



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 19, 2016

Day 17

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Second Session

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Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
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Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND),
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Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W),
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Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
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Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
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Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
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Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 54 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 19, 2016

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.
I would recognize the Member for Calgary-Hays.

Statement by a Member

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would like to thank you for inviting me back into the House today. That's very gracious. Yesterday was a day that I hope not to repeat any time soon for a number of reasons. At about 5 p.m. yesterday I was recognized to introduce my Motion 504, asking government to reaffirm parents' ability to choose for their children home-schooling, charter schools, private schools, francophone schools, separate schools, and public schools, something I feel strongly about. Not against the rules of this House but surely against tradition a member chose to introduce an amendment to the motion which, if carried, would entirely change the intent of Motion 504. That was when things in this House began to go off the rails.

As the amendment from the government side's member was distributed, I received not only the amendment but, in the same handful of paper, a copy of a ruling on a point of order not yet made, a ruling that in the course of the discussion became the actual ruling. I became convinced, rightly or wrongly, that all was not in order. At the conclusion of the ruling I stood and refused to take my seat though you, Mr. Speaker, asked me to do so several times. Eventually you asked the Sergeant-at-Arms to escort me from the House. I would like to acknowledge that when you did that, when you asked me to be removed from the House after I did not obey your request to sit down several times, you were correctly discharging your duties and acting within the scope of your authority. I recognize that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
I think it's time for us to move forward.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a distinguished guest, Mr. Josef Beck, consul general of the Federal Republic of Germany, visiting Alberta to build on the important relationship we share. Accompanying the consul general today is Mr. Harald Kuckertz, honorary consul of the Federal Republic of Germany in Edmonton. They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker.

Germany is a very valuable partner to Alberta. We collaborate in many areas such as research through the esteemed Helmholtz Association of German Research Centres and numerous ties between our academic institutions. Germany is a customer for Alberta-produced energy and agricultural products while Alberta benefits from imports of German-made precision instruments, machinery, and metals. We know that there are many opportunities to increase trade between Germany and Alberta, especially as Canada and Europe work to expand access to each other's markets, and I look forward to seeing our trade partnership with Germany grow.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to welcome Mr. Beck to Alberta, and I ask him and Mr. Kuckertz to now stand and accept the traditional warm greeting of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce two amazing women who are mentors in my political career and dear friends as well. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask them to rise now as I introduce them: Heather Klimchuk, our former MLA for Edmonton-Glenora from 2008 to 2015, our Minister of Service Alberta, of Culture, of Human Services, our Deputy Government House Leader, and a wonderful, amazing symbol for all of us in the Legislature – truly happy to have her here today – and, beside her, Genia Leskiw, the MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake from 2008 to 2015, the first woman to represent her riding, which is a fantastic achievement, and who as a former schoolteacher always kept us in line in the Legislature. She will always be known to all of us so fondly as Momma G. I would welcome these women to our Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of students, teachers, and parents from l'école St. Joseph school from my constituency of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. Twenty-five students are with us today to learn about the Alberta Legislature. They are accompanied by Mrs. Jennifer Jones Shaver, Mrs. Zenovia Wiwchar Crawford, Mrs. Debbie Davio, Mrs. Shauna Despina, and Mr. Terrence Corke. I would like the group of parents, students, and teachers to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly a school group from the MLA for Red Deer-North's constituency. The students come from Gateway Christian school, and they are with their teachers, Klaaske deKoning and Mr. Jesse Bourne, and parent helpers Cathey Monteith, Gina Thomsen, Andrea Samson, and Tracie Simpson. I would like to ask the students to rise and receive the customary welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there other school groups to be introduced today?

Seeing none, I would recognize the Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a lovely young woman that I've known for quite some time, one of the kindest, most compassionate young women I know, who is currently in animal sciences at the university, hopes to apply to vet school soon, and will be interning at a wildlife rehabilitation centre this summer. I'd ask Madeleine, or Madeleine when she's in trouble, my daughter, to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request if I can introduce my guest in the next few minutes because she's in transit right now.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Joy Hurst, the president of the Edmonton branch of the Canadian Federation of University Women, CFUW. Joy has been involved in helping to arrange the CFUW activity today for our celebration of the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage in Alberta. When she's not working on a CFUW project, Joy works as corporate lead in patient relations at Covenant Health Canada and has been a vital part in the health care system for many years. Joy, please stand now, wherever you may be, so that we may give you the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: She may not in fact be here yet.

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 rise to introduce to you and through you guests from the Cement Association of Canada. The Cement Association of Canada is the voice of Canada's cement manufacturers. The industry provides a reliable domestic supply of cement required to build Canada's communities and critical infrastructure, and the CAC is committed to the environmentally responsible manufacturing of cement and concrete products, including support for economy-wide carbon pricing. Joining us here today are Michael McSweeney, president and CEO of the Cement Association of Canada; Justin Arnott, director of markets and technical affairs, western region, Calgary; and Ken Carrusca, vice-president, environment and marketing, from Vancouver. I ask that my colleagues in this Chamber join me in extending our guests, if they may rise, the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you a retired MLA, Genia Leskiw. She served two terms within our riding, and it is great that she was able to join us today as one of my guests for the women of suffrage.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you Ms Michelle Brewer visiting us today, a resident of Edmonton-Centre, a former instructor at MacEwan University, and founder of the You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down film festival, which debuted in March of this year as part of International Women's Day. I'd like to ask Michelle to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you the members of the organization Through the Eyes of the Children. Their project began with a 2014 trip to Ukraine. It was founded to form an educational bridge between 13 schools in

Ukraine and Canada and now as well Uganda. Three hundred students from Lacombe participate in this endeavour. I would like them to stand as I read their names: founder, Dr. Leighton Nischuk; Mr. Warren Kreway; Mr. Chase Bailey; and Mr. Blake Core. Please join me in giving them the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly staff from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Every day I witness the passion and commitment of our Culture and Tourism team, members of the Alberta public service, who deliver programs and services that contribute to making our province such a great place to live and to visit. They are Jennifer Babcock, Michelle Baronian, Sarah Boyer, Karin Buchanan, Devyn Caldwell, Danielle Fleming, Julie Helwig, Sean MacQueen, Aimée Shaw, Roney Simon Mathews, and Kaja Verret Holding. I would ask them all to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today on the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage and introduce to you and through you one of Calgary-Bow's female community leaders, Jacqui Esler. She is the acting board director of the Bowness business revitalization zone, or BRZ, and can be found on any given day out in the community on behalf of all small businesses in Bowness, some of whom have been a part of the community since the 1950s. The main goal of the BRZ, in Jacqui's own words, is to help make Main Street Bowness a safe, attractive, and prosperous place to own a business and to shop. Jacqui Esler's hard work and dedication to our community is a fine example of women's capacity to be leaders and advocates in our communities, and I'm so proud to be introducing her here today. If Jacqui could please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other members' visitors? The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly eight women who helped organize today's event to commemorate the 100th anniversary of women finally having the right to vote here in Alberta. These guests are Gail Gravelines, Lea Craig, Michelle Brewer, Beatrice Ghattuba, Sinem Senol, Kristy Jackson, Susanne Goshko, and Janis Irwin. I'd ask these women, along with all women and girls who are in our gallery today as visitors or guests, to please rise to commemorate this historic day and receive the warmest welcome of our Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: I think we have another guest.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just handed this note to be sure to include a woman in the public gallery, Karen Leibovici, for introduction to all of us as part of this wonderful celebration and remembrance for the vote for women 100 years ago today. So, Karen, if you are up in the public gallery, please stand, and we'll give you a special welcome in the House.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta and Minister of Status of Women.

Women's Suffrage Centennial

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today because people who sat in this room 100 years ago voted to let me do so. Today marks 100 years since the passing of the Equal Suffrage Statutory Law Amendment Act, the long title of the law that allowed women the vote in Alberta elections. It was a long struggle, as they tend to be for those seeking equality. It was more than a matter of passing a law but of changing opinions of women's place in this world. Today the place for women is in this House. It is through the grit and determination of the women before me that I can be here. Women made change happen in Alberta in 1916, and we are making it happen today.

Extending the vote to Alberta women opened a path for women to run for office, and it took just a year for Louise McKinney, followed shortly by Roberta MacAdams, to win their seats in this House in 1917. They were the first women to do so in Alberta, in Canada, and in the entire British Empire. We applaud their courage and efforts, and we remember that the law extended only as far as granting the vote to women who were property-owning citizens of the Empire. It was a great victory but an incomplete one. The fight for equality continued as women and men of different cultural and religious backgrounds sought the vote, and it was finally extended to Canada's indigenous people in 1960. We can do better.

Today I stood for a photo with women from across Alberta and women in this Legislature, women of different experiences, gender identities, sexual orientations, cultural backgrounds, and economic statuses. These are women who are leaders in their communities, and they are women who continue to strive for better outcomes and equal treatment. Looking around this House, I see not only a gender-balanced government bench but one that exceeds gender balance, and I see elected representation that looks a lot more like Alberta. It is my hope that in 100 years Albertans will look to our time to see that we did not squander the gains made toward equality but furthered them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to rise today to mark the 100th anniversary of suffrage in Alberta and to stand where Louise McKinney, the first woman to be elected to this Assembly, once pointed out that "the purpose of a woman's life is just the same as . . . a man's life: that she may make the best possible contribution to the generation in which she is living."

We owe the rights that we currently enjoy – the right to vote, the right to hold public office, and the right to own land – to brave trailblazers of every political stripe, who knew that they could make a difference in their society. We've come far in just 100 years, but we must remember that early suffragettes were setting precedent in an often hostile environment. Even in Alberta, the proud home of the Famous Five, who worked so hard to show our country that women had a right to vote and to be recognized as persons under the law, even here these women faced incredible barriers, and they overcame them. It is so important to note that women won the vote. They were not given it or granted it. Women and men fighting for equality won it in the same way any campaign is ultimately won or lost, with hard work and perseverance.

1:50

The work of Louise McKinney, the Famous Five, and countless others adds strength to my voice here today. I firmly believe that we in this Assembly stand united in a desire to have more women run for public office and to identify and remove barriers that women in our political system still face today. We have the opportunity to

investigate and respond to the realities of women of all income levels, backgrounds, and circumstances. We can keep shining a light on everyday sexism that women encounter in our own country and also stay alert to the women around the world who still fight to achieve basic rights.

To those who paved the way in 1916: thank you. To our leaders today: thank you. Let's keep working together with courage and respect and determination.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would seek unanimous consent of the House to allow a speaker from the third party and the other leaders to speak if they so wish.

The Speaker: Both of the other leaders?

Mr. Carlier: Yes. Absolutely.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to stand here in the Alberta Legislature and join in a celebration of 100 years of voting rights for women. My thanks to you and to everyone who stood up and spoke on this historic and wonderful occasion.

It was February of 1916 when our then Lieutenant Governor Robert Brett stated that "equality should in Alberta be fixed by law." Bravo. Hard to believe that this was 100 years ago. So much has happened since then, much of it happening right here in Alberta. Prairie women are a hardy bunch, as I'm sure all women in here can attest to. Western provinces were the first to grant women the right to vote. When Alberta women took to the polls for the first time in 1917, Louise McKinney and Roberta MacAdams became the first two women ever elected in Alberta.

Now fast-forward to May of 2015, when only two women were re-elected in this Legislature, myself and our Premier. This time, however, there were a lot more new female politicians, ready to make their mark in the history of this Legislature. As I said earlier, despite our sometimes high-intensity exchanges in this House, I never tire of seeing so many amazing women gathered in this Chamber to guide our province forward.

We have very big shoes to fill as we fight for policy and legislation that will continue to make women's lives easier, the shoes of the Famous Five: Emily Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney, and Irene Parlby. I think about these courageous women and how their efforts have spawned a generation of political activism, and I promise to continue that work with my dynamic female colleagues and some pretty great guys, too.

I will stand tall with the women who despite threats, harassment, and intimidation still get out there every day to push the limits, to protect single moms like me, new moms like the Member for Calgary-Varsity and our minister responsible for the status of women, women diverse in their sexual orientation and their ethnicity, women with a vision of how to make life better in Alberta. And we are doing it just like women did 100 years ago, one vote at a time.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I quote Audre Lorde: "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are

very different from my own.” One hundred years ago, much like today, women were the cornerstone of Alberta society. However, until this day in 1916 they were denied the most basic of democratic rights, the vote. This was finally changed by the passage of the Equal Suffrage Statutory Law Amendment Act. It would be easy to look at the distant date – April 19, 1916 – and say that that’s ancient history. After all, a hundred years is a long time. If we did, though, we’d be deceiving ourselves.

While we here in Alberta can be proud that Louise McKinney was the first elected woman anywhere in the British Empire, serving this Legislature between 1917 and 1921, one merely has to look at today’s membership of Canadian Legislative Assemblies and Parliament to realize that despite it being 2016, equality in electoral matters is yet to be achieved. Nor can we forget that First Nations waited another 44 years to have the vote, nor that our wives and daughters and mothers still earn 70 per cent of what their male counterparts earn for the same work, nor that many women face a near impossible work balance of family and career, nor that safety of person is still a luxury denied to many, many women in this society.

So while we celebrate the achievements of those who tirelessly lobbied this House to include them in democratic society, we look to the future, when proportional representation is the norm in most countries. It will enable more people to be engaged and more people to influence the nature and balance of a government. We still wait for that day in Alberta. We must also recognize the long road ahead and commit, each and every one, to making the dreams of those early suffragettes a reality for all our citizens.

Perhaps Nellie McClung stated the dream best when she said: “I am a believer in women, in their ability to do things and in their influence and power. Women set the standards for the world, and it is for us, women in Canada, to set the standards high.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One hundred years since most women were granted the right to vote, 100 years since most women could fully participate in democracy, 100 years since most women could share their voices and opinions by selecting those who represented them within government, but even more remarkable, only one year after women were granted the right to vote, the first women in the entire British Commonwealth were elected here in Alberta.

I am proud to be a descendant of a remarkable woman who ran for elected office, my grandmother, whose name was Alberta Clark. That’s true. [interjections] Exactly. Vote for Alberta. Absolutely. She ran as a Liberal in Calgary in 1952, and she used to tell me: it’s not as easy to be a Liberal in Alberta as you might think. I tend to agree.

In 100 years, of course, we have come a long way, but we have very far to go. It wasn’t until 1960 that indigenous women and, in fact, all indigenous people were finally given the right to vote. And inequality persists today. I’m sure many of you read the article yesterday by Calgary MP Michelle Rempel, who wrote about the sexism and sexual harassment she and her staff have faced working in the political world in Ottawa and beyond.

While legal barriers have been broken down, institutional and societal barriers to women in politics remain. As long as women are looked down upon, degraded, insulted, harassed, and assaulted, we have very little legitimacy in stating that there is true equality in politics. It may be 2016, but in some areas not much has changed. Certainly, not enough has changed.

The fight for equality continues, and I commit to continue to being an ally for women in all walks of life, for LGBTQ-plus individuals, and for those who are marginalized within our province. I commit to speaking up when someone makes a rude comment, a joke, or contributes to everyday sexism. I commit to confronting these barriers and addressing sexism in politics when it happens. I commit to working alongside women to further the cause that was started by women such as the Famous Five and support the women in my life in their advocacy. I ask each and every Member of this Legislative Assembly to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:00

Oral Question Period

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

Property Taxes

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgarians are hurting, families are barely scraping by, many wonder where their next paycheck will come from. Unfortunately, this NDP government is only making things worse for Albertans. Yesterday we learned that Calgarians are in line for a 10 per cent property tax hike because this NDP government wants a larger take of their salary. That means that most families will be out another \$126 this year to pay for this NDP government’s spending addiction, and that’s on top of the carbon tax that will raise the price of everything for everyone. Why is the Premier raising taxes on the 76,000 Albertans that are out of work?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To begin with, I reject much of the premise in that question, much of the reason for that being that it’s greatly inaccurate. What I will say is that this government very clearly committed to ensuring that education funding follows enrolment and increases on a predictable basis of 2 per cent each year. We did that because we understood that we need to invest in our education system, not starve it like the folks over there would like to do. Now, three years ago the previous government established a formula. We didn’t change it. We didn’t tell anybody we would. This shouldn’t be a surprise for anybody.

Mr. Jean: No, but you dramatically increased taxes for Albertans.

Calgary has been decimated over the past year. Home prices have dropped by almost 4 per cent, and home sales are down 11 per cent. So it’s hard to believe the minister could be so out of touch with this reality, where she blamed the government’s need to increase Calgarians’ taxes on, quote, an increase in the market values of homes. End quote. Nobody is buying these excuses. Albertans are already feeling the pain. This NDP government is just making things much worse. Did the Premier really think that Calgarians would buy that excuse for raising their taxes when the value of their homes continuously drops?

Ms Notley: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the opposition take a bit of time to do their own research instead of believing everything that they read in the paper. Now, the residential education property tax is based on the assessed value of homes. The rate was \$2.50 per \$1,000 in 2015 and has been reduced by this government to \$2.48 per \$1,000 in 2016. The fact of the matter is that assessed values of homes have actually increased in some cases, so there is an overall increase, but it all relates to a formula that was established under the previous government with

respect to the percentage of property tax that goes towards education.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Hogwash.

The NDP's higher tax agenda on Albertans doesn't stop there. The new carbon tax will actually force Calgary to raise its property tax by another half of a percentage point. That's more money out of the pockets of hard-working taxpayers. We will see that effect in every single community across this province because of this NDP government's carbon tax. Higher property taxes, higher busing fees, more expensive groceries, higher prices at the pump, all at a time when Albertans simply can't afford these higher taxes. What does the Premier have to say to all those who will now be poorer while government has not had it so good ever?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The first thing that I will say is that notwithstanding all the Chicken Little-esque declarations coming over from that side of the House, the fact of the matter is this. All in, the tax regime in Alberta is still the lowest in the country, and that has not changed. We are maintaining that while we are investing in significant efforts to diversify our economy and to create jobs and to invest in the future, something that those folks over there wouldn't do. They would slash billions of dollars from our budget, put people out of work, and leave us worse prepared.

The Speaker: Thank you
The hon. leader.

Carbon Levy

Mr. Jean: We know that this NDP carbon tax will cost Alberta families at least a thousand dollars a year in direct and indirect costs, but what we didn't know until Friday was how the Premier expected Albertans to cope with increased fuel costs as a result of her policies. Her pitch to those who can barely make ends meet now and certainly can't afford to pay more at the pump was simply: change your car. What a brilliant idea. When faced with job losses and bills that pile up, just take on more debt. Why not? After all, our NDP government is doing that. Does the Premier perhaps have a better suggestion to those Albertans worried that they simply can't afford her higher tax agenda?

Ms Notley: Well, the first thing I would suggest is that those people get their information from someone other than the Official Opposition because these guys are making it up as they go along. Just yesterday they put out a chart that defied basic addition and subtraction, and they extracted it from a report where the author said: they're using it wrong, and they don't know what they're talking about. So the one thing Albertans can definitely do is not take advice from the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, this Premier just hit the typical family in Alberta with at least a thousand dollars in new costs per year, a tax on everything for everyone. Her answer to Albertans who are worried about another tax taking money is to laugh and to say: buy a new, fuel-efficient car. This is while the Premier travels the province in a large, GHG, gas-guzzling Suburban, and her ministers do exactly the same. What an example. How does the Premier expect Albertans to afford a new fleet of Teslas or Smart cars when

her policies in this budget are working so hard to drive investment and prosperity right out of our province?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, we based our plan on research and facts, and the fact of the matter is that the average family will pay roughly \$500 a year more than they would have previously. What that means, then, is that 60 per cent of Albertans will receive a rebate of roughly that amount of money. That's something that, interestingly, is not ever discussed by the Official Opposition, yet that's the way these things will work. In the meantime people can over time make choices to reduce their emissions. That's the way it works in every other jurisdiction with the carbon price, and that's the way we can change our emissions.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, this isn't the first time that this Premier and her government have been tone deaf to the pain of Albertans. Her Energy minister said that energy workers should move to B.C. to get a job. The Premier has since revised the message with a progressive jobs plan that simply asks Albertans to stay and apply for EI. Now when faced with higher gas prices, what the Premier is suggesting to Albertans is: change your car. Albertans want to know: once they return from picking up a new Prius, if they can't afford the groceries, will the Premier's next suggestion be to let them eat cake?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I hate to confuse the opposition with numbers and with facts, but here is something that's worth thinking about. In the last six months the price of gas in Edmonton has gone up 30 cents. When fully implemented, our carbon levy will be roughly 6 cents per litre. Interestingly, despite the Chicken Little-ism that's going on from over there, the economy did not drop dead with the price of gas going up and down. Quite frankly, it will not drop dead when we implement our carbon levy. However, what it will do is fund the diversification, the renewable energy . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Health Care System Manager Sick Leave

Mr. Barnes: Wildrose has been vocal in this House about mismanagement and waste in AHS and its bloated management ranks. The NDP government's response is to claim that these redundant and expensive managerial positions are crucial. Now it has been revealed that hundreds of AHS managers are collecting full pay while on sick leave. When the four-month maximum is up, they are magically better and return to work. This is just wrong, and it hurts those that are truly in need of leave. My question to the minister is this: what are you going to do about it?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, it's very troubling that the member opposite wants to find cost savings by compelling sick people to go to work in our hospitals. We're committed to improving health by finding efficiencies but absolutely not at the expense of patient safety. I can come to work with the flu. I don't want a nurse working in an ER or in an isolated immunosuppressed area to be doing the same.

The Speaker: Hon. member, please sit down.
Proceed.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you. Clearly, this Health minister is more interested in protecting entitled AHS managers than actually improving our wasteful and ineffective health system. It makes me sick to know that under this government's watch wait times for cancer surgeries are climbing while millions are spent on a system that rewards AHS managers for deception. Again to the Health minister: will you fix the broken system, that rewards waste and abuse at Albertans' expense?

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

Ms Hoffman: Now, we are all very clearly understanding that the Official Opposition struggles with math, but let me explain the facts. Over the last year the use of sick days in AHS has gone down, and it's below the average of health authorities across western Canada. Certainly, we are going to make sure that when people do get their cancer surgeries, they don't have somebody operating on them who's sick and expelling germs all over the place. These are managers, unit managers often in nursing units in acute-care health facilities, Mr. Speaker.

2:10

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, if a 1 per cent improvement is good enough for the minister, the management problem starts at the very top.

The Health minister's answers again confirm what we already knew, that this NDP government is more interested in allowing a broken sick-leave system to continue than ensuring better results. It's time for a reality check. In the real world abusing a sick-leave system would be stopped, not encouraged. In the real world hard-working Albertans don't get a third of the year off with full pay each and every year. Will the minister implement real accountability and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: In the real world somebody would not stand up and accuse somebody of being fraudulent. In the real world AHS employees have documentation from a physician if they're not able to perform their duties. Are you saying that the employees are fraudulent, that the doctors are fraudulent? I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker; that side of the House is trying to create a bunch of spin and disrespect. These are dedicated front-line health workers, including unit nurse managers in hospitals. That is inappropriate, and he should apologize.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Budget 2016

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Budget 2016 is setting records as a disappointment to many Albertans. The Alberta chambers call it "simply irresponsible." They asked the government to "do no harm" to Alberta businesses, "reduce the cost burden on business, contain spending, [and] borrow responsibly." Government told small business that they would be sheltered from the cost of the carbon levy. The government has failed on all accounts. To the Minister of Finance: did you ignore the chambers' advice because you focused on the optics of the budget for yourselves rather than on the economy for Albertans?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There have been a number of chambers of commerce, and I was just at one this morning up in Fort Saskatchewan, talking with them, and I'm going to see other chambers. They have been supportive of the things we're doing around small-business tax cuts, around investor tax credits, around capital investment tax credits. We are doing those things. I was at the Calgary Chamber of commerce on Monday, and they said: we commend the government for its leadership in establishing Alberta's first investor tax credit program to help equity capital flow. They are supportive.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That little piece there that they actually did like was recommended by the PCs.

Yesterday the minister of economic development said that his government was told by the chambers of commerce that there are a number of initiatives to help the economy move, and the minister suggested that his government adopted those initiatives. Clearly, based on what is stated in a release from the Alberta chambers, which I will table today, that cannot be true. To the minister of economic development: what's keeping you from telling Albertans the truth about how business and their chambers feel?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, you know, first of all, again I reject the premise of this. It is almost laughable in this House that a party that was in power for 40 years, that failed to reduce small-business tax, to bring in an investor tax credit or a capital investment tax credit is now trying to take credit for something that we did. The Finance minister, the Premier, myself, and members of cabinet as well as members of our caucus have been out consulting with business and industry across this province. We've been listening to them. We have taken their feedback, and now we're implementing measures that will . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Every business I know would prefer the policies before May 5 compared with what's here now.

Last week the Premier flippantly disregarded Albertans' concerns with the carbon tax and suggested that Albertans should just change the cars they have. To the Premier: how are middle-income Albertans going to afford that when they're paying your carbon tax on food, shelter, clothing, consumer goods, vacations, and other costs not rebated back as a result of your regressive carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What middle-income and low-income Albertans will get is a rebate that would effectively cover the cost of the carbon levy based on estimates that we put together. The second point that the member outlined: as I've said before, there are no facts to back up that assertion. The third point, I would suggest, in terms of what I said last week is simply this. All Albertans, as they can afford it, as they have the opportunity, as they gain access to the other programs that are put off the carbon levy, the efficiency programs, the grant programs, can make choices to reduce . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

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

Wildfire Season

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fire season has started early in our province, with some 37 fires currently burning. Overnight the hamlet of Duffield in Parkland county was evacuated along with residents of nearby acreages. The hamlet of Tomahawk was also evacuated as well as portions of the Paul First Nation. The residents of nearby Clear Lake are currently on evacuation standby. My question today is to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. What steps is your ministry taking to protect the residents of Parkland county from wildfire?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert for the question. While Parkland county is outside the forest protection area, the ministry is always ready to assist municipalities to protect residents. The department has sent four eight-person crews to help the county as well as a fire behaviour officer and one helicopter. All fires currently burning are human caused. While we are ready to assist where we can, I'd like to urge all Albertans to take necessary steps to minimize wildfires.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the ministry has started wildfire season early, to the same minister: what steps have you taken to minimize the likelihood of wildfires?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the member for the question. It is important to note the unpredictability when it comes to Alberta's wildfire season. It is difficult to predict weather patterns two weeks from now, let alone a full season ahead. Nevertheless, the trend is for a drier, warmer spring. To address this, I moved the start of the fire season ahead by a month to allow the department to plan early and have resources in place. The government has also invested in the FireSmart program and the Flat Top Complex to reduce the risk of wildfires and their impact on municipalities.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that my constituents value the important work of firefighters to fight these wildfires, again to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: would you please explain to the Assembly the variance between last year's budget and the one announced last week?

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, let me be clear that safety is paramount and that this government will put the resources in place to ensure it remains so. Fire seasons are unpredictable, therefore difficult to budget. There's a base funding level to maintain equipment and personnel. The cost of actually fighting the fires is drawn from emergency funding, which is to reflect in the following year's budget estimates forecast in our actuals. This was the past practice of previous Alberta governments and is the present practice of governments across Canada. Last year's budget differed, however. It was introduced on October 27, so the cost was reflected in the budget rather than the following year's forecast.

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

Parental Choice in Education

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. "Our caucus is steadfastly opposed to private schooling and particularly steadfastly opposed to public dollars supporting private schooling." That quote comes from our current Premier. Albertans are worried that this radical government has a hidden agenda to defund all but public school systems and destroy the Alberta tradition of honouring parental choice in education. To the Premier: is your caucus still steadfastly opposed to public dollars supporting independent, Catholic, charter, and home-school programs?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Certainly, since the time that I became the Minister of Education, I've made it very clear that we are funding all forms of education. Not only that, but we're funding for enrolment and enrolment growth for education across the province, which has allowed for significant growth. So you can talk about these things all you want, but you can actually walk the walk and put the money there, which we've done. Then you can see what we're actually supporting.

Thank you.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, given that yesterday this government attempted to radically change the education system by tabling an amendment to Motion 504 that would have undermined parental choice in education and given that if this amendment was passed, the motion would have encouraged the minister to assume full responsibility for all decisions about what programs can be offered and funded outside of the public system, can the minister commit to funding all education options at their current levels until the end of this term, or is his hidden agenda of eliminating parental choice not so hidden anymore?

2:20

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting for people looking for conspiracies under any rock, right?

What you can see from us is that I've said very clearly that we are funding all forms of education. To suggest otherwise is to inflame and to get people upset for absolutely no good reason. We have home-schooling in this province. We have private schools in the province, charters, and public, and together they form one of the best education systems not only in North America but around the world.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this minister has waffled in his support for Catholic school education, reneged on his commitments to charter schools by disallowing ReThink charter school in Calgary, and engaged in clawbacks to home education programs run by independent school authorities and given that just yesterday he attempted to violate article 26 of the universal declaration of human rights and undermine parental rights in education, what other items from his hidden agenda will the Minister of Education be implementing?

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, when people choose to fan the flames of disinformation, when they choose to put out information that simply gets people upset when it's simply not true, you know, that smoke smells like people just trying to cause trouble when we are trying to run an education system. We put that money into place. We fund for not just current levels, but we fund for enrolment and

growth as well, and for anybody to stand in the way of that, that is simply trying to cause chaos for no good reason.

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

Government Spending

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Government spending is a serious concern to my constituents. They work hard to do their part separating the wants from the needs. All they ask is that this government does the same. Yet this government will increase total spending by 4.3 per cent on average over the next three years, placing the burden for their mistakes on future generations. To the Minister of Finance: why did you not show the same restraint as my constituents and constrain spending to a more manageable level?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. I'm not sure where the numbers are coming from that the hon. member is using, but in the budget fiscal plan that I look at, it's constraining spending to about 2 per cent per year in the three years going forward. That is less than population plus inflation growth, far less than this side of the House had in terms of their spending year over year over year. We're bending the curve; they didn't.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That number comes from your jobs plan, hon. Minister.

Given that this government has acknowledged that the province is in a difficult fiscal state and given that the debt-servicing costs will be 300 per cent from 2014 to 2017 and given that this actually has the potential to be worse as the government is overly optimistic about WTI prices over the next three years, to the Minister of Finance: if WTI does not hit your unreasonable targets, how much debt is your government willing to rack up and heap upon the backs of Albertans?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you for the hon. member's question. You know, I think I stood in the House yesterday and talked about what our debt-servicing costs would be. They would be 2.4 per cent. If we look at B.C., if we look at Ontario, respectively those numbers are 5.5 per cent and 9 per cent. We are doing a good job here, and we'll continue to do it.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think for this government the sky is the limit.

Given that the government continually blames oil prices for the immense deficit and given that even if resource revenues were the same this year as they were in 2014-2015, a year which produced \$1 billion surplus, we would still have a \$3 billion deficit, again to the minister: will you stop blaming low oil prices and admit that your government is unable and unwilling to show even the slightest intention to constrain spending?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. You know, the Alberta jobs plan in Budget 2016 invests in this province. In 1993 disinvestment happened over here. They cut programs and services. We won't do that. We will invest \$34.5 billion in building this province so people can get back to work, Mr. Speaker. That's what we need: jobs, not the kind of rhetoric over here.

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

Pipeline Construction

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canada has a long history of unity-building pipeline projects, and despite what the members opposite like to say, several projects were approved in the last 10 years, including Enbridge's line 9 reversal; Kinder Morgan's anchor loop to Trans Mountain, a pipeline that reaches tidewater; Keystone; and the Alberta Clipper. Today as antipipeline, anti-Alberta movements are on the rise, these same companies are being stonewalled. NDP members and staff have been involved in anti-Alberta movements and have politicized pipelines. To the minister: when will this NDP government apologize to Albertans for its role in delaying these job-creating projects?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. Again, as I've said many times, we're working very hard for pipelines in all directions. We understand some in the old system have some permits, but they still have conditions they have to meet. We're working hard with our energy companies to help them meet those conditions.

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, given that the environment minister fed her radical socialist friends ideas for a book on protesting pipelines and given that the Member for Calgary-East, the Education minister, and our Premier have themselves joined in antipipeline rallies, it's a bit rich to ask Albertans to trust that this government really wants to get to yes, as it claims, or that it wasn't involved in politicizing the pipeline approval process. To the minister: when will her government finally realize that Canada's regulatory processes are robust and defend the integrity of their findings?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we are working constantly with our ministers across the way. I'm very proud of the work the Premier has been doing with her fellow Premiers across the country. We work with AER. We work with the NEB. We're working with everyone to assure people that pipelines are safe and they will continue to be safe.

Mrs. Aheer: Given that when the federal government announced it was working on a new regulatory framework, the CEO and president of the Canadian Energy Pipeline Association pointed out that the broader implication of this was that the NEB is broken and given that Canada and Alberta already have the strictest regulatory process in the world and that developing a new framework will delay approvals on key job-creating pipeline projects, why has the Energy minister refused to stand up for pipelines and the jobs that they create by publicly defending the integrity of our system?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what's not helping the construction of pipelines east and west. It's the rhetoric coming out of the Official Opposition, that is making problems where problems don't exist and, quite frankly, actually slowing down the process. The Minister of Energy has been a champion of pipelines, both Energy East and the west. Our government recognizes the need to get pipelines built. There are a number of things that we are doing to make this happen, not only dialoguing with the federal government, but it's because we've also introduced the most robust climate leadership plan in the country that we will get the social licence to get pipelines approved and our product to tidewater.

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

Job Creation and Retention

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just last fall this government was adamant that their previous jobs plan would somehow create 27,000 jobs at a cost of \$178 million. That's the math. There was never any evidence to back up that claim or jobs created, for that matter. Now, at \$250 million, they're claiming 100,000 jobs will be created by their shiny, new jobs plan sometime next year, I might add. Will the government table evidence on how and where these jobs will actually be created, or should we stay tuned for failed jobs plan number three next year?

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know what? I'm quite proud of the fact, and so are industry and business, that our government listened to the feedback they were giving. They told us that the incentive program that was initially designed would not meet the goals and objectives that we designed it for. But I'll tell you what hasn't changed: our commitment to working with the private sector, the job creators, to give them the tools they need to get Albertans working, to get them back to work, to diversify the economy, which, quite frankly, is something that the Official Opposition doesn't believe in.

2:30

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I teach my children that when we make mistakes, we correct them. This government needs to remember that important truism. Given that the Finance minister's own budget estimates that unemployment will hit a staggering 8 per cent this year and given that the 2017 start date for the government's investor tax credit is cold comfort for those Albertans who have been without work, jobs, for several months already, rather than making things worse, what is this government doing so that Alberta businesses are better prepared and positioned to create jobs now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? I'm quite proud of the work the Finance minister has done and the Premier has done as far as working with the private sector to create a robust jobs plan. What we did was actually increase our budget up to \$250 million. We are investing \$34 billion over five years to build roads, schools, bridges, and hospitals, which is going to create employment for Albertans. We introduced a \$500 million petrochemical diversification program, \$10 million to restore the STEP program, the \$90 million investor tax credit. We're investing in a capital investment tax credit. We have a series of initiatives that are going to get . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given that small businesses need to actually make a profit in order for the new small-business tax cut to have any meaningful effect and given that both personal and business insolvencies have increased by over 30 per cent in Alberta from 2014 to 2015, will the government back away from their job-killing policies like the carbon tax and the electricity scheme until full economic impact studies are done?

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it is a very serious thing what many businesses and Alberta families are going through right now with the incredible low price of oil, that is having an impact on every Albertan across this province. I can you tell you

that is exactly why our government is acting and why we've introduced the Alberta jobs plan, which is a very robust plan with a suite of initiatives to help Albertans. What I can tell you is that for far too long we've remained overreliant on one resource, on a single commodity, on a single buyer, and that has had a significant impact. Our government is working to diversify the economy and get Albertans working.

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

Health Care and Education Funding

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard a lot of self-congratulations from this government about how their budget stabilizes front-line services in health care and education. Budgets for those ministries are certainly robust, but like all plans the devil is in the details. One health care executive I met at a breakfast this morning told me: we don't have a budget problem so much as an allocation problem. To the Health minister: how are you working to ensure that the dollars allocated for health care are going to the areas where they are most needed?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. Wanting to reduce the expenditures from what we've seen historically being about 6 per cent down to 3 per cent this year is a great challenge, but it's something that we're certainly up to the task. Part of that is making sure that we have ongoing dialogue and that we're making sure that we're allocating to the right areas. We're focusing on community initiatives like addressing midwifery wait-lists by expanding by 400 courses of care every year over four years. That's a significant increase. We meet regularly with Alberta Health Services. I was at that same breakfast and happy to meet with some of the stakeholders to address their concerns in person.

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, given that front-line workers can often provide the best guidance on areas of neglect and wastefulness, again to the Health minister: what does that dialogue with front-line workers look like, and because they're watching, when we ask them, will they tell us that they've been consulted by your government?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I've met many times with folks at ACCA, one of the organizations that cohosted this morning. The work that they're doing to make sure that our seniors have the respect and dignity that they deserve as well as others who might have disabilities, who need supports to age in their community is certainly an important priority for our government. We are regularly in dialogue with front-line stakeholders, with local community leaders, and, of course, one of our biggest partners, being Alberta Health Services, which has the responsibility of delivering the actual front-line care. I met with them yesterday, and I'll be meeting with them again today.

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

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, to our Minister of Finance: given that the cumulative deficit over the next three years is a jaw-dropping \$28.9 billion and given that no substantial new forms of revenue are being sought out, are you prepared to tell

front-line workers in health care and education that their long-term job security fears are unwarranted?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. You know, for the long term this government is committed to continuing to fund education, health services, human services. We are going to make sure that the people who are doing front-line work are not put at risk as the previous government would have done and as the opposition would do.

Investor Tax Credit

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, we all know that small businesses are some of the biggest job creators in our economy. Over the past few months I've spoken to many business owners throughout my constituency who are ready and able to help put Albertans back to work, and they've been looking to this government for support. Yesterday the Minister of Economic Development and Trade announced an investor tax credit for small business and start-up businesses. Can the minister tell the House what this new tax credit is and how it will benefit Alberta companies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta investor tax credit will provide a \$90 million tax credit over two years to support local small and medium-sized businesses. It will provide a 30 per cent tax credit to investors who provide capital to Alberta companies in sectors such as information technology, clean tech, health tech, interactive digital media, game products, postproduction visual effects, and digital animation sectors. We will work with members of the business community and stakeholders over the summer to develop an effective program, and we're open to looking at additional, nontraditional sectors once consultation is complete.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the current challenging economic realities we're facing, can the Minister of Economic Development and Trade explain to my constituents why he thinks this is the right program for Alberta at this time?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the very relevant question. You know, quite frankly, Alberta has been lagging in capital activity compared to other Canadian jurisdictions. This limits growth in commercialization potential of local small and medium-sized businesses. British Columbia, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Manitoba, and a number of U.S. states have an investor tax credit. In Alberta investors have typically invested in the oil and gas sector. The province has talent and ideas outside of that sector which also need capital support in order to grow, so this will help level the playing field amongst other jurisdictions that offer investor tax credits.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Minister. Mr. Speaker, given that we need to be providing businesses with as many different supports as possible, again to the same minister: how will this tax credit work with other existing government job programs in Alberta that could help businesses in my constituency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta investor tax credit is part of the Alberta jobs plan, which will provide \$250 million in new funding through a series of initiatives that will go a long way to help build a strong, diversified, and resilient economy. It will complement existing Alberta programs and supports for small to medium-sized businesses without overcrowding the system. I'll remind the House again that the Finance minister and the Premier announced a small business tax cut, something that small businesses are applauding throughout the province. Our government is committed to working with small and medium-sized businesses to keep Albertans working.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Métis Settlements Consultation Policy

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 6 this year the NDP government announced a new Métis settlements consultation policy. Establishing this policy is important and will hopefully help improve the relationship of Alberta's government with Alberta's Métis. The government doesn't have a very good record of effective consultation in other areas, however. Can the minister please explain how exactly this consultation policy will improve co-operation when it comes to land and natural resource management?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We are very proud of the fact that on April 4 we were able to bring to this House the new consultation policy that was put together with our government and the Métis settlements. We have been working with the Métis settlements to ensure that they have a true voice in terms of the development that is going on in this province and all of the development that is going on around them on their traditional lands. We'll continue to work with them to ensure their participation in our success.

2:40

Mr. Hanson: Given that the Métis settlements and all Albertans will benefit from having open communication and consultation with industry and given that Alberta has Canada's largest population of Métis, can the same minister please explain whether and in what ways this process will help Métis settlements in Alberta participate more fully in the economy and what he is hearing from project proponents on this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We have been working with each of the individual settlements on particular projects in their areas, and we've been working very carefully with the general settlement council, who have been a participant fully in this consultation process. We have been having our technicians work with their technicians to make sure that they are involved in all of the options available for support for business growth and for involvement in industry as well as in the leadership plan that's coming forward.

Mr. Hanson: Given that I think we can all agree that consultation and conversation is important and given that reaching a consensus and taking meaningful steps forward is even more important, with respect to consulting and conversing with the federal government, can the minister tell this Assembly how he plans to co-ordinate with

the federal government to improve delivery of health and education services for Alberta's Métis people and indeed all of Alberta's indigenous people?

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I'm glad that they're paying attention to the good work that we're doing over on this side of the House because indeed we have. I'm very happy to say that the Minister of Education and myself met with the federal minister of indigenous relations earlier in the spring. We are continuing to work on a number of areas to bring them to a tripartite table, so we're involving all First Nations, all Métis people, and all the indigenous community in consultations in our work with the federal government.

Thank you.

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

Workers' Compensation Review

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans were intrigued when the Labour minister recently announced that an independent panel would conduct a comprehensive review of the Workers' Compensation Board. Now, they were intrigued because on December 7 I had asked the Premier why WCB, a system that she so vociferously attacked while in opposition, was now being made compulsory for farm employers and employees. The Premier said, "We are in the process of trying to do a fulsome consultative review of how we can improve the service provided by WCB." To the Labour minister: if a fulsome consultative review is already in process, why is it necessary to start another one?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's absolutely crucial that Albertans feel confident that the Workers' Compensation Board provides fair compensation and meaningful rehabilitation. I announced the launch of our WCB review, where we have appointed a three-person panel that will represent the workers, management as well as a neutral chair. The last review of the Workers' Compensation Board was done more than 15 years ago, making this due time to take a look at this system and make sure that it was reviewed properly.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, when the Labour minister speaks of things that Albertans don't have confidence in, it's just once again an example of something the Premier wrecked the confidence in in the first place. Let me restate the question more specifically. Given that the Premier assured this Assembly that the flaws she saw in WCB were already being addressed and given that a fulsome consultative review was in process already last December, to the Labour minister: who exactly was consulted during that review? Is it complete? If so, when will the results of that review be made public?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The review that was launched this year is going to be taking approximately one year for that panel to bring forward recommendations into 2017. The panel is going to examine WCB's system of governance and effectiveness, the principles of compensation, the policies of WCB, including those related to privacy, confidentiality, and transparency.

This is part of our government's commitment to review all agencies, boards, and commissions.

Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, twice I've asked and twice I've not gotten the answer, so I'm going to try a different approach. Given that the Premier attempted to mollify farmers and ranchers four months ago by saying, "We have engaged in a review of agencies, boards, and commissions, and the Workers' Compensation Board is part of that," and given that the Labour minister has now determined there is a need for a new review, a simple question: was there in fact a WCB review underway on December 7? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A fulsome review of agencies, boards, and commissions has begun under this government. For the Workers' Compensation Board, which is a very large system that impacts hundreds of thousands of workers, we have determined that we need to take a closer look at the details. We are going to be looking at the governance and effectiveness, the principles of compensation using a three-person panel to take a closer look at a system that has not been fully reviewed in over 15 years. This is part of good governance, to make sure that we have a system that is working effectively for all Albertans.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Organ and Tissue Donation

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that April 17 to 23 is National Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Week and given that more than 600 Albertans are waiting for an organ transplant, with many more waiting for tissue donation, what is the Minister of Health doing to improve the rate of organ donation in Alberta?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This certainly is a crucial conversation for this House and, I'd say, all Alberta houses. Only four years ago Alberta had some of the lowest rates of deceased organ donation in the country, sitting at 9.9 deceased donors per 1,000,000 population. We have some good news, though. Today the rate is at 13.6, and that's because 230,000 Albertans took the time to register online. Unfortunately, Alberta still has 600 people waiting for organ transplants. There's much more work to do. I hope all hon. members and all Albertans take the time to register.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for the update. In addition to registering as organ donors and given the need to continue increasing organ donation rates to ensure Albertans have access to life-saving organs and tissue, are there other ways Albertans can support organ and tissue donations here in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, there is a green ribbon campaign that's about public awareness. Again I'd like to remind everyone to please register if you haven't already done so. We're actually going to have a clinic here tomorrow where people can take the time to register on their way into the House, so

please stop by. If you are a registered donor, I want to remind you to please take the time to talk about that with your loved ones so that they can support your choice if that tragic time does come. It certainly is still up to the family in the end. Alberta organ and tissue donation agency also has a mandate to educate Albertans using public awareness campaigns like the green ribbon.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Second supplemental.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can you share any information about new initiatives that the agency is working on?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a new update around the Alberta organ and tissue donation agency that's just been launched, and that's the deceased donor patient potential audit next month. This is the first audit of its kind in the province. What's happening is that 16 hospitals from across the province will be used to help identify if any potential donors were missed in those specific facilities so that we can have an understanding of how improvements can be made and how we can reach out to families to increase opportunities. This audit is a crucial step for the agency, and the results will be used to create targeted education programs for professionals and for the public.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Continuing Care Facility in Bassano

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning I attended a breakfast on insights into continuing care and seniors' housing with the Minister of Health along with members of the Newell Foundation from my constituency. The Newell Foundation is trying to build a multi-use seniors' continuing care facility in Bassano. Having the AHS new acute-care facility integrated into the Newell project will save taxpayers \$5 million over a stand-alone facility. Can the minister commit that part of the \$365 million in continuing care listed in the capital plan is slated for the Bassano project?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for trying to get an announcement in the middle of question period. Good on you for asking. We'll continue to work with partners from across the province, to work with our Infrastructure minister to move forward on the sunshine list commitments and to work with all partners, like the Newell Foundation, through ACCA and ASCHA as well.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Oh, I'm looking forward to an announcement, but you can't blame a guy for trying for his constituents.

Given, Mr. Speaker, that AHS controls the land that the Bassano project will reside on and that the Newell Foundation could get to work on many parts of the project in anticipation of AHS coming through with the acute-care component, can the minister commit to expediting the land transfer and give a firm date so that another construction season is not missed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:50

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think it was yesterday and probably last week, too, where were hearing the Finance critic from the Official Opposition talk about: if we only spent at rates like our neighbours in B.C., which would mean cutting – I think his number was \$8 billion – from our budget. Certainly, that would impact our ability to deliver on operational funding as well as our ability to deliver on capital funding. Instead, we have a government that's committed to moving forward, making sure we have the right infrastructure in the right place, and I'm very proud of that.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, I only prepared two questions in the hope that I'd get a real answer, but in the event of a non answer, I'm going to have to try again. We are asking for restraint in the government, but out of the current capital budget allotments we're asking that our constituencies receive our fair share of funding that's already been committed. We're asking: will the minister commit to expediting a land transfer, which won't cost the government a penny?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very proud of the fact that I am the Health minister for all Albertans. Some of the announcements we've made very recently were in ridings that your party represents; for example, the dialysis announcement in Lac La Biche. I think that's something that we can all be very proud of. Certainly, we are continuing to work with partners throughout the province in all ridings. We think it's important that we have access to good information and make good decisions. I'll be very happy to follow up yet again with the Newell Foundation.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've had a request for unanimous consent to acknowledge some visitors that are in the House today. Is there an agreement on the matter?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a highly accomplished and dynamic constituent of mine from Calgary-Glenmore, Karen Lee. Karen Lee is a retired clinical trial and management consultant. She has lived in England for 11 years, where she taught part-time at Cranfield University business school north of London. At present she is a clinical psychologist and a published author. Karen's latest book is called *The Full Catastrophe: A Memoir*. I'm very pleased that she is here with us today. I would ask Karen to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds we will continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Women's Suffrage Centennial

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the risk of sounding repetitious, I am also speaking about this proud occasion of it being the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote in our province.

Imagine what life would have been like for a woman living in Alberta in the last part of the 19th century. By 1900 municipal voting privileges for propertied women were general throughout Canada, but most 19th-century Canadians, women as well as men, believed that the sexes had been assigned to separate spheres by natural and divine laws that overrode mere man-made laws. This stood squarely in the way of achieving votes for all women as a democratic right. Rather than being discouraged, though, the women of these times began to organize and attract supporters to their cause.

Groups like the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Edmonton Women's Business Club, the United Farmers of Alberta, and its women's auxiliary all supported the suffrage movement. Nellie McClung, Irene Parlby, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Louise McKinney, and Emily Murphy were the suffrage movement's main leaders. They argued that granting women the right to vote was a matter of legal right and that political decision-making would be improved by the participation of women.

On February 27, 1915, the leaders organized an informal sit-in at the Legislature. When the MLAs arrived for the day's session, they found their seats filled by women who read petitions and speeches calling for female enfranchisement. Premier Sifton would only promise that the government would take the matter into consideration.

Canada's suffrage campaigns were peaceable and urbane. They used humour, reason, and quiet . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I would remind the House that we try to limit the conversation during members' statements.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I rise to talk about the importance of democracy and to ask all members to protect it in this Assembly.

Yesterday we had a serious issue over a private member's motion. The government chose to play politics and moved an amendment that fundamentally changed the intent of the motion. The Speaker allowed the amendment, which might be the correct ruling on a technical level but leads us down a very dangerous path.

This Assembly has a long-standing tradition of allowing debate on motions to proceed without amendment unless the mover agrees. Yesterday's ruling was inconsistent with past rulings, in particular a 1999 ruling that pointed out that allowing amendments to private members' motions would do a great disservice to members who "may only get one chance in every three or four or five years" to put forward a motion on a topic that matters to them. We have now overturned that ruling and opened the door to where it is very likely that every single future private member's motion will be amended or subject to potential amendments.

Allowing a private member's motion to be changed and remain in the name of the original mover is a clear example of the tyranny of the majority. It is my hope that government members will be much more respectful of the traditions of this Assembly. Yesterday the government played politics with private members' business, and then in fixing it, they made a mess. The government made it clear that private members' business will actually be government political games business, controlled by the Government House

Leader. What will flow from this is a further damage to our democracy.

As a leader in this House I hope that we can all work together to ensure democracy is respected, Albertans' voices are heard, and that you, Mr. Speaker, can continue to fulfill your role in defending the rights of the minority.

Private Members' Business

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, with the exception of the Premier and cabinet, all other members of this Assembly are private members who share in a long-standing tradition to sponsor motions and bills on issues of importance to them and their constituents. These opportunities are very rare. It is done on a purely random draw, and it's not unusual for members to be drawn only once or even not at all. Private members matter.

In 2007 Speaker Kowalski stated that "the work and the advocacy of private members [is] to be paramount in the Assembly." Retiring members giving their farewell address often state that their sponsorship of a private member's bill was their proudest moment as a legislator. The three hours of private members' business yesterday saw those principles, those rare opportunities both honoured and trampled. For two hours we had great debate on the benefits of tourism in our province. Members from all sides participated in a spirit of respect. But that all changed at 5 o'clock. The Member for Calgary-Hays introduced the motion to affirm parental choice in education. An amendment that had not been shared with the mover and did not have his support was introduced. This amendment effectively denied the Member for Calgary-Hays his potentially only opportunity to introduce and debate his motion during the term of this Legislature.

Now, as I learned yesterday, private members' motions can be amended, but it is very rare, and it has always been done with the knowledge and consent of the mover. Sadly, both Deputy Government House Leaders either overlooked or purposely neglected to note this when they argued that these amendments are commonplace. This point, however, was raised by the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, who was there and witnessed it happen along with the Member for Edmonton-Calder, today's Minister of Education.

Mr. Speaker, the 68 private members and their constituents deserve to have their limited opportunities to raise issues respected by all members of this Assembly and especially by those in government, that hold the majority. But at 5 o'clock yesterday that didn't happen. It was a sad day for democracy in Alberta.

3:00

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to seek unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 7(7) so we can complete the daily Routine.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Investor Tax Credit

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I spent over 20 years in the technology field, and I'm very excited about new opportunities available to investors as a result of the investor tax credit announced yesterday by the minister of economic development and the potential upside for tech development in Alberta. Early-stage investment opens up opportunities for growth and sustainability,

and this new initiative makes a 30 per cent tax credit available for investment in local small and medium businesses in key areas of the provincial economy.

Alberta has been at a disadvantage nationally as one of the only jurisdictions without an incentive for venture capital investment. There are some very successful programs across the country like in British Columbia, which sees a \$2 return in tax revenue for every \$1 of VC tax credit. Access to capital for start-ups promotes their success. This tax credit will mean that Alberta can retain more talented technology professionals. I personally know of a number of talented people in the field of technology that have left Alberta for opportunities outside of the province, including my daughter, who works for a start-up in the United Kingdom.

A large part of the global economy is knowledge based. Keeping our knowledge workers and attracting new talent enhances our economy and will lead to an increase in non resource-based growth, and it's about time that Alberta joined this market in larger numbers. Venture capital investment is vital to innovation. Traditional investment institutions are not in the business of risk, and while investment in technology has made some people very wealthy – we think about Facebook, Amazon, and PayPal – it's also an inherently risky prospect. The investment tax credit acknowledges this risk by offering a healthy tax credit to venture capital investors who take this risk on. I'm excited about the economic and social benefits the province will reap as a result of this investor tax credit program.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Dickinsfield Amity House ESL Book Project

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak about an amazing book and story sharing project by the Dickinsfield Amity House ESL classes in my beautiful riding of Edmonton-Decore. It all started with a question: "Who reserves the right to create unrest, cause wars, and destroy the lives of people? Who has the right to endanger the survival of our children? Will it ever stop?" These questions were asked by the students. From this and a series of discussions in their classes the students were invited to speak about their experiences of war in their home countries. These students come from all over the world: countries in Africa, Iraq, Mexico, the Philippines, and many more.

As a result of these conversations the unique book project *And War Shall Be No More* was born. It's a collection of stories from these ESL students with the help of 16 volunteers, including students and professors from King's University who tutored and supported them not only through the challenge of putting their thoughts into English but also remaining beside them while they relived those traumatic experiences. I'm very proud to announce that the official launch of *And War Shall Be No More* is on May 12 at Glengarry Hall from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., where some of the students will be sharing their stories. I've had the honour of meeting some of these students, and each and every one of them has an amazing story to tell.

Finally, I would like to conclude with a quote from their teacher, Louisa Bruinsma, who is in the gallery here today: if there is any recurring theme of hope in these accounts, it is in the sigh of relief from each of these students that they could come to Canada, a place where they feel safe; perhaps we should honour their courage by working towards a future where all humanity can live together in peace and war will be no more.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Parental Choice in Education

Mr. Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During my teaching career I was proud of being a public school teacher. I honoured the fact that students and parents are at the heart of our education system. The Alberta education system has always been about meeting the needs of students through a variety of authentic choices in educational models supported by government.

As a public school teacher I believed that I could provide a top-notch education to any child who entered my classroom, but I also understood that just as each child was a unique individual, I and my public school may not always be the right choice for that particular child. Where a child would go to school and which educational option was the most appropriate would be decided by the parent. This was a parental right. I was not the parent. It was not my call to decide if a public school or an independent school or a charter school or a home-school experience would best meet the unique needs of that child. To interfere in that decision was crossing a line into territory that I had no right to be in.

Yesterday this government crossed the line. Yesterday the government introduced an amendment that attacks parental choice in education. Through this ill-founded amendment Albertans would only be allowed an educational alternative outside of the public system if the Minister of Education determined that the public system did not provide that alternative. This proposal attacks parental decision-making rights and assumes a power that no minister or government should have. This government needs to remember that it is a servant of the people, not their master, and that this government does not have the right to undermine parents' ability to make authentic educational choices for their children. This government is trespassing onto parental territory, and like all trespassers it either needs to remove itself or be ushered off the territory.

Speaking plainly, this government needs to reaffirm its commitment to the long-standing tradition of authentic parental choice in education and not to its hidden agenda of restricting parental rights.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings for you today. First, I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of a document posted online yesterday by one Nicholas Rivers refuting the ability to use his study on the effects of the British Columbia carbon tax on the economy in Alberta.

Second, Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to table the requisite number of copies of another document, authored by the same person, entitled *The Case for a Carbon Tax in Canada*, that lays out an argument for aggressive action on climate change.

The Speaker: The Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of a document referenced earlier today by the Minister of Economic Development and Trade that contains 15 examples of instances where motions other than government motions were amended in this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I made reference today to a document, that I will now table, from the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, and it's entitled Alberta Jobs Plan Spells Pain for Job Creators and Passes the Buck Down the Line.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of Mr. Ceci, President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, erratum for page 124 of the Budget 2016 fiscal plan, which was tabled on April 14, 2016.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there was a point of order raised today at I believe about 10 minutes after 2. Does the Deputy Government House Leader wish to speak to that point of order?

Point of Order

Reflections on Nonmembers

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During question period today, at or about 2:10 p.m., the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat accused AHS staff members of deceit. That's not only in contradiction of Standing Order 23(j) and (l), perhaps others, but it also contravenes *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms* at page 151, section 493(4), which states:

The Speaker has cautioned Members to exercise great care in making statements about persons who are outside the House and unable to reply.

O'Brien and Bosc on pages 616 and 617 states:

The Speaker has ruled that Members have a responsibility to protect the innocent, not only from outright slander, but from any slur directly or indirectly implied.

On June 25, Mr. Speaker, you yourself cautioned members, stating:

Members must remember that when they refer to people outside of the Assembly, those individuals have no ability to respond to the allegations that may have been made in here.

Your predecessor, Mr. Speaker, in 2012 made similar cautions; for example, on November 26.

We should not be referring to people who are not here and not able to defend themselves.

After having said all that, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the member retract his statement and apologize to our hard-working public servants at AHS.

Thank you.

3:10

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I missed the citation that the Deputy Government House Leader used. However, I'm happy to respond on a couple of particular areas here in the Chamber.

There has been much debate about who exactly can and cannot defend themselves and who is considered absent and who is not, and there is certainly a large school of thought that believes that that particular precedent is speaking specifically about members and former members. But more important than that position, Mr. Speaker, is that my hon. colleague never once identified an individual. It certainly would be difficult to bring in the over 50 managers a year that take 16 weeks of sick leave. It certainly would be difficult to bring the hundreds of managers at AHS here to the Chamber to have them defend themselves. If the hon. member may have identified one individual, perhaps there would be a point of order here, but nothing could be further from the truth about what happened today.

Furthermore, in 2014 the former CEO of AHS acknowledged that a policy surrounding sick leave needed to be revisited as it was costing the system \$190 million a year. They set in place a policy whereby managers would monitor sick leave to identify any trends or irregularities. Now it seems, according to the CTV report, that it's the managers who are actually the ones that are using up to four months of sick leave a year. This particular project was part of major cost containment measures that the former Premier ordered in light of a massive drop in oil prices. Whether or not there is an abuse of sick days is certainly a matter of debate and definitely – most definitely – one worth investigating.

The Speaker: Hon. Opposition House Leader, are there specific references that you might draw my attention to with respect to *Beauchesne's*?

Mr. Cooper: The only one that I will make is from the standing orders, where it speaks specifically to individuals, none of which were identified today.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to the point of order raised earlier today?

Hon. members, I would just make a general observation. I will tell you that I'm going to defer a decision on this until a later date, but I have noted, as was cited and as I've tried to mention several times, that it seems to me that the language and use of words may not be intended but is certainly pushing the envelope in terms of trying to maintain decorum in this place. However, I'll defer my judgment on that decision until a future date.

I do have a request before we go to Orders of the Day. We have another guest to introduce. I need unanimous consent to recognize Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this moment to introduce Dr. Mary Valentich to the House. She has had a 50-year career as a social worker and a social work educator. One of her many accomplishments is that she is the founding member of not one but two rape crisis centres, one in Ottawa and one in Calgary. She has over 50 referral articles, chapters, and is the writer of three books. She is currently a professor emeritus at the University of Calgary. She embodies the ideals of feminism and social justice, and considering what we've been talking about in the House on this day, I believe she is an inspiration for us all. I would hope that she would stand and accept the warm welcome of this House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Provincial Fiscal Policies

13. Mr. Ceci moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate April 14: Mr. Cooper]

Mr. Fildebrandt: Spendthrift, hopeless, extreme, ideological, reckless: these are some of the words that came to mind when I read the NDP's 2016 budget. But the word that stuck with me the most was irresponsible: irresponsible with our public services, irresponsible with our tax dollars, irresponsible with our future.

This budget is yet another extremely irresponsible budget in a long line of preceding irresponsible budgets that refused to do what needs to be done. Those previous irresponsible budgets kicked the can down the road for the next Minister of Finance or the next government to deal with. This is Alberta's ninth consolidated consecutive deficit. The operational deficit stands at \$10.4 billion. Looking at the change in net financial assets, which includes capital spending, this year's consolidated deficit will exceed \$14 billion. Even after accounting for inflation, this far exceeds the worst deficit run under Premier Getty, which was \$4 billion, in 1986.

This deficit would be irresponsible if it was taken in isolation, but it is even more irresponsible when taken within its full context. We have run a deficit on a consolidated basis every single year since 2008, and every single year since 2008 our government, under four PC Premiers and one NDP Premier, has made misleading and even false claims that the budget was either balanced or would be balanced just a few years from now if we would only trust them. Instead, between 2008 and this budget's projections for 2018 the net financial assets of our province – in English, the net value of our government – will have declined by an almost criminal \$65 billion. From \$17 billion in the sustainability fund and no debt in 2008 we have spent our way into a hole that will leave us with a debt that will soon exceed \$58 billion. This is irresponsible. This is driven by a decade of reckless, poorly-thought-out, and often wasteful overspending.

The operating expenditures in our budget right now on a per capita basis are projected to cost us \$1,000 more than Quebec, \$2,000 per capita more than British Columbia, and now \$3,000 more than Ontario. Quebec, fuelled by \$9 billion in equalization, offers all kinds of services that Alberta does not but somehow still manages to spend less. That's right. This government spends more than even Quebec on operations. Ontario has been run for 12 years by one of the most irresponsible Liberal governments in the country – and that's saying something, Mr. Speaker – and it still spends far less than Alberta's government.

But British Columbia is our best comparator, being an energy- and resource-based economy with significant population growth and some of the most expensive terrain on which to build capital projects and roughly the same population density as Alberta. British Columbia also has similarly high private-sector salaries and wages, especially in Vancouver, where the cost of living is significantly higher than most Alberta cities'. But British Columbia provides a high level of social services, higher than Alberta's when you look at wait times and other key metrics, and they do it at \$2,000 less per capita. Put another way, British Columbia manages to provide a similar level of government services for \$8,000 less per household than Alberta can. That's \$8 billion every year that we spend on operations just to get what B.C. gets. Folks, if that's not a sign of a serious spending problem, I don't know what is.

3:20

I made a full-time job before I was elected out of trying to convince the previous government to take this problem seriously. I did my best to explain that Alberta would be best served if we returned to the conservative principles that built this province and made us a beacon of prosperity and freedom, principles held by great Premiers like Ernest Manning, Peter Lougheed, and Ralph Klein. I did my best to warn them that unless they got spending under control now, our savings would run out, our debt would grow,

that all of the hard work, pain, and difficult decisions made in the 1990s would be for naught, and that this province would have gone through an extremely difficult period of time only to squander that legacy. And that legacy has collapsed. Both the former Premier and the current Premier believed that the cost of this should be borne by the Albertans who pay their taxes, go to work, and create jobs.

But as far as this government said it would go during the election, it has gone much farther. This government promised to balance the budget by 2019. It has now entirely jettisoned any commitment whatsoever to balancing the budget before any child born today reaches their eighth birthday. An eight-year plan that just waits for revenues to catch up with annual spending increases is not a plan.

This NDP government has gone much farther than it said it would on taxes. They have imposed a massive new \$3 billion carbon tax on businesses and individual taxpayers. With the Leaper federal NDP operatives running this government, from their own chief of staff to the Premier on down, they have decided to attack the single largest job creator and wealth creator in the province, and in so doing, they will cost the average family thousands of dollars a year. Try as they might to buy Albertans off with their own money, these government cheques will not compensate most families for the true cost of the ND PST carbon tax. They will not account for the increased costs of electricity, groceries, and everyday consumer goods. It isn't done fairly as it would appear that two single people sharing a space will get more of a rebate than a married couple.

The response that this government gives to concerned Albertans who don't think that they can afford this tax is: buy a new car. It's pretty rich for anyone in this House to be lecturing Albertans on gas when most of our gas is paid for. This is the kind of champagne socialist attitude that has distanced the NDP's modern hardline activist movement from its once proud working-class labour movement. The NDP, whose actions reveal that it is no longer the party of everyday blue-collar workers, shows its true colours by fighting for the antipipeline dreams of ivory tower environmentalists and acting as though everyone working for the government is anointed to sainthood while everyday working Albertans see their wages rolled back and their jobs lost.

Alberta deserves a government that works for all Albertans, not just for the Leap Manifesto brain trust of the NDP and those working for the government. We value our public servants. Many of them do critical work for Albertans, but we are deceiving ourselves and Albertans if we act as though each and every person working for the government, insofar as their private-sector counterparts are in difficult circumstances, deserves raises no matter what and they are entitled to pay increases and growing staff ranks no matter how many jobs are bled in the private sector. This is irresponsible.

It is also irresponsible to ignore advice just because that advice is coming from the Official Opposition. The opposition spent hours during the last budget debate warning the Minister of Finance that his resource revenue projections were grossly overoptimistic. They remember it. We warned him that his touted new debt ceiling was powerless. They remember it.

On November 17, 2015, I said in the House with respect to Bill 4 at the time:

This bill has no checks or balances being put into place to ensure that we do not exceed a debt limit of 15 per cent. There are no consequences whatsoever for exceeding the proposed 15 per cent debt ceiling. There is nothing to stop the minister from ordering his staff to exceed that debt ceiling.

I hope that the minister remembers that.

We warned the NDP until we were blue in the face that their 15 per cent soft debt ceiling was wholly inadequate. Just as Premier Redford replaced Premier Klein's strict and prudent restrictions on government borrowing with a flimsy debt ceiling, this Premier has replaced Premier Redford's lax restrictions on borrowing with what amounts to a debt skylight, and already this government has smashed through that skylight with a record level of debt between now and the next election.

We repeatedly warned the minister that this debt ceiling would be inadequate, but the minister said on the 3rd of November, 2015: "I believe that this 15 per cent [debt] limit will not be breached. In the three-year plan that's before you here, I think it takes us up to about 9.5 or 10 per cent of debt to GDP, so there's lots of cushion." Some cushion, Mr. Speaker. Now, just four months, 12 days, and 15 hours later the minister is claiming that he couldn't see any of this coming.

On the same day in 2015 the minister said: "We don't come anywhere close to the 15 per cent. So I don't see where there's going to be an issue like you [the Wildrose] do." Mr. Speaker, I would be embarrassed if I passed legislation promising that I wouldn't do something with much fanfare and then, just a few months later, had to repeal my own law because I didn't listen to what I was being told by the opposition. That is irresponsible.

The Finance minister said, again on October 29, 2015: "15 per cent debt to GDP is a prudent benchmark for limiting government debt. With this cap in place, Albertans can be assured that the government's borrowing will not get out of hand." Famous last words.

Speaking of irresponsibility, that eight-year-old that I was speaking of earlier is my niece Lucy. Lucy was born earlier this month, and she already has \$4,625 of debt to the provincial government alone to her name. By the next election my niece Lucy, when she's three years old, will owe almost \$14,000. By the time the Minister of Finance might balance the budget, by 2024, assuming he drops his borrowing by a billion dollars a year, eight-year-old Lucy will owe \$25,000 to her name, still 10 years from being old enough to vote for a representative in the government. If we follow the reckless path this government is laying out in its budget, after eight years of NDP government Lucy will have \$25,000 of debt to her name that she does not deserve. That is not just irresponsible; that is immoral, Mr. Speaker. That is intergenerational theft, and the minister should be ashamed of it.

If we believe in the principle of no taxation without representation, then we should not be so wantonly burdening future generations not represented in this House with this kind of deficit. Mr. Speaker, I believe that today's deficits are tomorrow's taxes, and the Premier has alluded to that, with the threat of a provincial sales tax hanging over our heads. One day those generations not yet in this House will have to make a decision about the generations that will come after them. They will have to decide either to be short-sighted and greedy and enjoy the instant gratification that comes with other people's money, or they will be responsible stewards of the greatest, strongest, freest, and most prosperous land in the world. I know what kind of representative I am, and that's why I will oppose this budget.

3:30

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)?

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 8

Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2016

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to speak in favour of Bill 8, the Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2016. Through the government there are many delegated agencies, boards, and commissions that act as regulators and provide oversight on specific sectors and services that Albertans rely on. Albertans expect that these delegated organizations answer to the Alberta government and do the job that they were designated to do on behalf of Albertans. Given that the government is put into power by the will of the people, if an organization is in a position where they could act unethically, improperly, the expectation by the people is that this organization would have to answer to and be reviewed by the ministry responsible.

I've heard from my constituents, who expect their government to hold these organizations accountable because we are accountable to our constituents. Accountability and oversight, Mr. Speaker, are the standards which Albertans live by. We see this direct oversight through boards like AHS and various elected and appointed boards of governors. One issue that currently exists under the current Fair Trading Act is the lack of oversight for organizations delegated responsibilities. The current legislation limits the mechanisms available to the ministry to provide proper oversight of organizations that protect the rights of consumers whenever oversight is needed.

Mr. Speaker, it is important that Alberta consumers have confidence that the Alberta government can hold designated agencies, boards, and commissions accountable to the people of Alberta. That is why the proposed amendments to the Fair Trading Act are critical for protection of Alberta consumers. The mechanisms used to strengthen government oversight of delegated regulatory organizations are about good governance and public accountability given that the current legislation does not provide the Alberta government authority to verify organizations' practices. The oversight mechanisms will ensure that delegated regulatory organizations are held to high standards and that these organizations can be held accountable in ways that Albertans have come to expect. This bill represents our government's commitment to protecting Alberta consumers. Albertans expect and deserve these protections whenever a delegated regulatory organization exists and a consumer is involved.

I am happy that we will now have varieties of options available to remedy any problems that may arise. Given that these amendments are tailored to deal with any problems that may arise for Alberta consumers and given that the bill allows our government to continue to stand up for consumers, I am extremely happy and proud to support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Any questions or observations under 29(2)(a)?

The Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 8, the Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2016, promises to bring good governance and public accountability to delegated regulatory organizations under the Fair Trading Act and will ensure that these organizations are properly regulating their industries. The Fair Trading Act is unique in that it does not provide the minister ultimate authority

over delegated authorities created under the act. This bill will ensure that any delegated authorities under the Fair Trading Act follow an existing precedent. My caucus and I support that change.

Bill 8, when passed, will allow the minister to order a review of a delegated authority, to issue orders related to such a review, to dismiss board members or employees if any order is not complied with, and to appoint a representative of the minister to oversee the management of the organization and/or its compensation fund. While there are a number of delegated authorities in Alberta, including the College of Physicians & Surgeons, the Real Estate Council of Alberta, and the Alberta Funeral Services Regulatory Board, among others, the only such delegated authority under the Fair Trading Act is the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council, or AMVIC.

I'm quoting their website here. AMVIC

is Alberta's automotive industry regulator. AMVIC is an independent delegated authority and is . . . incorporated under the Alberta Societies Act as a not-for-profit organization for the purpose of administering motor vehicle industry regulations as outlined in the Fair Trading Act.

AMVIC is governed by a 13-member board consisting of six directors appointed from the general public by the Minister of Service Alberta, five directors appointed by the industry association, and two members nominated from the industry at large. AMVIC's status as a delegated authority is uniquely Albertan. No other province regulates their entire automotive industry through a delegated authority.

While AMVIC has for the majority of its life successfully regulated the automotive industry in Alberta, it has in recent years had progressively more serious allegations levelled against it, and its ability to maintain consumer and industry confidence has been questioned. Wildrose was among the first to raise concerns around the operation of AMVIC. While the government shouldn't make a habit of pulling arm's-length organizations under the government's wing, we do hope this measure allows AMVIC to function more effectively for the consumers it was created to protect. Wildrose is very disappointed in the previous government's failure to adequately equip AMVIC for success, and Albertans can count on us to be watching very carefully to see that this move actually solves the problems with AMVIC.

While Wildrose is committed to the principles of the free market, we know that the key to successful industry is consumer confidence and trust. Consumers deserve to know that they are protected by a properly functioning regulatory body, and we believe the proposed legislation does just that. Albertans understand that the former government used this government's agencies, boards, and commissions to reward their friends and donors. It was wrong then, and it's still wrong today. Wildrose will continue to watch these organizations closely to ensure that such practices do not continue under government's watch.

In my role as shadow minister for Service Alberta I have had the opportunity to meet with a wide range of stakeholders, including automobile industry and consumer stakeholder groups. It may surprise many in this House that I include myself in that group. This may be a rare example of the NDP government actually presenting legislation that's in line with what Albertans really want. The Motor Dealers' Association of Alberta is in favour. So are the Auctioneers' Association of Alberta and the Recreation Vehicle Dealers Association of Alberta given that this bill simply sets oversight of AMVIC on equal footing with other delegated authorities and because it will benefit the automotive industry to have increased consumer confidence.

Wildrose recognizes that efficient government is important to all Albertans and that there needs to be a balance between providing

effective oversight and micromanaging arm's-length agencies, boards, and commissions. We recognize that this is a positive move considering AMVIC's unique status and its scandal-ridden history. However, a word of warning to the members opposite: Albertans are paying attention, and so are we. We would advise the NDP to take a lesson from history and resist the ideological temptation to keep growing a government that is already so large that it can often take weeks and months to get back to Albertans.

Again, we support this bill. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who would like to speak to the bill? Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to be able to rise from time to time and add my voice to some of the debate that goes on within the House here. It's certainly a privilege to be able to rise and speak today on Bill 8, the Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2016.

Mr. Speaker, consumers have an expectation that when they're making major purchases such as a car, which, as everybody knows, is probably the second-largest purchase outside of a home that a consumer will make, they will be protected should a problem or an issue arise. I think it's safe to say that this government is committed to ensuring that consumer protection is maintained at the highest of levels.

3:40

Wherever an outside agency is acting as a delegate of the government, Albertans deserve to know that they will be fully protected, and they want to know that these delegated organizations are ultimately accountable to government as well. Mr. Speaker, the changes being proposed in Bill 8 will ensure that this indeed is the case and will serve as another way in which this government is continuing to stand up for Alberta consumers. For this I'm happy to provide my support to Bill 8, the Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2016, and I certainly appreciate the members opposite supporting this bill as well.

Just so we're clear, the focus of Bill 8 is on ensuring that delegated regulatory organizations, or DROs, as the acronym goes, under the Fair Trading Act are held to a high standard and that they can be accountable and meet the expectations of the public. The minister would then have a variety of options available for remedying any problems that may come up at these DROs.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to note that every other DRO in all other pieces of legislation has this same type of oversight already in it. There's certainly nothing new that's being done here, with this piece of legislation merely duplicating what already occurs everywhere else, so I'm sure that my fellow members will agree that we have an interest in government having the appropriate oversight of all delegated regulatory organizations.

Now, although there is only one DRO currently under the Fair Trading Act – and it is an important one – going forward, this bill will also allow for any new DROs created under this act in the future to automatically fall under the same proposed oversight language, just like every other DRO, thus achieving what we're currently trying to do, to provide some oversight in this act.

Mr. Speaker, I guess just to sum up really quickly what I've been talking about here, Bill 8 will provide mechanisms to ensure that consumer protection is always maintained at the highest levels, that delegated regulatory organizations have the same oversight provisions already in place in other acts, and that they can be held accountable when those standards are not being met. Ultimately, everyone in the province is a consumer, and ensuring a fair

marketplace for all Albertans is something, I think, we all have an interest in here.

Again, I'm happy to offer my support for Bill 8, the Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2016, and I would certainly urge all of my colleagues here in the House to support this bill. I do look forward to hearing some more views from other members in this House and what their thoughts are going forward while we debate this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 8? Standing Order 29(2)(a) does apply now. The Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Sorry; is this . . .

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Ellis: No. Thank you.

The Speaker: Any under 29(2)(a)?

Go ahead, Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really proud to stand up in support of Bill 8, the Fair Trading Amendment Act. You know, I can tell you that after the last election, when I was assigned the role as the PC critic for Service Alberta, I actually received a lot of complaints from people that certainly had concerns with AMVIC. What I did do at that time – of course, as an investigator I wanted to investigate what the history was in regard to AMVIC and what the previous government had done.

Fortunately, I did have our good friend Mr. Manmeet Bhullar as a guide, who was, obviously, the Service Alberta minister during quite a time of, we'll say, controversy. I will pass on the words that Mr. Bhullar had explained to me, which were that when he got into the role of Service Alberta, many of the bureaucrats were not happy with him because he wanted to essentially change everything, and part of that change had to do with AMVIC. Sadly, prior to his arrival AMVIC had grown into this snowball, and it seemed as though there was no way of stopping it. It was really, you know, a *W5* report that kind of put AMVIC in line. Manmeet tried in his brief role with Service Alberta to certainly put people in a position that would try to make a positive difference in AMVIC but sadly to no avail. A lot of political infighting would occur in that particular organization and, obviously, Manmeet moved on to other things within the government itself. AMVIC was able at the time to hold off any, let's say, offence from Mr. Bhullar, who tried to do his best in a very challenging, challenging role.

To give you also a little bit of background here, in 2014 the then PC Service Alberta minister Doug Griffiths suggested that AMVIC had become inconsistent, arbitrary, and at times punitive in relation to the enforcement of responsibilities. The Service Alberta operational review of investigative practices, which was dated April 29, 2015, made 16 recommendations that fall under the following main topics, right? Eight recommendations were related to clarifying and making adjustments to policies or ensuring policies were followed, specifically relating to undertaking policies in the Peace Officer Act and regulations. There were three recommendations related to improving the quality of investigations as reflected in investigation reports. There were two recommendations related to improving operations, simplifying the charge approval process, and clarifying the complaint handling process; one recommendation related to ensuring that investigations were completed independently from the adjudication process; one recommendation related to ensuring that AMVIC followed through on Service Alberta's

recommendations; and one recommendation related to improving staff morale.

Recently AMVIC stated that they are pleased with the progress of the implementation of these principles, and a report on the status of these recommendations, of course, highlights the excellent work, to a certain degree, that AMVIC had been doing.

Also, in early March of 2015 a leaked document outlined the government's concerns, at the time the PC government's concerns, again with AMVIC in a letter written by the then minister, Stephen Khan. He raised several concerns such as misuse of administrative enforcement tools; investigations and hearings that have not been reached in a manner that is fair, impartial, and open; and high staff turnover rate with low morale among the investigators.

Additionally, an April 2015 internal draft of the Service Alberta review of the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council expressed serious concerns about the welfare of the council's staff under the administration of the executive director at the time. This is a quote: the executive director acts as a tyrant and a dictator who interprets any question or decision, direction or process as disobedience and responds with intimidation. This, of course, is what Service Alberta investigators say that they were told by several staff, according to the review.

In a June 2015 class-action lawsuit against AMVIC for negligence the claim was that AMVIC failed to regulate the business practices within the auto industry and alleges that Service Alberta failed to oversee AMVIC. This is a key reason why this government is providing more ministerial oversight through Bill 8. The allegations related to the failure of Treadz, a Red Deer based auto consignment company. The lawsuit claims Treadz failed to pay the owners of vehicles and sold and failed on promises, and there was a lot of, of course, neglect.

3:50

Of course, now we are here in the current situation. I'm very pleased that the Service Alberta minister has listened to the concerns of people who have had significant issues with AMVIC, and here we have before us Bill 8. I'll quote our Service Alberta minister: because of how the previous government created the act, the minister has little power, if none, actually, to take action on behalf of Albertans when a regulator is not doing its job.

So, you know, although I'm not a significant fan of more power or having control, certainly I believe that it's important to listen to Albertans, and I believe in this particular case this is a bill that is listening to Albertans who have a concern with this specific area, which is called AMVIC. I believe that this government in collaboration with the opposition will do the right thing for all Albertans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Any other speakers for Bill 8? No one wishing to speak?

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move to adjourn debate on Bill 8.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 10

Fiscal Statutes Amendment Act, 2016

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 10, the Fiscal Statutes Amendment Act, 2016.

As I mentioned at the bill's introduction, Bill 10 makes legislative amendments in several different areas, including the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, the Financial Administration Act, the Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan Act, and several Alberta tax statutes. These amendments will provide flexibility to allow government to address current economic and fiscal challenges and will protect the integrity of our provincial tax system and provide greater clarity and consistency in our financial legislation.

Mr. Speaker, let me take a few minutes to review the key elements of this legislation. As I announced with Budget 2016 last Thursday, this bill repeals section 3 of the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, or FPTA. As members are no doubt aware, this section limits the government's debt to nominal GDP to 15 per cent. When this amendment to the FPTA was contemplated, our economic forecast and those from the private sector were very different. As it has now become clear, we are in a critical moment in Alberta's history. Oil prices have dropped by over two-thirds, from \$105 per barrel in 2014 to less than \$30 a barrel in January. As a result, the unemployment rate has risen dramatically, and we are forecasting an almost 90 per cent drop in nonrenewable resource revenue.

Mr. Speaker, as I outlined in my Budget Address, Albertans are confronted with a choice that will have profound consequences for generations to come. When oil prices have declined in the past, Alberta governments responded by making reckless and extreme cuts to public services, firing thousands of teachers and nurses and cutting supports for seniors. Some suggest that we should turn the clock back and do the same thing again today.

As Budget 2016 makes crystal clear, our government is taking a different approach, a better approach. Instead of slashing and burning, we are choosing to protect the health care of Albertans, that they have demanded, and the education system that our children rely on. Instead of sitting on our hands, we are moving forward with our capital plan, which addresses decades of inaction, and we'll rebuild the critical infrastructure that Albertans rely on. Mr. Speaker, instead of doing nothing, we are partnering with Alberta businesses to drive economic growth and diversification. Budget 2016, the Alberta jobs plan, will create the conditions for 100,000 new jobs right across this province. It is the right approach to address the most severe economic shock our province has experienced in generations and one that I was proud to unveil last Thursday, Budget 2016.

Mr. Speaker, as members are well aware, much has changed since Budget 2015 was developed and released last year. Back in August and September 2015 the private-sector forecasters told us that oil would average \$61 per barrel in 2016-2017. As I made clear last Thursday, the same forecasters are now saying that oil will average \$42 per barrel this fiscal year. Simply put, the economic outlook has changed dramatically over the last six months. All Albertans recognize this. This is why as part of Budget 2016 we have included a risk adjustment in our oil forecast to recognize the extreme volatility in our resource revenues. In these challenging times as a government we have chosen to respond by investing in jobs and protecting the vital services Albertans rely on.

Mr. Speaker, if the government had chosen to follow the advice of the Official Opposition to not exceed 7 per cent of debt to nominal GDP, we would have had to cut over \$8 billion from Budget 2016. That would have been the wrong decision. It would have made a bad situation even worse. An \$8 billion cut is more than the entire Ministry of Education. An \$8 billion cut is more than the combined budgets of the ministries of Advanced Education and Municipal Affairs. An \$8 billion cut is virtually the entirety of our

capital plan for this fiscal year, which was designed to put Albertans back to work while providing the required infrastructure that Alberta businesses need to grow and thrive. Put another way, even if we close the Alberta Energy Regulator and the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission and we cancelled the investment and investor tax credits, wound down the biofuels initiative, and suspended all monies for public security in the Ministry of Justice, we would still be roughly \$7 billion short of the Official Opposition's debt limit.

Mr. Speaker, I only raise this proposal for the \$8 billion in cuts made by the Official Opposition in December to illustrate the choice we face, and it's an important choice. Budget 2016 has made this government's position clear on how we should respond to this economic shock. The title says it all. With the Alberta jobs plan we spur the creation of 100,000 jobs, protect core public services, and partner with business to drive innovation and diversify our economy.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the change that I just identified, there are a few other elements of Bill 10 which I should quickly highlight for members of this Chamber. Bill 10 proposes a change to the Financial Administration Act, specifically to section 42.1, which requires that loans made pursuant to express statutory authority be tabled before the Assembly. The current wording of this legislation could be interpreted to apply to corporations and individuals. Under this exceedingly strict interpretation it's possible that several kinds of loans to individuals would have to be tabled in the Assembly, including loans made to individual seniors under the Seniors' Property Tax Deferral Act and loans made to seniors under the proposed Seniors' Home Adaptation and Repair Act.

Mr. Speaker, I think we can all agree that making such loans public is not desirable and was not likely the original intent of the act, which was passed 20 years ago. Our government has no desire to see the personal information of grandmothers and grandfathers or students tabled in this House because this bill has not kept pace with the times and it was not explicit enough. Therefore, as a remedy Bill 10 proposes a \$500,000 threshold. Loans made to individuals below that threshold would not have to be tabled in the Assembly. The tabling requirement for loans made to corporations, of course, will still apply.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, this bill also makes changes to the Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan Act. As you may recall, the program was created in 2005, our centennial, and was designed to encourage parents to open up registered education savings plans. The program failed to support the very people it was meant to help. Bill 10 will give legal authority for the program's closure, with any application received after July 31, 2015, no longer eligible.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, let me highlight for members that the bill also proposes minor technical amendments to various Alberta tax statutes. The amendments are designed to ensure continued consistency between Alberta and federal tax regimes, clarify or correct technical deficiencies, repeal expired provisions, standardize administrative policies across Alberta tax statutes, and to make other technical changes needed to maintain current policy.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, this proposed bill covers amendments in several different areas: the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, the Financial Administration Act, the Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan Act, and several tax statutes. These amendments will provide flexibility to allow government to address current economic and fiscal challenges, and they will also protect the integrity of our provincial tax system. More importantly, changes in this bill will enable the government to respond to this once-in-a-

generation economic challenge and establish the conditions to put 100,000 people to work through the Alberta jobs plan.

I ask all members of the House to support this bill. Thank you.

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really hope that the Minister of Finance will be here to take questions from the Official Opposition. It really would be a shame if the Minister of Finance didn't do his job to stand in this House and answer questions from the Official Opposition about a bill that will tear up the debt ceiling in this province. If the Minister of Finance weren't here to engage in questions and answers under 29(2)(a), it would be extremely disappointing.

The Speaker: Hon. member, 29(2)(a) does not apply as I understand it with respect to the mover of the motion, nor will it apply to you, sir. So please proceed with your question rather than making reference to the other side of the House.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It certainly would be a shame if the Minister of Finance weren't to participate in the debate in a back and forth . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think he was participating. Could you please proceed.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'm getting to it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill 10, the Fiscal Statutes Amendment Act, 2016, also known as the Unlimited Debt to Infinity and Beyond Act. Some could say that this is the start of a provincial sales tax implementation act.

There is some housekeeping in this bill. The final wind-down of the Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan Act. It was intended to provide a way for parents to save for their child's college or university education through RESPs. Since its inception the program has paid out close to \$132 million. While the grant amounts are not large, they are meant to get parents started, and the effect of compound interest has made the program significant. It's too bad it's not affordable for many anymore.

There's also some harmonization going on in this bill, measures like aligning the federal Income Tax Act so that Alberta companies can report their earnings in U.S. dollars, Australian dollars, British pounds sterling, or euros.

As the law is written now, all of the loans the government makes are supposed to be tabled. I don't think that seniors getting deferrals for property taxes or for their home renovations want that kind of information out in the public, nor do students want to see their names in print that they took out loans, so the government has not been reporting these loans. Bill 10 makes changes to reasonably fix this problem. All corporate loans will still be reported. The only individual loans that will be reported are over \$500,000.

Dividend tax credit. The dividend tax credit is adjusted down to reflect the change in the small-business tax rate from 3 to 2 per cent. This is generally a positive thing and good housekeeping for individuals who take their income from their small business as a dividend.

That's the housekeeping in a nutshell, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, it doesn't stop there. The kicker in this bill is the elimination of the debt ceiling. Only four months and 12 days ago the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board passed Bill 4 in this House. It would be a positive thing if he were to debate its repealing today. I would certainly invite the Minister of Finance to get up and debate it, only Bill 4 brought in a 15 per cent debt-to-GDP limit as Alberta's debt ceiling. That was a high ceiling in and of itself

considering that we had a debt ceiling of zero just a few years ago. That's where Wildrose likes it. What good is the law if you're just going to break it and keep changing the law? Not even five months later year 3 of the new budget has a 15.5 debt-to-GDP ratio, so the minister will just want the law changed so he can break through the debt ceiling.

We are now on track to have a \$58 billion debt in just three years, Mr. Speaker. Bill 10 will allow us to break even that. Less than 24 hours after the budget was released last week the Dominion Bond Rating Service had already downgraded Alberta from a triple-A to a double-A rating. I don't know how the members on that side can look their constituents in the eyes and tell them that they are being responsible with future generations' money. I spoke about my niece Lucy just a few months ago in the budget debate. I don't know how they can look someone that age in the eye and say: we will saddle you with \$25,000 of debt before you can even vote on how we should be spending your money. It's shameful. Not even 24 hours after their budget the bankers were demanding higher interest rates.

The budget estimates the population at 4,247,000. That works out to \$13,563.93 owed by every single man, woman, and child in Alberta to the bankers who bought the bonds that create this debt, bonds that evoke images of being tied up, ropes and chains. And Albertans are tied up here. That debt over the next three years could build over 3,000 new schools, or it could repave the entire provincial highway network, or it could build 38 Calgary South Health Campuses. Say that 10 times fast, Mr. Speaker. How much of this debt is going to capital builds? We need to know this. We need to know how much could have otherwise gone, instead of to interest payments, to schools and ring roads around our cities.

Much is also going to pay for operating costs now, a whole new low for this government. The day-to-day government salaries will be funded by debt, those, too, of teachers, nurses, and AHS managers, those managers who suspiciously take four months of sick leave and then show up at work the day that their sick leave runs out . . .

Ms Hoffman: After their chemo is done?

Mr. Fildebrandt: . . . when the average Canadian in the private sector only takes about 9.1 days a year in sick leave. We know that the Minister of Health is a bit sensitive on the topic.

In Alberta a portion of the teachers' pension plan is also paid for by taxpayers.

Is it wrong to pull Albertans into a debt spiral? Interest payments on the debt will be the biggest expense in the government after health, education, and social services before the next election. That means that this government will spend more servicing its debt than protecting our environment or keeping our streets safe.

We warned the Minister of Finance that his numbers were off. I heard nothing but excuses from the Minister of Finance, who I challenge to get up out of his seat and debate this in the House here. We heard nothing but excuses from the Minister of Finance, saying: we couldn't see it coming, Mr. Speaker; we couldn't see it coming; we had no idea this would happen. There are miles of *Hansard* transcripts in this House where we warned the minister day after day that his revenue projections were grossly optimistic.

4:10

Nobody was projecting that oil prices would recover the way that the minister was. Certainly, the Official Opposition sounded the alarm day after day after day when we debated Bill 4 and the previous budget, and the minister refused to listen. Perhaps the

minister wasn't in his chair at the time to hear. We warned the minister, and he refused to listen. Perhaps he wasn't anywhere near.

Mr. Speaker . . .

Mr. Carlier: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been raised. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Referring to the Absence of Members

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member across the way is referencing the hon. Minister of Finance, speaking disrespectfully and referencing that he has not been in the House. He's done that several times, earlier as well, in contradiction to 23(h), (i), (j).

The Speaker: Is there a specific standing order that you can point to? I, too, was looking for that. I think I would be asking for more detail. I will be looking at *Beauchesne's* and others with respect to that.

I need to remind all of the House, please, that it's certainly been the practice and my understanding that you do not make reference or allude to the fact of whether or not a member is in the House. That's been my understanding.

On a couple of occasions in the last few minutes, hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, you made suggestions that might have led that way. I want to caution you that you not do that in the future, and I apply that to all members of the House.

Please proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly didn't mean to allude to the minister not being in the House. I wanted to just encourage the minister to rise from his chair and speak to the issue at hand, the bill he is sponsoring.

Debate Continued

Mr. Fildebrandt: We warned the Minister of Finance repeatedly. We told him over and over and over that it was his responsibility to budget responsibly and that his oil projections were wildly off. And now he stands in this House and has nothing but excuses. He claims that nobody told him. There are miles of transcripts of *Hansard* where we told him over and over and over again. And just in case he was wrong about his oil revenue projection, we said that we don't trust your 15 per cent debt-to-GDP limit, that that needs to be a hard limit, that there need to be consequences if you break your own laws. We proposed that there be fines for cabinet ministers if they break their own debt-to-GDP limit. Well, it seems we were getting to the crux of the matter.

We proposed a referendum if governments wanted to raise the debt limit in the future. The government opposed it again. Either they intended to repeal their own bill or they weren't paying attention to the facts. The Wildrose has consistently pointed out that this government has not been budgeting realistically. And every time they blow their budget, they come back here and they complain. They complain with excuses, and they shirk their responsibility, which is why I encourage the minister to stand up and explain his actions about why he could not listen to the Official Opposition with regard to his revenue projections.

That's why I encourage the Minister of Finance to stand up in this House and defend his ignoring the repeated warnings about exceeding the 15 per cent debt-to-GDP limit he has put in place. That was only four months, 12 days, and 15 hours ago, give or take,

Mr. Speaker. On October 27, 2015, the minister said of the 15 per cent debt-to-GDP limit: "This act will limit Alberta government borrowing to 15 per cent of GDP, half the average of other provinces. That will provide enough room to allow our government to play its economic role without tipping into overdependence on debt."

The suggestion in the minister's own statement seems to be that going beyond 15 per cent would mean an overdependence on debt. For once I agree with the minister. And here we are today, blowing straight through a 15 per cent debt-to-GDP limit in just a few years, beginning with the current account deficit of \$14 billion this year alone.

Now, we know that the leaders over there inherited a 44-year-old dynasty that was spending far above the national average and far above our neighbours in cost-high British Columbia or over in Liberal Ontario, but are Albertans really to believe that there wasn't significant waste to be found?

Just yesterday CTV Calgary broke a story about scores of AHS managers going out on sick leave for months at a time. As soon as the sick leave was used up, they were back on the job. Mr. Speaker, the average private-sector worker in Canada takes 9.1 days of sick leave a year. AHS managers taking four months raises some real questions. It must be a very unhealthy workplace. No wonder we have wait times and people are not getting services that they need.

Some of them – and I'm only saying some managers, not all managers and certainly not all employees at AHS, who are doing great work – are worried about using up all their sick leave instead of serving Albertans. When the government says that it refuses to exercise any fiscal restraint whatsoever for the sake of helping Albertans and then has to turn around and tax those Albertans to cover up the cost of its short-sighted borrowing habits, it hurts the very people that they want to help.

I will conclude this part of the debate by telling a metaphor about finances. Alberta's finances remind me of going to a party where there's lots of promotional alcohol provided. It's a great party. Everyone can partake to their heart's content. But eventually the free stuff runs out. The party is over till someone finds that hidden bottle of moonshine: don't stop the party. Ladies and gentlemen, the party is over. We have run out of money. It's time for us to get serious. The minister is not serious; he has nothing but excuses. It is his responsibility to stand up in this House right now and explain his actions and debate the Official Opposition on this bill.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the government's Bill 10, the Fiscal Statutes Amendment Act, 2016. What this bill seeks to accomplish is nothing but a reckless disregard for future generations. This government is looking to get rid of their 15 per cent debt ceiling only a few short months after enacting such a bill. Alberta's debt will be \$58 billion by the next election. This government is simply passing down irresponsible governance and bad decision-making to future generations. My colleague for Strathmore-Brooks talked about a young child getting to their eighth birthday as we see where we'll be at with \$58 billion.

We know what large-scale debt entails. We know that it has deep and problematic implications not only for Albertans today but for future generations. Frankly, doing this to the next generation just seems to be immoral. By designating the next generation as the ones responsible for paying off the debt, this government is willingly depriving them of the advantages Albertans so recently had, and it's absolutely clear that they do not have a plan for that debt.

4:20

One year ago, during the election in 2015, this government claimed that, sure, they'll borrow and, of course, yes, they'll spend but that they will balance the books by 2018. Sure enough, they borrowed. Sure enough, they spent. Speaking here in October, the Finance minister claimed, "We will get back to balance in 2019-2020, and if the economy picks up, we'll get there sooner." They kept borrowing, and they kept spending. Last week, Mr. Speaker, they revealed that the books won't be balanced until 2024, and they continue to borrow and continue to spend.

It's clear that there's no plan to balance the books, not a real one, but they do have a plan to rack up debt, and now Alberta's credit is being downgraded, a development that has troubling consequences, to say the least. I was somewhat astonished to see just last week, regarding the Dominion Bond Rating Service's lowering of Alberta's credit rating, that the Premier said, and I quote: there's, frankly, nothing we could have done to avoid it. End quote.

But this credit downgrade is no surprise. DBRS warned this government as far back as January that their high borrowing agenda would lead to trouble. I read from the report, and I'll quote that: DBRS believes that the fiscal response is unlikely to be adequate to maintain credit metrics consistent with the triple-A rating, in particular maintaining a DBRS adjusted debt burden below 15 per cent of gross domestic product; debt is now expected to exceed 15 per cent of the gross domestic product as early as 2016-17. End quote.

Our caucus pressed the government to try and rein in spending, and repeatedly we were disregarded. The government could have tried a moderate budget, protecting front-line services while reining in spending, to show creditors that there is still some semblance of fiscal competence, fiscal responsibility. Instead, this government chose to present a budget that showed only disregard for the Albertans tasked with paying it down. Not even a day had passed after the budget was released last week and DBRS had already downgraded Alberta from triple-A to a double-A rating. It doesn't sound like much, but this is the first step to what? An A-minus rating? A B rating? Each incremental step that the rating is lowered means that a subsequent rise in the cost of borrowing is imminent. That's just a fact.

Albertans should be concerned with the mounting debt and the cost of it. Simply put, it's cheaper to borrow when the province has a strong credit rating than to borrow when it does not have a strong credit rating. Anyone who's ever borrowed money knows that a bad credit rating means higher interest rates. In Alberta's case it means that we're racking up debt faster, with larger interest payments. It means that taxpayers, everyday Albertans, everyday Albertans' families, are on the hook for more.

This government is now on track for \$2 billion in annual interest payments on their debt. That's \$2 billion not going to schools, \$2 billion not going to infrastructure, \$2 billion that could have gone to solving the numerous issues we talk about in this House every day regarding health care. Two billion dollars in annual interest payments means that thousands of families work and pay taxes in a given year just to pay off the government's debt interest year after year. That's shameful, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not going to try and give a history lesson here today, but I do want to speak about the past, as closely as I remember it, as far as debt and debt ceilings and the like have progressed. Now, remember that this is from memory, so please don't hold me to account if I miss something by a year or two or something like that. I'm not trying to offend or re-create 100 per cent accurately but just to recall, to bring some sort of understanding as to what we've done in the past.

My reflective cognizance of the era of the Alberta government in the mid-80s to early '90s is that a global oil glut saw the price of oil fall dramatically. Now, the price tumbled something like 60 per cent. The economy was already in a world-wide recession. The overproduction of oil just deepened that downturn. I was just a young man starting my farming career. Interest rates were abysmal, as I recall. For someone trying to begin that lifestyle and borrowing a lot of money – well, \$100,000 was a lot of money to a young fellow like me – 18 per cent interest was unbearable. Investing money would have been genius if a fellow had any money to invest. There were some, of course, who had been around for years and years and had some money to invest. They did very well. Their retirement was secure. But folks that were the same age as I was, that were trying to get their careers started, probably all remember some of those '80s years. Times were tough.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

But all that aside, the government of the day found itself in a deficit. Several more deficits followed, and Alberta ended up having a total debt of something like \$15 billion by the early '90s. The number itself isn't that important in this context, just that Alberta had managed to indeed run up a rather large deficit for the times.

The next Premier – and everyone here knows who we're talking about. It doesn't matter whether you believe that it was done correctly or incorrectly, depending on your political stripe, but the next Premier managed to get the debt under control. He managed to get the deficit under control, and he managed to see the books balanced in Alberta. That was 10 short years ago. It was a very proud moment for Alberta. We were all there, and I'm sure we all felt the same pride. Then a debt retirement act was introduced, which required the government to pay off debt until it was zero. After that, strict controls were put into government to stop them from borrowing except for some pretty small, specific things such as borrowing for municipal capital on the government's credit rating.

The era that followed brought in reasonable but modest, small changes to allow for something like P3s or something to that effect and other small amounts of legitimate borrowing. The next Premier, that came along in the era following that, kind of wiped out all that legislation that I just talked about and allowed the government to borrow for capital, to significantly borrow for capital. But the interest payable, as I recall, again couldn't exceed a certain portion of the government's revenues. It was really just a different way of doing a debt ceiling. As much as it went against what had happened only a few short years before that, all of a sudden it was okay for the government to borrow again.

Then the current government came in and did something that I really never thought would actually come to fruition. This government created a number and created legislation that allowed borrowing for anything, capital and/or operations, and that number wasn't to exceed 15 per cent of the gross domestic product.

4:30

Our Finance critic, my colleague from Strathmore-Brooks, expressed on more than one occasion in this House and directly to the government that there was no reason to believe that this government wouldn't test that number in the very near future. He's already talked about the discussions that he's had, and the speeches that he made reference those very points. The Finance minister called him a fearmongerer. Well, lo and behold, I'll take the Member for Strathmore-Brooks' comments to be the word: four months, 12 days, and I can't remember how many hours.

The Finance minister tabled a piece of legislation that took away the debt ceiling and has no cap on borrowing in legislation today. In other words, the NDP government can borrow any amount of money that they see fit, do whatever they want to do with it, and at the end of the day the Alberta taxpayer is on the hook. So the Wildrose fearmongerers, those feared folks on the right, turned out to be exactly right because this Alberta government cannot see its way clear to explore any kind of spending control whatsoever. You know, a deficit is a choice, and the government that sits in power today made the choice to put Alberta into the deepest throes of debt in this province's history, now without a ceiling to stop them from borrowing as much as they see fit.

When this government began discussions about both of the budgets that they have introduced, they made it clear that we had to get off of the royalty roller coaster, we had to diversify. The budget that was introduced on April 14 and the discussions that took place before and some since have revolved around the price of oil rising in order to see Alberta be able to start to use less borrowed money. Nowhere in the budget presented do we see a significant plan to diversify the revenues of this province, as we were told had to happen, certainly nothing that is significant enough to replace or even come close to substituting for the revenues required to service the proposed expenses of the government.

Rather than a balanced approach to a provincial budget that would address spending along with the limited income available because of the world price of oil, we now see no limit, no cap, no boundary that would define the largest amount of debt that is to be tolerated in the province of Alberta, and certainly no plan to pay this money back, short of annual interest payments, and no discussion of any consequence that would see some form of an interest in decreasing . . .

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

Mr. Malkinson: Under 29(2)(a)?

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Listening to the remarks of the hon. Member for Little Bow, you know, I just had a couple of comments and a question. He mentioned that we don't have a diversification plan. I would note that our budget actually mentions many things that would result in a diversification plan. It involves investing in our petrochemical industry. It involves having AIMCo invest half a billion dollars in Alberta businesses with growth potential, in whatever industry those may be in. It involves ATB increasing its loans to small and medium-sized businesses as well as our investor tax credit and our capital investment tax credit.

Now, the hon. member also spoke a lot about a reckless disregard for future generations and talked about the fact that our plan includes some debt. Well, I'd like to ask the hon. member: where is his plan? We have made a clear choice that we want to support jobs, we want to support families, and we want to diversify our energy industry. To stay under the suggested debt limits that the opposition has often put forward, I would ask the hon. member: which schools would he cut, which children would he leave in overcrowded schools with overworked teachers, which hospital maintenance would he defer, and what long-term care beds for our seniors would he cut? So I would ask the member: where is his plan, and what would he cut?

Thank you.

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

Mr. Schneider: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I do have right in front of me what I said when I talked about the revenues of this province. The hon. member took the liberty to change what I said, so I'm going to repeat it if that's all right. Nowhere in the budget presented do we see a significant plan to diversify the revenues of this province, as we were told had to happen, certainly nothing that is significant enough to replace or even come close to substituting the revenues required to service the proposed expenses of this government.

What I hear on this side is that we need to diversify and get away from the royalty roller coaster. It continues and continues. I was looking forward to seeing what we were going to be doing. I was really looking forward to seeing what the diversification was going to be that would replace or even significantly become noteworthy or newsworthy for a revenue source that was going to replace the oil that we sell in this province. That's what Alberta is all about. Alberta is about – let me think, now. I'm going to try to remember this thing. Alberta is about: rope calves, drill oil – what's the other one?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Eat cow.

Mr. Schneider: Eat cow.

You know, if it was my job, if I was sitting on that side of the House, I would make the decisions that you talked about. I would put them on paper, and I would present them, just as you have. But it isn't my job to determine how Alberta is going to spend its money or whether they're going to get enough income or any of the things you talked about. Those are the government's choices. They've made the choice. They've found a deficit number that they're happy with, and this is what the people that are just being born – eight years from now all the comments that the Member for Strathmore-Brooks made are all true. We are facing the biggest debt in Alberta's history, and it doesn't seem to bother anybody near as much as it does me or some of the people on this side of the House.

I wish I'd had the chance to come and sit in your meetings and discuss how you wanted to approach this budget, how you wanted to see diversification of income, and if you wanted to see how we could find some cuts. I'd have been happy to be a part of that. Nobody invited me. I simply wasn't involved, so it's impossible for me to answer those questions, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. Under 29(2)(a) I'm also interested in knowing – the Leader of the Official Opposition supported five consecutive deficit budgets when he was in Ottawa, so clearly there are opportunities where I imagine he . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The next speaker on my list is the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to speak to Bill 10, the Fiscal Statutes Amendment Act, 2016, or as we already have heard it called, to infinity and beyond.

Anyway, even though Christmas is barely over, I'm beginning to feel like the Grinch. I don't feel as though I'm stealing Christmas day after day when I come to work here in the Assembly. The reason I'm feeling Grinchy is that every time the government comes up with a bill, they're giving away any hope of future prosperity for our province. Dr. Seuss would have been really proud of that. You know, he liked the Grinch. He liked to show how he did that, took presents away.

4:40

Frankly, we're taking away future gifts for our children when we're looking at the \$2 billion that we're going to have to pay back just in interest payments. This is an outstanding number to me. How many hospitals could we build? How many roads could we build? How many schools? What are we taking away, Madam Speaker, from the future generations, from my kids and from my grandchildren and everybody else's kids and grandchildren? I think it's irresponsible, in my opinion, to go down that route and be able to take these gifts that we've been given in this province and change it to having to give this money to banks. I'm very much against this borrowing that we're looking at, of up to \$58 billion.

You know, while promising shiny, new things like massive infrastructure projects, unbelievable capital projects, new roads and bridges, and higher minimum wages, this government does not seem to understand that the cost related to these promises is going to bankrupt this province. I have to say that again. It's going to bankrupt this province.

We've gone from where in 2004, which the Member for Little Bow just alluded to, we were debt free. We were completely paid in full. I remember seeing that sign, Paid in Full, and now we're not. We're going to be looking at, again, \$58 billion or higher. This government seems to have the attitude that they can simply spend their way through the worst economic slump we have seen in decades and that someone else will pick up the tab.

Kind of like having a credit card, but you give it somebody else to deal with after you go on a spending spree. That's irresponsible. Sometime in the future, somehow, it's got to be paid for. Sort of like having a massive Christmas shopping spree, using maxed-out credit cards to pay these bills, every kind of credit card you can get your hands on, whether it be MasterCard or Visa. Go to all of the different stores, Walmart. Max them all out. Well, being the Grinch that I am, I'm looking at the end result of this uncontrolled spending spree, and I'm terrified that the full cost of this ill-funded economic plan is going to leave my children and grandchildren to pay it off.

The worst part of all of this, Madam Speaker, is that the government knows they can't pay for all of these promises, so they are demanding that Albertans pay for them and future Albertans pay for them, not just Albertans today but future Albertans. They have increased taxes on almost every part of our lives. They've increased taxes on businesses, they've driven out job creators, and they now are going to tax regular Albertans out of their ability to enjoy a comfortable standard of living.

Under this government's ill-founded economic policy we saw yesterday that an average Calgarian home will see an increase in their existing property bill of about \$170. This province will take about \$126 of that \$170. That's just over 74 per cent of it. Madam Speaker, that's an awful lot of money that is being taken out of Calgary by this province, you know, using a tax as a property tax at a time when, I think, Calgarians and Albertans can least afford it.

So many Albertans are out of work and underemployed and having to take less of a paycheque, a lower paycheque, rather than a raise in their paycheque. That \$170 is money that's going to be lost, that won't be circulated in the economy, that won't go for, say, somebody going out for a meal or somebody buying some new kind of a gadget, that could put money back and circulate it in our economy, money that would do so much more. Because when the money goes back into circulation, what you get is employment, employment at places that sell these things, whether it be restaurants or whether it be stores. These jobs will be lost because people will not have that \$170. Like the carbon tax or the sin tax of last fall, this is yet another case of the government indirectly raising

costs on families. It seems like their hand is in your pocket everywhere you turn. We're seeing it on everything lately, it seems.

Again we have more money being taken out of our pockets through gasoline taxes once they go to the pump. It was 9 cents a litre, and now it's going to be up to – I'm trying to remember what it's going to be up to.

An Hon. Member: I heard 6.

Mr. Taylor: An additional 6 cents?

Dr. Starke: Six point seven.

Mr. Taylor: Six point seven. Thank you.

An additional 6.7 cents: when you're talking about all the millions of litres, that's an awful lot of money that's going to be coming out of the pockets of Albertans and going into the government's coffers.

An Hon. Member: Out of the economy.

Mr. Taylor: Out of the economy.

Who can spend it better? I think Albertans should have a better chance of being able to spend it and seeing how their money should be spent.

Despite all these cost hikes for families we are somehow blowing through the debt limit that the government decided on last fall. That brings us to Bill 10. This is perhaps one of the most ill-conceived pieces of legislation this government has come up with. This bill removes any hint of fiscal control. It seems that the lid is off. Again, like, to infinity and beyond: where's it going to stop? This government intends to continue their spending spree and their reckless spending habits, and this is why they have tabled Bill 10. With this bill they can just break open the maxed-out credit cards and carry on with their Christmas spending spree, leaving the worry about budgets to others. The Grinch in me sure doesn't like that.

Their lack of concern for fiscal management is, according to them, actually a virtue as they attempt to prime the economy by creating jobs. But at what cost? Albertans need assurances that this government will get their spending under control. If this NDP government can't control the spending and work within the parameters of coming close to balancing the budget, how do we as Albertans know that in four years this debt number won't be the predicted \$58 billion but something higher than that? Will it be \$60 billion, \$65 billion, \$70 billion, \$75 billion, or \$100 billion in debt? There's no cap. There's no reason or rationale to stop this spending from going up from the \$58 billion to \$100 billion because there's nothing to stop that, Mr. Speaker.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Perhaps the minister could tell us if he will hit \$100 billion in debt by 2024. Is that what the projected budget beyond this will be, beyond \$100 billion? Mr. Speaker, I don't know where this will go. I don't want to become the most highly in debt subsovereign government in the world, and we're going down that road. If we look at it per capita, we're trying to compete with Ontario, and we're getting there quite quickly.

Contrary to what our Prime Minister said – you know, our Prime Minister said that budgets balance themselves – budgets really don't balance themselves. That's a fact. We as legislators and, apparently, the opposition as Grinches must do the hard work to ensure that the budgets are balanced so our children, our grandchildren will have the competitive Alberta that we have come to love and expect, the competitive Alberta that – you know, we could hold our heads up proudly and say: we're Albertans; we have

the Alberta advantage. But where has that Alberta advantage gone? It seems to be slipping out of our hands like sand slipping out of my fingers.

4:50

When this government puts Alberta in debt to the tune of somewhere close to \$60 billion, this has huge implications for Alberta, Albertans, and postsecondary institutions. If I look at the cost to service debt alone, the \$2 billion, and put this into capital projects that they have planned for this year, which is \$438 million, I can see that this is over four times the capital projects, all the capital projects that we wanted to put in in this province for our postsecondary institutions. That's four of those. We could have done four times as much this year as what was planned for this year, but that's going to be gone. That's going to be erased because we're paying debt, and that's irresponsible to our postsecondary institutions.

This goes across the board with all the different aspects of this province, again, the roads, the schools, the hospitals. The hospital in Wainwright, Mr. Speaker: it's projected to be \$240 million to have a brand new hospital facility placed in our town. That \$2 billion would provide us with eight of those hospitals. The size of hospital that we want, a regional hospital for our area: we could have eight of those dotting this province each and every year. That's what we're losing just based on what we're spending, the \$2 billion, to service that debt.

This means that we have lost the potential to build new postsecondary institutions, brand new ones – they could be done – just because we're going to have to service the debt with that \$2 billion.

The number seems to be, you know, just beyond belief. I had a person tell me before that if you took – they used the analogy of: what does a billion dollars look like? Well, if you looked at a million dollars and then you went and converted that to seconds, it would have been two years ago, but if you went to a billion dollars, you're going back around the time of Christ. So \$2 billion: I'm not even sure where that puts us, the time of Ezekiel or something. I'm not sure, but it takes us back into the Old Testament. Ezekiel talked about prophecy, and I'll tell you: this is a prophecy that it looks like we're coming up against.

Mr. Fildebrandt: The four horsemen.

Mr. Taylor: Well, that's Revelation, but I get your analogy about the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

This government, this NDP government, wants to become friends with big banks. Big banks seem to be their big buddies now. Obviously, it must be because they keep giving money to the big banks through interest and loans. In fact, every time we do this, we have to have a credit downgrading.

The Speaker: Are there any questions for the hon. member under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was certainly intrigued by your speech on Bill 10 here. You seem to be very concerned about the debt-to-GDP ratio, and I note that on December 22 of last year your party had put forward a plan to hold debt to GDP at 7 per cent. I'm a little bit concerned that another member of your party has said that it's not the opposition's job to give any details to their plans. However, I'm going to try anyway. I was wondering if the member still stands by that plan of 7 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio and, if so, which services that his constituents rely on he would cut himself.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I really can't speak to what the Member for Strathmore-Brooks was exactly referring to and speak to what his words are or what he wants to articulate about this, but I am definitely concerned about the debt-to-GDP ratio. The more debt that we take on, the fewer projects, the fewer things that we can do, and it definitely does concern me. We need to make sure that we are looking at moving towards balancing our books, and balancing our books is the ultimate end goal. Nowhere in this do I see that we are going anywhere towards a balanced budget in the next four years. There's nowhere in there that I see a balanced budget coming into this, so I'm very concerned about what's happening here.

I'm sorry. I cannot comment on what the Member for Strathmore-Brooks would want to say, so I will sit down and say thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Schneider: Yeah, 29(2)(a). I'd just like the member to be able to get back to his speech. I know that he had spent some time on it. I guess I can just ask: what would happen to them or what would they be experiencing, the folks that are going to have to end up paying this \$56 billion? This is the proposed number, \$56 billion or \$58 billion. It's all big numbers. What's life going to be like for those folks? If you have better information there that you'd like to share, I'd love to hear it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Member for Little Bow. Thank you for asking me to continue on with these words that I had from the speech, from where I left off.

Although I advocate for capital projects, I believe that these capital projects should be on a planned, systematic, transparent, measurable priority list with a rationale for each project. The PC and the NDP governments have spent Alberta into an unbelievable, deep financial hole at times. Rather than reduce spending to try to balance the budgets, the NDP have chosen to keep increasing spending and take on massive debt. The government is amending the 15 per cent debt-to-GDP limit that they imposed last fall because Budget 2016 proposes a 15.5 per cent debt ratio. This government has done the unthinkable, and instead of slowing down their uncontrolled spending spree, they have chosen to remove the cap entirely.

In this way, they will remove all semblance of control and will incur approximately \$58 billion in debt before Albertans have a chance to vote them out. Our children and grandchildren will have to find ways to pay back this debt because this government won't make the tough decisions now. They have control of the books. They know what's going on. That was their complaint when they took over the government. They needed to wait until November before they came out with a budget because they wanted to make sure that they did it right. All I see is that we're going backwards, and we're late on this last budget.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to start off. I'm going to be speaking in support of this bill, which, I'd imagine, would not be a shock to anyone in this House.

What this bill does is – there's already been some discussion on the various parts of it. One of the things I'm happy with is that everybody seems to be onboard with the fact of, you know, changing the FAA, where we're going to be raising the limit for

individuals who are having a loan from the government to \$500,000 to protect the personal privacy of those who have a student loan or are going to gain a loan from various other programs that we're implementing. The same goes for us winding down the Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan Act and our various tax changes that we need to do just to clean up our tax code in order to bring it in line with our federal counterparts. One of the reasons why we're doing that, of course, is for an ease of accounting for businesses, which I know is something the members opposite are always very fond of making sure that we in government do, everything as efficient as possible.

5:00

There is also, of course, the one where we are removing the 15 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio, which is something that's required because we've had a once-in-a-generation downturn, that no one could have predicted. That is what has changed since we were last in this House debating a debt-to-GDP level. It's one of those things where if it ends up being 15.5 per cent, Alberta's debt-to-GDP ratio would be roughly half the weighted average of other provinces.

What would that give us? I notice that the members opposite are very enthusiastic about using colourful words about our budget. They're saying that it's a to infinity and beyond budget. Well, I would say that it's going to be an infinity to wait times for surgery if they had their way. In order to cut back to the 7 per cent debt-to-GDP limit that the opposition had previously proposed – since the opposition had mentioned that it is not their job to come up with specifics, that is sort of the number I'm working with – to stay under that, we'd have to take \$8 billion out of that budget, which, as noted by the minister, is more than the entire budget of Education, it's more than the entire budget of Municipal Affairs, and it's almost all of this year's capital plan, which would leave one to wonder: what would they cut?

I'm going to digress from that. Oftentimes, you know, the opposition has said to us: you need to cut; you've got to do your part to make sure that government is running as efficiently as possible. Mr. Speaker, we have been doing a lot of that, actually. We have dissolved or amalgamated 36 agencies, boards, and commissions, which is going to save approximately \$33 million over three years. That is looking into government and finding ways to cut costs.

Instead of taking a panicked approach, we are slowing down some of our platform commitments to make sure we can roll them out in a fiscally responsible manner. In addition to these, we have also taken careful measures to bring down the cost of government. We have frozen management salaries at government agencies, boards, and commissions and also commenced a review of the salary rates of all of these agencies. Cabinet ministers, MLAs such as myself as well as political staff will not see a salary increase for the entirety of this Legislature. The same is true for managers in the public service for two years.

Also, Mr. Speaker, our projected growth and overall spending for the next three years is going to be on average 2.5 per cent for health care. I will note that previously the rate of growth in health care was around 6 per cent, which, since health care is the biggest part of our budget, created some serious pressures on our budget. By bringing this down, it allows Albertans to have a sustainable public health care system that they can rely on so that doctors and nurses are there when Albertans need health care.

One of the other things we're getting out of this is that we are going to be supporting Alberta families. One of the things we're doing is that starting this summer families are going to be getting a new Alberta child benefit. What that means, Mr. Speaker, is that a low-income single parent with two children would receive just over

\$3,000 a year in benefits. This would help 3,800 children, who will be better off because of the policies that are in our budget that are there for Albertans.

We've also called on the federal government to expand employment insurance to those in the Edmonton and surrounding areas who have been hurt by this economic downturn.

Also, we are going to be investing \$50 million to help apprentices complete their training and finish off their work experience requirements so they can get into the workforce. Second, we're going to be spending \$10 million on the training for work program, which targets a broad range of Albertans who are underrepresented in the workforce, including women, indigenous peoples, newcomers to help them secure employment in high-demand jobs.

Now, second, Mr. Speaker, which is something that I believe we've already talked about in the course of our conversations so far, is that we have a concrete plan to invest in infrastructure. We're going to be spending \$34 billion to upgrade with new roads, transit, schools, and hospitals. This is a plan that increases investment 15 per cent compared to what the previous government would do, an additional \$4.5 billion in new investment over five years. Previous governments, for example, were very fond of announcing schools without having funding for them, and that is something that this government will not continue.

When we talk of education for our kids, Mr. Speaker, we want to make sure that there is a school for them, that there's a teacher for them, and that there's proper funding for each and every one of those children. We think that that's good for Albertans. It's a way to move Alberta forward and not backwards to the cuts of the '90s, which members of the opposition are often so fond of thinking back to as being a glorious time in Alberta's history, which I think many of us would disagree with because those times involved cutting back on schools. It involved literally blowing up a hospital, and I don't see how that benefits Albertans.

Also, Mr. Speaker, our plan involves diversifying our energy industry and energy markets. That was another thing that the hon. members across the way had spoken about. Part of that is our carbon levy. What that levy does is that it allows every cent of it to be reinvested in the form of a rebate back to lower income Albertans, and it also involves us to help diversify our economy by investing in energy efficiency programs, investing in alternative energy sources such as wind, solar, geothermal, and possibly other energy sources that we have yet to think of. All of that is reinvested into Alberta. I also note that our carbon levy, for those in our agricultural industries, does not apply to dyed diesel or dyed gasoline, which I think is definitely a help to our farmers.

Fourthly, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to supporting Alberta business, we have most definitely listened to Albertans' job-creating business community. In October we announced that the Alberta Treasury Branches is going to be spending \$1.5 billion to support lending to small and medium-sized businesses in every region of this province. Also, I'm pleased to note that ATB announced that it has increased loans to small and medium-sized businesses in the fourth quarter by \$335 million. That's \$335 million to small and medium-sized businesses to expand and to ride out this downturn.

We've also announced two tax credits, Mr. Speaker. I have to note that last weekend after we released our budget, I had a chance to talk to many people I know who live in my riding of Calgary-Currie and who I've worked with in the past who are frankly quite excited about this investor tax credit. It allows for investments and new start-up companies in the IT sector and other areas, and it's to encourage growth that is outside of the oil and gas sector. Increasing these sectors allows us to, when we have downturns like this, not

have such a drop in our other business tax revenues because we would have a diversified economy in that sense.

Also, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade is often very fond of talking about our \$500 million in royalty credits towards business that are investing in petrochemical facilities. They use methane or propane to produce higher value products such as methanol and plastics. This is the type of thing that we talked about and I talked about during the election campaign. When it talks to doing value-added for our petrochemical products here in Alberta, that means jobs in this province, that means tax revenue for us to pay for the things that Albertans rely on, things like hospitals and things like schools.

5:10

I will note, Mr. Speaker, that during the Budget Address by the Finance minister we decided that we were going to help small businesses by lowering the small-business tax rate from 3 per cent to 2 per cent. I will note that that is something that has been applauded on both sides of this House. I think it is an excellent example of how we are listening to the business community and supporting businesses, Mr. Speaker.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we are making a decisive choice to invest in the things that Albertans rely on, things like hospitals, things like schools, things like roads and other infrastructure. I believe that this is the way forward for Alberta and that it's a responsible way forward. I believe it is for the benefit of all Albertans, and I will proudly stand behind it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Strathmore-Brooks; 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I always enjoy my entertaining interactions with the Member for Calgary-Currie. He's normally wearing orange; I see he's in republican red today, trying to make Alberta great again.

I thank him for mentioning the small-business tax rate. This is something that the Wildrose and indeed all members of the opposition have supported for some time. Unfortunately, the Member for Calgary-Currie and the members on the opposite side didn't support it in October when the Official Opposition moved a motion to do the exact same thing. I'm curious and wonder why the Member for Calgary-Currie thinks that lowering the small-business tax rate from 3 per cent to 2 per cent is a good idea in April but it was a bad idea in October. Perhaps it was because it just came from the wrong people.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also curious. The Member for Calgary-Currie talked about the deep, brutal cuts they're making to agencies, boards, and commissions. They said that they're going to save \$30 million. Well, that's nice. I like saving \$30 million. But in the context of the overall consolidated deficit they're running this year, \$14 billion on a consolidated level, net change in financial assets, that savings of \$30 million, the only savings they could manage to find, amounts to about 2.1 per cent of the deficit for just this year. It's a pretty small start, especially when spending goes up every year. You know, I love it when elected people can say, "We're cutting spending" but actually somehow manage to increase spending. It's like: well, I cut the soda out and I bought a case of pop, but I am somehow cutting spending. I'm interested to know if the Member for Calgary-Currie believes that \$30 million in cuts out of a \$14 billion deficit, amounting to just over 2 per cent of the deficit for a single year, is very significant.

The member also talked about how tough they're being on freezing salaries for senior management in the government. That's a nice start. Unfortunately, though, public-sector compensation

costs are skyrocketing in the province. They're continuing to hire more people to work for government. They're refusing to renegotiate salaries. This government, at a time when people are losing jobs by the thousands across Alberta – downtown Calgary is emptying out. At a time when people are bleeding jobs in the private sector, I'm interested to know why the Member for Calgary-Currie feels that it's appropriate for the government to hire hundreds of new bureaucrats, not front-line service providers but bureaucrats.

I'm wondering why they felt that it was necessary to give a significant pay hike to officers of the Legislature, why they voted for that but now move to freeze it. They're talking about freezing salaries for a select number of people – that's a good thing – MLAs, senior managers in the government, but they don't talk about it for their union bosses, who really run the government. They haven't asked Kevin Davey, former AUPE negotiator, to demand salary freezes from the AUPE. I'm not sure which side he's negotiating on anymore. But I'd be interested to know what the Member for Calgary-Currie thinks and if the member has asked Kevin Davey, formerly of AUPE, to make tough concessions of the AUPE.

The Speaker: Why don't you ask and allow the hon. member to answer your several questions?

Mr. Fildebrandt: I would love to hear his answers, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think I've got the list of questions here. The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks mentioned that apparently this government had voted in support of raising wages for members of the Legislature. I'm assuming he means us.

Mr. Fildebrandt: No. Unions.

Mr. Malkinson: Sorry?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Not us. Unions.

Mr. Malkinson: Okay. I may have misunderstood that question, then.

Anyway, moving on, the freeze or the reduction for ABCs, as mentioned, at 21 per cent is just an example of a first step. I also mentioned that we froze wages all across government for managers, for political staff, for MLAs. Basically, you know, in a nutshell, we froze wages in government for everyone we could that didn't have a current union contract in place, and one of the reasons why we didn't go after those union contracts, Mr. Speaker, is because . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to stand before we begin debate on the budget. Let me be clear – and this may come as a shock – that Wildrose does not like everything about this budget.

An Hon. Member: Shocking.

Mr. Hanson: Shocking. I just wanted to be clear.

We did see that the government took our proposal to drop the small-business tax, but with the carbon tax that small drop is completely negated except for non carbon-intensive small business with a lot of profit.

In our 10-point savings plan we advocated some reductions to the bureaucracy through attrition while maintaining front-line services. The government has found a way to hire 250 more bureaucrats and

a bunch of AHS managers over the last year instead. Clearly, this government has a problem with listening. This government has a chronic spending addiction, and removing the debt limit is the ultimate enabler.

In November the Wildrose Finance and Treasury Board critic, the Member for Strathmore-Brooks, recapped the history of Alberta's fiscal situation. We heard him warn the government about their risky ideology and reckless fiscal plan and what it would do. The government didn't listen. It's not just that the government turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to our warnings. The government flat out refused to listen to logic and reason and offered up poor platitudes instead. We warned the government in question period. We warned the government through the media. We warned the government in debate. We warned the government by submitting logical, non-sense amendments, and the government again decided to close their ears.

Let me remind you of what the Minister of Finance said to our repeated warnings last year. On October 27:

This act [the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act] will limit Alberta government borrowing to 15 per cent of GDP . . . That will provide enough room to allow our government to play its economic role without tipping into overdependence on debt.

On October 29:

The bottom line . . . is that a 15 per cent debt to GDP is a prudent benchmark for limiting government debt. With this cap in place, Albertans can be assured that the government's borrowing will not get out of hand.

On November 3:

I believe that this 15 per cent limit will not be breached . . . I think it takes us up to about 9.5 or 10 per cent of debt to GDP, so there's lots of cushion.

. . . the ability to get to balance, as we've predicted in the five-year projections, will mean that we can start to aggressively pay down the debt, which will mean that we don't come anywhere close to the 15 per cent. So I don't see where there's going to be an issue like you do.

He was referring to us on this side of the House.

On December 2:

We are going to stick to 15 per cent of GDP. That is sound. That is the lowest in the country. That is a debt cap that is calculated to help us get to where we need to go.

5:20

When I look at Bill 10, page 5, section 3 presently reads:

3(1) For a fiscal year, Crown debt shall not exceed 15% of GDP for Alberta.

Yet in this document that we have today, section 3 is repealed just like that. Well, clearly, that was a lot of hogwash. Clearly, Wildrose was right and is right to be concerned. Clearly, the government needs to learn to listen to common-sense arguments and stop putting their reckless fiscal plans and risky ideology into place on the backs of everyday Albertans. When it comes to finances, this government refuses to listen. This government refuses to learn. They are irresponsible, and they cannot be trusted to do what is best for Albertans.

This government's fiscal irresponsibility is making things worse. The NDP ideology and budget are making things worse by driving investment into the ground, chasing jobs out of Alberta, and raising taxes on all Albertans. Whether it's increased corporate taxes or their \$3 billion carbon tax on everything, everybody is being made to pay more. The government hiked personal, corporate, and sin taxes last year and have hiked more fees in this budget.

Don't be fooled by their promise that this carbon tax is revenue neutral. Don't be fooled by the idea that this carbon tax is just about the environment. Just last week Wildrose clearly showed that this

carbon tax will affect every Albertan. It's not just that the cost of your fuel will increase. Your heating bills will increase as well. Your grocery bills will increase. Your electricity bills will increase. The tax that will be charged will not just be swallowed up by business. It will be passed on to you and me in every sector on every item we buy.

The NDP's smoke-and-mirror rebates aren't going to give back to most families what they spend, but the government would like you to believe that. They're pretending that the average gas use and the average home-heating bill are all you will pay for. According to the Premier Albertans shouldn't worry. She says that this carbon tax is a levy you can control how much you pay on. Well, that sounds great. But wait; she goes on to say that if you change the car you have, if you do energy efficiency stuff – the word "stuff" is actually a quote – in your home, you can pay less.

Well, this is just another example of how the Premier and the government are not listening to Albertans and are completely out of touch with the current reality. Tens of thousands of people have lost their jobs. These people are fighting to put food on the table, and the Premier wants them to buy a new car and upgrade their appliances. Awesome. However, what Albertans know and what this government is about to find out is that you can't take on more debt and expect the old debt to disappear. You can't take your poor credit score to the bank and expect to get good interest rates.

When Albertans are hurting, this Premier casually states that Albertans can fix the problem themselves. When Albertans are struggling, this government adds to their burden. Five billion dollars of government debt is not enough. Ten billion dollars of debt is not enough. Fifty billion dollars of debt is not enough. That's another \$2,000 a year in debt repayment for each family, and that's before our credit rating was downgraded, making better interest rates a thing of the past. Additionally, with more and more money going toward debt-servicing costs, that will mean less and less money for social programs and infrastructure, less money for hurting, struggling Albertans, less money for those who need it most. We're looking at an average increase of 41.8 per cent per year in debt-servicing costs. This year alone we are looking at nearly \$1 billion in debt-servicing costs.

Let me put that into perspective for you. That's more than has been budgeted for the majority of ministries. That's more than Agriculture and Forestry is budgeted to receive, more than Environment and Parks, more than the Infrastructure ministry, more than Service Alberta. The NDP government's budget is only making things worse. As it sits right now, we would need oil to be at least \$122 a barrel to get us back in the black. That's probably not going to happen. Let me remind you that the price of oil is currently at \$42. This deficit is obscene. This budget is irresponsible, and it's yet another example of the NDP putting ideology before anything else.

Mr. Speaker, a year ago the NDP promised to balance the budget in 2018. Five months ago they said that it wouldn't happen until 2020. Last week they admitted that a balanced budget in 2024 is merely a goal. Let's be honest: 2024 is simply a year that was pulled out of a hat. There is no evidence to support that idea. Furthermore, there are more budgets to come, and I suspect that a balanced budget projection will just keep getting pushed back with each one.

History is clear. When socialist governments come into power – and we know that the members opposite support a lot of those governments – they leave behind a mess, and the next government has to wipe it up. But it's not just the next government that will have to wipe up the mess that this government is creating. It's the next generation.

If the government won't listen to logic and reason, perhaps it will listen to this. At some point this government is going to have to

learn to draw the line. They cannot continue borrowing and spending with no regard for taxpayers and future taxpayers. At this current rate of borrowing it won't be just grade 4 students who will be lucky if the province has a balanced spreadsheet by the time they vote. It'll be kindergarten kids. It's the children of today and tomorrow who will be paying the price. This government is robbing them of their future at a time when the whole world is supposed to lie before them. These children are saddled with debt before they've even made a dollar.

The seniors who built this province built it to be something great, and they worked hard to leave the province in good shape for their children and grandchildren. They budgeted hard; they knew what they could afford and what they couldn't. They made sacrifices so that future generations would not need to make as many. How does this government repay them? By increasing their costs when they're on limited income. This government, in effect, has told them that their sacrifice, their scrimping, their saving weren't enough. This government is going to take seniors' last pennies and tax their grandchildren on top of it. Mr. Speaker, this government is making it more than just a practice to spend recklessly and irresponsibly. They're making it a way of life. Their poor decisions no longer just affect Albertans today. This government's poor decisions will affect Albertans of tomorrow. Albertans are worried and anxious because this ideological government is taking risks and making mistakes.

Wildrose will stand up for Albertans. Wildrose will provide strong leadership and give Albertans the hope they need. We need an efficient government, not one that is bloated and breaking trust with Albertans. Thank you.

At this point, sir, if you would indulge me, I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 7
Electoral Boundaries Commission
Amendment Act, 2016

[Adjourned debate April 19: Mr. Bilous]

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to rise today to speak on Bill 7, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2016. Now, of course, this is a bill that we probably would not even be reviewing if it weren't for the snap election that we saw last year about this time, that was called by the former Premier in what I felt was his own self-interest. For the curiosity of the members across the way, there are actually two weeks left on the law to call the election, so we all would probably be right now pulling our signs out of the barns or, in your cases, printing them, but every single one of us knows that that's not the case. That's why we're here in this Assembly today, and we'll leave it to the pundits to debate whether or not it was a good decision to call that election because it's history now.

When we break down Bill 7, Mr. Speaker, we see that the proposed legislation makes two changes to the law. The first change is significant because it moves the timeline of the Electoral Boundaries Commission appointment date up to October 31 of this year. This advancement puts the commission appointment roughly about a year or two ahead of schedule. The last commission was appointed only seven years ago, making this proposal fall a little bit outside of the traditional eight- to 10-year timeline of the Electoral Boundaries Commission's regular appointment.

5:30

Now, with that said, Mr. Speaker, I would say that it is understandable that the government would like to appoint a commission and get the process started early, while we are not close to the next election. My caucus also recognizes that by appointing the commission ahead of schedule, it allows for all parties to establish constituency associations and begin the process of building support in the new ridings.

The second proposed amendment changes the data that will be available to the commission when they are appointed. This amendment presents a double-edged sword, Mr. Speaker. On the one hand, the government should always be striving for the best results, and one would think that using the most accurate data would allow for the best results, but as we all know, different municipalities have different capabilities in our province when it comes to deploying resources towards a regular census. Larger municipalities are able to organize door-knocking census teams, online portals, and even pay for advertisement in local media. A lot of our smaller municipalities have a much harder time collecting data at the same rate as the larger municipalities, and they cannot conduct a census every two years while many of Alberta's largest municipalities can. The only concern I have here is that when the commission is collecting population data, the smaller areas may not be represented in the same way.

On the same note, I have some questions about the commission's timeline and the data that will be used, the most up-to-date population data. The city of Edmonton is currently conducting its census and will stop taking submissions by the end of this month, with results coming back by the end of this year. Maybe the commission will use this as the most up-to-date information. However, the federal government is beginning its census on May 2, and Stats Canada will begin rolling out its results in 2017, with the population and dwelling counts being published as early as February 8, 2017.

My question is: due to the commission's early appointment, will it be rushing to use larger municipality census numbers from this year, or will it be waiting for the federal government's province-wide population survey in February? Whichever set of data is used by the commission, the most important part of its work is the commitment to effective representation.

I would like to echo what the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in 1991, when it reviewed provincial boundaries in Saskatchewan. The right to vote comprises many factors, which include representation by population but must also take in other considerations. Factors like geography, community history, community interests, and minority representation may need to be taken into account to ensure that the Legislative Assembly effectively represents all Albertans. The Electoral Boundaries Commission Act already compels the commission to make considerations based on those factors. In the act it is under the section area, and the Wildrose is glad to see that these provisions have not been changed.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to emphasize that the commission's work is of the utmost importance to the maintenance of a fair and equitable democracy. While serving on the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, I have been able to learn a great deal about the electoral process. I firmly believe that a fair, open, and transparent process is in the best interests of all Albertans. I will be supporting Bill 7 in second reading, and I believe my caucus will as well, but we will have several questions that we would like to hear more about from the government during Committee of the Whole.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Hays under section 29(2)(a)?

Mr. McIver: No, not under 29(2)(a).

The Speaker: Are there any questions for the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre under 29(2)(a)?
The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise on Bill 7, the electoral boundary adjustments. I'll be brief, but there's a principle here that I sincerely hope the members of the House will consider and that it will be included in some form or fashion that's appropriate to whomever is on the commission.

Currently amongst Canadian jurisdictions, as I understand it, Alberta has one of the widest variances in population allowed between the highest and the lowest, as high as 25 per cent, and I understand there are other jurisdictions, many of them, where the variance is as low as 5 per cent. I understand the principle, Mr. Speaker, of democracy – it's an important one – the fact that every vote has equal weight, but the reason for the variance in Alberta has a great deal to do with the realities in our geography and the actual layout of the province. The ridings get so big in rural Alberta that if you try to make the population per Member of the Legislative Assembly exactly the same, it will be very hard for very many Albertans in rural Alberta to get any time with their MLA.

There is precedent for this, folks. The precedent, as I understand it, comes from way back in Britain with the word "riding." The source of the word, as I understand it, was approximately the distance that a person could ride on a horse in a day, a very important principle that should not be forgotten. Now, I appreciate that most of the MLAs here don't ride horses to see their constituents.

Dr. Starke: We might go back to it with the carbon tax.

Mr. McIver: With the carbon tax it could become a more attractive option than it is today. That is correct.

On a more serious note, Mr. Speaker – and I really want to make this point, which is why I stuck around to get on my feet – there are two principles at work here. One is equal representation, which is an important principle, and we should take that seriously. The other principle is accessibility to your elected representative. If you can't get to your elected representative or your elected representative can't get to you, you are not being represented. There's a lot of rural Alberta that is depending on this House and the upcoming commission to keep that in mind. It's an important principle.

I don't have any trouble explaining it to my constituents in Calgary. Some of them might look me in the eye and say: well, Ric, that's not as good for us as it is for people in rural Alberta. But there's an element of fairness that has to be considered. MLAs have to be able to get to their constituents; constituents have to be able to get to their MLAs. It's not too hard to figure out in looking at a map of the ridings.

I know that in my particular riding, Calgary-Hays, while I haven't done it in one trip, I've surely door-knocked it many times. By my estimation, I believe I could walk from the two farthest points in my constituency in about two and a half hours, walking as fast as I can. There are constituencies in Alberta that it would be hard to drive across, from one side to the other, in two and a half hours and in some cases two and a half days. [interjections] Thank you. So I'm hearing some support for that.

I would just as a caution, I hope, ask that people consider the two principles when we go ahead with this. One is equal representation, which I'll again acknowledge is a very important principle and

perhaps the most important. But the other principle, that should never be forgotten, is the principle of accessibility to your elected official because leaving Albertans without any effective representation by virtue of geographic exclusion is something that we should caution against. In my view, it is a big reason for the fact that the variance is allowed as high in Alberta as it is, because we understand that people need to get to see their MLA when they need them.

So there it is. That's my speech. I think it's short. Mr. Speaker, maybe it's my own sense of urgency, but I think it's important, too, and I respectfully hope that members of the House will take this under consideration and seriously, I hope, as the debate continues here.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Questions for the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays under 29(2)(a)?

The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief because I certainly support Bill 7, and I think that absolutely we do need to redraw electoral boundaries for all the reasons that have been enumerated in this House.

I want to pick up on and offer some support for parts of what the Member for Calgary-Hays has talked about but offer a different perspective, recognizing that it's the 21st century. One of the things that always struck me as odd: in the city of Calgary there are 25 MLAs; there are 14 city councillors in the city of Calgary. As much as I love each and every one of my colleagues – and it's wonderful to see them at events – there are times when there are upwards of two dozen of us at the same event, and I always wondered if that made any sense.

5:40

What I would like to just put out into the discussion is: are there other ways of ensuring that rural Albertans are effectively represented aside from having the number of MLAs that we have? Is there a possibility of actually reducing the number of MLAs in this province? Alberta has more MLAs per capita than our friends in British Columbia, substantially more.

Is there an opportunity to perhaps significantly enhance the budget for constituencies in rural Alberta? I find it striking, actually, how little difference there is between the constituency budgets for myself and for some of our rural colleagues. I find that actually remarkable. I think that rural MLAs ought to be funded to a point of having two good, proper offices, with staff full-time in both locations, perhaps even more than that for some of the larger constituencies. Does that introduce with technology, with Skype, with online access an opportunity to provide that representation?

I know that the work of an MLA is never done. I know that the work that we do is essentially infinite – it can't all be done – and we all have to make those choices. I recognize that I represent an inner-city, urban constituency, and that represents an entirely different set of challenges than it does to represent rural constituents, time to physically drive around being not the least of that.

I just wanted to put that out into the discussion as something, as the committee goes forward, for all of us to consider, you know, not just the cost for each MLA – that's certainly part of it – but is there an opportunity for us here to perhaps be more effective? I have to say that there's been more than one occasion where multiple members from both sides have risen to say basically the same thing so we've got something in *Hansard*, so we can distribute that to

stakeholders, and I wonder if, in fact, that's always the best use of our time, if perhaps this House would operate more effectively if there were somewhat fewer of us. I'll put that out there. That's something that's been brought to me by my constituents and by my party members, and I wanted to put that out there.

Having said that, I certainly enthusiastically support Bill 7, and I can hardly wait, Mr. Speaker, for the hallway conversations with my MLA colleagues, particularly those from rural Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any questions for the Member for Calgary-Elbow under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find the conversation of interest to me, particularly the last comments from the Member for Calgary-Elbow, because I have one of the largest constituencies in Alberta. I have over 22 communities, and I travel a lot of miles every month. I'm just wondering: is it the opinion of the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, would he therefore think that we should have fewer members in the major cities? Is that the direction you're going, hon. member?

Thank you.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. I mean, I think that the Supreme Court has been very clear about what the difference is. So the short answer is: yes, I think we actually should have fewer MLAs in the cities. We do need to consider maintaining proportionality between urban and rural.

You know, whenever bills like this come up, when we do redraw electoral boundaries, it gives us an opportunity to have that conversation. In fact, the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee also could consider this question, and perhaps that's something I'll bring up at that committee as well. It would mean fewer constituencies throughout the whole province. I think that's the job the commission has before it, to make sure that we maintain effective representation, not necessarily equal representation. I don't think that's desirable or attainable in any way. But I think that if we reduce, it should be on a proportional basis, perhaps starting with just a smaller number. Even going back down to 83 from 87: I wonder if that's an opportunity.

It also shows Albertans that we're willing to economize in challenging economic times and to frankly do more with less in this province. I think that's an opportunity for us to show some leadership by example. That's certainly a perspective that I've heard and something that I hope we can entertain as part of the process, all the while making sure that we consider all of the different impacts of that, positive and negative. I stand to be

corrected if this turns out to not be such a great idea, but I do think that it's something we should consider.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, are there any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Calgary-Elbow?

Seeing none, the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened with interest especially to the members for Calgary-Hays and Calgary-Elbow, their comments on the rural MLAs and their support for the rural MLAs. As one of those rural MLAs I don't have the largest district in the province, but I have well over 50 communities in my district. Many of those are summer villages, which I'm very proud of. I, you know, enjoy the support.

I'm looking forward to the commission's report. The Electoral Boundaries Commission has the opportunity to review the boundaries, you know, every few years. I'm looking forward to the report and perhaps looking for that support for the rural MLAs and for rural communities, that are so important.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Is there anyone else who would like to speak to Bill 7?

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

Bill 8

Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2016

[Adjourned debate April 19: Mr. Carlier]

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had, you know, a lot of discussion around the Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2016, this afternoon. I don't have anything really to add to what we've already heard from both sides of the House.

An Hon. Member: Question.

Mr. Carlier: Yes, please. Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a second time]

The Speaker: Deputy Government House Leader, go ahead.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We listened to very good debate from both sides of the House this afternoon. I believe we've done some very good work. I would move that we adjourn until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:48 p.m.]

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