



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 17, 2016

Day 29

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Second Session

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van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
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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, May 17, 2016

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my absolute pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 50 of the brightest grade 6 students, from Northmount elementary school, located in the incredible constituency of Edmonton-Decore. They are accompanied today by two of their teachers, Nicole Christian and Diana Coumantarakis. I'd ask that they all please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly the students and teacher of Eleanor Hall school from Clyde, Alberta. They are here conducting the week-long School at the Legislature. Their teacher is Mr. Albert Perreault, and the parent helpers are Ms Julie MacLean, Mr. Jim Laughy, Mr. Ian Despina, and Mrs. Linda McCoy. I'd would ask that the teachers, parents, and students rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take great pride today to introduce to you a class from Rutherford constituency, l'école Greenfield school, with their teacher Caitlin Hudon and parent helpers Susan Woepel and Jessica Doody. If they could please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other school groups, hon. members?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and all members of the Assembly an organizer and supporter of the group Oil People Helping Oil People, Mr. Orion Fike. Based in Brooks, Oil People Helping Oil People stepped up to help our laid-off oil and gas workers in the Newell region and have been successful in raising funds to provide food, gas, and medication and accessing community supports to our laid-off oil and gas workers. I'd ask that Orion please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my absolute pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly several guests joining us from the Imperial Sovereign Court of the Wild Rose. I ask that they rise while I call their titles: Lj Steele, Emperor XXXV; Trey LePark Trash, Imperial Grand Duke XL; Davvid Drag On, Imperial Crown Prince XL; Carrie Du'Way, Imperial Crown Princess XL; Yeust Bobb, Emperor Elect

XL; and Myra Maines, Empress Elect XL. I'd be remiss if I didn't add that Myra Maines' nondrag name is also Michael Connolly, spelled exactly the same way as mine. As you can imagine, there have been some mix-ups in the past year as we seem to run in similar circles. I now ask that the Assembly affords them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce you to a wonderful family, the Elkuraji family, consisting of Yasir, Safiya, Ahmat, and Ramadan with their volunteers Merna Schmidt, Julie Kamel, Badi Jabbour, Ahmed Najar, Elise Campbell, Carol Vogler, Alice Sears, and Phyllis Ramsden. Would you all please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three people that volunteer in Strathcona-Sherwood Park: Jim Johannsson, Shelley Johannsson, and Cam Robinson. All three of them are essential to the day-to-day ongoing operations of the Cooking Lake Airport, which I'll be speaking more about later on today. Their hard work is exemplary of the volunteer spirit alive and well in my constituency. I'd ask all three of them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other guests? The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure and honour to introduce to you and through you a group from Fort McMurray who played an instrumental role in ensuring the safe and timely evacuation of a few hundred pets from our community. It was comforting to know that the SPCA was there when the community needed them the most. As I state your name, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly: George Rowe, the SPCA president of Fort McMurray; Gilles Huizinga, the treasurer; Tara Clarke, the executive director; Sara Gaertner, the operations manager; Misha Gaertner, the kennel manager; and Andryia Browne, public relations. Please rise and accept this warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome. Thank you.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Wildfire Update

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several important updates for the Assembly on the wildfire situation, but first I must again express our gratitude to the people working on the ground in difficult and dangerous conditions to protect Albertans.

Today there are 17 wildfires burning in our province, including five new starts. Four are out of control, one is being held, 11 are under control, and one has been turned over to local authorities. We have over 1,950 firefighters and support staff on the ground today, supported by 208 helicopters, 412 pieces of heavy equipment, and 29 air tankers. Fire risk remains extreme across much of Alberta.

The fire in the MD of Greenview has grown a small amount, from 800 to 900 hectares, which is substantially less growth than expected,

which is great news. The mandatory evacuation order was lifted from the hamlet of Little Smoky although residents remain under evacuation notice. We have 75 firefighters and three helicopters fighting that fire.

The Fort McMurray fire is now close to 355,000 hectares and is still out of control. Conditions remain extreme, and we expect another very challenging day for firefighters and emergency responders. Yesterday the fire rapidly burned north, prompting mandatory and precautionary evacuations for more than a dozen energy camps and facilities. Approximately 8,000 people were safely evacuated. These camps and facilities are at risk; however, no assets have been damaged. Highway 63 has been restricted north of Fort McMurray as the fire advances eastward.

Within the city structural firefighters responded to a fire in the Thickwood neighbourhood and to an explosion in Dickinsfield. The causes of both are still under investigation. Both incidents damaged several homes, but those fires were quickly put out thanks to the structural firefighters ready and on the scene.

Much of the re-entry work has also been delayed due to the continued threat of the fires as well as the extreme air quality conditions. Fort McMurray is not yet safe to return to, but we continue to make every possible effort to keep Albertans safe, to protect their homes and businesses, and to bring them back to their communities as soon as is safely possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Members' Statements

Depression and Suicide

Mr. Connolly: Just over a year ago we were all elected to this Chamber, and we all have different stories as to how we got here. In March of 2015 I had to leave Ottawa, the place I had called home for three years, because I knew that if I was to stay in the situation I was in I would be dead before the end of the semester. I was in a relationship that had become unhealthy, and I felt that my options were either suicide or to come back to Calgary, where I knew I would have the supports that I needed to get through this incredibly tough time. I therefore returned home that same week.

1:40

I tried to get my mind off things by involving myself more heavily in the upcoming election and offered to be the NDP candidate for Calgary-Hawkwood. But failing to deal with my mental health problems sooner, I continued to fall into depressive states during and after the election. I didn't make time for myself, and I simply tried to ignore my issues until they couldn't be ignored. I eventually did get help and have been seeing a psychologist ever since. However, this is only because I'm privileged to have the resources that I have.

According to a 2013 national college health assessment survey of 30,000 students 1 out of every 10 postsecondary students in Canada has seriously considered attempting suicide. In that year 390 admitted to unsuccessfully attempting suicide.

Mr. Speaker, a couple weeks ago a friend showed me the spot where they had once intended to hang themselves. While I was in university, I had many friends who were in continuous battles with suicide and depression. In high school I drove a friend to the hospital when they believed they could no longer carry on.

Reaching out for help can be extremely difficult for someone who is suffering from depression and/or suicidal thoughts. Oftentimes those who are suffering feel that even if they do reach out, no one will care. I would like to sincerely tell all those who may be suffering from depression or suicidal thoughts that people are here

to help you, you are loved, and our world is better because you're in it.

Thank you.

Sexual Assault Victims

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, one of the main reasons that I stand in this Chamber today is because of the duty and responsibility I feel to make Alberta a better place for the next generation. I also think of the responsibility I have to teach my children right from wrong and how to be decent and moral upstanding citizens.

We can and we must do better to change parts of our society that are marginalizing women and allowing for sexual assault and harassment to exist. As I stand here today, there's absolutely no reason for sexual violence to have a place in our society, but the fact is that it persists. As long as sexual assault and harassment continue to be a problem in our society, every woman deserves to know that should they become a victim of sexual assault, they will be believed.

The fact is that only 10 per cent of sexual assaults are reported to police, and that means that there are women that all of us know who carry the burden of having been violated in silence. Those women will never have their day in court, will never see justice for what was done to them. But for the 10 per cent that come forward, I say this: I believe you, and I want to thank you for your bravery.

That is why it is so devastating to learn that these brave people who came forward to police, who are prepared to have their lives scrutinized by the courts, aren't getting to see their day in court because of the lack of justices. These women do not deserve to be further traumatized because the justice system has failed them. The Justice minister needs to be doing everything she can, not just urging the federal government to appoint more justices but also working to remove roadblocks to prioritize these cases, to ensure that the victims of sexual assault have their voices and cases heard.

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

Carbon Levy

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a government with a Premier who has effectively developed a policy which is both socially progressive and fiscally conservative. That Premier won an election when no one thought she could win. Sorry, Premier; I'm not talking about you. I was instead speaking of Premier Christy Clark.

It would seem that our current Premier is a great admirer of Premier Clark as well. One of their flagship pieces of legislation was almost a direct copy of a program which has been in place in British Columbia for years. When I say "almost a direct copy," I mean that B.C. does it better.

Normally when drafting a government policy, you look into similar jurisdictions who have policies you're considering, and you build upon those successes while avoiding the pitfalls. Yet somehow this government has taken effective policy from our western neighbours and made it worse. When B.C. introduced the carbon tax in 2008, they made the tax truly revenue neutral instead of trying to redefine the term. In rolling out the revenue neutral tax, the B.C. government also accounted for a potential unfair impact on low-income British Columbians by introducing a tax credit designed to offset the carbon tax created by these individuals.

The NDP tries to justify their lack of revenue neutrality by repeatedly touting their plan to invest in energy efficiencies. Well, Mr. Speaker, B.C. did that, too. However, instead of taking money away from their constituents to fund their own pet projects, they

introduced a grant which gives local governments and school districts four years to become carbon neutral. If successful, the grant offsets the carbon tax these entities pay, a win-win for everybody.

When the government reviewed the tax, they considered the impact it had on B.C. businesses. Instead, the NDP decided that they needed to be a shining beacon to this world, the success of our backbone of industry be damned.

One of my favourite ads is the famous Gatorade commercial Be Like Mike. Well, Premier, maybe be like Christy. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Cooking Lake Airport

Cortes-Vargas: Mr. Speaker, it's an exciting time for the Cooking Lake Airport in Strathcona county. On June 11 of this year they are celebrating 90 years of service, making it Canada's oldest publicly operated airport.

I wanted to take the opportunity to share a bit about the story of the Cooking Lake Airport. The airport was established by early aviation pioneers in 1926. In the 90 years since its inception the airport has been the site of many interesting firsts in our province: in 1932 the first recorded medevac flight from Fort McMurray; in 1953 the delivery of the first single-engine Otter aircraft to Wardair. In 1959 the airport hosted the first full-length Hollywood picture filmed entirely in Alberta. During World War II the airport served as a temporary U.S. Army air base and contributed to the construction of the Alaska highway and Canol pipeline. It has been the training site for four generations of pilots, longer than any other airport in Canada.

They continuously contribute to our province, and recently, like many of the constituents in Strathcona-Sherwood Park, they looked for ways to utilize their unique skills and assets to respond to the needs of the wildfire evacuees. A student in the aviation services collected donations of basic necessities and then flew them up to Lac La Biche to drop them off.

Today the airport continues to serve Albertans as our sixth-busiest community airport and our newest international airport.

Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize the dedicated volunteers who keep the Cooking Lake Airport in operation. I'm extremely proud to have a piece of aviation history in my constituency.

Thank you.

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

Syrian Refugees in St. Albert

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Who doesn't remember the haunting image of the Syrian child washed up on a Turkish shore? I think we were all horrified and felt compelled to help. The UN estimates that 4 million Syrians are now refugees. Since the conflict began, four years ago, 250,000 children, women, and men have been killed. Since January 2016 2,000 Syrian refugees have arrived in Alberta.

A couple of months ago a group of volunteers in St. Albert chose to join the Edmonton refugee volunteers to help as many government-supported families as possible. The St. Albert group is now connected with 10 families, and one of those is the Elkuraji family. During the first year of the civil war the Elkuraji family lost an 18-year-old son, a brother, a mother, and an infant in two separate bombings. Young Ahmat lost a leg and the use of an arm in the third attack just within hours. The Elkuraji family was able to get to a refugee camp in Turkey, where they stayed until coming

to Canada. Although those three years were difficult, love did bloom, and they now have a stepmother.

The Elkuraji family is a government-assisted refugee family, with supports coming from a federally funded resettlement organization. There are very big differences between private and government sponsorship. When the St. Albert volunteers got involved, the young children in the family had not been enrolled in school nor had Ahmat been assessed for mobility aids. Within a couple of weeks the volunteers got together, fund raised, and he now has a scooter. I think that he's scaring pedestrians all over the place. As of today the family continues to live in housing that is not wheelchair accessible, but I know that surrounded by the love and support of their volunteers and their translators and their new friends doors will open for them all over Alberta and Edmonton.

Thank you very much, and thank you to the Elkuraji family for coming.

1:50

Oil People Helping Oil People

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, layoffs in the oil and gas sector have hit close to home in rural communities across Alberta. Many oil and gas workers and their families in Strathmore-Brooks have lost their jobs and sometimes even their homes, so members of the oil and gas community have banded together to help each other out.

Oil People Helping Oil People is a grassroots organization that started in Brooks and has stepped up to help oil and gas families get through this crisis. OPHOP is helping those in need with some of the most basic necessities such as food cards for the grocery store, fuel cards for the gas station, and assistance with medications for those who have lost their medical coverage. OPHOP is even providing professional guidance on managing paperwork, finances, and taxes and guidance on community services.

Support from sponsors and donors has been exceptional. Businesses like the Dent Clinic, CSC Workwear, the Longhorn Ad Board Company, *Brooks Bulletin*, League Pipeline Services, Mark's Market, the Red Basket, Paramount Mechanical, and so many others have stepped up to the plate to help. These are small, community-based businesses stepping up to look after one another and families in need. To date OPHOP has been able to help 14 families with supports in the Newell region, including the city of Brooks, the town of Bassano, and the villages of Duchess and Rosemary. This is the spirit of rural Alberta, communities and neighbours pulling together in a crisis to help one another out.

Just this past weekend in Strathmore-Brooks events were held to raise funds for other oil people in Fort McMurray. We managed to get 55 six-foot-tall pallets of requested supplies collected, loaded, and trucked to relief agencies in northern Alberta. In just one weekend we raised \$75,000 in cash donations for the people of Fort McMurray. That's Alberta strong, Mr. Speaker. That's oil people helping oil people.

Statement by the Speaker

Rules and Practices of the Assembly

The Speaker: Hon. members, if the Clerk would just hold the clock for a moment, I would like to take this opportunity to just remind all of the members of the House that when the Speaker is standing, other members should be sitting at all times. If they are coming in, please remain stationary while the Speaker is standing.

I also would urge the members again and remind you that the volume and substance of the comments need to be respectful of this Chamber and of each other, and I would ask that you pay particular

attention to those two attributes as we go into the several weeks that we still have ahead.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Fort McMurray and Area Firefighting Resources

Mr. Jean: Last night was another bad day and night for Fort McMurray. Fire consumed multiple structures, and two separate explosions levelled nearby homes. Further north fire destroyed the Blacksand lodge. Eight thousand people who just got back to work at multiple oil sands plants were again ordered out and rejoined thousands of others as evacuees right across this province. This comes a week after international offers of assistance to fight the fire were rejected. Many Albertans are struggling to understand this. They are asking why more hands wouldn't help to fight this fire. Can the Premier please explain why extra help has been turned away?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. First of all, just to clarify with respect to yesterday, there was one explosion and one other fire, that was caused by other causes. Both are under investigation.

In terms of the issue of firefighting resources we can only rely on the advice of the firefighting experts who are working so hard each and every day to control the wildfires throughout the province and especially in Fort McMurray. What they tell us is that at certain points they become limited by the amount of airspace they have and that at certain points the amount of work in advance that can be done in front of the fires also limits what they can do and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: As the size of this fire grows, so, too, does the anxiety felt by my friends, my family, and the residents of Fort McMurray. Two weeks – two weeks – after residents fled a burning city, homes and businesses are still being burned by a fire that rages on. On top of the personal losses, we're told that at least \$1 billion of oil sands production has been lost just from these fires. It means increased uncertainty for evacuees and for our economy, for our jobs. Albertans want to know if more can be done to stop this fire. Can the Premier please explain how she can consider the current level of firefighting resources to be sufficient as Fort McMurray continues to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Notley: Well, to be clear, Mr. Speaker, Fort McMurray itself is not continuing to burn, and no businesses were impacted by what happened last night.

That being said, we have over 1,900 firefighters at work on firefighting in Alberta. We have interprovincial agreements and have the ability to get more firefighters across the country and additional agreements with international firefighters. The requests for new firefighters come on the basis of what those experts say that we need, and they tell us that we have what we need. We can't change the fact that for five years there's been no rain. We can't change the fact that there's a huge amount of very dry fuel. We can't change when the wind comes up. But we can do what we're doing . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, every single business and person from Fort McMurray is being affected by this fire continuing. There are dozens of people whose feelings of relief a week ago upon learning that their homes were untouched by the initial fire now are feeling horror as they learn that fires and explosions last night consumed their homes. It's difficult to provide certainty in disaster situations – we understand that – but residents and business owners of Fort McMurray at least deserve to have the assurance that absolutely everything possible is being done to fight this fire and protect our city and property. Can the Premier please provide even just that small amount of certainty to those . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, the question for the Premier, please.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I absolutely understand the level of anxiety that Fort McMurray residents are feeling around this, including the member opposite. Indeed, we were meeting with the members of the Wood Buffalo council when news of the change in the weather and the growth in the fire pattern came to all of us, and it was very clear to see the impact that it had, the personal impact that it had on residents of Fort McMurray.

There is absolutely nothing that should be done that is not being done. There is no resource that is not being dedicated to this. There is no ask that is not being made that will contribute to fighting this fire. Everything possible is being done, Mr. Speaker, and I would like the people of Fort McMurray . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Fort McMurray Wildfire Damage Control and Recovery

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With explosions going off in Fort McMurray, Albertans are worried about the safety of all first responders working to get Fort McMurray back online. We've seen the photos of firefighters sleeping on lawns, trying to recover from their work. We know that trades are working around the clock to get services back online. If explosions are going off in Fort McMurray, what precautions are being taken to keep trades and first responders safe?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the member for that question. We value intensely the work that is being done by the first responders, not only the original first responders, who were heroic in their efforts to save the city, but those who have been rotated through ever since. We are working with them to ensure that what they do is well supported. They have accommodations. They have food. Their health is being monitored. We have a health care facility up there that's dealing with them, and all the personal protective equipment that they need is there. When the conditions get too intense, we pull them back so they're not at risk. Safety is always number one as they do their work.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, emergency officials at this morning's briefing described the situation in Fort McMurray as, quote, very volatile. We know that embers blowing into the city remain a threat, but currently most of the city remains safe from any direct threats from the fire. With gas restored to 60 per cent of the homes in the city, will the Premier tell Albertans: what exactly are the conditions that are leading to this volatility that might be leading to these explosions?

Ms Notley: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, just to clarify, we're talking about one explosion, not two. As I said previously, this is under investigation, as it should be, because we're not exactly sure what led particularly to the one explosion and the two fires.

The fact of the matter, as members opposite would know, is that there was significant disruption to the services of the city. Ten per cent of the structures were lost. Electricity stopped, water supply stopped, gas supply stopped, and now we're in the process of trying to get it back online while we still have these issues around air quality. That's why we have the level of volatility that officials are describing.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, we know that several businesses in Fort McMurray are being hit hard. Workers are displaced not just across Alberta but all of Canada. Oil sands production has taken a major hit. Those who depend on a vibrant Fort McMurray for their livelihoods need to see local businesses supported. The Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce has recently made a request for emergency bridge financing so that local businesses can survive. Is the Premier considering this request, and if so, when can Fort McMurray expect an announcement?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I mean, we are working on all fronts with respect to this fire. Yesterday we sort of took a step backwards and got back to the whole emergency response phase of things. But in the meantime I've asked the minister of economic development to work closely with our recovery team, that is giving advice to the wildfire task force in cabinet, to look at exactly these issues in terms of what can be done to support small-business and other business owners, quite frankly, in the area, to link up between what they have in insurance and what else they still need and what additional programs we can look at either through our government, the federal government, or through the Red Cross.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
Third main question.

2:00 Justice Services for Sexual Assault Victims

Mr. Jean: No victim of sexual assault should have to feel that the justice system is working against them, but that's what we have here today, a court system where people who bravely came forward to tell their stories of abuse are now unsure if they'll even get a chance to see some justice. It's a pain they shouldn't be suffering, and it runs the risk of seriously allowing criminals who should be put behind bars to walk on the streets free. Yesterday the Justice minister said that she hasn't received a timeline from Ottawa for appointing any new judges. Will the minister please pick up the phone and tell Ottawa that this is simply not acceptable?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Of course, we're incredibly troubled to hear that these cases are not proceeding forward. These incredibly brave women who have come forward to tell their stories are not getting their day in court, and we're very troubled by that. I have been in contact with the federal government over this, and in fact my office was in contact with them yesterday, was in contact with them multiple times before that, and will be in contact with them again today. Hopefully, we will be provided with a timeline today.

Thank you.

Mr. Jean: Still no answer, Mr. Speaker.

Albertans aren't looking for excuses or for politicians to play the blame game. They want answers and solutions, and we want an answer for Albertans. By failing to protect the victims of sexual assault and other serious crimes from being revictimized by a failing system, the government risks creating a chill on other victims coming forward to tell their stories. The federal government is dragging its feet. It's no excuse for the provincial government to do the same, not just in appointing judges but also on the overall review of the system for judicial appointments. Does the minister worry that delaying justice will discourage other victims of sexual assault from coming forward, and what . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for something that may have had a question in there somewhere. You know, obviously, we're deeply concerned about this, and we've taken a number of steps. We've been working with the Crown prosecutors' office to ensure that court case management is proceeding forward, which has done some decreasing of lead times in terms of provincial judges. For provincial judges, that we have the constitutional ability to appoint, we are making those appointments as quickly as possible. In terms of the federal minister I understand that she will be making those appointments in advance of completing her review of the system, and if that is the case, which, hopefully, I may find out later today, then I would thank her for that.

Mr. Jean: Yesterday I mentioned a report from Alberta Justice after a sexual assault victim in Airdrie saw her case tossed out. I hope the minister has had a chance to refresh herself on that. It's called Injecting a Sense of Urgency, and it was released in 2013. Outside of recommendations to provide better resources in our courts, it carves out several steps the province can take to ensure that our justice system is putting the interests of victims of violent crimes first. I will ask the Justice minister again: how many of these recommendations have been fully implemented by this NDP government?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We are familiar with the report he has referred to. It was prepared under the previous government. You know, we have moved forward on a number of those steps. As I've mentioned, we have in fact been working with the Crown prosecution service in terms of court case management. Additionally, we have been looking at the traffic court system, which is primarily what was criticized in that report. I'm not totally sure that all of those criticisms were absolutely accurate, but we're certainly looking at fixing what we can in the interim.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Coal Strategy

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in QP the Energy minister claimed that "we would export metallurgic coal, not thermal coal." What the minister actually said – she was correcting a previous statement – was that what happens to those coal mines and coal exports really is up to the market forces, not government. To the minister: since your incorrect correction of your previously corrected statement now needs another correction, will you just

now answer the question instead? Does coal magically conform to your standards and the emissions magically disappear when it is burned on the other side of the world in a plant with lower emission standards?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: What our plan is going to do is to tackle the emissions from coal. We care not what the source is but what the emissions are, and Minister Phillips' climate change plan will be addressing that.

Mr. McIver: Well, clearly, the minister doesn't care what the emissions are because she's going to let the emissions happen on the other side of the world. Apparently, that doesn't count.

To the Energy minister. Your ministry opposes innovation that would lower emissions at Calgary coal plants even though those coal plants create jobs, and instead you favour higher emissions that cannot be controlled while it's burned in other countries. When we share the air all over the Earth, how does shifting high emissions to a lower standard jurisdiction benefit the environment?

Ms Phillips: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, Old King Cole may have been a merry old soul, but he was rather less jolly when he presented in an emergency room with acute asthma, which is why we are addressing the health effects of burning coal for electricity. In this province we are phasing them out such that by 2030 we will be avoiding a number of health impacts, including, according to Environment Canada, \$2.7 billion in avoided health care costs.

Mr. McIver: In the spirit of nursery rhymes, the emperor minister's answer has no clothes, Mr. Speaker.

Now, the Member for Calgary-South East asked the Energy minister in estimates about coal-fired electricity and said: if we were world leading in emission reduction, could there be a future for this sector in Alberta? To that, the minister answered, "If there is a commercially viable means of making coal zero-emissions, then I don't see why [not]." To the Premier: do you agree with your Energy minister, who says that clean-coal technology is a good idea, or with your environment minister, who won't listen to anybody under any circumstances?

Ms Notley: I believe the question was to me. Let me just say that what I agree with . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Ms Notley: . . . is the climate leadership plan, that our whole caucus supports. It is a great plan. It is a leading plan in Canada. It is a plan that will reduce and eliminate coal emissions in Alberta, which is the kind of thing that should have happened under the previous government decades ago. But I'm very proud on behalf of Albertans that we are moving forward on this issue.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Electricity Prices

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In order to implement their climate leadership plan, the government has announced phase-out of coal-fired generation of electricity. However, wholesale electricity prices have declined steadily over the past several years, and the cost of new generation is substantially higher than what pool prices have been able to produce since 2014. At current and projected price levels the market may not be sustainable, particularly in terms of building new capacity. Higher cost generating plants may not be economically viable, and

substantial subsidies may be required. To the Minister of Energy: how much more will Albertans have to pay for electricity in order to build out this new infrastructure?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, we are phasing out coal-fired electricity, in the first instance according to the federal regulations established by the Stephen Harper government and after 2030 according to a schedule for those plants that is currently under discussion by the coal negotiator. In the first instance what is guiding our deliberations on this as well, when we designed the renewable energy competitive procurement, is stability for ratepayers, no unnecessary . . .

Some Hon. Members: Time.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Excuse me, hon. members. I will take care of the time.

Dr. Swann: Given that under the current system the government cannot guarantee power pricing and given that almost all experts, including the government's own experts, believe that the cost of power is going to go up, can we ask the Minister of Economic Development and Trade how he expects industry, particularly heavy industry like manufacturing, to invest in Alberta given the uncertainty around one of their primary expenses?

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you for the question. You know, this is part of the climate leadership plan, that indeed we are phasing out the post-2030 plants, and we are in the midst of a negotiated process for that. We are equally in the midst of designing the renewable energy procurement policies that will phase in renewable energy as coal phases out. Of course, we are in the midst of that via the Electric System Operator. In addition, there have been some budgetary pieces for community energy systems and other investments in renewables.

2:10

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Second supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister. Well, given that Alberta has an energy-only market where prices are determined in real time and given that in an energy-only market potential investors need to see high prices for sustained periods before investing hundreds of millions of dollars and given the uncertainty of energy prices in energy-only markets, is the government considering alternatives: long-term, fixed-price contracts or re-regulating the market?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, as we negotiate the post-2030 phase-out, we are also designing the renewable energy procurement process, and within that there are many different competitive options for how we might phase in those renewables, which are under active consideration by the Electric System Operator. I do note that there were about 120, 130 submissions, many, many investors very interested in the new markets. There's a tremendous amount of positive energy around Alberta's renewable energy procurement, and we're very pleased.

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

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents in Edmonton-Ellerslie know our government's budget invests in stabilizing and maintaining the services Albertans depend on rather than making reckless cuts that will only make things worse for Alberta's most vulnerable. Given our government's commitment to supporting the safety, dignity, and well-being of persons with disabilities, to the Minister of Human Services: how has our government invested in the assured income for the severely handicapped program in Budget 2016?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our government believes that all Albertans should be able to live in a stable home and be able to put food on the table. That's why, despite challenging economic times, Budget 2016 maintains AISH benefit levels, with a targeted funding increase of \$28.3 million. Families receiving AISH may also be eligible for the Alberta child benefit, for which a single parent of two children can receive a maximum of \$1,650.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that I've had several constituents who are AISH recipients connect with me about the program and given that I've heard concerns from some of them about the ability of AISH workers to manage growing caseloads, again to the Minister of Human Services: what is our government doing in order to make caseworkers more accessible to those that depend on AISH?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. In tough economic times like these even more people need supports. That's why we have increased the funding to AISH to accommodate increased demand. The AISH caseload increase is upwards of 1,500 clients per year, and our government has invested an additional \$28.3 million to address the growing caseload and increase in cost per case.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given that AISH recipients depend on this funding to pay for their housing, food, and other basic needs, what is being done to better streamline services so AISH recipients receive the supports they need when they need them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Overall, there are 54,000 adults with disabilities receiving supports from the AISH program, and our government is committed to ensuring that these Albertans receive the support they need. AISH application wait times have been reduced through improved and centralized processes in the AISH program. In addition, AISH applicants can seek short-term assistance through Alberta Works income support programs. I will continue to work with my officials to find ways to further reduce the wait times for Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Farm and Ranch Worker Regulation Consultation

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had several serious inquiries concerning the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act and those round-tables. In estimates on April 21 we were informed that the announcement of the specific membership of the tables would be a few weeks away due to the volume of applicants. To the minister. We are now nearly a month away from those estimates. Can you please tell us when you're releasing this important information to the stakeholders?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. You know, we're still working with groups, including the ag coalition, making the opportunity to make sure we have the best possible people to populate these techno working groups. It's important for our producers, important for Albertans, important for the workers. To answer the member's question, we're very close, and I'd ask him to stay tuned.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that this process has been anything but open and transparent and given that the farmers and ranchers continue to feel excluded from the process, can the minister at least tell us how many actual farmer and rancher positions, labour groups, and individual producers are included in the 72 available seats?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It's important that all groups are represented in this. Farmers, ranchers, workers, health and safety, labour experts are all well represented. I'm quite happy with the work that we've done to this point to make sure that they are represented, and I'm looking forward to getting onward with the process and starting this process.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that this legislation has been surrounded by secrecy from the start and given that there is still plenty of suspicion, confusion, and anger around this government's intentions for family farms and ranches, will the minister take this opportunity to be forthright, honest, and guarantee that the round-table makeup will be announced before the end of this session?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Good question. You know, we're so close. We're really close – right? – to be able to get this together. We have the representative. We know that going forward these recommendations will help government shape the policies and shape the regulations, looking for the input from all of these groups, knowing that it will be a benefit not only for workers but for the farmers and ranchers themselves.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

PDD Service Wait Times

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to the Minister of Human Services there are 413 people currently on the PDD service wait-list. We have however heard from the government's own individual supports program who tracks the population on the wait list that this number isn't entirely accurate and that the actual size of the wait-list in Calgary alone is over 500. To the Minister of Human Services: where did your numbers come from, and what is the actual total number of people on the wait-list for PDD services in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For these numbers and advice I do rely on my officials, and I will stand by my statement that according to my officials the wait-list is 413 people. That's the correct number.

Ms Jansen: Well, I guess the people who actually do the work must be wrong.

Given that last week I asked the Minister of Human Services what supports were available to the individuals in the families on these wait-lists and given that the minister's answer provided no clarity and no reassurance to the families who were waiting for services, again to the Minister of Human Services. People are stressed and worried and they're waiting for answers. What is the plan to reduce the size of the wait-lists that you presented to Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. A couple of questions. One: what supports are available? People who are waiting for services can access income support programs. Second thing, we have centralized that process, and we are working with our officials. We've added more funds, reversed the cuts from the previous government to create capacity to deal with these issues. So we are working with our partners. We are working with our officials to make sure that Albertans who need the support get it in a timely manner.

Thank you.

2:20

Ms Jansen: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're certainly hearing from PDD families that things were better under the previous government, so nice try.

Given that the minister promised a one-stop integrated service delivery approach for Human Services and given in the same estimates the minister stated that there were no measurable outcomes, deliverables, or even a commitment that this plan would appear in the next business plan, to the Minister of Human Services. No plan, no outcomes, no commitment to even act. How does this minister actually plan to improve service delivery for PDD in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. As a government we are committed to making sure that Albertans get the support they need in an appropriate and timely manner. Integrating services towards a more centralized, integrated model is a work-in-progress. Once it's completed, Albertans will have access to services like one-stop shop services

through Alberta Supports centre and other avenues. We are working on it, and we will report on the progress.

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

Pipeline Development

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rhetoric of the NDP government regarding pipelines is becoming very tired. Let there be no doubt that principled conservatives in this country have long been in favour of pipelines in every direction. This is in sharp contrast to the conflicting views of the Leapers and the sitting MLAs in the NDP caucus who have in fact protested against pipelines. Keystone phase 1, Alberta Clipper, Kinder Morgan anchor loop, and Enbridge's line 9 reversal were all completed under the previous federal government. Will the Minister of Energy acknowledge that her partisan and out-of-touch talking points on this issue are just plain wrong?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question, I think. Our government weekly and daily is committed to pipelines. We work with energy companies. We work with the builders. We work with the shippers. Our commitment has been to be collaborative partners in making sure that the process is respected and that we can do it all in a timely fashion.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Perhaps it's time for a little bit of self-reflection. Given that the Member for Calgary-East was busy protesting less than five years ago against Keystone XL, holding a sign saying "no more dirty oil" and given that the minister of environment put her wordsmithing to use by cowriting a handbook entitled *An Action a Day: Keeps Global Capitalism Away* and given that when the going got tough, the current economic downturn, the jobs minister took a trip to B.C. to campaign for an environmental extremist NDP candidate, which of these actions would the NDP government like to choose to demonstrate their stellar track record on pipelines?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you. Again, we work constantly with our industry partners. They are very happy with our approach. They recognize that the approach of previous governments did not work. They like being partners with us. And they agree totally with the way we are managing this project to get a pipeline to tidewater in a timely fashion.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that I along with my caucus was pleasantly surprised to see that the NDP members of this Chamber voted in support yesterday of the Wildrose motion which voices support for urging the federal government to remove a proposed tanker ban on B.C.'s north coast. Up until last night the NDP government has been mum on this issue, refusing to publicly voice opposition to proposed tanker bans by the Trudeau government. So I will keep this simple. Will the Energy minister publicly state right here right now that the federal government must not place a tanker ban on the B.C. coast since it would kill the Northern Gateway pipeline?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I will publicly state is that the energy companies I work with like our plan. They are frankly confused about why you don't like pipelines and why you want to see us fail. They want you to be . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please try to keep down the volume of hitting the desks. I've asked before about that. I'd ask you to do it again.

I think it's the Member for Airdrie.

Airdrie's Sierra Springs Commercial Area Access

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is the member for Airdrie.

Last month Airdrie city council approved a recommendation from ISL engineering, an independent consulting firm, to pursue a left-hand turn lane for the Yankee Valley Boulevard and Sierra Springs corner, the Boston Pizza corner. This has been a high-risk intersection for years, and ISL has now provided independent confirmation that this left-turn lane is the best way to improve traffic safety and flow. To the Minister of Transportation. Your department has been against this proposal in the past. Where do you stand on this matter now?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the hon. member to provide me with that report. I will review it and give her an answer.

Mrs. Pitt: I have, but I will again.

Mr. Speaker, given that this is a matter of transportation safety and that the consultation firm stated on the record that, quote, improvements at Sierra Springs would provide the best overall benefit for the city of Airdrie – end quote – and given that these recommendations have been unanimously accepted by the local city council as being the best way to mitigate risk and keep Airdrie residents safe, will you commit to working with your department, when I provide the report again, to respect the safety of Albertans and the autonomy of our local government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker. I remind the hon. member that it is also a provincial highway, so the provincial government and the Department of Transportation also have a say. Having said that, I respect the work that's been done by the local council, and I will be happy to review this matter again and get back to the member.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this simple change is something that has long been needed in our community – it's truly an annoying corner – that would improve traffic flows as well as the safety of Airdrie residents and given that costs would be covered by the city, please, please, please, Mr. Minister, can you give us a timeline for this?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the timeline is this: when I review the report, talk to my department, and make some sort of decision about what the timeline is, then I'll provide the timeline to the member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Emergency Management Planning

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Environmental issues are front and centre with many governments and their citizens all over the world. Even in this House we have members who want to implement environmental policy at all costs, any cost, even if it hurts Albertans. On the other hand, we have members in this House who believe that we as humans have no impact at all when it comes to the environment. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how, specifically, is your government preparing for future disasters in Alberta given the increase in extreme weather conditions we have seen over the past few years?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Certainly, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency works closely with the municipal emergency management experts to ensure that they have plans in place to give them the support they need to have those plans in place in terms of responding to a disaster. We also continue to work with the federal government in terms of talking about how we can all respond together as a country in terms of how we deal with the continued increase in challenges we're faced with. I look forward to ongoing communications with them and coming up with some solutions in co-operation with one another.

Mr. Fraser: Given that during the 2013 floods in southern Alberta many people experienced tremendous losses: loss of life, precious personal items, and vital documents – as the associate minister in High River I saw first-hand this crisis Albertans were faced with, and it was heartbreaking – to the same minister: is there any work being done on my recommendation in developing a system where Albertans, especially those living in disaster-prone areas, have the ability to preregister for the disaster recovery program?

The Speaker: The minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that I'm not familiar with that recommendation. One of the things that we are doing is looking at across the province where there are areas of high risk and how we can work together to reduce that risk. Some of that work is being done in terms of the mitigation work that my colleague in Infrastructure is leading, working together with Environment and Parks. Certainly, we're happy to work with Albertans to reduce their risk if we are faced with a disaster in the future.

2:30

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence, I want to be clear. Our caucus fully stands with this minister, the Premier, and their government to support all of the efforts in Fort McMurray. But, Minister, tell this House, tell Albertans that you have read the recommendations from the most recent disasters and that you are giving the latitude to the Alberta Emergency Management Agency to act on those recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that I think the Alberta Emergency Management Agency team that I have is incredibly amazing, and I have great faith in them to continue to move forward in terms of ensuring the prevention but also the response to disasters as they happen. You know, I will continue to support them and encourage them and ensure that they have the

support they need to be able to do that work freely and without my micromanaging that experience.

Short-term Personal Loans

Mrs. Schreiner: Mr. Speaker, I have heard from constituents who shared with me stories of taking out a payday loan to help cover their family in an emergency only to have to go back and take out another loan just to pay back their first. This creates a further crisis for these folks. People who are living in poverty want to get out, but it can be difficult. To the Minister of Service Alberta: what is the minister doing to ensure that people who may need temporary financial assistance are not being unfairly punished?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We heard loud and clear from Albertans last fall to take action on exploitive payday loans. They asked us to bring in fair rules so that vulnerable Albertans don't get trapped in vicious cycles of debt. We took action last week by bringing forward legislation that brings in the lowest cost of borrowing in the country, requiring instalment payments and longer payback periods as well as financial literacy. Alberta municipalities, local business revitalization zones, and community and poverty-reduction groups all support these changes, and Alberta's credit unions have committed to launching alternative products.

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

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many of these same people have told me that they only turned to payday lenders because they had no alternative, again to the same minister: is the minister going to be working with stakeholders to ensure that Albertans have access to the socially responsible loan products that they may need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Albertans do need access to short-term, small-dollar loans that won't exploit or gouge them when they have unexpected expenses. We've been working with Alberta's credit unions, ATB, community groups, and others to put in strong and fair alternatives. First Calgary Financial and Momentum are leading with their cash crunch loan, which is a microloan product, and it's exciting that Servus Credit Union will offer short-term loans at significantly lower rates than traditional payday lenders. Our government is committed to promoting these and other alternatives that are fair and sustainable.

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

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, given that we all know the importance of accurate and up-to-date data if we want to develop the best possible additional strategies to educate and protect Albertans from financial crisis, again to the Minister of Service Alberta: what is the minister doing to ensure that the ministry and stakeholders have access to the information that they need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Accurate data is critical, as mentioned, so that we can make decisions based upon evidence. That's why part of this legislation, An Act to End Predatory Lending, will require companies to report data on loans, which will provide us with a clear state of the market. Based upon that, if we need to go even further to protect Albertans, we will act. We want Albertans to have access to fair, short-term loans when they need them.

Government Policies

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, the NDP's hard-line agenda has made an already bad situation worse for our small and mid-sized oil companies. One of the job-killing policies is the looming carbon tax, which will drive taxes on gas and diesel from 13 cents a litre to 21 cents a litre in less than two years. The NDP did a special side deal for certain big energy companies but showed no such consultation and concern for the small and mid-sized companies like those in Strathmore-Brooks. Will the Minister of Energy show fairness and help our small oil companies by exempting them from their punishing carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the climate leadership plan that we released in November of 2015 outlined a number of different ways in which our energy-intensive and trade-exposed industries will be kept competitive going forward; for example, the on-site natural gas exemption until 2023 and a series of performance standards which will be phased in to phase out the existing specified gas emitters regulation.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Bluster and BS from the government, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bilous: Point of order.

Mr. Fildebrandt: The NDP finally did right on pipelines but only after they were put in a corner and shamed by the Official Opposition. The Wildrose Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky's motion yesterday calling for a stop to the proposed tanker ban on the B.C. coast was passed unanimously in this House but only after the opposition once again shamed the government into going on the record with a vote. They cringed while doing it. Will the Minister of Energy come out and enthusiastically endorse no tanker bans on the B.C. coast and fight the federal NDP's attack on Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and for the question. I'm in touch biweekly with my federal minister, asking for clarity on the tanker ban. There is no tanker ban yet. It is a moratorium, and we are constantly trying to seek clarity on that.

Mrs. Pitt: Do your job.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Excuse me. I'm doing it right now.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Could I warn the hon. Member for Airdrie. I requested volume control at the beginning of the session. I would ask that you remind yourself of that.

Could you finish the answer, please?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Yeah. It's become apparent recently that the opposition cares more about seeing us fail than actually getting pipelines to tidewater. [interjections]

Mr. Fildebrandt: I would request the same level of order when members of the opposition speak, Mr. Speaker.

Laid off oil and gas workers . . .

The Speaker: Pardon me? I didn't hear your point. Could you please be seated? The point you made was – what? I didn't hear it.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I would request that order be restored equally when members of the opposition speak as when the government, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, the tone of your voice makes me concerned that you are raising the fairness of the Speaker into question, and I would ask that you contain your comments with respect to that. Do you hear me?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker, that laid-off oil and gas workers are suffering, that the federal employment insurance program is designed to support other parts of the country and is ill-fitted for the workers of Alberta and that for many EI is about to run out even though most Albertans pay far more into the system than they will ever take out, groups like Oil People Helping Oil People in Brooks are stepping up to help, but they can't do it alone. One-off EI tinkering to the status quo will not do the trick. Will the Premier stand up for Alberta and demand an EI program that will work for Albertans?

The Speaker: The deputy House leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quite frankly, our Premier has been very effective in communicating with the Prime Minister to ensure that Alberta and Edmonton get the same benefits that are extended across the country. To the member's point, our budget is the Alberta jobs plan, which is investing millions of dollars in Alberta companies, in small businesses, in much-needed infrastructure. Quite frankly, that party over there would cut billions of dollars out of much-needed infrastructure, which would cause an exacerbation of layoffs of nurses, teachers, and you name it. That is not the solution. Our government is moving forward with a robust jobs plan.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Beef Marketing

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we saw recently, there's an appetite for certification of beef raised and processed in Alberta to clearly define that it is humanely treated at all stages of life. While I know that it's being done here in Alberta, we need to make it known to the whole world that Alberta beef is not only the best but it abides by the highest standards of humane treatment of livestock. To the minister of ag: what is your government doing to introduce a certification program that will be recognized in all markets?

2:40

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Nobody produces better beef than Alberta. Alberta beef has a well-deserved reputation. It's delicious, healthy, and is sourced from second-to-none ranchers and producers. Our beef industry has already taken the lead in helping set benchmarks for sustainable beef, which include animal health and welfare. For example, McDonald's Restaurants has worked with Alberta to determine and establish sustainable protocols for beef. Their verified sustainable beef pilot project, on which a report will be due this June – I'm looking forward to finding out . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the term "certified humane" is a registered trademark created in the United States for marketing purposes and given that Alberta could create and uphold a certification which more accurately reflects the quality of meat for consumers since the meat is not only tested for antibiotics, hormones, BSE but also has traceability throughout its life cycle, which is not the case in the U.S., to the minister: what areas of standardization can we expect to see in an Alberta certification program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We support and fund the Canadian round-table for sustainable beef with our industry partners. It's an industry-led initiative to determine best practices and supply-chain reporting. This is second to none. It has allowed the industry to market right around the world. Both myself and the Minister of Economic Development and Trade are expanding those markets right around the world. We all know, everyone in this Chamber and in Alberta, that Alberta producers have the best beef. We need to have that message go out loud and clear.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta beef producers' livelihoods depend on Alberta beef being marketable as certified and given that these producers are the experts in defining what is needed to certify the most humane and best-tasting beef, to the minister: how are you working with the beef industry to decide what this certification will include and what the timeline will be for this to be introduced?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Canadians know that when they eat Alberta beef, they're getting the absolute best. We as a government and myself as the minister will continue to partner with industry, continue to work with industry to maintain those high standards. Going forward, it is about marketing. It's about maintaining those markets right around the world, and we're doing our best, working with industry as they are the leaders, and will continue to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Indigenous Peoples' Economic Development

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our collective future is brighter when all Albertans are able to participate and help grow Alberta's economy. However, many indigenous people face barriers

which prevent them from participating in the labour force. To the Minister of Indigenous Relations: what is the minister doing to address and improve the economic participation of indigenous people?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. My ministry collaborates with indigenous communities, industry, other Alberta ministries, and the government of Canada to provide funding for community-driven indigenous projects that improve economic participation. In 2015-16 we provided approximately 100 grants through the aboriginal economic partnership program, the employment partnership program, and the aboriginal business investment fund. These services help to create and enhance opportunities for indigenous people to participate in the Alberta economy. They enhance economic development within communities, support job training, and employ . . .

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

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to hear about the supports available for indigenous people. I'm also interested in what the ministry is specifically doing at the community level for First Nations. Given the economic challenges faced by many First Nations communities, to the same minister: what are you doing to support and enhance the economic development of First Nations communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The aboriginal business investment fund is the only provincial funded capital investment fund in Canada specifically meant for indigenous community business owners. The whole community benefits when these businesses have the capital and the opportunity to flourish. The aboriginal business investment fund helped support several notable projects this year; for example, a \$750,000 grant for the O'Chiese First Nations market, which placed an 11,000-square-foot grocery store in the community. We also had a \$250,000 grant to Bigstone Cree to . . .

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

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the update. It is encouraging to hear more about this fund and some of the great projects where our government is supporting our First Nations.

Again to the Minister of Indigenous Relations: what kind of collaboration is occurring between your ministry, other Alberta ministries, and the federal government to co-ordinate grant delivery and enhancement of economic developments?

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. There are a significant number of grants and services provided by the Alberta government. My ministry works with other government of Alberta departments to share information and best practices and to increase awareness of supports for economic development. We link indigenous communities to other departments like Culture and Tourism and Economic Development and Trade. My government is also collaborating with Canada's lands and economic development advisory committee to explore opportunities to strengthen relationships between government levels

and to improve the training and capacity of First Nations economic development officers. Providing new training opportunities for their officers will equip nations with . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. members, unanimous consent has been requested to introduce some visitors who have arrived late.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

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

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the members of the House for the indulgence. It is definitely my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 40 students from the ESL Dickinsfield Amity House, located in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Decore. They're joined here today by their very proud instructors, Louisa Bruinsma and Frieda Maaskant. These are the students behind a unique book project, *And War Shall Be No More*, which is a collection of stories about their experiences with war in their home countries, that I had the pleasure of speaking about in this House last month. I'd now like to ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, in 15 seconds I will recognize the minister.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 18

An Act to Ensure Independent Environmental Monitoring

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and request leave to introduce Bill 18, An Act to Ensure Independent Environmental Monitoring.

In April I announced a plan to put in place a stronger, more accountable environmental monitoring system that will ensure rigorous scientific oversight and will regularly report to Albertans on the condition of their environment. This plan also ensures that environmental monitoring is brought back into the department as a core function of government as it relates to the health and safety of Albertans. Bill 18 is an important step in that plan.

The bill will establish a system that will ensure the scientific integrity of the province's monitoring data. It does this by outlining specific legislative duties of the chief scientist and by establishing a science advisory panel to provide advice as well as assessment of the scientific integrity of the overall environmental program.

It also mandates the minister to establish another panel to advise the chief scientist on how to incorporate traditional ecological knowledge into the environmental science program. This will be the indigenous wisdom advisory panel.

Bill 18 also includes a number of transitional provisions that are necessary to move the front-line staff from the Alberta Environmental Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Agency back to government as soon as possible and with as little disruption as possible.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, Bill 18 will ensure that we quickly move forward on the return of the core government responsibility of environmental monitoring so that we can ensure that we are building a focused, efficient system that is fully accountable to Albertans.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: I understand you might have a tabling, Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and table the requisite number of copies of written responses to questions from my Health estimates just late last week.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite copies of pages 244 and 245 of the transcript from the Resource Stewardship Committee, which are from the Energy estimates which took place on May 9, 2016. On page 244 the Minister of Energy initially states that Alberta will only be exporting metallurgical coal. On page 245 she corrects herself and states:

Sorry. Before you ask a question, there is one correction I need to make regarding the coal. The climate plan is about ending coal emissions by 2030, but what happens to those coal mines and the coal exports really is . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, you're tabling the document. Is that right?

Mr. Gotfried: Yes. That's correct, sir.

I'm also tabling the requisite copies of page 919 from *Alberta Hansard* from question period yesterday, where the minister stated: "I want to confirm that you're incorrect on the thermal coal. During my estimates I said that we would export metallurgic coal, not thermal coal." This is a direct contradiction to what the minister actually said, and perhaps she would like to . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, table the report.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Acting Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Schmidt, Minister of Advanced Education, response to a question raised on May 11, 2016, Ministry of Advanced Education 2016-17 main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Sigurdson, Minister of Seniors and Housing, responses to questions raised by Mr. Gotfried, hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and Mrs. Pitt, hon. Member for Airdrie, on May 10, 2016, Ministry of Seniors and Housing 2016-17 main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Minister Miranda, Minister of Culture and Tourism, responses to questions raised on May 11, 2016, Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2016-17 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: On a point of order, the Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under 23(h), (i), and (j): (h) is "makes allegations against another Member"; (i) is "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member"; and (j) is "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder."

Mr. Speaker, in very short order I believe you will see that in his first supplemental the Member for Strathmore-Brooks in his preamble, when engaging with the Minister of Energy, actually stated that her response was, and I quote, BS.

I will quote from numerous rulings in the past, Mr. Speaker, that this has been ruled unparliamentary language. Rulings on December 11, 1990, Acting Deputy Speaker Jonson; on June 5, 1990, Deputy Speaker Schumacher; May 22, 1987, Deputy Speaker Gogo; and on May 21, 1987, Deputy Speaker Gogo had ruled that completely unparliamentary. I'll also draw your attention to *Beauchesne's* parliamentary practice. On page 149 "B.S." in *Debates* from 1978-79 was ruled as unparliamentary language.

Mr. Speaker, it's not just unparliamentary. That kind of language in this Chamber is offensive, is disrespectful, is unbecoming of a member of this Assembly representing the over 4 million Albertans that reside in our province. The member should be ashamed to be using that type of language, which is offensive. I will remind the House that there are many school groups that are often in this Chamber witnessing question period and others that are watching this live streamed. It not only is offensive to members in this Chamber but to Albertans and, quite frankly, is unbecoming of a member of this House.

So I would ask that the Opposition House Leader and the member apologize to the minister for using that language against her, to yourself, Mr. Speaker, and to the House and withdraw his comments.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the point of order today. From time to time members inside the Chamber say things that they ought not to. I think we saw an example of that yesterday when there were accusations made towards this side of the House.

Typically speaking, the most appropriate path forward when that happens is for the member to rise, apologize for their comments, and withdraw them, and I am more than pleased to do that on behalf of the Member for Strathmore-Brooks. I hope that in the future the Minister of Justice will also be happy to withdraw statements that ought not to be made.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 13

Veterinary Profession Amendment Act, 2016

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured to rise and speak to Bill 13, the Veterinary Profession Amendment Act, 2016.

My ministry is responsible for legislation that governs the practice of various professions through their respective professional regulatory organizations. The government grants authority to these

organizations to regulate their professions and ensure that their members carry out their practice according to professional standards in order to protect the public interest. The Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, or ABVMA, governs both veterinarians and veterinary technologists in accordance with the Veterinary Profession Act.

If passed, this bill will enable veterinary technologists in Alberta to be represented in ABVMA's governance. These changes mean that technologists can participate and vote in the association's governing council, practice review board, and disciplinary committees, and as full voting members they will have a voice in governance decisions which may affect them professionally. This is important because ABVMA is responsible for setting and enforcing the rules around the practice of veterinary medicine in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed changes will provide greater public protection by ensuring that the highest professional standards are followed by all technologists. There are approximately 1,500 practising veterinarians in Alberta and the same number of practising veterinary technologists.

One other point I'd like to make about this legislation. If this bill is passed, it also has the potential to increase the number of women sitting on ABVMA's governing boards and committees. Since 98 per cent of veterinary technologists in Alberta are female, this change could mean that more women are given a voice in the governance and practice of this profession.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to note that Bill 13 will not change the scope of practice for veterinary medicine nor the qualifications required to be a technologist. The purpose of this bill is to allow veterinary technologists to participate in the governance of the ABVMA with full voting rights. By enhancing accountability for technologists, Albertans can be confident that their animals are receiving the best care possible.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all of my colleagues in the Legislature to support this bill. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, are you moving second reading?

Ms Gray: Yes. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak? The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 13, the Veterinary Profession Amendment Act, 2016. I don't think there's a single member here who doesn't recognize and appreciate the importance of the veterinary profession. Albertans across the province look to veterinarians for the health and well-being of their animals. In many cases that involves looking after the health and well-being of household pets, but in other cases, including in large parts of my constituency, Albertans work with and depend on animals for their livelihoods. For them, good veterinarians and veterinarian technologists are a must-have.

3:00

Now, veterinarians and veterinarian technologists are both under the jurisdiction of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, but I think we can all agree that giving adequate representation to both on the ABVMA body makes sense. We owe a lot to those who work in the veterinary field. If we are going to insist that their profession be one of those where governance comes back to Alberta Labour, we should ensure they're treated fairly.

I appreciate what the bill seeks to do, which is to ensure adequate representation of veterinary technologists on professional boards, and I was glad to hear that this provides more opportunity for females to be able to be represented on this board as well. If veterinary technologists are to be governed by the same act and the

same professional organizational body as veterinarians, it only makes sense that the act is applied properly to them. I appreciate that the Minister of Labour is seeking to achieve this here.

That said, my caucus colleagues and I are reaching out to stakeholders in the veterinary profession for feedback to better inform our opinion here. We want to make sure that there aren't adverse regulatory problems being created or problems that aren't being addressed in this act. There is, rather regrettably, a certain skepticism that accompanies the current government's legislative initiatives.

My colleagues and I over the past year have seen this government put forward bills that are done with little to no consultation. For instance, look at Bill 6 and the massive oversight that occurred in consulting Alberta's farming and ranching community.

We saw this with Bill 1. To this day I don't know what the government hoped to achieve with it given that barely anyone has stood up to defend it thus far, and I don't think the government knows either. To this day it languishes on the Order Paper. To this day the current government has failed to make the case as to why that legislation is needed at all. Not a single policy expert or business group or anyone, really, has stepped forward to say that Bill 1 as proposed fills some sort of gap. Its necessity is still in question.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you're dealing with a different bill in Bill 1. Please get to the subject matter.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I will. I'll tell you why I'm saying that . . .

The Speaker: I know. I heard it. That's why I'm saying: get to the bill.

Mr. Hunter: Then there's Bill 4. Despite being delivered under the guise of implementing a Supreme Court decision, that line itself went above and beyond that. It is for reasons like these that there is a certain skepticism about other legislative initiatives taken up by this government.

We wouldn't be an effective opposition if we took things at face value, of course. But with this government – and this is certainly not the sole fault of this minister, in particular – we do have to be particularly attentive to the details. My colleagues and I are reaching out to veterinarians and veterinarian technicians in our constituencies. To date there aren't any really significant concerns, but we do want to do our due diligence on this file given the importance of what veterinarians do. As the Official Opposition we at least owe this much to Albertans.

The government's own figures show some 1,500 veterinarians in the province and approximately 1,500 veterinarian technicians. That's not an insignificant number who will be impacted by this legislation. Under this legislation veterinarian technologists not following the instructions of the registered veterinarian supervising them or practising veterinary medicine that the technologist is not authorized to practise are deemed: "conduct that harms the integrity of the profession." That seems like a common-sense, straight-forward measure, Mr. Speaker.

Furthermore, technologists cannot imply that they are veterinarians. After all, the Veterinary Profession Act already does not allow anyone except a registered veterinarian or permit holder to imply that they are veterinarians. It also does not allow a registered veterinarian or permit holder to imply that they are a specialist without actually being approved as a specialist in the field of veterinary medicine. So extending the spirit and letter of the law to technologists is a common-sense measure. In many ways it's also a consumer protection measure for those who rely on the services of those in the veterinary profession.

Given that the aim of this prospective legislation is to bring veterinarian technologists into the fold of the same professional governance as veterinarians, all of what's included here involves technical updates. Where the governance body already could make decisions on the registration of students and required qualifications for veterinarians, they can now do so for technologists as well. Just as they could revoke licences of veterinarians, they can now do so for technologists as well. These seem to be professional house-keeping measures, and I support that, Mr. Speaker.

Under the existing law, as it stands on the books today, the council of the self-governing professional body consists of a minimum of seven veterinarians elected by registered veterinarians for a length of time as determined according to their bylaws. Under the proposed legislation that number is moved down to six, and two technologists are added. That is not unreasonable.

Under the proposed legislation both veterinarians and technologists can now be appointed to both hearing tribunals and complaint review committees. This is a fair measure given that these are the tribunals and committees now responsible for veterinarian technologists as well.

There are also some changes to the membership of the practice review board, which makes determination of one's academic qualifications and experiential qualifications and makes decisions on whether they should be allowed to practise veterinary medicine. If they are able to make such consequential decisions about veterinarian technologists, it only makes sense that veterinarian technologists are represented. These are issues of professional representation. These are issues that seem to be addressed directly in this legislation without any apparent intent to move outside of those boundaries.

We support the intent of this bill. Frankly, in many regards it does seem like a rather straightforward piece of legislation, one that addresses a professional matter at the technical level, but we are going to continue our outreach to stakeholders on this file and reserve final judgment until we do so. We want to ensure that the government has done their due diligence and that there are no unintended consequences of this legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to rise in support of this bill today, and I urge all members to support this bill as well. This bill at its core allows veterinary technicians to be represented by the Veterinary Medical Association. In particular, it gives them representation on their governance council, the practice review boards, and their disciplinary committees, rulings all of which could impact the work of a veterinary technician. No major changes in the scope of practice or the qualifications of either veterinarians or veterinary technologists – I have a feeling I'm going to get tongue tied more than once – are a result of this bill.

Now, one thing I am very proud that this bill has the potential to do is to increase the representation of women in governance. That's because 98 per cent of technologists are female. As a result of that, there is the strong potential for more women to serve on these boards, on the governance council, the practice review boards, et cetera. At present I note that only 14.5 per cent of board members in Alberta are women, and that is a statistic that I believe all members and indeed all Albertans should be striving very hard to improve.

Now, I also note that this bill is supported by both the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association and the Alberta Association of Animal Health Technologists. Indeed, I am informed that this bill

was spearheaded by the ABVMA with member support, an indication that all members should get behind this bill.

Finally, I am excited to note that this bill should improve accountability and consumer protection for all Albertans. I was talking to somebody about this bill earlier, and the first place their mind went to was their family dog and the care that they receive, but I note that both vets and veterinary technicians are also heavily involved in the livestock industry. This is certainly something that all parties in this House have expressed strong support for, especially in light of a certain company's recent decisions. I strongly believe that accountability for this industry is something that we should all support as well.

I urge all members to support this bill. Thank you.

3:10

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

Mr. Strankman: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to question the member. I believe that he made some comment in regard to the potential input from technicians in this bill. That's a concern that I have because they are not members of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association. Even though they will be and could be included in this legislation, I was wondering how he feels they would then be represented. Even though the legislation encompasses them, they are not allowed to be on the Veterinary Medical Association board, so I was wondering how they would have a representative voice on that board.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is certainly an important concern. I do note once again that the Alberta Association of Animal Health Technologists supports this bill. Further, there is certainly room for a change to the veterinary act to expand on that. However, I believe that with their support, we can certainly move towards a more inclusive set of boards and councils in this regard.

The Speaker: Other questions under 29(2)(a)?

I recognize the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As members of the Assembly might suspect, I have an interest in this particular bill. I'd like to thank the Minister of Labour for bringing this forward, and I am rising in wholehearted support of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I am still a somewhat delinquent member in my attendance of the Border City Rotary Club. One of the principles of Rotary Club is that we have representation from a wide range of professions through which the members in our club get to know about professions. When issues arise, quite often we turn to those professionals and ask them for some insight into this. I'll give an example. A few years ago there was an issue where a chiropractic adjustment had resulted in a patient suffering a very serious complication, so we turned to the chiropractors within our club to get some further information about that specific incident. In some ways I feel that today we're doing something a little bit similar, or at least I would ask the hon. members, my colleagues here in the Assembly, to allow me to provide some insight and some context into this piece of legislation from the point of view of a veterinarian.

I'm very proud to be a veterinarian – I said that last week – and I continue to be very proud to be a veterinarian. Our profession is one that, somewhat paradoxically, is one of the most respected professions in survey after survey after survey. Becoming a politician was a real adjustment for me because in those same

surveys politicians do not fare nearly as well. But I will say, Mr. Speaker, that I remain very proud to be a veterinarian, and as a politician I do endeavour wherever possible to not besmirch my profession in my conduct here in the House.

Animal health technologists. Please do not call these folks technicians. They're technologists. There is a very significant difference. If they're called technicians, as I have occasionally made the same error myself, you can sometimes expect a very well-deserved retort. Animal health technologists are professionals in every sense of the word.

I have had the privilege of working alongside animal health technologists throughout most of my career, although I will confess that when I first graduated, in 1983, the practice I worked with did not have the fortunate nature of having an animal health technologist in its employ. We had a nurse who had been trained in human medicine but also had a lot of experience working around horses, and she adapted a lot of her training to what we were doing. But over time and thanks in no small part to the excellent training programs that we have at a number of colleges here in Alberta – at Olds College, at NAIT, at Lakeland College, and also at Fairview College – we have some of the top programs in the country for training animal health technologists. It's a two-year program, it's a very rigorous program, and it also involves a practicum period of a minimum of four weeks working in a veterinary hospital. I have had literally dozens of these students come through my hospital. It is always fun to have them. I always really enjoy it.

These technologists go on to work in practices but not just in veterinary practices. They work in a number of other applications. They sometimes work in research facilities. They sometimes work in animal production facilities. Animal health technologists are also at times employed in places like feedlots and hog production. Now, in that context they're not under the direct supervision of a veterinarian and therefore are somewhat more limited in their activities, but I can tell you that the animal health technologists that I had the privilege of working with were better at starting catheters, were better at getting blood samples, were better at taking X-rays, and could do a lot of the work in practice that is so important. Again, I cannot speak highly enough of them.

Now, there have been some concerns that have been expressed by some members. The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner expressed some skepticism, and I always wonder where that skepticism starts. Does it indeed start with a stakeholder group, or are there just questions in the stakeholder group that are then fanned by the Official Opposition? That's a question that I sometimes have to ask myself.

I will tell you that veterinarians have been working with the AAAHT, the Alberta Association of Animal Health Technologists, for the last decade to bring a greater sense of unity between these two professional groups, and in fact in 2011, five years ago, at our annual general meeting of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association a motion was passed to bring AHTs into our profession as full members and also to have them sit on the ABVMA council as full council members. So this has the support of veterinarians.

Now, I would say that you could probably find a veterinarian or two out there that probably don't think it's a good idea, but I think that, like any professional organization, at some point decisions have to be made. In our profession those are made at annual general meetings. At the annual general meeting in 2011 it was duly voted on to proceed, and in fact the activity of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association along with the AAAHT working with the government, working with the past government, to bring this about has been ongoing since that time. So it has the support of veterinarians. This measure would bring technologists into the fold.

You know, the animal health technology field is one that has developed a great deal in the last 35 years. The AAAHT was formed in Alberta in 1977, but the profession of animal health technology dates back well before then. In fact, if you were in the U.K., these individuals are known in the U.K. as veterinary nurses, and they work very much in the same capacity as AHTs do here. They are known around the world, and there's even now specialization in a wide variety of specialized disciplines for animal health technologists, including small animal clinical practice, neurology, dentistry, orthopaedics, and a wide variety of other fields.

I do wish to take, though, Mr. Speaker, some issue with a point that was raised by the Minister of Labour and reiterated by the Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert. It has to do with the potential for this bringing more women onto the board of the ABVMA. Veterinary medicine is already a profession that has undergone a significant transition in the last 30 years, and there is no need to worry about adequate representation of women either in our profession or on our board. In fact, when I graduated in 1983, our class had an equal number of men and women. We had already achieved gender parity back in 1983.

3:20

There has not been a class graduated from the University of Saskatchewan since that time that has had more males than females, and in fact there have been a couple of classes at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine in Saskatoon that have had 100 per cent females in the class. Now, this has been achieved without quotas, and this has been achieved without any specific artificial means to increase the participation of women in the profession. It is simply because women have qualified on their merits and been chosen by one of the most competitive colleges to get into, more competitive than medicine, more competitive than dentistry.

It is harder to get into vet school than just about any other faculty. There are usually six or seven qualified applicants for every seat in most veterinary colleges, and that situation hasn't really changed much since the opening of the University of Calgary school of veterinary medicine, the dean of which, I'm proud to say, up until just very recently was a classmate of mine.

Mr. Speaker, the suggestion of bringing animal health technology onto council: yes, 98 per cent of animal health technologists are in fact women, but right now our ABVMA board, with its 12 members, has five women and seven men. We have had many, many, many female presidents of the ABVMA, and I'm actually very proud to say that this is a profession where women and men have enjoyed, I think, equality for a number of years. I say that with a certain amount of pride because my wife is also a veterinarian, and we met at vet school. That maybe had something to do with the equal numbers of men and women.

Mr. Rodney: And some horsing around.

Dr. Starke: No, there was no horsing around, but thanks to the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

I will say, Mr. Speaker, that while we can talk about a lot of things in this debate, I would really urge members to not say that they like this bill because it will increase the number of women on our council. That gives the impression that our council is a number of old guys like me who are sitting in darkened rooms smoking and playing poker at night.

An Hon. Member: Like your caucus.

Dr. Starke: No. That wouldn't be accurate either.

I will say, Mr. Speaker, that that is a relic from the past and that while veterinary meetings in the '60s and '70s occasionally may

have looked like that, I can tell you we have moved a long way forward since then. I would ask both the Minister of Labour and others who speak to this to recognize the fact that our profession has already moved forward a long, long way, and to put a fine point on it, we didn't need the government's help with that.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to support this. I am proud to bring animal health technologists directly into our profession. I, quite frankly, think that this is a potential model for other professions. Having worked somewhat in the health care field, I sometimes note with a certain amount of sadness that there is a certain amount of tension between different professional qualifications within the health care field. I don't think that serves us well in human health care. That separation, that tension does not exist in veterinary medicine. In veterinary medicine we enjoy a level of respect and co-operation. Our practices function as teams. From the veterinarians to the animal health technologists to everyone else working in these practices, we all have the concern for the comfort of the patient first and foremost, ahead of all other considerations, and I know that that is something that we strive for in human medicine as well.

This is a good bill. This is a bill where I would never say, "Let's get this done quickly" because I don't necessarily cater to the idea that we have to rush any piece of legislation through. But if you want the opinion of a former practising veterinarian who is a member among you, who can provide some context to what this bill would mean to our profession, I will tell you without hesitation or reservation that this would be a good thing for our profession, it would be a good thing for not only the veterinarians but also the animal health technologists in our province, and because it is our sworn duty to promote and preserve animal health in our province and, through that, also preserve and promote the health of the entire society, I think that members should all consider supporting Bill 13 and moving ahead.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any questions to the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a fondness for experiences working with veterinarians, and I can fully relate to the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster in what I believe and what I believe a lot of could I call them agriculturalists believe is a high moral ground in working with animals and relieving any sort of distress that they may be in.

To the Member for Spruce-Grove-St. Albert: when I questioned him earlier, I wanted to make him aware that even though these people are being brought forward on these situations, this is legislation, and I will be supporting it.

I also wanted to ask the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster if he also believes that maybe the profession that we have chosen relating to animals is something that relates to what some people in the rural and agricultural communities may believe to be a higher moral ground.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a difficult question. I guess I have a certain degree of discomfort in replying or responding to it because I've never considered, certainly, myself or members of my profession to stand on any kind of higher moral ground. We do the job that we've been asked to do by our clients, we do the job that we've been trained to do, and we do the job, indeed, that we love to do because that's what we do. You know, I know that I run into lots and lots of people who say, "I always wanted to be a vet," and for some reason or another that was something that didn't come out in

their life's journey. I didn't always want to be a vet. I wanted to be an accountant, but a series of incidents in my youth changed that path, and I'm grateful for them, and I'm grateful for the fact that, quite frankly, it was animals that changed that path for me.

But with regard, specifically, to the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, I am very proud of the contribution that veterinarians make in communities, large and small, across our province. I'm proud that I was just joined recently by another veterinarian in a provincial Legislature. There was an election of a veterinarian in Manitoba just a few weeks ago. He joins myself as well as a veterinarian in the B.C. Legislature, who also happens to be the Minister of Health in British Columbia. There is, in fact, a long tradition of veterinarians that have served as elected officials.

Now, again, I referenced earlier that given the relative esteem that veterinarians are held in and the relative esteem that politicians are held in, that may not necessarily reflect the higher moral ground, but it is nonetheless certainly a profession that I'm proud to be part of, and I'm proud of the contribution of my colleagues to their communities throughout the province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, hon. member, I did want to become a veterinarian, but I didn't make it.

I'll go to the Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: On the bill, please, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Not under 29(2)(a)?

Any other questions under 29(2)(a) to the member?
Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Yes. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon, everyone. First of all, I'd just like to start out with a little bit of a statement here if I could. I have the deepest respect for this profession. As a boy and all the way through to my mid-30s I experienced many, many occasions where we had qualified professional veterinarians out to our operation, and it was always something that I was thoroughly, thoroughly fascinated about.

I'd also like to take a moment to say that I have the deepest amount of respect for the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster and for this profession that he is in. I think he speaks eloquently on this subject, and I, too, would like to echo a lot of his thoughts. I, too, am in support of this bill.

We have accumulated a bit of information that we'd like to present about this today, Mr. Speaker, and a bit of background has been prepared. I'd just like to go through it a bit. There are a few points that we have found that we'd like to bring up for perhaps a little bit of discussion, for further clarification, a bit later on in my presentation here.

3:30

The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster started out talking about, I believe, animals and a lot of things to do about animals. You know, almost as long as there have been humans, there have been domesticated animals. Whether for food or companionship, animals have been with us every step as we've wandered through our history. While the ability to aid and heal animals has been a focus of humans for centuries, veterinarian medicine as we know it today apparently was not formalized until the late 18th century – I'm reading here right now – when the first schools were established in France. It would take over a hundred years before a school – I believe that in Canada the Ontario Veterinary College was the first one to be established. Since that was established, veterinarian medicine has apparently quickly grown and expanded both in terms of medical advancements but also in governance and structure.

By 1874 the association there had been established, and over the course of the next six decades provincial associations popped up across the country, including the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, founded in 1906, I understand, a year after this province was established. According to their website:

The Alberta Veterinary Medical Association (ABVMA) is the professional regulatory organization governing the practice of veterinary medicine in Alberta under the authority of the Veterinary Profession Act. As a self-governing profession, [it's] required to perform its regulatory and professional functions in accordance with the law and in a manner responsible to the public of Alberta through the government of Alberta.

Almost as long as there has been formal veterinary medicine, there has been a need for educated veterinary assistants to support them, and, as the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster said, they are now called veterinary technologists. In 1908 the Canine Nurses Institute was established, in fact, in England in an effort to meet this demand. While there had been trained veterinary assistants prior to that, now called technologists, since the turn of the 20th century, there wasn't an established association in North America to support them, really, until 1960.

It would be a further 18 years before Alberta finally would see the creation of its own provincial association, apparently in 1978, when the Alberta association of technologists was established. As per their website it was created to provide continued education for veterinary technologists in Alberta and to serve, support, and register those technologists.

As veterinary medicine has evolved in sophistication and quality, so has the need for evolved leadership and oversight of the industry. Bill 13 proposes to be the next step in that development. The proposed changes, from what we can see, include having veterinary technologists subject to similar professional obligations of actual veterinarians and expanding the regulatory scope of the council of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association to include veterinary technologists. With the expanded authority to regulate technologists, Bill 13 will mandate two members of the council to be veterinarian technologists as elected by the ABVMA.

It also proposes to change the definition of a member to include both veterinarians and veterinary technologists and to change the composition of the practice review board, which is the body that makes determinations of an individual's academic and experiential qualifications and makes decisions on whether they should be allowed to practise veterinary medicine in Alberta.

Of course, with any change we must be cognizant, I think, Mr. Speaker, of unintended consequences, and this case is no different. I mean, with all of the kinds of legislation that we deal with from time to time, we can run into unintended consequences. I'm sure that all of us in the House today recognize that. Over the course of the coming days we'll be taking the opportunity to speak with more veterinarians and more veterinary technologists to get their feelings and thoughts on these proposed changes.

One issue that I've heard about already – in fact, it's actually from an acquaintance of mine – is with regard to the membership fees. While both veterinarians and veterinary technologists are vitally important to maintaining the health of Alberta's animal population, we must understand that the responsibilities and, thus, the compensation of both of these professions, of course, are not the same.

Labour market information shows the median wage in Alberta for technologists to be only \$21 per hour before taxes, in fact. The cost of a full-year membership fee, though, for technologists is almost \$350, with an initial application fee of \$122. Compare that with the veterinarians, for which labour market information shows the median wage in Alberta to be \$45 per hour. The current full-

year membership fees for veterinarians total in excess of \$1,600 per year. I'm wondering: will the changes currently proposed in Bill 13 result possibly in increased fees? Will this have a consequential impact, potentially discouraging others, perhaps, from joining this wonderful profession? These are the sorts of questions my colleagues and I hope the minister can speak to as we continue to debate this bill.

There are many reasons why we must be skeptical of claims that this government consulted extensively. I need only mention the complete lack of consultation this government did with regard to their insistence to forge blindly ahead with increased minimum wage. I don't even need to mention Bill 6 as a catastrophe in the fall in that regard. Follow that with the introduction of Bill 1, and there's a clear pattern this government has established with regard to its desire not to consult widely with stakeholders beyond those that already agree with it.

As my hon. colleague mentioned earlier, we in the Official Opposition will continue to reach out to stakeholders for their input and will watch this government closely to ensure that they keep their word. While I still have some concerns with the bill with regard to consultation and unintended consequences, as I just said, I intend to support the intent of this bill, as I said in my earlier remarks, and the effort it makes to modernize the legislation covering the veterinary medicine industry. For this reason I will be fully supporting this, Mr. Speaker, at second reading, and I encourage all other members to do the same.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the member?

Seeing and hearing none, I would recognize the Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today to support Bill 13, Veterinary Profession Amendment Act, 2016. I'm very pleased to stand up to support the professional assistance to veterinarians that we have today. I really appreciate the background and overview provided by the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. I learned a lot about the profession in detail. From what I've understood so far and based on my knowledge, I am in full support of this profession, considering the fact that they provide great assistance to the vets. Animal care is something very important for us because we have got animals in the form of pets, wildlife, on farms, and in many cases they are considered as being part of the family as well.

In terms of providing excellent care to animals, it's very important that the profession is under the umbrella of a regulated body. That will add more credibility and put a standard on it so that people have no question about the technologists and their services. Although they do provide excellent services, it will just add more credibility and put them under the umbrella of being professionals, just like many other professions, and give them more respect and dignity in our province. This will be great way to do that.

I can speak to the importance of having a profession under a regulatory board with confidence because I myself am an engineer in training under APEGA, and I see the importance of how once a profession is affiliated with a regulatory body, how much of a difference it makes. I have a lot of appreciation for that, and I believe that having this profession under that professional umbrella will also help people who are working as veterinary technologists. As their scope of work is broad as they take care of animal clinical pathology, radiology, anaesthesia, surgical, assisting necropsy, office, hospital management – the list goes on – we can see the important role they play, and having the opportunity for them to

participate, actually, in the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association governance board will also allow them to be more actively involved with other veterinarians and to have that opportunity to progress in their careers as well.

3:40

I was also going to mention the part about how 98 per cent of technologists who are working are women; however, gender parity was already elaborated about, so I'm glad to know about that. I feel that this bill is an excellent opportunity to create an excellent pathway for technologists to further succeed and to have that respect, that credibility and standard in the province of Alberta.

This concludes my remarks. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there any questions for the hon. member under 29(2)(a)?

Hearing none, the minister to close debate.

Ms Gray: I'd just like to thank all members for their comments.

To the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster: you asked if we wanted your opinion in this, and we did, so thank you very much for your support of this bill and your opinion and your vast history and experience as a veterinarian. We appreciate that insight being brought here to this debate.

With that, I would like to close debate.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:42 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Goehring	Panda
Anderson, S.	Gray	Payne
Babcock	Hanson	Phillips
Carlier	Hinkley	Rodney
Carson	Hoffman	Rosendahl
Connolly	Horne	Sabir
Coolahan	Jabour	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Kazim	Schneider
Cyr	Littlewood	Schreiner
Dach	Loyola	Starke
Dang	Luff	Stier
Drever	Malkinson	Sucha
Drysdale	Mason	Sweet
Eggen	McLean	Taylor
Feehan	Miller	Turner
Fitzpatrick	Nielsen	Westhead
Ganley	Nixon	Woollard
Gill	Orr	

Totals: For – 53 Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 13 read a second time]

4:00

**Bill 11
Alberta Research and Innovation
Amendment Act, 2016**

[Adjourned debate May 12: Mr. Bilous]

The Speaker: Anyone wish to speak to this? The Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak on Bill 11. The Innovates groups have been brought under one ministry, that being the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. As the shadow minister for this ministry these four corporations have been on my radar since this ministry was created.

I have had the chance to meet with the CEO and soon to be previous CEO of Alberta Innovates: Bio Solutions, Mr. Steve Price. This meeting was back in February of this year, and he was already aware that the Innovates departments were amalgamating. He was able to provide some of the details such as on the merger of the boards and the separation of Innovates: Tech Futures into a separate subsidiary.

During that meeting I was able to learn a lot about the organization itself. I learned that they examine research proposals and fund those they deem worthy. With more funding from private investors they have been able to help take research projects to the market. I learned that due to Alberta's large agricultural sector and forests many companies come to Alberta for the vast biomass available. Alberta is also one of the leaders in nanotechnology for agriculture and cellulose nanocrystals, otherwise known as wood pulp. It was a very informative meeting, and I was grateful to Mr. Price for taking time out of his busy schedule to educate me on what this arm of the Innovates corporations does. It is always great to know that many of our brilliant Albertan minds are creating new and exciting products, whether through government or private institutions.

I was also privy to a tour of Alberta Innovates: Tech Futures by the CEO, Mr. Stephen Lougheed, back in April. He was also aware of the merger of the Innovates corporations at that time. I was able to see the prototypes of new technology that may one day help my former petrochemical colleagues in the future. I was able to see their very large facility, with very few people working in such a large complex. It was interesting to see why many people wanted to ensure that the funding arm of Innovates stays separate from the spending arm. There are many things that past governments did with tax dollars that may have been questionable. Innovates has done some great things in the past like create many of the technologies used today by our oil field workers.

At the beginning of February I had a very productive meeting with the CEO of Alberta Innovates: Energy and Environment Solutions, Mr. Eddy Isaacs. He told me that he was going to retire once the merger happened. He enjoyed his time as the CEO and was able to do many great things with this arm of Innovates.

Four months back, in February, I had a meeting with the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. He was also able to give me some minor details on this merger. He said that Innovates asked to be merged so that people would not be confused as to which Innovates corporation they should be approaching with the research proposals. The meeting did not revolve around that issue, but it was brought up as a concern from myself. It was very interesting to hear about this bill from multiple different sources months and months before any public announcement. The very earliest public hint I could find that this merger was happening was in March, when an article came out talking about laying off senior educators in advance of a restructuring for Alberta Innovates.

Information gained and compiled from multiple sources leaves me with concerns. I do not have all the information; otherwise, I would not have concerns. Obviously, nothing happens overnight, and there was a lot of work put behind this bill and this merger. Whoever has held a corporate job would understand this aspect. I have, and I understand that there are many working parts that need to continue to operate for a corporation as large as Alberta Innovates to work properly. I understand that many things had to happen before this bill came to the floor. I'm not questioning that many of

those things may have had to happen before this bill was presented to the House. For things to run smoothly, I understand that people need to be informed and put in place to ensure a smooth transition.

What I'm questioning is the transparency of the entire operation. This government ran on a platform of transparency. Did the government do everything in its power to ensure that this whole process was as transparent as possible? Was it possible for the government to be more transparent on this process? Was it possible for this government to release their intentions back when the cabinet agreed to merge the Innovates corporations?

When I first heard about this back in January, there was not a speck of information available on this. There was no way to verify if my source was telling the truth. I was happy that the minister did not hide his intentions, and I appreciate his honesty. I'm just curious why this information was not made more readily available to the public sooner. If the minister could answer these questions next time he speaks on this bill, it would be greatly appreciated.

I would also like to get clarification on something that was mentioned in one of the meetings. I was told that 50 per cent of the executive positions for the new Innovates corporation would be filled prior to the CEO being selected. Would the minister be able to answer for me if this is true or not? If it is true, why were those positions filled before the CEO was selected? Should the CEO not have the authority to fill those positions? Will those positions be replaceable? Who is deciding who will fill those positions? Is the minister or his ministry choosing those positions? If so, are those positions going to be patronage positions like the previous government was accused of doing?

For the record I'm not accusing this government of doing any of these things. I sincerely do not know the answers to these questions, and that is the purpose of this time. Any and all information would be greatly appreciated.

The minister has mentioned the \$5 million being given to Alberta Innovates, which should eat up the \$2 million in savings from this merger, so this leads me to questions relating to the savings. We have not received any information as to how this money is being saved. Back in August the Minister of Economic Development and Trade was looking into managers being paid more than triple the salary of the Premier. Now, if that position was removed, that would be a little over one-quarter of the savings. Is the minister saving \$2 million by removing four executives? Or five? We don't know. Mr. Speaker, I want to know where this \$2 million worth of savings is coming from and why the savings are not higher.

4:10

Cutting three-quarters of the boards should save more than \$2 million. Can the minister table for the House where the savings are coming from? Can the minister also detail how many board members have been removed and what their costs were so we can do the math ourselves? I believe that if we added those numbers, it would equate to more than \$2 million.

I know this government likes to jump up and down about being transparent. Hopefully, I'm helping them by showing where their transparency is lacking. I do not mind being proven wrong. What I do mind is not having all the information to make an informed decision on a bill. I appreciate that this government is finally making some effort to find efficiencies. Don't get me wrong. That's a great first baby step on the journey to getting us back to a balanced budget.

If the government can find 5,000 more \$2 million efficiencies, we can eliminate the \$10 billion deficit we are looking at and avoid the \$58 billion debt this government will have in 2019. A debt of \$58 billion is a huge amount. I don't think this government realizes how long it will take to pay that debt off or the toll it will take on

Albertans, who will have to pay an extra \$2,000 a year just to service that much debt. That's why I want to ensure that this merger of Alberta Innovates is as fiscally effective as possible, and from the minimal information that has been released on this merger, I do not believe this is the case. I do not believe that this merger is being done in a way that is as fiscally effective as possible.

These are the unanswered questions, Mr. Speaker, that have been brought to my attention. I really hope that this government can answer my questions and provide clarity and more transparency on this merger.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise to support the bill, Alberta Research and Innovation Amendment Act, 2016. Research and innovation are fundamentally important for diversification of our economy as well as giving us a competitive edge in many areas that eventually will help boost our economy. Combining public research, innovation, and commercialization systems will strengthen our research department because it will open doors to utilize expertise from all over the world.

The consolidated and leaner innovation system will allow innovators, researchers, and industry to work in collaboration to create more opportunities for Albertans. Intellectual growth, progress, advancement, and success we can all envision once we have all the expertise from all over the world from different areas of innovation, creativity, industry, and research brought together at the same table.

The current system for the past many years has not been strong enough due to the lack of focus and leadership, the sustained low price of oil, and the current economic situation of the province. We can see that if we can bring in more innovation and diversify our economy – and diversification comes through research and innovation – then in that case we don't necessarily have to rely on one resource to strengthen our economy for the long term.

Basically, when we look at sustainability, sustainability is a triangle of social well-being, economy, and environment. In order to find that balance of making sure that we are trying to be sustainable in these three areas, we want to ensure that we are continuously trying new things and moving forward with bringing in expertise in different areas from all over the world and trying to do new experiments and bringing in new things to make sure that in the long term we are sustainable as a society.

This investment of consolidation will help build the world-class reputation of Alberta world-wide in the field of research and innovation. It will allow educational institutions higher rankings world-wide, opening doors to a bright future for our students and researchers. Having the higher ranking of educational institutions particularly is very crucial for the well-being of any society. First of all, they're providing excellent education, and once a society has quality education available, then it means that they have better chances for being successful.

Having that world-class reputation, once that reputation is acquired, will then encourage people, students, researchers, and other communities from different parts of the world to specifically come to Alberta and learn about Alberta's economy, Alberta's culture, at the same time bringing value and adding value to our education system through their wealth of knowledge and information and expertise. So this plays an important role in boosting the economy because it will allow more international students or more foreigners to come to our institutions as well as to come to Alberta. That will allow Alberta's economy to do well.

At the same time, research and innovation plays an important role in many areas of our lives. For example, when it comes even to

health care or patient care, we can provide quality health care to our citizens. As well, we can advance in energy efficiency, reduce carbon emissions, and all that will help us to advance ourselves from technology borrowers to, basically, technology providers.

In fact, recently we can see that. As we know, Harvard University is one of the top universities in the world, and they actually have some programs when it comes to decarbonization and the environment. This year they are offering fellowships to people from all over the world to look into policies in China as well as Europe when it comes to decarbonization and reducing carbon emissions in the environment. They're opening this opportunity to people from all over the world. As we can see, this is a step towards globalization through having an institute or having that excellence in academia that is allowing or promoting globalization and collaboration amongst people from all over the world towards sustainability.

I can speak to that with great confidence myself as well because I have five years of research experience. Before getting into the oil and gas industry, I was working as a research assistant and did my thesis specifically on carbon dioxide sequestration, and then I did research in different areas as well. I did research for the dentistry department of my school in nanotechnology, where I was working basically on creating artificial teeth for the replacement of teeth operations. That was something that I gained as an experience. At the same time I worked on a research project related to fluidized beds that was totally traditional chemical engineering based research, and then I did research on algae cultivation. That was more related to environmental engineering. At the same time I was taking workshops to understand how there is a relationship between social issues and economics involved when it comes to sustainability and how society, the economy, and the environment are all connected.

Having that research experience in different areas and different departments, I gained the experience that through the research, basically, we are looking 20 years ahead of time. Basically, we're planning our future. If we do research today, we are securing our future for the next 20 years or so, and if we excel in that department, then basically it means that we are providing security for our future generations.

4:20

I'm very happy to see that the ministry is taking the step by having this bill because through this bill they are bringing academia, small businesses as well as industry all together on one platform, basically. That is very important because, as I mentioned, when I was working in different research departments, as well I worked as a student with other students on a research project that was sponsored by industry, and it was called Capstone, in Sarnia, Ontario. My project was basically with other group members of mine on varieties of production. We had the opportunity to present that project because we had collaboration with the industry.

If all these three bodies – industry, businesses, and academia – are all connected, that is when we are able to bring it to the next level. Otherwise, it's really hard to connect all three bodies together. If you work in silos, then basically we are not creating that flow of information that is needed or not creating those channels, that are important, to send that information across and to achieve the goals that we are trying to achieve. This creates synergy, having all three bodies together, and once there is synergy, then there's more energy to move forward, and once we have more energy to move forward, then we are more able to get closer to what we are envisioning.

I would like to basically congratulate the ministry for coming up with this bill. I was very delighted to see that, and I'm very happy to stand up for this bill because I'm speaking on behalf of the students here, on behalf of residents of Alberta as well as the MLA

for my community. I'm also applying all my background experience from the past, from all perspectives. In the way a jeweller will examine a diamond, if I do that examination, I don't see any flaw in this bill. I would like to encourage and urge all the members of this Assembly to support this bill, and then we can all plan more security and more sustainability for our province.

Thank you very much.

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

Seeing none, I would recognize the Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 11, the Alberta Research and Innovation Amendment Act, 2016. On the surface of the bill I see the potential for what the government is attempting to achieve. They're trying to create a leaner system, with less CEOs and board members, that apparently has the ability to save taxpayers \$2 million per year. Having one ministry with four boards consolidated into one board would seem to make sense. This could result in less confusion for the public if handled properly and provide a more effective way of using public funds.

Wildrose is certainly in favour of reducing government budgets, but today I was a little bit confused because they were talking about reducing government budgets with this one, and we had brought forth a lot of amendments to the main estimates, but none of them – none of them – were actually accepted. I thought they were great amendments.

An Hon. Member: Well, at least someone did.

Mr. Taylor: Yes, somebody did.

I guess we need to take baby steps when trying to get the government to reduce their budgets and reduce costs. This is a first, and that's a good thing.

On first glance at this bill I was quite hopeful that we finally were starting to see some constraint on the government to reduce costs and streamline operations. That was a good thing. However, when I look at what happened with the same plan that formed Alberta Health Services, I'm left with some doubts. I am not confident in this government's ability to consolidate programs into one massive organization and maintain or improve services for Alberta. We haven't seen that at AHS, and I'm concerned that we may see challenges at a megasized Alberta Innovates with a smaller accountability structure.

In addition to my general unease with the format of the new corporation, I also have concerns regarding some specific provisions. Now, when I was reading over the bill, I looked at section 7. It's one of the areas that caused me to think that we have some real issues involved in this bill if implemented. It's not perfect like a diamond, like the member opposite was saying it was, not just exactly the way it should be. Section 7(a) – this is where I had my confusion – says:

in subsection (1) by striking out “up to 4 research and innovation corporations” and substituting “one or more research and innovation corporations, in addition to the corporation established under section 6.1(3).”

What does it mean? Well, at this point it's unclear, but it would seem to me that the government is leaving the door open for more research and innovation corporations in the future, Mr. Speaker. When the government says that there will be one or more, how many does the government intend to form? Why go to all the trouble to table this amendment bill only to leave the door open to create one or more research and innovation corporations, which would put us back right in the same situation, with multiple corporations? This clause could leave Albertans with many more corporations in the

future than they have now, with little or no involvement in that decision-making process. Who would decide that more corporations are needed? What criteria would be used to make that decision? What are the potential costs and benefits of having an unspecified number of corporations where the current bill limits the government to four?

This is simply too open-ended and too vague, Mr. Speaker, and too prone to uncertainty for me to be comfortable with it. Through this Alberta Research and Innovation Amendment Act, 2016, we should be saving taxpayer money from the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, which I have to applaud. That's a good thing if this government actually does find those savings, and I mean: if. But another risk is that the savings may be found in places other than management levels. Albertans would like to know where the government is going to find these efficiencies.

When I was in business, you know, I had to track all the costs that were associated with my business. That's what I did. I tracked all the costs for advertising, for how much my salesmen were costing me at that time, and for my administration, the cost for the copiers, the costs for all the mail-outs that we did. There was a ton of different costs, but in the end I was able to see where my money was going and the return for my dollar spent. From that information I found efficiencies, and I grew my business and got a solid return on the investment. This is a very simple business practice, and it's used right across Canada.

I simply come back to the question: what is the government doing to track the money spent on grants? They can find efficiencies beyond the consolidation of research and innovation corporations, those four corporations that we've talked about. When it comes to both jobs and grants, Albertans expect transparency so they can readily see what programs and jobs are being created with their money and what the overall impact is going to be on the economy in Alberta. How do we find this transparency within this new legislation? Where exactly will Albertans see the supposed savings of \$2 million, Mr. Speaker? Even if we find \$2 million in the short term, how long will Albertans see those savings with the open-ended clause that I see, that was mentioned, section 7? That section 7 leaves no accountability for the eventual number of corporations that could possibly be established under this bill.

The sunshine list disclosure of all the salaries and bonuses paid to Alberta Innovates: will they disclose all those? How will Albertans know if they are receiving good value for the wages and the benefits paid to those employees in the corporation? I am hopeful that some of those savings, those \$2 million in savings, will come from the reduction in the outrageously high wages being paid to the top management positions as opposed to coming from front-line staff. Again, I and all Albertans indeed want to see how this government transitions to this plan.

4:30

I am concerned about the effectiveness of the new corporation as it consolidates the research areas of four corporations into one. How will the highly technical and specialized areas of research be assigned? What priorities will be assigned to those research areas? How will stakeholder input be gathered and used to ensure that the priorities of Albertans are reflected in the new corporation?

You know, while I am concerned about this bill – it leaves doors open to the growth of these corporations in the future, that will lead us to a perhaps more costly and less efficient scenario than we have now – I believe that it's a step in the right direction, and it shows that the government is finally beginning to look at ways to cut the outrageous spending spree that they've been on since forming government.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, while I have some very real concerns – and section 7 is my biggest concern with this, the open-endedness of that one part of the bill – I can support this bill. I believe that we need to support the government in finding efficiencies in how they manage the province and Alberta Innovates, and this is a good starting point.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, are there any questions under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Battle River-Wainwright?

Hearing none, I would recognize the Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of this bill, and I do so for a number of reasons. But, first of all, I want to thank my colleague for her wonderful analysis of what this bill will do.

My first reason is that I think that Albertans deserve to be represented in the most effective manner possible to diversify and grow our economy. This is an innovation system that builds on our strengths, and it creates a more diversified economy, and it delivers value for money.

Now I'm going to kind of sidestep a little bit. This past weekend I was very pleased to be at the University of Lethbridge when we provided a cheque to a group called MindFuel. It went to a group of students from one of the high schools in Lethbridge. They were there for the weekend at a workshop, and what they were developing was nanotechnology to develop a biological way to coagulate blood quickly in case of an accident or for a haemophiliac or in any number of cases.

The other thing that I've seen in Lethbridge was – I met with a group of scientists and professors at the university, and I've heard many, many incredible ideas. A group of scientists got together at the university – there are probably 25 in the group – and they looked at so many different things that could be done in Lethbridge in terms of renewable energy. In my opinion, this bill is supporting those kinds of things where we can move our economy forward in a very diversified manner. This bill really supports that happening, having one corporation that's going to deal with that and work with those people to do those things. Here we have a group of students, and we have a group of professors. We can get together. We can develop all kinds of things.

To me, this bill is a necessity, in terms of going forward, if we want to do this – and we must do this – in our economy, and this is the time for us to do it. The decision to refocus our public research, innovation, and commercialization system through consolidation reflects the advice from stakeholders and best practices from around the world. That's what I see happening in Lethbridge right now. The bill will support this new approach and enable much-needed subsequent changes to Alberta's research and innovation system.

The investment helps to diversify the economy by creating a knowledge-based economy and enhances Alberta's reputation as a world-class research and innovation jurisdiction. Co-ordinating and leveraging the research and innovation system will help to drive research and its applications, will increase business start-ups and the commercialization of Alberta ideas, and provide access to services.

A more effective and efficient system will spur innovation and allow for the development of new companies and industries. By increasing the pace of technological innovation, we can add value to our resources such as by improving patient care, advancing energy efficiency, and reducing carbon emissions. Alberta's innovation system has realized practical applications and numerous

benefits from scientific innovation and research, including creating thousands of new jobs as a result of technological advances such as the investment in oil sands development, up-to-date health care services resulting from Alberta's medical research facilities, and diversifying Alberta's economy.

Again, I'll look back to Lethbridge. We have two research centres apart from the university and the college. All kinds of research is being done for agriculture in my community, research that has shown itself to increase our agricultural output. The fact that we have irrigation in southern Alberta in a drought area: those kinds of things are all part and parcel of this.

I absolutely support this bill, and I urge everybody in this House to do so. Thank you.

The Speaker: Any questions for the Member for Lethbridge-East under 29(2)(a)?

I recognize the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 11, the Alberta Research and Innovation Amendment Act, 2016. Unchecked, Alberta Innovates has ballooned inefficiencies at the board level. Wildrose has long advocated for the government to find those inefficiencies within the numerous organizations and the departments that it funds.

It's my belief that this move to consolidate Alberta Innovates, if done right, will result in a superior outcome for all Albertans. Technological investment is especially important. To echo the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, one of the most important things we can do is to bring those ideas together.

Technological investment is especially important at a time of deep economic recession, and now is the time for Alberta's considerable labour and capital resources to be directed towards initiatives that foster innovation and technological growth. The reality of the recession is seen every day as Albertans struggle to make ends meet, to put food on the table, to pay for hockey skates and music lessons. However, there is an economic opportunity for our resilient Albertans. The weakened economy, with its depressed prices, facilitates an opportunity to restructure and retrain and reinvent. I believe that it is our job as government to help steward Albertans with efficiently operated programs that assist them in finding opportunities to grow.

For a number of Albertans, Alberta Innovates is that opportunity. Consolidation of this organization, to the extent that it results in streamlined services, is the common-sense solution for an organization that risks becoming an unnecessarily cumbersome entity. Unmanaged redundancies such as duplication at the board management level risk slowing down the innovation that this organization is actually designed to facilitate. This is a time when finding simple, low-consequence cost savings could not be more important. As Alberta's tax base shrinks with unchecked unemployment, every dollar spent needs to reach further.

4:40

As we continue on with second reading, there are still, however, you know, a number of questions about this bill that remain unanswered. Albertans are owed the highest degree of transparency – and that's something all of us campaigned on – especially with regard to the consequences and the extent of the consolidation. It's important that any changes to this organization are not coming at the expense of quality investment decisions.

My constituents have told me that they're eager for clarity on how exactly this consolidation will save the government \$2 million. I along with, I'm sure, my caucus mates and Albertans are eager to hear from this government more details on their findings with

regard to that. We're a little disappointed that we're still waiting for transparency from the minister on where the \$2 million efficiency is coming from. It's concerning to Alberta that this organization may have been running for years with \$2 million in inefficiencies. I think the faster that we can get to understand where this money is being taken from, the better.

In conversations with my constituents some have expressed their concern that the money may have been wasted by Alberta Innovates and are uncertain about how now, suddenly this is becoming a problem when issues like this tend to be systemic or structural. It's my hope that this government could provide the good, innovative, entrepreneurial people of Chestermere-Rocky View and Alberta with some more answers with regard to this.

The government should be looking into finding further efficiencies within its own departments as well. Albertans are, however, concerned that the government is only interested in finding efficiencies within the arm's-length organizations. While this is important, we would really appreciate seeing the government look at all options in all areas of government.

Albertans want to know how the cuts will be made to this organization. Will it be through reductions in employment levels? As you're likely aware – you've heard this before – the CBC received news of layoffs in a leaked e-mail, that was sent around to employees of Alberta Innovates: Technology Futures by the organization's chief executive officer, Stephen Lougheed. We feel that the minister needs to confirm that the approach that this government will be taking – is this the approach that we're going to be taking to find efficiencies?

Perhaps more importantly, to what extent will the government find its efficiencies? Is it through a reduction in the labour force? Alberta Innovates is our province's mechanism for funding Alberta health researchers and getting the ideas of Albertan entrepreneurs to market. Technical expertise is clearly an important factor in making appropriate investments with the money of Albertan taxpayers. If positions are being eliminated, which positions are those, and are those high-ranking positions? In addition to the alleged layoffs, is the government considering reductions in salaries similar to the reductions we've seen at a number of private companies in what they're doing?

Our province faces turbulent economic circumstances, and we have clearly, most recently through our jobs action plan, recognized the importance of building our knowledge capital, especially in this beautiful province. There is a lot here.

Wildrose believes that this move by our party and the government will increase the speed at which the applicants are able to move through the program and receive funding, but what we are asking for is just assurance that this is, in fact, a mechanism for reducing onerous systemized redundancies along with all of the other important things that will happen by consolidating. Wildrose is eager to see the evidence and will appreciate seeing that this move to consolidate produces better results for Albertans.

Albertans are interested to learn more about the minister's conversations with the stakeholders as well, Mr. Speaker, that requested this move by the government, again transparency being the most important aspect of that. The investments that come out of Alberta Innovates are a complex thing. There are, obviously, competing interests at play, and Albertans need more information, and Albertans should be told where the efficiencies would be gained. Albertans deserve to know how the organization will be structured after the changes are made, and I would ask that the minister give some clarity on how the existing research areas will be organized and prioritized under the new system. Alberta Innovates is an organization that needs to have an investment edge

over its competitors as they're not only using private capital. Much of their funding comes at the expense of Alberta taxpayers.

In addition, some stakeholders are concerned about energy research and how that will continue. Reducing the level of specialization on Alberta Innovates boards should not come at the expense of investments in energy-related research. Obviously, Alberta has a competitive advantage in energy and energy research, and we want to see that this advantage is utilized through the proper facilitations. However, we are still waiting to see a plan from the government to ensure that energy research maintains its position as a top priority area for the research.

I'm hopeful that as debate continues, the questions of my constituents and fellow Albertans will receive more answers. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any questions for the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View under 29(2)(a)?

Hearing none, I would recognize the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to rise and speak on Bill 11, Alberta Research and Innovation Amendment Act, 2016. I would say first that this is a good start, but in facing a \$58 billion deficit in a few years, we've got a very, very long way to go.

I have to say that this amalgamation of the four Alberta Innovates into one entity with one subsidiary corporation was one that my colleagues and I were pleased to see. We are pleased about the cost-saving measures, and we can only hope that wisdom was used when they decided where the cuts would be made because this government isn't great about being transparent. Efficiencies in government and all entities is a huge priority for Wildrose. I have to say that I was a little taken aback when I realized that this spendthrift government was going to take some cost-saving measures to begin the work of efficiency, especially since we had no effect with our amendments on any of the budget estimates.

Anyway, Albertans have been frustrated with the government's and the previous government's efficiency when it comes to creating high-earning positions. We are hoping that this amalgamation will help relieve those frustrations. Because of the growing frustration and apprehension, I do have some questions when it comes to issues of transparency and accountability, so I'm going to take a little bit of time to go over those.

The public has asked for this merger to simplify the organization and, hopefully, reduce costs. The government says that this consolidation will save \$2 million a year. Alberta Innovates has received \$170 million in grants, and I'd like to know where the \$2 million will be saved. Not only do we want to simplify things, but we would also like to ensure that this creates a leaner system. It would be a missed opportunity if we were not able to see some additional cost savings. My colleagues and I would like this government to please share with us and all Albertans how it is that they will be reducing Alberta Innovates' costs by \$2 million a year. Where does it come from?

It's not like we're asking for too much here. We're only asking for transparency and for this government to be more accountable to all Albertans. I believe my colleague alluded to the fact that we all ran, both sides of the House, on a more transparent government. Albertans want a government they can trust, and they want to trust this government. They want to trust that this government knows what it is doing. When you hide details, it only makes confidence in government worse.

Please keep in mind that I was delighted to hear that these amendments were being made and that a possible restructuring

could take place and efficiencies be established, but we need more information. Albertans deserve to hear how the former corporations' research areas will be assigned priority after the changes are made. Will it be savings through employee reduction or by not replacing employees after retirement or resignation, through attrition? These are questions that Albertans would like answered. It's not like this government has given any reason for Albertans to trust it based on its assurances. The government has gone back on its promises on many occasions, so the people really need explanations.

There really are so many questions here about what the government's plans are with this amalgamation. I have heard that Albertans are anxious, frustrated, and worried that the government will break their trust. Why not come out and show Albertans what plan you have in place, something substantial, something transparent, something that we can agree or disagree on but a plan? The consolidation of Alberta Innovates is a common-sense approach and a cost-saving measure. However, we need this NDP government to be more honest and open with Albertans by explaining these cost-saving measures and exactly how they came up with \$2 million.

4:50

We are worried, Mr. Speaker. We are worried when we see how reckless this government has become with budgetary issues. Trust: well, that's another subject. Albertans have said that they have lost trust. How can we begin to trust when the government only doles out small amounts of information on huge decision items such as this one? What is the intent behind this legislation, and how will this legislation create real results for Albertans? So many questions but, again, not many answers.

However, once again I would like to say that I'm very pleased to see some cost-cutting measures being implemented in such a fragile economy. I just wish that we could go further. I guess my hope is that this government might get it right for once by implementing cost-saving measures and making sure that these measures and decisions are open and transparent for all Albertans so that answers are given to many of our questions.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any questions for the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills under 29(2)(a)?

Hearing none, I would recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to speak at second reading of Bill 11, Alberta Research and Innovation Amendment Act, 2016. It's a really interesting and important time in our history to be trying to balance innovation, technology, new breakthroughs in health care and the environment and biosciences and engineering. What a dilemma this government faces in trying to stimulate a new economy, get off our singular dependence on oil and gas, and foster new business and a new economy given the many challenges that we face today, recognizing that oil and gas may never be the same in Alberta, that we actually are going to need some dramatic shifts in this province, and that this is, in fact, the time to invest in research and new technology, energy being one of them and, certainly, biosciences and biotechnology.

What I'm hearing in the health sciences is precision medicine, where we're looking at the genome of people and defining whether people need a certain diet to prevent disease, whether they can predict that certain exercise programs will have a significant effect on their blood pressure or not. The genetic field has opened up massive new opportunities in health care. Of course, health system

research can help us make more efficient use of the professionals that we have and the buildings that we have and the technologies that we use for testing people. All of that opens up tremendous opportunities not only for more efficient use of our current resources, which is widely recognized to be inefficient in Alberta, but also to improve the quality of life for people who need and expect the kinds of technologies that improve their arthritic conditions, their blood pressure conditions, their diabetic conditions, whatever they happen to be. There are tremendous breakthroughs happening in terms of prevention and early intervention.

Health, in particular, I guess I'm starting to get to. The roll-up of Alberta Innovates: Health Solutions into this large amalgam called Alberta Innovates is a problem. It is going to reduce our visibility on the national stage. It is going to reduce our credibility across the world as a leader in medical research. It is going to diminish our capacity, actually, to improve the very system that is costing us so much. It is going to be rolled up into one ball under this plan, in which there will be a board, as I've seen it developed. I know that there are lots of reasons for trying to bring this all together and manage it more efficiently, but I think that there are some real downsides to lumping environmental technology and energy solutions with the major spender in Alberta, which is health care.

We have to focus, I think, in a special way on health care because of both the budgetary demands that health care presents and the tremendous leadership that Alberta has had for 40 years in health care. If the world sees that we are pulling back on this primary investment, then we are going to get fewer people coming here; we're going to have less investment coming to this province. We're going to have, I think, a real loss of both good people and confidence in the people in the profession. I'm not just talking about physicians. I'm talking about PhDs. I'm talking about nurses. I'm talking about lab people who are innovating new laboratory tests. I'm talking about imaging people who are doing exciting things in imaging. I'm talking about geneticists who are looking, again, at the genome and identifying tremendous opportunities for more targeted intervention for people of high risk, starting in childhood, starting in prenatal life, that can actually make a massive improvement in both their opportunities but also in the costs that they're going to engender in the health care system over time.

While I respect the decision to try to economize, that's the dilemma you're faced with, for one, and I hope it's not just because I have a background in medicine but because I see the tremendous economic as well as the health benefits of having a strong research agenda driven by those who are connected with the health system, not diluted by a bunch of people around the table competing for resources for their pet project but deliberately focused and separate at some level from the larger board that's overseeing innovation in Alberta.

As indicated, Budget 2016 will reduce by \$33 million the overall funding for Alberta Innovates corporation. The government's press release states that "we are committed to making it easier for Alberta's researchers and businesses to navigate the . . . innovation system." In some ways it may be nice to talk about a single shop for innovation, but that's not the way research works, Mr. Speaker. These are very separate areas of research that can communicate with one another, but if there is no storefront that says that health research is here in Alberta, if it just says Alberta Innovates, the rest of the world is going to say: okay; we've stopped that world-breaking record in medical research that we've had here for 40 years, since Peter Loughheed first initiated the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research.

I think that one has to look very carefully at that particular issue. I'm willing to hear arguments in the other areas, but I don't think

they're quite as persuasive because of the tremendous investment we're making in health already and the opportunity for more efficient use of our health services as well as improving people's health in Alberta and reducing their costs as well through improved management of people with medical problems.

Previously health research received the lion's share of funding under the Alberta Innovates initiative. With the cuts now health will lose its status as a research focal point. While the proposed merger will undoubtedly result in some cost savings, there's still a very real question as to how health research fits with the other three entities and whether we will indeed not only lose in terms of efficiencies in our health system because we don't have the health system connected to the research arm and working together to improve outcomes; we also lose, obviously, the marketing or the business opportunities that come out of some of this fantastic research. For example, our dean of medicine here has discovered some tremendous new approaches to hepatitis C, and this, of course, is improving the quality of life and the length of life and the productivity of people. We've been leaders on a number of fronts: transplants and health promotion and prevention leadership as well.

I will be in committee suggesting that we try to find a way to amend the bill, not that we haven't made some good decisions here in terms of cost cutting, in terms of amalgamating, in terms of reducing redundancy in the management. By all means, nobody has any problems with that as long as it doesn't cause the unexpected or undesirable side effects of cuts to international funding for all these areas, loss of business opportunities that we're obviously going to be faced with. If we don't do the research, we can't develop the technologies and market them around the world. It's a very double-edged sword, the direction we're taking now.

5:00

Certainly, in the area of health innovation I think we should seriously look at how we can include that, especially since it received an \$80 million annual endowment back in the day that, through the interest on that fund, has continued to fund tremendous research. In some ways it would be disingenuous, at least, if not a misappropriation, to take that endowment, which was dedicated to medical research by past governments and indeed by philanthropists who have donated to that endowment. It would be to some extent unacceptable to pull that money out of health research and put it into other areas just because you want to.

Some people have made serious commitments in their lives to research and have come here – some of them have been here 20 years working on and improving our systems of care and our base laboratory technology, lab studies. I think we are going to have to look at that carefully and debate it, and I would hope that the government could see a way to include under the larger innovation corporation a separate branch of health innovates.

While I applaud the government's attempt to streamline, to manage more efficiently, and to ensure that we continue the strong legacy of research and knowledge translation and new technologies, which we desperately need in this province if we're going to get off the one-trick pony, let us not throw out the baby with the bathwater here, and let's make sure that we protect what has really been a tremendous asset to Alberta both as a technical profession and as a marketing and business opportunity around the world.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View under 29(2)(a)?

Hearing none, I would call upon the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the interest of time I think I'll pass.

The Speaker: Okay. The Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: I'll take a short stab at it, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 11. This is a bill that I'll be able to support, I believe. Of course, it's long been the position of my caucus colleagues and I that there are efficiencies that can be found in government and government corporations, including those impacted here. I believe everyone in the House is aware that the Official Opposition suggested amendments to the office of every ministry while we were going through estimates. Of course, we dealt with that this morning, and we all know the outcome.

To that end, if done right, Mr. Speaker, consolidating Alberta Innovates is a common-sense measure. It's my sincere hope that what this bill seeks to achieve with the consolidation of the Alberta Innovates boards will be an effective solution to some of the frustrating inefficiencies that emerged as a result of having several boards. And by frustrating inefficiencies, I mean that we should at the end of the day at least see a much leaner system. Frankly, there will be fewer CEOs to deal with and pay and fewer board members, of course. I think it's likely that a single board in this case will be much more accountable than four boards. That all does tend to make some sense. Pooling resources may have the ability to be an attractive alternative.

That being said, I do have a few questions and concerns that I hope the minister responsible for this bill or, candidly, just anyone on the government bench will be able to speak to. There are some consolidations that have created issues that weren't foreseen. I'm thinking, of course, of the creation of the single health superboard, which was justified in terms and phrases much like some of the justification that was used in the consolidation we're debating here today. It doesn't work ideally in every instance. Best-laid intentions don't remove the fact that consolidation doesn't have an inherent tendency to save costs. It's not a guarantee, especially where government is concerned, and not just this government, any government. Even though we may believe that costs may be reduced and efficiencies will be found, consolidation, if not organized properly, can lead to long-term negative consequences.

Rural Alberta, for instance, would be hard-pressed to suggest that one of the largest bureaucracies in Alberta, the health superboard in AHS, has created a better system than the personal, local health boards that it replaced. That ship has sailed, though, so debate is over in that instance.

We should always be looking to create something better when we amalgamate, something that's more well organized or effective, not less. I know that creating something less effective would never be the intent here, but it bears attention. I know that this is the intent with the reorganization, so we encourage the government to be honest and transparent with Albertans by explaining exactly how this consolidation will save taxpayer dollars and create the desired efficiencies that are sought. That is important to Albertans.

I want to note that there was a media article on March 18 of this year with the following headline: Alberta Innovates Begins Laying Off Senior Executives in Advance of Restructuring. That was nearly two months ago, before this debate began. March 18 was also nearly one month before the current government rolled out its latest budget, which, if I recall correctly, first committed to these changes. Now, that could be considered somewhat presumptive. Establishing laws that can affect and impact the lives of everyday Albertans is a responsibility that we share within these walls, and compared to other levels of government we do so with what is, arguably, minimal scrutiny. There is no upper Chamber that gives consideration to the

same items we do. Proposed legislation is rarely sent to standing committees. Very little stands in the way of any governing caucus to fire through legislation as they see fit.

Look, I'm not suggesting that the current government is the only government in Alberta that has pushed legislation through this House. Certainly, it's happened before, and I expect it'll happen again. But for this government to start laying off people because they know that legislation that they will eventually introduce to this House will eventually require it regardless of the debate that takes place, regardless of the public response, regardless of any amendments that any of the opposition parties may propose all seems a little bit presumptive, Mr. Speaker. It may be fair to suggest that a certain complacency may be presumed in the work that is done from time to time in this House. Given that the work we do in this House is the work that is done on behalf of Albertans clear across this province, I wonder: would they consider that presumptive action respectful?

Given what was in the media report about the layoff of workers several months ago now, my colleagues and I would be interested to hear someone on the government benches give a little bit more detail on precisely how much consolidation has already happened under the expectation that this proposed legislation will pass with the government's majority. And not only the government's majority; it seems like a lot of parties in the House are speaking in favour of supporting it.

That being said, beyond the procedural concerns I have a few concerns that I hope the minister will be able to help us out with. Consolidating Alberta Innovates: Bio Solutions, Energy and Environment Solutions, Technology Futures, and Health Solutions into one corporation has raised some anxieties. Once again, from media reports regarding Alberta Innovates, health researchers have expressed concern that a merger, quote, would reduce money available for medical research in Alberta, potentially affecting access to cutting-edge treatments for patients. Unquote. I sincerely hope that the current government can address that claim by either confirming it or proving it not credible before this legislation is passed in this House.

Our offices have heard from economic development and business groups that have expressed confidence in Edmonton as a centre for health research. They obviously see a potential for health care in Edmonton. They see a potential for growth. A key component of that is medical research.

Speaking only of statistics, the economy in Edmonton is doing marginally better than many other parts of the great province that we live in amidst the downturn because there are some growing industries in the city that aren't as negatively impacted by the downturn, which I'm sure is common knowledge for the current government. In the year and 12 days, I believe, since the election, speeches from the government side of the House have used the phrase "economic diversification" a number of times. I can only hope that those sentiments are indeed sincere.

Health care innovation is an opportunity for our province. There is interest here. There's a clear possibility for growth. But, as stated earlier, the current government must take care to ensure that their decisions are not negatively impacting that potential. To be clear, I'm not suggesting that this consolidation of four Alberta Innovates corporations will necessarily make things worse on this front. But professionals in the field have raised a concern; thus, I hope that the government can speak to whether or not that concern is valid. That would go a long way to alleviating the concerns mentioned.

5:10

My caucus colleagues have heard from industry that the existing system was ineffective. It was also frustrating, we've heard, and this

sort of consolidation can indeed make things more effective. We are of course pleased to see that the current government is taking action on that criticism, but please regard this critique as well. The current government in the course of, well, one year and 12 days, I believe, since the election has demonstrated a bit of an aversion to doing consultation. We saw that with Bill 6 last year. There was almost an unwillingness to listen to concerned farmers and ranchers. I know that I'll hear from members on the opposite side that there were consultations going on. The problem was that the consultations weren't going on with grassroots farmers and ranchers. That probably could have seen a very different reaction to that imposing bill.

You know, we have also seen that this government is unwilling to pause in order to carefully consider evidence, in order to conduct economic impact assessments to ensure that there aren't negative consequences to the policies put forward. I don't know how many times the opposition has suggested that certain bills be sent to committee for study. This can only be considered good for the folks that send us here. In fact, we saw earlier this week that the opposition outlined an array of studies concluding that this government's minimum wage hike will hurt job creation and have negative consequences for low-income Albertans. My colleague from Battle River-Wainwright had a motion that simply asked that this government pause their plan in order to conduct an impact assessment first, but those that have the power determined that such a suggestion wasn't warranted. That seeming aversion to evidence-based policy has left many Albertans questioning this government's sincerity. That diminished credibility casts a long shadow over other initiatives like this bill that we debate here today.

While I'm on this subject, I do hope that the minister will be able to elaborate on which stakeholders have asked him to consolidate these boards. Albertans need some assurances. They just want to know that consultation regarding the collaboration, as it were, has taken place. It is not an unreasonable request. Certainly, I don't believe it is. Frankly, it should be standard practice.

I stand to be corrected, but I don't think that I've heard a clear explanation of how the Alberta Innovates corporations research areas will be assigned priority under the new consolidated system. Seriously, I'm not trying to be terribly critical, but shouldn't that information be something that we have all heard so that we can all, including Albertans, understand how and what priorities are dealt with in which order?

I wonder what the new funding allocation model looks like. I wonder what the newly consolidated organization chart will look like. We know that there will be layoffs. There have already been layoffs, but what does the new Alberta Innovates look like as far as staff are concerned? With the consolidation of support staff for the four boards, were there any job redundancies identified right away, any attrition possibilities? Questions like this are important. I certainly hope we can hear some clear answers before the final vote is counted.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, consolidation is a good idea. The reality is that our province is facing a massive debt and deficit, one that wasn't expected, certainly not campaigned on. The fact is that we do have a large debt looming as well as a large deficit. One way to slow its growth, minute as it may be, is to find efficiencies in existing operations. I certainly hope that care will be taken with this consolidation in order that it can meet that criteria. Consolidating Alberta Innovates: Bio Solutions, Energy and Environment Solutions, Technology Futures, and Health Solutions has its merits, but there are valid concerns as well, and they, too, need to be addressed. I do hope that the government is able to give this piece of legislation the due attention that it deserves as restructuring occurs.

I will be supporting this bill and encourage the rest of the House to do the same. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Little Bow?

Are there any other members who wish to speak to Bill 11, Alberta Research and Innovation Amendment Act, 2016?

Is there a wish to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 9 An Act to Modernize Enforcement of Provincial Offences

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 9, An Act to Modernize Enforcement of Provincial Offences, here in Committee of the Whole. I'd like to thank my colleagues on both sides of the House for a good debate on and their support of this valuable legislation. I want to thank my colleagues for acknowledging their commitment to this bill and identifying concerns, which I'm happy to address. During debate at second reading there were some questions asked about the legislation. I'm pleased to respond to those questions to further the dialogue about this bill and what we're doing with it.

As I mentioned previously, the purpose of the bill is to make amendments to improve enforcement of provincial laws and municipal bylaws by making it more effective, efficient, and proportionate while better assisting vulnerable Albertans. In addition, the bill will also allow the processing of e-tickets. It's clear from the comments made during second reading debate that the current system of using warrants to enforce tickets for minor infractions is not effective and has not been so for a number of years. Many of my colleagues express their sentiments that these amendments will clearly help focus law enforcement and court resources where they should be, on more serious crimes.

The Official Opposition had some concerns about how enforcement will work after changes are made, and I'll be happy to address these. If passed, the legislation will expand the registrar of motor vehicle services' authority to restrict services to include unpaid fines for non motor vehicle infractions. Firstly, I want to emphasize that civil enforcement measures, including this restriction on motor vehicle registry services, will be more effective than warrants at holding offenders to account. Almost 97 per cent of Albertans of age 16 or older use motor vehicle registry services, and for those who don't, other enforcement mechanisms such as filing writs against property and garnishing bank accounts, wages, income tax refunds, and GST rebates will be available.

Secondly, I want to make it clear this legislation will only impact motor vehicle registry services. Other services, including health care services and the issuance of health care cards, will not be affected.

I realize this doesn't address the most vulnerable populations, and the Official Opposition had some concerns about how repeat

offenders would be held to account, so it's important to take a look first at who those repeat offenders tend to be. One category is homeless individuals or individuals with mental health conditions or living with addictions and youth at risk of entering the cycle of poverty. This is one category of people who typically wouldn't have a motor vehicle registered or may not have any property to enforce against. These people are the province's most vulnerable, and they need support services from the province. Those services are not necessarily best provided in a jail setting.

Based on experience in working with our law enforcement and social services partners, we know that vulnerable people often end up in jail because they can't pay these fines. These vulnerable people aren't being sent to jail because it's an appropriate penalty for their infraction or because they pose a danger but rather because they can't afford to pay a fine, so landing in jail further perpetuates a cycle of incarceration, poverty, and homelessness, which does not create safer communities or help vulnerable Albertans. If we can stop this revolving door of poverty and incarceration, we know the lives of vulnerable Albertans will improve.

These amendments will put our government and social agencies in a better position to help these vulnerable Albertans. I will add, though, that these amendments do not affect tools available to law enforcement officers to deal with other chronic offenders and with disturbances. Officers will still be able to remove individuals from premises, arrest when necessary, and, where appropriate, issue a mandatory court appearance ticket that can be enforced by way of a warrant.

5:20

Madam Chair, we have received a wide range of support for this legislation because if passed, it will result in significant benefits. In addition to protecting Albertans, the province will save money on the costs associated with incarcerating these individuals, which will help to offset some of the pressures that we experience as a result of increasing incarcerated populations. It will also help to create some efficiencies. Additionally, the province will benefit from more effective collection of fines and penalties payable to the province.

The greatest benefit, ultimately, will fall to the social realm, which is to say that people who are otherwise marginalized will not be falling into this cycle of incarceration and poverty. We recognize that with respect to certain individuals who are very, very vulnerable, who have mental health challenges, we won't be putting them in jail, and perhaps we won't be able to enforce against their motor vehicles because they don't have any. But with respect to those people it's our view, ultimately, that they are in need of services and not in need of jail. As I've mentioned, with respect to those other individuals, the powers that police had to force an appearance will still exist but can only be exercised in the public interest. I have great confidence in our law enforcement officers and their ability to make those discriminations.

The other piece of the legislation, obviously, deals with e-tickets. This will just be streamlining of the ticketing process, allowing police to file tickets electronically with the courts and improve service, create efficiencies, and reduce errors.

I will conclude my comments with that, as I don't understand additional questions were asked. I welcome the comments of my colleagues.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak about Bill 9, An Act to Modernize Enforcement of Provincial Offences, in

Committee of the Whole. As we've heard in second reading and as we're hearing again today, there is real promise for Bill 9 to reduce administrative burdens that are currently weighing down the justice system.

The two amendments in this bill represent a twofold reduction in red tape, the first of which seeks to end the issuance of warrants for those who have violated provincial offences by not paying their fines. This has been explained to the Assembly as a way to reduce the workload on court clerks, which we just heard again from the hon. minister. I believe the number that has been used several times is a yearly reduction of 9,000 hours of court clerk time. That's great. This would mean that court clerks would be able to spend 9,000 hours more every year working on issues that present a real risk to the public.

My only question at this point would be: why are there no savings in the Justice department as a result of these 9,000 reduced hours? Now, we need to look at efficiencies within the system, and I understand that there's going to be a transition time. But in the end, when we are reducing workloads, are we also creating efficiency with that as well? I believe that the hon. minister has said that they're moving the resources to other areas. In the end, I do believe that when you reduce the volume, you also increase the efficiency, and we should be able to see some reduced cost in that.

Another administrative burden that Bill 9 stands to eliminate is the waste of tax dollars that are currently being spent on arresting, processing, and jailing offenders who have not paid their tickets.

There have also been some discussions earlier about cost savings that would come from no longer needing to pay officers to transport and process the people and savings that will come from the corrections facilities that will no longer have to house and feed nondangerous offenders.

Another step to remove administration burden or red tape has to do with the second amendment that is proposed in Bill 9, and that is introducing e-ticketing. This removes the burden on police officers to swear a summons ticket to a commissioner for oaths. Our law enforcement officials will simply be able to enter their ticket into the computer, which I imagine will be in their police vehicles, print the ticket, and be back on their way, monitoring Alberta's communities and making it safer for all of us.

Madam Chair, the removal of administrative burdens needs to be a priority for not only the Justice department, but it needs to be incorporated as a philosophical approach to governance across Alberta. In my opinion it is something that has been lacking from this government, and I'm glad to see that they are at least recognizing one way to tackle some unnecessary spending. I believe that removing administration burdens should be a priority for all governments. It saves taxpayers' hard-earned money and allows for front-line services to be administered more efficiently. In this bill the institution of e-ticketing would be saving police officers time in the field. They would spend less time writing and processing tickets and more time – more time – protecting our communities. This is great.

The same can be said about no longer forcing police officers to arrest and jail people who are tardy on paying fines for minor offences. The time that officers are spending to take individuals to jail is time that is taken away from patrolling a neighbourhood or responding to an emergency. There's also an administration and onerous cost to those who are being arrested. If someone has a loitering ticket and is pulled over for speeding, they could be imprisoned. This could impose an economic burden on the person as well as on the facilities themselves. If the individual is on their way to work, they could lose their job because of the fact that they are caught in this cycle. Once they are in this cycle, they may not be able to get out of the cycle because it is a perpetuating cycle. I

believe that enforcing a payment mechanism that is similar to overdue traffic tickets is an appropriate means for collection rather than arresting and jailing.

On that same note, much has been said on Bill 9 and the ending of what some refer to as debtors' prison. Essentially this means that when marginalized people like the homeless commit a provincial offence, they often do not have the means to pay their tickets. As a result they are being picked up on the streets, put through the process to make sure that they don't have any tickets outstanding, and then sent to prison. It seems a little counterintuitive to me.

This bill ends that cycle. It no longer puts homeless people in jail simply for being homeless, which is something that I commend. However, I think that if this bill is to pass, then we also must have a greater explanation from the minister on what this government's plan is to deal with the marginalized people that are no longer in the corrections system. Has the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General worked in concert with Human Services or perhaps the Department of Health to make a plan to tackle mental illness? As I understand it, mental illness is a significant challenge that confronts the homeless population, and I think this Assembly could use a little more clarification on what the plan is to address the issues that affect homeless people other than just no longer ticketing them and throwing them in jail.

5:30

Madam Chair, I look forward to having some of my thoughts on the points that I have raised today being answered by the minister. I will say again that I support Bill 9, and I would hope that everybody in this Assembly would support it with me.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there any other speakers with questions or comments on this bill?

Then we'll have the question.

[The clauses of Bill 9 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Madam Chair, I would move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Woollard: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 9.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? Say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much. I would like to thank all hon. members for a very productive debate this afternoon on a number of important pieces of legislation. As we have accomplished our goals for the afternoon, Madam Speaker, I will move that we call it 6 o'clock and reconvene tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:33 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875