estimates. Frankly, to go back to a point I made earlier, it annoyed me when shops would take advantage of somebody like that by not providing an estimate or giving an idea to that customer about what it would cost. Frankly, that makes other mechanics look bad. It's about helping customers understand what they are getting into for their repair.

I'm going to read a bit of a quote here about this bill. The AMA, for example, said that the move to pass Bill 203 is a step in the right direction, according to motor vehicle association Senior Policy Analyst Scott Wilson.

It's an appropriate direction and echoes some of the provisions in other jurisdictions, which is what I think they were trying to achieve . . . I think anytime you can provide a consumer with a little more certainty around a transaction at a collision repair facility, it's a good thing.

The hon. member, I believe, is sincere in his desire to carry forward a good bill that protects customers and protects mechanics.

I'm going to give you another story from when I was a mechanic. I was working on an engine. It was going to be a very simple repair. It was going to be adjusting valves. Unfortunately, for whatever reason, somebody else working on the engine had abnormally tightened down some bolts on the valve cover, and when I went to remove the valve cover, which should have been a simple job, I ended up snapping off a couple of them, which means that I turned a very simple repair job into a very long repair job. I'm sure the mechanics in the gallery right now can all relate to a story where they've had a repair job that's just not their day. That's what happens sometimes. So, of course, when I went back to the service writer at my shop, they went to me and gave me the: so, why did this take an extremely long period of time? I had to explain to them what happened. Of course, while I was doing this, the customer was calling, wondering where their engine was, why it wasn't ready, and why it was taking us an abnormally long amount of time to get it done. [Mr. Malkinson's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Hon. member . . .

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:00

The Speaker: I was waiting with bated breath as to whether it would start.

The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to remind the member across, you're not the only mechanic in the room. Forty-five years ago I was licensed as a mechanic. I spent five years in the trade, so I know a little bit about it. Long before diagnostic equipment was available, it was much more of a manual process. [interjections] We even had running water.

Anyway, I rise today to speak against Bill 203. That I'm disappointed to have to rise to speak against this bill would be an understatement. I would have liked to have risen today to speak in support of a comprehensive jobs plan, a jobs plan that lowers small-business taxes, reduces needless government red tape, increases apprenticeship usage on government projects, empowers local economic development, reduces WCB premiums, and stops the NDP carbon tax. But, hey. Instead, I'm forced to stand opposed to a bill that would be more appropriately entitled the Needlessly Redundant Solution in Search of a Problem Act.

If my hon. colleague across the aisle had done a modicum of research before introducing this ill-conceived and needless bill, he would have found that the existing Fair Trading Act already protects consumers from the issues raised in Bill 203. Where the Fair Trading Act falls short, the automotive business regulation covers specific consumer protection concerns related to the automotive industry. Section 12 of the automotive business regulation lays out an extensive code of conduct, rendering Bill 203 needlessly redundant.

Bill 203 proposes to protect consumers from incurring charges for "work or repairs for which an estimate was given, an amount

that exceeds the estimate by more than 10 per cent.” The Fair Trading Act, in section 6(2)(e), already does this. In fact, I’d argue, it does it better. Section 6(2)(e) protects consumers from incurring charges for goods or services that are more than 10 per cent, to a maximum of \$100, higher than the estimate given unless the consumer has expressly consented to the higher price before the goods or services are supplied or the consumer and the supplier agree to an amended estimate.

Bill 203 promises to protect consumers by legislating that any parts removed in the course of work or repairs shall be returned to the customer unless advised by the consumer that they do not want the parts returned. The hon. member opposite should have taken the time to read the automotive business regulation before proposing Bill 203. They would have found that under section 12(n) automotive repair shops must offer to return all parts removed from the vehicle in the course of work or repairs to the consumer unless advised by the consumer that they do not require the parts returned. Now, to be fair, Bill 203 is broader in its scope and requires parts to be returned to the consumer to be kept separate from any other vehicles being repaired and that the parts be returned to the consumer in a clean container.

The independent automobile repair shops and the dealers’ association last year had over 8.8 million automotive repairs that were completed. Of those 8.8 million, only 296 resulted in complaints being filed. Of those 296 complaints, only 125 were deemed to be in need of further investigation. Of those 125, only one resulted in further action being taken. That means that just over three one-thousandths of a per cent of repairs resulted in complaints being filed. I find it very hard to imagine that of those 296 complaints, any of them were because the repair shops stored the parts too close to other vehicles or they returned the parts in a dirty container. It could be funny if it wasn’t so absurd.

Bill 203 mandates that repair shops cannot charge a fee for an estimate unless the customer or the consumer is advised that a fee will be charged. I think we can all agree that this is pretty reasonable. It’s a reasonable requirement, and it’s a wonder it took so long before it was included in our consumer protection legislation although – wait a minute. Hold on. There’s more. That requirement is already included in the Fair Trading Act in section 6(2)(f). It already prohibits a company from charging a fee for the estimate unless the consumer is informed in advance that a fee will be charged, has expressly consented to be charged the fee. Not only is Bill 203 redundant in this requirement; it doesn’t even mandate a repair shop to disclose the estimated cost.

Bill 203 proposes to amend the Fair Trading Act to be explicitly and needlessly repetitive. The automotive business regulation and the Fair Trading Act already include sufficient, broad consumer protection to the point that they include almost identical protections to what this bill would amend in some cases. The few abuses that do take place under existing legislation and regulation could be far more effectively addressed by educating consumers than by introducing this needless redundant legislation.

In fact, the government already has an agency responsible for this. The Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council, AMVIC, was established in 1999 with a mandate “to provide consumer protection in Alberta’s motor vehicle industry through mandatory . . . licensing for motor vehicle businesses and salespeople” and “to provide a fair marketplace for both [automotive] consumers and businesses.” Furthermore, it defines that its mission is “to protect the public interest and promote trust and confidence in the motor vehicle industry through heightened awareness and the fostering of a positive exchange of information among industry stakeholders.” If the hon. member opposite feels that AMVIC has failed to adequately protect Alberta automotive consumers, then they should

have proposed a bill that addresses that issue, not propose needless, redundant legislation.

It’s become apparent that this government has not learned the importance of consultation. If there had been consultations, we wouldn’t be here wasting time debating a bill that has no support from industry stakeholders and does nothing but repeat what is already established in current customer protection legislation.

Now, I’ve met thousands of Albertans since being elected, and though my memory isn’t what it once was, I can assure you that not a single person I’ve spoken to has told me that we should be focusing on eliminating dirty automotive parts containers. Let’s say for a moment that this poorly conceived bill is passed. What is the government’s plan for enforcing these new, unnecessary measures? Can we expect the government to create a clean-container brigade that travels the province ensuring that repair shops return used parts in clean containers? To be fair to my hon. colleague across the aisle, the establishment of a clean-container brigade would result in the creation of more jobs than the government’s recently cancelled failed jobs plan, which created zero jobs.

The last thing Alberta businesses need right now is more red tape and more regulation. Albertans are already hurting from the NDP’s hikes on taxes and the minimum wage. Albertans are looking for a government that will stand up for them where it matters, not one that tries to reintroduce protections that already exist. Do not do that.

According to the government’s own website the unemployment rate in Alberta is now 7.9 per cent. For the first time in 27 years Alberta’s unemployment rate is higher than the national average. Since this government took office last year, unemployment has increased 34 per cent. It is estimated that nearly 100,000 Albertans have lost their jobs. That is 100,000 families that have experienced the devastation of loss of employment. According to StatsCan the average size of an Albertan household is 2.6 persons. That means that approximately 260,000 Albertans have already been directly impacted by job losses. We have nearly 100,000 Albertans out of work, more being laid off every day. Albertan families are struggling. The average Albertan has seen their personal debt increase to a staggering \$27,000. Alberta’s three-month delinquency rate shot up over 13 per cent. The food banks are running out of food, usage has increased 23 per cent, and the shelters are at capacity.

Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines a crisis as “a difficult or dangerous situation that needs serious attention.” If Alberta’s current economic situation doesn’t fit the definition of crisis, I’m not sure what really does. Albertans are looking to Edmonton for reassurance. Instead, what do they see? Debate on a needless and redundant piece of legislation that mandates that automotive repair parts be returned to the customer in clean containers. We can do better. We must do better.

For these reasons, I oppose this bill in second reading, and I encourage my colleagues to do the same. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of this bill, and I do so for several reasons. The first, of course, is that I believe that every single Albertan should be protected as a consumer.

Now, you’ve heard me speak to other bills, and I usually provide a personal anecdote or something about one of my constituents. I was living in Ottawa in January 2010 when I found myself in need of a new vehicle. I purchased a Volkswagen Golf TDI, which met

my requirements for a vehicle: environmentally friendly, good gas mileage, heated seats for the winter, air conditioning for the summer, big enough for four people to sit comfortably, big enough for four sets of golf clubs, a roof rack to pack luggage for four golfers, and solid feeling when I'm driving on the road. Now, the golf is because that's what I do to keep myself healthy.

4:10

When I came to Lethbridge, I went to Lethbridge Volkswagen, the dealership in Lethbridge, and they looked after me and my vehicle. Yes, my vehicle was one of those vehicles that was identified with the emissions problem. As soon as the problem was identified, I received a letter from Volkswagen, and I received a phone call from either Mike or Craig – I can't remember which one it was – to advise me of the problem and to assure me that the company, in particular the dealership in Lethbridge, would walk me through the problem and that once the fix was identified, my car would be in and be fixed. I received some compensation, and I received regular updates from Mike and Craig.

Now, I came to need a new vehicle because my previous vehicle, which I had bought privately, was just a couple of years old, was in good shape, and had low mileage. I saw a mechanic when I bought it here in Edmonton, and he did a great job for me. Then when I moved to Ottawa, I had to find another mechanic. I did not have great luck. I went to a shop that looked after the make of vehicle that I had. At least, they advertised that they did. The first time I went – I brought it in for my spring checkup and to get my tires changed – it seemed like they did a good job. The second time I went was in the fall, and they told me that my brake pads needed replacement. That was done.

Very shortly after there seemed to be a clicking noise. I was having some difficulty with the car starting. I went back, and they told me that it was an alternator. I got that fixed. A few months later it was something else. Within a year and a half I had to get my brake pads replaced again. I asked if there was a warranty on the brake pads, and they said that they wore out more quickly because my wheels were out of alignment. Now, I couldn't figure out why they were out of alignment because I would have thought that when they fixed the brakes, they also would have made sure that the tires were aligned.

So the story went on, and I spent \$2,000 to replace the brakes. Within two months the brakes failed, and I was advised that the warranty was only for 30 days because it was an older-model car.

Now, my car didn't drive in the wintertime when I was in Ottawa because I had a transit pass. It came out occasionally on the weekends, when I went to get groceries or had some errands to run. It took me to play golf in the summertime, but that was it. I didn't put very many miles on it, and I couldn't figure it out. I looked after this car. It just shouldn't be falling apart the way it was. So I thought: every time I get something fixed, something else seems to break. That's when I bought my Volkswagen. I talked to the mechanics at the Volkswagen dealership in Ottawa where I bought it, and I brought in the invoices for the work that I'd had done on my old car. They looked at it, and they kind of shook their heads, and they said to me, "I think you might have been scammed," but they weren't going to go to court with me on it.

Now, I didn't file a complaint, but I did talk to lots of friends, and I found out that this company, in fact, had done similar things with their vehicles. So even though it was mentioned across the way by the opposition that there weren't many complaints, it's probably because there were lots of people like me, who didn't go and file a formal complaint on it. I did talk to my friends, and I complained a

lot about it, and I did pass the word on that I would never go back to that shop to have any work done on a vehicle again.

I'm pretty happy with my guys Mike and Craig. They always take the time to explain what needs to be done and any future concerns that there might be.

Now, I'm not a mechanic, but before I got my licence, my dad made sure that I knew how to change a tire and how to change the oil. My younger siblings actually got to learn how to change the engine, but he didn't do that with me.

I believe that this bill is about consumer protection. I urge you to support this bill. Thank you.

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to stand to talk about this bill. I'll acknowledge that I'm sure the hon. member that put it forward has good intentions. But what I hear from people in the automotive industry, to be plain about it, is that it's kind of a *Seinfeld* bill. It's a bill about nothing. What I mean by that is that while what's in there seems to make sense, where it becomes a bill about nothing, as has been pointed out by a couple of people here, is that most of what's in there has already been done. It's already in the consumer protection legislation. So what we're contemplating doing is redoing something that's already done. You know, it's a little troubling here.

Here's an excerpt of something that a constituent of mine that owns an automotive shop said for my edification, but I'll read it for the House.

Alberta is the only province in Canada that utilizes a regulatory body such as AMVIC (which works under the arm of Service Alberta) ...

I'll come back to that when I'm finished.

... to monitor and mediate repair services under the ...

Wait for it.

... Fair Trading Act. To operate an automotive repair facility legally in Alberta you must have an AMVIC license and you must renew it each year. The money we as automotive shop owners pay to AMVIC is used to police our industry and protect the consumer. We are extremely fortunate to have AMVIC in our Province of Alberta and I feel Bill 203 does a huge disservice to the men and women on the AMVIC Board of Directors and the AMVIC Society Members.

There is always room for improvement but this Bill 203 has many flaws and it needs to consult with industry members to resolve them.

Wait for this.

Why not work with people that understand how the repair industry works, understands the terminology that is used in the industry, understands how warranty works and understands the difference between authorizations, estimates, and diagnostics.

I am all in favour of creating a better industry that protects both the consumer as well as the repair facility but let's involve the people and associations that understand the automotive industry. This is not something that can be done quickly but should be given the time to properly refine the legislation.

Thank you ... for taking the time to read this ...

Et cetera, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, I guess I would say that the mover, the sponsor of the bill might want to take a little bit of time to read the Fair Trading Act to find the sections that are extremely similar to what's in this act.

I would also suggest politely to the mover that they might want to talk to the AMVIC representatives to find where they're at. Just to make it a shorter trip, I would respectfully suggest that the hon. member talk to the Minister of Service Alberta, under which the Fair Trading Act resides, and maybe find out how much of what's

being presented today is already there and how little of it is actually new. However, in the spirit of my constituent, who's in the automotive business, that sent it, what they did say – and I'll repeat it because I think that it's important – is: why not talk to industry members? There are probably some things that can be improved.

Mr. Speaker, I guess what I would say is that if the hon. member and his government colleagues could consent at some point to sending this to committee so he could invite industry members in, we could probably pull some value out of this bill. You know what? I would suggest that you do that. As a member of this House who's not on the front bench of government, in other words not a minister – I'm not one; you're not one – we don't get bills that often. We have to wait till our name gets drawn, so it means a lot more if you can have a bill go forward that actually makes Alberta better. There's still time for this one. There's still time, if this one went to committee, to go and search for those things that would be improvements on what's already happening. We could probably get advice from the industry. We could probably get advice for the minister who's in charge of the Fair Trading Act, the Service Alberta minister, and probably make something out of this inauspicious beginning. As I said, it's not too late.

4:20

Now, I appreciate that not everybody here in this room has been in Alberta that long and that some may not have driven for that long, but the fact is that there are a lot of people around in Alberta that have been here a long time and there are a lot of people that have driven a long time and there are a lot of people in the automotive industry whom we could get excellent advice from. So my polite suggestion is to get some of that excellent advice, that's probably very easily obtainable, and let's do it together. If we did it in committee, we could probably still make this into a bill that could improve Alberta without duplicating what Alberta businesses are already required to pay for by provincial legislation. We might actually be able to then, at the end of the day, if we go through this process, feel good about having made Alberta better when we're finished.

I'll stop now with that encouragement to work together. Let's get to a place where this bill could actually improve what's already on the books now.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Sucha: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I spoke with one of my colleagues, sidebarred with him recently, who knows how the industry works, and he told me about how his story ended, so with bated breath I can finish that off. Ultimately, the Member for Calgary-Currie did tell me recently that they did explain to the customer what had happened and that they would not be facing any extra charges. Then, moving forward, however, he did indicate to me that it would only take one individual to tarnish a shop's reputation. It would only have taken one shop out of the hundreds that are in Calgary to ruin the reputation of those hundreds by unfairly charging the customer for their time because of that bad day.

You know, ultimately, when I hear that story, one thing that I'm always reflecting on is that sometimes these protections can also protect the business as well. Having two parties sign on to an agreement can help protect the shop from an individual who is wanting to pull a fast one on that shop, who is going to change their mind after this job has been completed.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, going on to serve my side of these experiences, I spoke with my father after this bill was introduced because my grandfather was an automotive mechanic in Calgary after he served as a soldier in World War II. One thing that he and his peers really tried to work hard to develop was a society in Calgary that would set guidelines and best practices for the industry as a whole because they did realize that it does take just one person to ruin the reputation of all parties and all players.

To kind of sidebar and to give an example of that, when I started managing a seafood restaurant out in Ottawa, before I moved back to Calgary, they told us a story about how entire seafood restaurant chains all across the city, no matter what brand they were, almost went under. It was because at the time Ontario didn't have sufficient regulations in place to protect individuals and to set guidelines for how seafood restaurants conducted themselves. Basically, the short end of it was that someone got sick from eating spoiled oysters. It was basically one big outbreak that happened in the city of Ottawa at one restaurant, and it almost made all the restaurants that serve seafood in Ottawa go under because people stopped eating seafood. While it isn't automotives, it is an example of how one bad seed can ruin the entire scope of things.

Now, we live in a capitalistic, free-market economy – it's how I made my living – and as legislators it's our responsibility to protect consumers. To kind of give some sort of examples of legislation that came from the previous federal government to protect consumers, we saw the Harper government move for more transparent ticket sales by companies like Ticketmaster. They mandated that credit card companies show how long, if you paid the minimal payments, it would take for you to pay off that credit card. They mandated that airline companies could not provide hidden fees. They basically set a system in place to make sure that our industries were more transparent. So it is our responsibility as legislators to make sure that we provide as transparent a market as possible.

Now, in reflecting on my grandfather's scenario, he was a mechanic, and my grandfather Sucha, rest his soul, passed away. Subsequently my grandmother did not know a lot about cars because my grandfather always dealt with them. There was one time when my grandmother took her car in for routine service, and sadly it was one of those bad shops, one of the very few in Calgary, and they scammed her. They basically added new tires, which she didn't ask for, and then billed her for it. At the time my uncle and my father were not available to back her up on this, so at risk of not having her car, which she needed, she paid for it. She was on a fixed income, and this was very harsh on her. So, sadly, this one shop could potentially, as my grandmother shares this story, probably not even knowing the name of the shop anymore, ruin the reputation of an entire industry.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Ultimately, you know, we're all trying to find a more transparent way of ensuring that industry can help conduct itself. Reflecting back to even myself as a restaurant manager, some of the systems that we had in place to ensure that we were transparent – and this was mandated by the AGLC – were that we had to post and provide costs for every single amount of liquor and provide the ounce quantity for it so that, at the end of the day, we couldn't pull a fast one on our consumers. This was every restaurant, and if we didn't do it, we would pay penalties.

Ultimately, we want to ensure that we provide our industry players with the tools they need to be successful so that they do not

have one small player ruining their reputation. That is why I am going to be supporting this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against Bill 203. You know, when I reflect on the folks here who've joined us in the gallery and the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw and his comments talking about how essentially one bad apple spoils the bunch – I think what happens is that if someone gets a bad deal at one particular dealership or repair shop, they don't go back to that repair shop. They tell everyone about that particular repair shop, and everyone knows about that. It's not that you never go and get your car serviced anywhere else ever again. I can assure you that the people who are here in this gallery today as well as many others understand that fully. That is the nature of a market-based system, and I think it's one that we need to be very mindful in this House not to overlegislate.

I have many concerns about this bill, many of which my hon. colleagues have already spoken to. One of the things that I worry about when we come to this place is that sometimes we legislate. In fact, we often legislate; sometimes we overlegislate. The question I always challenge my staff with, my remarkable, tremendous staff, who support this big machine called the Alberta Party caucus . . . [interjections] It's quite an operation. I ask this question every single day: what problem are we trying to solve, and what's the right thing for Albertans?

The Member for Calgary-West brought up quite a remarkable statistic, that of 5 million possible repair jobs, 45 of them had complaints. That is 0.000009 – that's five zeroes – per cent of the time. The only thing that happens less often is a pipeline rupture. I have a real concern that this fixes a problem that doesn't exist, that is already covered by existing legislation, and that we're piling legislation one on top of the other.

You know, it makes me wonder. Of course, we need rules. I don't think anyone is suggesting that we have no rules. We need rules. Perhaps we can tweak those rules or improve them, but we have those rules. At some point we're going to have so many rules that all we do is follow rules and we never actually get any work done, and that's not helping anyone.

So I encourage my colleagues on all sides, on both sides of the House, to think critically about this bill as I think we ought to think critically about every bill but no more so than about private members' bills. All of us in this Assembly, barring the few members from the front bench who've joined us today, are private members of equal standing in this Legislative Assembly.

4:30

We can vote how we please on these bills, and I encourage each one of you to think very hard for yourselves on how you consider this bill. Ask yourself well and truly if you feel we're actually solving a problem here. I think it will be a great day in this Assembly when on private members' business there's perhaps a little bit of interplay, perhaps an opportunity for one or more members, in particular the government caucus, to say: "You know, maybe this doesn't actually make sense. I know it's my colleague that brought this up." I will be the first one to rise and praise you for doing so because you stood up for what you think is right, what you think is in the best interests of your constituents, and what you think is in the best interests of this province.

I'm going to talk now about some of the specific concerns I have with the bill, many of which have been raised here today. What I'm going to start with is concerns of unintended consequences, so let's

take section 57.11(1), which talks about the 90-day warranty. Many parts only come with a 30-day manufacturer's warranty, so what you may find is that repair shops no longer stock parts that only have a 30-day warranty. What that means is that the parts they stock will be more expensive. This is not a zero-sum game. Somebody has to pay, and that somebody is the consumers of the province of Alberta. If people choose a cheaper part, that comes with a lower warranty. This section, 57.11(1), makes it less affordable for Albertans. That's the net effect of this. That's not helping Albertans.

The Member for Highwood talked about the Fair Trading Act, section 6, unfair practices, and section 12, the automotive business regulation general rules of conduct. The requirement for authorization, section 57.4, already exists in the Fair Trading Act. This is not new. This is again a very clear example of solving a problem that doesn't exist.

I want to come back to a point the Member for Calgary-Hays made, which I couldn't agree with more, and that is that I don't question that the member who's brought this forward is doing so from the best of intentions. I believe that absolutely this comes from a good place. I believe this comes from a place of wanting to help people. Perhaps a constituent has come into your office, written you a letter, visited your office, and raised a question and said: this happened to me, and it's a problem. That's entirely possible, but we have to look at the numbers. We have to look at the data. I'm sure you want to protect people, but until I see compelling data and evidence to the contrary, that this is in fact a problem that is rampant and not something that happens only on an occasional basis, not something that isn't already addressed through existing legislation in force and in place in the province, I simply cannot support it.

If we look at sections 57.6 and 57.7, the term "in writing": what does that mean? Does that mean that you need to leave your job, take a cab back to the repair shop, that you need to sign something, physically go back to do it? Can you give authorization over the phone? What happens if you do that and there's a dispute later? Who's at fault there? How does that work? Again, these are provisions that, broadly speaking, are already covered in the Fair Trading Act. What we're doing is not only making it more cumbersome for the repair shop and the business owners, those individual, very often small-business owners, entrepreneurs who run their own shops on a tight budget but who have perhaps struck out on their own and taken some entrepreneurial risk. We're also making it more cumbersome for the consumer as well. All of this takes time, and time costs money, so ultimately we make car repair less accessible and less affordable for the people of Alberta.

I will just try to jump ahead here to parts that have not already been spoken about. Section 57.11(9), talking about subcontractors. My understanding of the industry vernacular is "sublet," not necessarily "subcontract," but regardless, by involving the customer in that process, again we're perhaps burdening customers with more work or more risk or exposure than otherwise they may have had, again making things more complicated for consumers than perhaps they are currently.

In conclusion, I will say, then, that although I think the bill is well intentioned – I don't question that it comes from a good place – I think it tries to solve a problem that either doesn't exist or it doesn't exist broadly enough for us in this House to be passing legislation about it. It raises costs for consumers. It puts more laws on the books than are necessary because we've already got laws that cover this. For those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I simply cannot support Bill 203.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Cooper: Why, thank you. It's like my mom's in the room, with that kind of reception.

It's an absolute pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 203, Fair Trading (Motor Vehicle Repair Pricing Protection for Consumers) Amendment Act, 2016. I think we've heard a number of very, very good points this afternoon on the need for input from important stakeholder groups, the fact that there are some conflicting pieces of legislation, that perhaps there are already adequate protections. I know that the member opposite has moved this piece of legislation with the intention of trying to assist constituents and all Albertans.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that you'll be quite familiar with my rising from time to time and speaking about the importance of committee, so it's my delight to rise today and propose, as the Member for Calgary-Hays and some other members on this side of the House mentioned, that we move an amendment that would in fact result in this piece of legislation being studied at committee and allow expert testimony and witness.

I have the appropriate number of copies. Do you mind if I continue with the amendment?

The Speaker: Please proceed as it's being distributed.

Mr. Cooper: I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 203, Fair Trading (Motor Vehicle Repair Pricing Protection for Consumers) Amendment Act, 2016, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 203, Fair Trading (Motor Vehicle Repair Pricing Protection for Consumers) Amendment Act, 2016, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Now, I know that we in this House all have some history together on referring bills 203 to committee; I know that at the end of the day we got there with the Member for Drumheller-Stettler's bill. It, in fact, was referred to committee and the subject matter studied there. It's my hope that all members of the Assembly will do that this afternoon.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for that, and thank you to the hon. member for introducing this particular bill. I want to commend the hon. member for working diligently to prepare a piece of legislation and his clear desire to protect consumers, to make sure that people get treated fairly. I think this is a very important principle, and I want to stand in support of the principle of this bill, which is what second reading is about. It's to talk about the principles of the bill. I think that this is, in fact, something that we should be concerned about here. We need to be considering how people are dealt with to make sure that they are dealt with fairly.

I take the other points that have been made with respect to maintaining the reputation of the industry. I know that the vast majority of members of this industry treat people fairly, try to get the vehicles back on the road or maintain the vehicles at a fair price, and that they're diligent and so on.

A number of things have been raised with respect to this bill, and I think that it's a good bill. I think that there may be an opportunity to hear from members of the industry – a number of them are present here today – and to gather their input and find ways to improve the bill in its specific clauses, which is the role of committee. We have Committee of the Whole or, as the hon. Opposition House Leader has indicated, we have the opportunity to refer a bill to a standing committee, which provides a little more flexibility. It allows the committee, if it wishes, to hear from the

public or to hear from stakeholders that may be affected by the bill and to make amendments that could improve the bill.

4:40

I think that that's probably something that we should do in this case, and I want to just indicate to all hon. members that I would encourage them to support the referral motion that has been moved by the hon. House leader of the Official Opposition. I think it's a good bill, and I think that with further input we can make it a better bill, and we can work together in this House to provide improved legislation to further the interests of the public and the industry. I would urge all hon. members to support this motion, and I look forward to the opportunity for members of the industry and members of the public to come forward and help us improve the bill and to work together with all members on all sides on that committee to do the right thing for consumers, to do the right thing for the industry, and produce a bill that actually will strengthen consumer protection and, at the same time, take into account the complexities of the industry, make sure that we are not creating any unintended consequences as a result of the bill.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I'll take my seat. Hopefully, there are other speakers. We at 5 o'clock go to private members' motions, so I would encourage people to talk until then.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We are speaking to an amendment on Bill 203, referring it to committee. The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, always wanting to co-operate with and accommodate the Government House Leader whenever I get a chance, I'm pleased to be on my feet, Mr. Speaker. Every morning I get up and say to myself: what can I do today to make the Government House Leader's life better? Today I am presented with an opportunity. Let me say that it's a happy occasion that I get to try to accommodate the Government House Leader today, and I appreciate his stated willingness to support moving this to committee.

As I tried to say in my earlier remarks, I think there genuinely is an opportunity for all of us here to improve this bill, to make it something that the hon. member who moved it, when it's all done through the legislative sausage-making process – if we all work together, which we can, and I think that there's perhaps a spirit in the House to do that, we could actually make something that we could all be proud of, including the mover.

When you get an opportunity like this – and I see here in the gallery that we even have members of industry willing to take the time out of their lives and their business to participate, to contribute, to share their expertise with those of us that may have less than them – then I think we should take that opportunity to hear from them. I also think that when we get a chance to work in a bit of a multipartisan way on something that could make a positive difference for Albertans, that's a good opportunity as well.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the process. You know, this can be a crazy place, but every once in a while you get to do something where, when you're finished, you can say: we did the right thing for the right reasons, we did it together, and we did it for the benefit of Albertans. I think we may well be heading for one of those instances here.

On that basis, I will sit down, but before I do, I will just state, to be perfectly clear, that I have every intention of supporting this amendment because I think, again, that it's the right thing to do for the right reason. I'm grateful for the Government House Leader's

indication that they may well support this as well as my colleagues in the PC Party and the other opposition colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity, and I'm finished talking for now.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I'm understanding that the definition of luck is when opportunity meets circumstance.

Other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in support of the amendment. I think that it makes sense to engage more people like the experts that are up in our gallery. I had that wonderful opportunity. My community is great because I have people that have learned that they can reach out to me and talk to me about legislation that is proposed. A gentleman by the name of Frank Garritsen called me, and he knew that I would be able to come down and speak to the owner of Heartland Ford. As a side note, I have their cards in my pocket. I'm happy to talk about the fact that they are happy and willing to talk about legislation that comes from other parts of the country, about this very legislation. The owner, Kelly O'Connell, sees the intent to work on consumer protection for people. He knows that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark wants to do what's best for his constituents.

I think that once you start to engage these people – you know, these people sit on national-level boards and work with other provinces, so they have a real clear understanding of what needs to be looked at and what could be amended and what can be accepted. I think that there are good things in here that we could adopt, things like putting signs up in repair shops to understand what it is. I know that for dealerships, repair shops are hugely important to their industry. It's something that keeps them working with their customers. It's good customer service. It maintains relationships so that the next time you need a new vehicle, you go to the dealership where you know the owner and you know your salespeople and you know that you have good repair people that you can depend on.

I'm really happy that this amendment has come forward. I am glad that the Government House Leader is supporting it, and I intend to do the same. I hope that everyone in the House supports it as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is good when the Legislature is like this, and it's great to be a part of speaking to it. Some thanks, I think, are in order to the member for bringing forward the bill and certainly to the Government House Leader for his eloquent words and to the government caucus and all private members who have indicated that they will support this.

What I like about this idea, what I like about sending it to committee, is that it is an opportunity to quantify the problem we're trying to solve and to truly understand the scope and scale of the challenge that we're trying to solve. Is it a big problem? Is it not a big problem? Are there aspects of it that deserve more attention than others? I think that's always – always – a worthwhile exercise and in this case, I think, absolutely needed based on some of the feedback that I've heard from industry stakeholders.

Of course, we always want to make sure we're looking out for Albertans and consumers and identify any gaps that may exist in the Fair Trading Act or other legislation to make sure that what we pass in this House is appropriate and not simply piling onto other legislation that may already exist. But if there are gaps or things that need to be addressed, that's a wonderful opportunity for us to do

that, to simultaneously ensure consumer protection, which, of course, has to be a big focus for us here in this House, but also to enable the continued viable and vibrant business operations for repair shop owners so that more people can choose to go into that line of business and do so knowing that the rules they need to follow are reasonable and appropriate and do not overburden them simply with bureaucracy and administration for its own sake.

I'm pleased, absolutely, to support the motion to move it to committee, and I certainly encourage others to support it as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise to speak to the amendment. I can support sending this to the committee. As I was listening to the debate earlier, if there's a message that I could convey to that committee as they're talking about how to strengthen this bill, that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has brought forward, and in the good spirit of making sure that we're putting together the best legislation we could, I did hear a couple of comments from the other side. You know, based on the number of repairs that we've seen and how many complaints have come forward and how many were actually dealt with and even quantifying as much as a percentage of, well, .0000, however many other zeros, those that were actually affected, I would hope that we would not think about minimizing those people's experiences when we're trying to create the best bill that we can. When you're not in that percentage, it might not necessarily be a big deal, but if you happen to have fallen into that .0000, or whatever, percentage, it could mean a substantial amount of dollar figures for them, which could present hardships. So I would certainly encourage that.

Again, I will support this to move it into the committee but that those committee members try not to use that kind of line of thinking as they're amending that motion. Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to also rise in favour of the amendment sending this bill to committee. I was greatly impressed by the attendance in the gallery and the representation made by members of the industry who sought to gain the ear of government and by the mover of this bill to seek further input and improve the legislation, and I welcome the opportunity to do so by sending it to committee. I don't think that there's a member of this Legislature who does not have an automotive business repair shop in their riding. I myself have three, and I think that all three of those businesses have strong, positive reputations and, by and large, serve their customers well.

The bill itself, of course, is a consumer protection measure. There are issues of consumer protection which we should all be concerned about, but I think we can all agree that with the amount of time and energy spent by industry members to come here today and make representations to us, talking about their concerns with the bill, that should be respected and considered during time spent in committee debate. I look forward to hearing their concerns once the bill reaches committee should the amendment be passed.

Thank you.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to agree with my friends from across the way and suggest that this bill be referred to a committee. I have a lot of repair shops in my own riding, and I haven't had the time to speak to all of them about this bill, so I am delighted at the motion that was made by my friend

from across the way, and I suggest that we all support the amendment and refer the bill to committee.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Other parties who wish to speak to the amendment to the motion? Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'm sorry that I had to step away from the House for a moment, but this amendment certainly falls in line with consultation. Of course, consultation with stakeholders is vitally important to any sort of success with a bill or an operation, and certainly I'm proud to stand up and support this amendment. It is wonderful that we can work as legislators in a co-operative manner, both as opposition as well as government and opposition, to ensure that we come up with a bill that is certainly best suited for all involved, all stakeholders and all consumers, and certainly that will be in addition to my message going on to this committee as well.

I agree with one of the hon. members on the other side in that we certainly do not want to minimize anyone in regard to being a victim of any sort whatsoever, but I think it is vitally important that we come up with a solution, or that at least the committee comes up with a solution, that will certainly be in the best interests of all Albertans and all stakeholders involved.

I certainly support this amendment, and I thank you for your time.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on the motion for amendment, are there any other members who would like to speak to the referral to committee?

[Motion on amendment carried]

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I rise to request unanimous consent to call it 5 o'clock and move to Motions Other than Government Motions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Prescription Drug Costs for Seniors

503. Ms Kazim moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consider measures that would further lower the cost of prescription drugs for Alberta's low-income seniors to ease their financial burden and reduce their health care costs.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today and speak to the issue of mitigating the cost of prescription drugs for Alberta's low-income seniors. As Albertans face the challenges resulting from the current economic situation, I remain proud to be part of a government that has maintained its commitment to ease the financial burden of low-income seniors and reduce the overall expenditures of our health care system. Mitigating costs for prescription drugs is a step towards meeting these goals. Therefore, on behalf of my constituents of Calgary-Glenmore, who have shared their concerns regarding costs of medication, and specifically on behalf of Alberta's seniors population, who have spent decades contributing to the growth and prosperity of our province, it is my privilege to debate this motion today.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans along with the rest of Canadians are paying among the highest prices for prescription drugs in the world. In 2016 Canadians will fill over 500 million prescriptions, at a cost of \$30 billion. Of this, approximately \$6 billion is paid out of pocket by Canadians and \$12 billion is paid through public drug plan coverage, for which Canadians are still paying deductibles and copayments. Among the larger provinces Alberta spends the second most on drug programs, next to Ontario.

Currently the Ministry of Health sponsors affordable drug and supplementary health plans for all Albertans, including plans for seniors. Government-sponsored programs cover approximately 20 per cent of Albertans, private employers or insurers cover 57 per cent, and federal programs cover approximately 3 per cent, leaving roughly 20 per cent of Albertans without coverage. This 20 per cent includes vulnerable Albertans and seniors, who need a government to stand up for them and their needs.

Under the government-sponsored coverage for seniors plan, drug coverage is available to Albertans 65 years of age and older. Seniors pay 30 per cent of their prescription costs, to a maximum of \$25, regardless of income. While a \$25 maximum copayment may seem low, I urge everyone to put themselves in the shoes of low-income seniors, whose only income is their pension or a low-wage job. Seniors in my constituency have told me that this is not affordable. This is a \$25 max copayment for medication, and many seniors require multiple prescriptions to manage their health. Having costly and inaccessible prescription medication is having a very real and adverse effect on their quality of life.

5:00

To all those I have spoken to and to all Albertans who share this concern: I am standing up for you today. I want to remind you that our government is committed to improving the quality of care and overall well-being of our seniors, families, and communities. The fact is that high costs for critical prescription drugs is not the Alberta way. Albertans, especially low-income Albertans, should not be in the position where they choose between their medication and food or shelter, but evidence indicates that 1 in 10 Canadians does not take their prescribed medication because of costs.

A study completed by Dr. Braden Manns from the University of Calgary's Cumming School of Medicine indicated that up to 30 per cent of low-income seniors reported not taking their medication to treat chronic health issues due to costs. Given that medications prescribed to seniors are primarily used to treat chronic diseases and given that the costs associated with chronic diseases represent a high proportion of total health care costs, this motion represents our government's commitment towards rectifying past mistakes, promoting good governance, and being fiscally responsible to taxpayers.

I would like to remind all Members of the Legislative Assembly that seniors are not usually prescribed one or two medications. In Dr. Manns' study it was found that seniors typically take six to 10 different medications. Again, given that Canadians are paying more than most other countries for prescription drugs and given the cost of copayments for those who are covered under a plan, high medication costs are coming at the expense of individual health, families, communities, and taxpayers.

In Canada studies have found that an estimated \$7 billion to \$9 billion is spent on health service because individuals did not take their prescribed medication, but by mitigating the cost of prescription medication to low-income seniors, this will reduce health service expenditures. Research shows that low-income individuals are less likely to adhere to their prescribed medication due to financial barriers. Often this results in additional health complications and higher costs to the health care system. Given the

current economic circumstances I'm confident that all members of this Legislature can support a motion that supports low-income seniors and promotes responsible public finances.

There are a variety of mechanisms which the hon. Minister of Health can use to mitigate the costs of prescription medication. However, I am inclined to urge the Minister of Health to examine the benefits of pharmacare. Pharmacare must be viewed as a central pillar to mitigate the financial burden on seniors and Albertans as well as to reduce the spending in health care. Given that the cost associated with the coverage for seniors plan in 2014-15 for prescribed medication was over \$523 million and given that Canadians pay higher prices, we can do better, and we must do better.

Governments throughout the world have implemented public drug plans that follow pharmacare values. The results have been overwhelmingly positive, with citizens having a system based on access, fairness, safety, and value for their taxpayer dollars. Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve a system based on these values as well. Prescription drugs and supplementary health benefits are important in ensuring quality health care treatment and support important clinical outcomes for patients and the health system. Just because prescription drugs are not considered part of publicly insured services under the Canada Health Act, it does not mean that we as members of this Legislature should ignore this issue. Access to affordable medication is a human right and should not be determined by one's level of income.

I urge the Minister of Health and members of this Legislature to work collaboratively with organizations and other provinces and jurisdictions to ensure Albertans are getting the best prices possible in a system that is comprehensive, evidence based, and sustainable. Mr. Speaker, reducing the cost of prescription drugs, especially for low-income and vulnerable seniors, will reduce expenditures for government and households. During our current economic challenges this is what good governance looks like.

Having spoken to many seniors in my constituency, I know seniors are proud and independent Albertans. This motion is central for Alberta's seniors to maintain their health, quality of life, and sense of independence. From a government perspective, reducing the overall costs to the health care system ensures the long-term sustainability of a public service all Albertans rely on. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be part of a government that is protecting Albertans, their public services, and is fighting to ensure equitable access to necessary medications.

Thank you very much.

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

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start by thanking the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore for her remarks and for introducing a motion, a private member's motion, that, I have to confess, at times during her opening remarks sounded much more like a government motion than a private member's motion because, indeed, it introduced a great deal of additional material that I don't think is germane to the discussion that is specifically before us with regard to this motion. This motion is very specific with regard to the cost of drugs for seniors. I would suggest that we confine our commentary to that rather than getting into debating the merits of a pharmacare program and some of the other things that the hon. member raised during the course of her remarks.

There are a number of things that were raised by the hon. member, but there are a number of realities that we do need to know when we're discussing these issues. The statement that Canadians pay higher prices for pharmaceuticals: that is a true statement, but the thing is that you have to understand why that comes about. With

a population of about 35 million people, Canada is, in fact, a small market. One of the things that we do have in Canada that I think we can be quite proud of is that we have a very strong regulatory framework for new drug approvals. Health Canada does a very specific and a very good job of protecting Canadians to make sure that all new drug approvals have to go through a rigorous and science-based mechanism to make sure that these drugs are, in fact, safe. That's part of what drives up the cost of drugs for Canadians. That approval process is costly, and it gives access to a relatively small market. We think of 35 million people as being a lot of people, but in point of fact it is not, from a pharmaceutical company standpoint, a large market. So the price of pharmaceuticals is a reality.

The other thing that is a reality is the burgeoning cost of pharmaceuticals as a major cost driver within our health care system. We want to encourage pharmaceutical companies to do research, to develop new and exciting medications, but that research is extremely costly. In order to recoup those costs, as we know, pharmaceutical companies are constantly bringing in new medications, new drugs, and in fact over the last 40 years the cost of pharmaceuticals as a total, nation-wide cost has gone from \$1.1 billion to \$30 billion in Canada. At that, it is the second-highest contributor to overall health care costs in Canada. It passed physician costs in 1997. The only other thing that costs the health care system in Canada more than pharmaceuticals is hospitals, and the percentage that hospitals contribute to the overall cost has dropped by nearly half in terms of a percentage. It used to be close to 50 per cent; now it's down to 28 per cent. So the issue with regard to the cost of pharmaceuticals is real, and it is one that, I would suggest, systemically we can't do a lot about.

But the hon. member did raise some important points with regard to how it affects seniors. Now, she mentioned very briefly in passing that seniors currently have a situation in Alberta where they are offered or afforded an opportunity through a copay mechanism of a maximum cost of \$25 per prescription. It's 30 per cent of the cost of the prescription up to \$83.33, and beyond that, the eligible senior pays nothing more. There are medications now that are used for a number of conditions. For example, the biological drug Remicade is used, and it's a very effective drug for a number of immune-related conditions. The individual cost of Remicade can be over \$3,000. The cost to the patient, the cost to the senior, is \$25. So, you know, while I appreciate what the hon. member is saying, the truth of the matter is that there is a great deal being done already to shield seniors and other vulnerable Albertans from the cost of these increasing pharmaceutical prices.

5:10

I think a more effective way to decrease the cost to seniors, which is the financial burden that the hon. member speaks of, is working on reducing the number of medications that seniors are on. That number of six to 10 medications is a huge concern to me because, quite frankly, as you increase the number of medications, you increase the risk of drug interactions, and you increase the risk of drugs that are working, in fact, in contradiction to each other.

One of my concerns is that sometimes some seniors are not fully aware of why they're taking certain medications. I know that that was the situation with my mother. When she was quite elderly, she was on three or four different medications, and when I asked, "Do you know why you're on them?" she was not entirely clear as to why she was on the different medications.

I would suggest that if we want to help our system, if we want to help, most importantly, our patients, one of the things we have to do is that we have to do a better job of medication management, and quite frankly an underutilized resource in this regard is our

pharmacists. The pharmacists of Alberta are highly skilled individuals, and in this province we have been a national leader, Mr. Speaker, in giving them a broadened scope of practice to allow our pharmacists to do a better job in terms of co-ordinating the needs of patients and, in fact, speaking to patients and co-ordinating with their doctors to say: "Look, Mrs. Smith is on nine different medications. At least three of these, in my professional opinion, are unnecessary, and we could reduce them." By doing that, you reduce that \$25 or whatever the copay amount is. To me, that is the better way to move towards a lessening of the financial burden.

To simply look at the cost of drugs, which is what this motion does, zeroing in on the cost of drugs, it is, I think, quite frankly, an incomplete analysis of what the cost drivers are. There's much more that goes into the overall cost both for the patient and for the system. While I certainly applaud the member for bringing forward the issues on behalf of her constituents, I think that it would be wise for us in the consideration of this motion and in the consideration of any situation where we're looking at cost drivers within the health care system to get the best advice from the people who are skilled in this area, who are trained professionals in this area, and certainly that would be our physicians, but it would also be our pharmacists.

Our pharmacists are very familiar with that, and certainly our pharmacists working in communities in Alberta, especially in rural communities, often provide the continuity of care that, unfortunately, has been a challenge to provide in Alberta. In many small rural communities they have difficulty retaining physicians for prolonged periods of time whereas the community pharmacist has often been there for 20, 25 years or longer. I think this is a resource that we should make full use of during the course of the rural health review. We spoke to the RxA, to representatives, and they have many, many good ideas as to how we can reduce the costs not just to the system but indeed to the patient, which is the goal of this motion.

So it is with some hesitation and some reluctance that I'm actually opposed to the motion. It's not because I don't think it's a good idea to reduce costs, but I think that the motion is incomplete. I think that the motion does not take a broadly enough based look at the overall cost drivers. The motion itself simply talks about reducing costs to reduce the financial burden. I think there are better ways of doing that. I think there are more broadly based ways of doing that. Therefore, reluctantly, Mr. Speaker, I will be voting in opposition to the motion.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 19(1)(c) I must now put the question on the following motion for consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's speech.

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mrs. Littlewood moved, seconded by Mr. Westhead, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois Mitchell, CM, AOE, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Motion carried]

Government Motions

Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

11. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

[Government Motion 11 carried]

Motions Other than Government Motions

Prescription Drug Costs for Seniors

(continued)

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today in support of Motion 503 and to speak to some of the work that the Ministry of Health is already doing to assist our seniors with the cost of prescription drugs.

As was noted, all seniors in Alberta are eligible for premium-free drug coverage that ensures they have access to essential medications at a more affordable cost. The coverage for the seniors' drug program is one of a number of provincial government sponsored drug and health benefit programs that were developed as targeted solutions to protect individuals and to provide access to appropriate medications. This program helps over half a million seniors in this province right now, but we know that these costs are not going down and that the need continues to rise.

Alberta Health will continue its work to give seniors access to appropriate medications while managing expected growth in drug program costs. We've already seen success with one of these medications. Lucentis, a drug used for the treatment of macular degeneration, is one of the most costly medications that Alberta currently covers. We have launched a pilot program that allows ophthalmologists to prescribe the drug Avastin for this condition at no cost to the patient. Through this program seniors get the care they need with no out-of-pocket costs and at a much lower cost to the province overall.

This is one area where Alberta has been successful at bending the cost curve while also improving quality and access for Albertans. We must remain diligent in our approach to continue to build on these successes. Joint efforts with drug plans across Canada capitalize on combined purchasing power, leading to increased access to drug treatment options, lower drug costs, and greater consistency of listing decisions for everyone.

Many Albertans face challenges with the cost of prescription drugs. Our government has drug coverage programs that provide access to needed medicines for many Albertans, but we know that these programs can be improved. We are working with our provincial and federal partners to explore an evidence-based approach for funding and delivery of drug coverage in Canada.

There are a number of ways to design programs that provide access to prescription drugs. A national pharmacare program that provides coverage for all residents with minimal or no cost sharing is just one option. Considering who would be eligible, what drugs they would be eligible for, and how much the program would cost is important regardless of the type of program being considered. Together with other provinces and territories our government continues to find new ways to improve review processes to make prescription drugs more affordable and to enable appropriate access to both brand name and generic prescription drugs.

I thank the member for drawing attention to this important issue, and I call on the members assembled to support Alberta seniors through this motion. Thank you.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the Member for Calgary-Glenmore for bringing this motion to the floor of the Legislature. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Motion 503, which would urge the government to consider measures to lower the cost of prescription drugs for low-income seniors.

I would like to begin by saying that I will be supporting this motion. Furthermore, I believe that good governance requires that we continually explore such matters and always work towards improvement. We know that Albertans are currently struggling a little more these days with our economic growth slowed and Albertans being asked to shoulder more and more of the load for our government.

5:20

This weekend in Medicine Hat I was talking to a gentleman, a small-business owner, an oil field services contractor, who relayed his struggles to me. He is making the exact same income as in previous years, but because of recent increases to taxes and fees, he is now taking home \$800 per month less. Mr. Speaker, that's nearly \$10,000 a year. While some may be tempted to label him a person who has not done his fair share, I can assure you that his contributions to his community, to charity, and, most importantly, to his family have always gone above and beyond. He, like so many Albertans, does not use the fruits of his labour to live lavishly or extravagantly. With his income, above and beyond business expenses and the cost of living, he has been supporting his elderly parents.

So when I consider this motion, that aims to consider measures to ease the financial burden of our seniors, I think also of their families, their caregivers, who willingly and lovingly carry so much of the burden themselves. It is only right and proper when we consider every way to ease some of the burdens on those in the greatest need that we do this. What forms these measures take remain to be seen, but I encourage the government to keep an open mind and truly explore all the options available at their disposal.

It's important to note, Mr. Speaker, that we currently have several programs available to low-income seniors for prescription medication on top of the universal coverage for seniors' benefits, which provides prescription coverage to all residents over 65 premium free. In my four years I continually find in my constituency office – and I'm sure other members in this Assembly can relate – that many seniors can become overwhelmed reviewing the various programs currently available to them. The forms can often be confusing, onerous, and numerous, and the process seems very disjointed at times. So if the government wishes to support low-income seniors, I would also suggest that the easiest thing they could do right away would be to streamline the programs and simplify the application process. Right away I think we could see improvements in the quality of life of seniors and added efficiency in government, that can serve all Albertans so well.

If the government does consider measures in line with this motion – and this consideration should, of course, already be ongoing from the minister – we as Albertans must continually ask whether we are getting the best value possible. Mr. Speaker, it has been said that improvement is not a destination but a never-ending journey. So I hope to that end we constantly strive – constantly strive – for the best value possible and the best use of Albertans'

dollars. How well we do in achieving value will ultimately be measured in how well people are served and their quality of life.

Many words have been spoken in this House about the need for fiscal responsibility and sustainability, but as I consider this motion, it really drives home to me what these concepts mean. At the government level the sustainability of our system means having the resources in place long term – long term – so that they're there when we need them. It means not having this generation and future generations trapped under the weight of crippling debt and interest payments. It means having the means to cover our province's priorities, not lost to these bloated interest payments. At the personal level it means ensuring that the province's families have the opportunity to thrive. It means ensuring that folks like my constituent can give like no other to their family, to their parents, and to their community.

Mr. Speaker, I will absolutely be voting in support of the consideration of all measures to reduce the financial burden for seniors' health care. At the same time I encourage this government to consider how it may ease the burden on all families and caregivers across the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted to speak in support of the Member for Calgary-Glenmore's motion, that encourages our government to reflect on measures that further lower the cost of prescription drugs for low-income Alberta seniors. We stand together because I, too, have seniors in the constituency of Red Deer-North whose well-being is adversely impacted by the financial burden of prescription costs. I thank you for the opportunity to rise today and speak to the importance of this motion.

Alberta and Canada are paying among the highest prices for prescription drugs in the world. To some seniors this means compromise on various levels. Fixed incomes, low incomes do not have flexibility to sustain an increase to monthly expenses. As a result our low-income seniors' options are conflicting; that is to say that if I buy these prescriptions, I may have to decrease my food budget for the month. Our Alberta cannot tolerate that as a status quo.

Currently our government-sponsored plan for seniors makes drug coverage available to all Albertans 65 years and older. Through this program seniors pay 30 per cent of their prescription costs to a maximum of \$25. This is not variable. All seniors have this available regardless of financial disposition. Mr. Speaker, as I have engaged with the senior constituents in Red Deer-North, I have heard many times as a constant concern that the unaffordability of prescriptions causes duress. On behalf of my constituents of Red Deer-North who have shared this concern, I am indeed proud to stand up in the House and speak in favour of them and this motion.

Seniors are prescribed medications that primarily combat chronic diseases; that is to say that without these medications, their health could and would deteriorate. If we refer to the numbers as presented in Dr. Manns' study, we are presented with the fact that seniors typically take between six to 10 different medications at a maximum of \$250. In consideration of those low-income seniors who are extremely limited, the cost potentially represents the difference between health and hunger, as though either compromise is acceptable. It is apparent that we have placed our seniors in a position that is undeserving to them.

As we suffer through the economic challenges that Alberta is experiencing, our government needs to look at how we can mitigate the impact. With the current economy our seniors may experience less support from their families. As a result our low-income seniors

may compromise their resources by not taking medications as prescribed. It is apparent that any compromise will certainly bring greater demands on our health system.

Mr. Speaker, this motion reinforces the government's commitment to protecting Alberta's vulnerable while remaining responsible public finance administrators. Today's motion is about protecting our low-income seniors. The constituents of Red Deer-North have been very transparent that the \$25 maximum copayment per prescription is not affordable on their limited income.

Very often in the House we speak to the community mindedness of our Albertans. Let us acknowledge the decades of contribution to Alberta's growth and prosperity at the hands of our seniors, including our low-income seniors. Our province has been fashioned by their hard work, and regardless of our difficult economic climate, seniors deserve our protection. To ignore seniors, especially low-income seniors who depend on essential prescription medication, is not the Alberta way.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, I applaud the Member for Calgary-Glenmore for bringing this important motion before the House. I echo the statement made by the member that access to affordable medication is a human right and should not be determined by one's level of income. Reducing the cost of prescription drugs, especially for low-income and vulnerable seniors, will result in the reduction of expenditures for government and households. Considering our current challenges, this motion resonates sound governance, fiscal responsibility, and our ability to remedy past mistakes. Our government needs to look to responsible measures to reduce costs and barriers.

Mr. Speaker, may I say once again that I am proud to speak to this motion, presented by the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, and also proud to be part of a government that shares this commitment. We as members of this Legislature cannot allow income to determine the quality of health for low-income and vulnerable seniors.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to speak on Motion 503, a motion to consider measures that would further lower the cost of prescription drugs for Alberta's low-income seniors to ease their financial burden and reduce their health care costs. For too long the government has not given the seniors' file the attention it deserves. Seniors' facilities went unbuilt, patients ignored. Palliative care centres were shut down in a manner which lacked both efficiency and compassion. It is good to see that these issues are now being discussed and that this Legislature is working to address some of the ongoing issues.

Our seniors built this province, and the Wildrose believes they deserve the best. Seniors are among Alberta's most vulnerable population and shouldn't have to worry about how they're going to pay for the medicine they need. When considering measures to lower costs, it is important to ensure they are fair across the board.

This is a debate that is happening because of the current system we have in place. Currently in Alberta the Alberta group coverage plan is charging a copay towards seniors accessing necessary prescriptions. It is the government who is charging a copay amount to our seniors of up to \$25 per prescription. The current plan that governs seniors' prescriptions and drug coverage is in need of a full review to ensure that all of our seniors are incorporated into a plan

that works with their individual needs. We also have to recognize that this is a very complex issue.

We believe it is important to reduce costs for our seniors whenever possible in a fair, transparent manner. We all know Alberta's seniors have worked hard to get where they are, and it is so important we help those who are accessing care. Too often I hear from seniors that they are struggling with costs . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I would just like to interrupt a sec.

I notice that there may be a telephone conversation going on, which is not consistent. I'm sure one of his peers may point that out to him, I believe.

An Hon. Member: No. There's no telephone conversation, sir.

The Speaker: No? It wasn't a telephone conversation? My apologies. Okay. Thank you.

Please proceed.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Too often I hear from seniors that they are struggling with the health system. Perhaps the government should also consider creating an independent Seniors' Advocate who would be able to provide information to address systemic problems and stand up for our seniors by helping them navigate these complicated government programs.

The fact that people live longer than ever should be celebrated as one of the biggest success stories in history. As the saying goes: getting old is better than the alternative. But we must ensure that we are creating programs that are reflective of these facts and that when we are debating these pieces of legislation, we are always cognizant of the most vulnerable.

There are many concerns about this motion and alternates to this motion that should be considered, ensuring that all pertinent groups are consulted, ensuring that this is sustainable. It is my hope that the government will bring in a reasoned, common-sense approach that will address the major shortfalls for seniors.

At this time I will support this motion. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to rise today and speak to this important motion brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. As the member of this Legislature stated, considering measures that would lower the cost of prescription drugs for Alberta's low-income seniors to ease their financial burden and reduce overall health care costs is critical during the current economic climate. I am proud to stand beside the Member for Calgary-Glenmore and privileged to be part of a government that remains committed to protecting Alberta's most vulnerable. On behalf of my constituents of Wetaskiwin-Camrose, who have also shared their concerns with me on this issue, I am proud to stand up in the House and speak in favour of this motion.

Mr. Speaker, as I door-knock in Wetaskiwin-Camrose or meet with constituents in my office, a constant theme I encounter is the unaffordability of prescription medication for seniors, especially low-income seniors. Reducing costs of prescription drugs, especially for low-income and vulnerable seniors, will reduce expenditures for government and households. During these challenging times it is how good governance functions.

Given that this motion aims at removing income as a barrier to health and seeks to improve the overall well-being of Alberta's low-income seniors while being fiscally prudent to taxpayers, I fully support this motion.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Glenmore for putting this forward. I really want to extend my appreciation to our colleagues across the way for the very positive comments that have been made about this. I think this is a situation where all of us can come together to recognize that there is a vulnerable population amongst us. Some of us have reached that vulnerability already, I could say. Maybe you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know. [interjections] In any case, this is a matter that the Legislature should be putting its mind to. This is a situation where there is hardship going on, and I'm hoping that with the efforts of the Member for Calgary-Glenmore and others that we will gradually improve the situation for our vulnerable seniors, particularly those that have a low income.

I did want to make some comments about some very positive things that are going on in our health care system at the present time. The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster mentioned the important role of pharmacists in controlling drug costs, and I've been very impressed with meeting several pharmacists, including the head of the College of Pharmacists, who lives in my riding of Edmonton-Whitemud, along with several of the pharmacists who operate stores or outlets in Edmonton-Whitemud. All of those people are very interested in this vital issue. They every day see seniors who can't afford their medication, and as an association the pharmacists have been looking at ways that they can help deal with this.

Seniors have issues that really are compounded in this area. Many of them have chronic diseases: diabetes, chronic lung disease, chronic kidney disease, hypertension, chronic heart disease. I could go on and on. These conditions are not curable in the sense that I can cure somebody with leukemia with the appropriate chemotherapy or that we might be able to cure somebody's eye disease with an injection of Avastin. These conditions require a combination of several different medications. Often those medications have drug interactions. We count on the pharmacists as well as the pharmacy information network – that's one of the good things that we've got in health management in this province – to try to mitigate that.

5:40

I'm really proud as a physician that I can have access through the Netcare system to the pharmacy information network, and I can actually look at the list of medications that have been prescribed for the patient. It was mentioned by at least one other of the speakers that patients often don't get their prescriptions filled or that they don't take the prescriptions on a regular basis because of the cost, but at least you know what medications were prescribed. I think it's the responsibility of physicians like me as well as pharmacists to take a look at those lists and to try to limit the polypharmacy that is going on. What I do think – and I agree with the mover of this motion – is that we need to be looking at a national program, something like pharmacare, although I think that's sort of the golden temple on the hill. But there are things we could be talking about early on.

In cancer therapy in this province we're actually very fortunate. Very expensive medications, which are very effective, for instance, in treating leukemia, which is my area of expertise, are provided by the government through the drug benefit plan of the cancer program. Some of those medications – and I can give you an example from my own practice. If I treat a patient for chronic myelogenous leukemia with imatinib, which its brand name is Gleevec – I think some of you will have heard of it – the cost to the taxpayer is about \$35,000 a year. I've been treating some patients for over 15 years, so you can do the math on that. Fortunately, none

of my patients are noncompliant because of cost, unlike the experience in the United States, where about 30 per cent of the prescriptions that are given out for imatinib are never filled, and then the leukemia basically goes untreated.

We need a catastrophic drug program to deal with, for instance, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, Crohn's disease, dementia – that may be coming to me some day – chronic kidney disease. These medications, as was mentioned by another speaker, are catastrophically expensive. What I think we need to be thinking about as legislators are ways to get a catastrophic drug program, probably through federal-provincial co-operation since another component of this would be negotiation of pricing with the pharmaceutical companies through the 10 provinces and the three territories. Generic drug pricing is very important. It's a complex issue, and it's one that I think we need to collaborate with the pharmacists on as well as the pharmaceutical companies.

I do want to bring up one thing that relates to the policy of this government, and that is that the trans-Pacific partnership needs to be looked at very carefully in this regard. The trans-Pacific partnership would result in the lengthening of the patent period for medications. This will cost Canadian governments billions of dollars, actually, over the next five years if the provisions in the TPP are not covered.

In summary, there are lots of things that we could be looking at as legislators to try to improve the lot of the senior with diminished financial resources to ensure that the senior can live out their life in comfort and in good health.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I am happy to support the motion from the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. The issue of drug affordability for seniors is one that I often hear as I meet Sherwood Park constituents in my office or attend community meetings. Seniors are having difficulties paying for the drugs that their doctors prescribe to them. While seniors can access the government drug coverage plan, where they pay only 30 per cent of the prescription cost to a maximum of \$25 per drug, this still leaves many seniors with the choice of affording drugs or food. Not taking the prescribed drugs not only endangers the life of the senior, but it also means additional costs to the health care system when they have a health setback or their health is seriously impaired just because they cannot afford the drugs prescribed.

This morning I spoke to local physicians, members of my local primary care network, about this issue. They told me that they are very well aware of how the cost of drugs impacts seniors, especially those with chronic diseases or those for whom a nongeneric drug needs to be prescribed. These doctors try to help by giving out drug samples or ensuring that they find a replacement generic drug if possible. The PCN even tries to find funds when all avenues have been exhausted for the senior. I have also spoken to pharmacists, who take great care to make sure that seniors do have access to the prescribed drugs by working with their doctor, the PCN, or other health care providers to ensure that the drug prescribed is affordable to the senior. I want to take the opportunity to thank the doctors, the pharmacists, and the PCNs who are helping seniors to afford the needed drugs when they cannot afford the drugs even though part of them are covered, and I think they need to be thanked, some of them.

Unfortunately, few seniors are able to keep the extended health benefits when they retire, which would help them to manage the cost of drugs. Few employers offer this option to their retired employees. I am fortunate that my husband's former employer did

offer this option to its retired employees, so when it's my time to retire, we will have an easier time to manage the cost of our drugs. But this is offered to only a very small proportion of our seniors.

No one knows what chronic disease or health problems might strike them in the future and can therefore plan accurately for the cost of all their needed medicine. Some seniors, in addition to the cost of drugs, have substantial out-of-pocket costs for such things as diabetes testing strips or other supplies that are not part of the drug program. This seriously depletes their limited funds, making their ability to afford the needed drugs even more challenging.

Given the challenges that seniors face in affording the needed drugs, I would urge all members of this House to support Motion 503, that asks government to consider measures that would further lower the cost of prescription drugs for Alberta's low-income seniors.

Thank you.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for this motion. First of all, I'd like to thank her for highlighting Dr. Manns' study, which highlighted the seriousness of this issue. Having 30 per cent of low-income seniors unable to take their medication due to financial implications is putting a lot of stress on our health care system and public finances. Adherence to prescription medication is key for controlling and stabilizing health. As such, nonadherence increases the risk of developing additional chronic diseases and developing acute related symptoms. This worsens overall health and increases health care costs.

We are aging. Our population is aging. Our life expectancy is increasing, and more and more we are seeing seniors not just living with low incomes but living in grinding poverty. Women are living longer, and we know there is a wage gap, so it's not unusual to see – in my community I've seen older women who probably should have retired and spent time with their grandchildren, but they're working in low-paying jobs, minimum wage jobs like Tim Hortons or like Home Depot. I see it all the time.

5:50

I know from my own life, in my own work life, when people do not take their medications properly, there are all kinds of related problems. If people don't have access to medication that slows down the rate of Alzheimer's, there are huge implications for seniors and for their families. As well, failure to take correct medication results in injuries from falls.

My parents were entrepreneurs, I'll call them. They liked to try a lot of different businesses, and they liked to move around a lot. So they never had a pension, and financially they were not able to put a lot of money away to save for retirement. Now my folks are in their 70s, and life is tough. They live in a rental apartment, and they don't have a lot of extra money for anything. Thankfully, I and my siblings are able to help them, and I'm grateful that we can. However, I have seen the decision-making process. I have seen my father sort of wave off my mother about the diabetes test strips because "it's really not necessary," because they really need to contribute to the grocery budget. So it's real. I think the implications of not testing properly or not having the money to buy the correct food to manage your health is hugely expensive in the long run. Anything that can help is a good thing. Twenty-five dollars might not seem like a lot, but it's huge.

I can remember one time leaving the Cross. We were at the Cross for some treatment for my father, and they were going to try a different medication. I'm not sure what the name was. I think it was interferon. I might be wrong. It was hugely expensive, and even

though he only had to pay a portion of it, he knew that that would not be possible. Now, there was a social worker there. Actually, we were able to stop, fill out some forms, and get some assistance through the Cross, which I will be eternally grateful for. That's a reality for far too many seniors in Alberta.

So it's my absolute pleasure and I'm very thankful that this motion was put forward, and I am overjoyed to support it.

Thank you.

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

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd really like to thank the Member for Calgary-Glenmore for bringing this motion forward into the House. You know, I can't imagine living and working an entire life in this province and getting to that stage where I would then be a senior and not having the economic resources in order to pay for the medications that I would need. That would just be horrible. Perhaps there are even Albertans that are watching us right now, listening to us right now, that are experiencing that very reality. It bothers me so much that there are individuals that have given their lives to the service of this province, and that's the reality that they're going through. It's a shame.

Albertans and low-income seniors should not be in a position where they must choose between their medication and food or shelter. Given that the costs associated with chronic disease represent a high portion of total health care costs, this motion represents a step forward toward rectifying past mistakes, promoting good governance, and being fiscally responsible to the taxpayer. On behalf of my constituents of Edmonton-Ellerslie, who have also shared their concerns with me on this issue, I'm proud to stand up in this House and speak in favour of this motion. Mr. Speaker, as I door-knocked in Edmonton-Ellerslie and I met with constituents in my office, this was a constant theme I encountered, this unaffordability of prescription medication, especially for those low-income seniors.

That being said, you know, Albertans are community minded, and they value that our government is standing up and protecting those who are facing immediate financial hardships. To ignore seniors, especially low-income seniors, who depend on essential prescription medication is just not the Alberta way.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Calgary-Glenmore has shed light on the fact that Canadians pay higher prices for prescription medication than most around the world. In Canada Alberta is spending the second most on drug plans.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, but under Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore to close debate on Motion 503.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I couldn't guess that a collection of facts and thorough research on the matters especially identified as serious issues by my constituents could be perceived as not a private member's motion. I would like to thank the members of this Legislature for speaking today on this issue and having the voices of their constituents heard.

Mr. Speaker, vulnerable, low-income seniors need a government that is willing to stand up and protect them during these difficult economic times. Health and stable quality of life must not be dependent on one's income or whether they have a strong support system that is able to assist the seniors. Low-income seniors deserve the right to accessible and affordable prescription medication, which means the maintenance of health and independence.

Mr. Speaker, consideration of measures that would further lower the costs of prescription drugs for Alberta's low-income seniors represents a needed step towards easing the financial burdens faced by low-income seniors and a reduction in overall health expenditures. In other words, this motion represents a commitment to protecting Alberta's most vulnerable seniors while remaining fiscally responsible to taxpayers' hard-earned money as this province endures the current economic challenges. These are the recommendations Albertans expect and deserve.

This motion is not based on ideology, but it is based on practicality. The fact is that Canadians pay among the highest prices for prescription drugs in the world. Among Canadians Albertans are paying the second-highest prices on drug plans. We need to find solutions that reduce the cost of prescription medication. The current system is not built for the long-term sustainability of our health care system. As previously mentioned, approximately 20 per cent of Albertans remain without coverage. With higher than average costs 1 in 5 Albertans are unable to purchase their necessary medications. Many low-income seniors fall into this category, and the fact is, Mr. Speaker, that we cannot cast aside the issues facing Alberta's aging population.

All the Alberta senior population is eligible to be covered under the government-sponsored coverage for seniors. The costs resulting from copayments are still too high for seniors to bear, especially for low-income seniors. I have heard from constituents in Calgary-Glenmore who tell me that the cost of prescription medication is unaffordable. There are eight seniors' care facilities in my

constituency, and I have been visiting them and talking to seniors on a one-on-one basis to listen to them and hear what their concerns are. They have mentioned that it has been unaffordable for themselves, unaffordable for their aging parents and grandparents, unaffordable for their neighbours and friends.

Mr. Speaker, as Dr. Manns' study highlighted, seniors rely on multiple prescriptions to manage their health. Sure, a \$25 maximum copayment may not seem like much, but given that most seniors are paying much more than \$25 every time they need a refill, it is clear why 30 per cent of low-income seniors are not taking their medications. The costs are simply too high. The results, of course, are obvious. Seniors are experiencing less comfortable lives and are at increased risk of losing their independence. This adds pressure to our health services. The costs associated with chronic disease represent a high percentage of overall health expenditures. Consideration of the measures that limit these services, that result in nonadherence to critical medication, is what we need in this province. This would represent effective and responsible management of public finances.

This motion also represents a commitment to all Albertans that as members of this Legislature we are standing up for their interests regardless of whether the province is in an economic boom or bust. Reducing the cost of prescription drugs, especially for low-income and vulnerable seniors, will reduce expenditures for government and households.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 carried]

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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