



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, May 24, 2016

Day 32

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Second Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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| Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W) | Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND) |
| Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND) | Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND) |
| Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W) | MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W) |
| Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND) | Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND) |
| Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W) | Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND), Government House Leader |
| Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND), Deputy Government House Leader | McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret, Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND) |
| Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND), Deputy Government House Leader | McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC), Leader of the Progressive Conservative Opposition |
| Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND) | McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND) |
| Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND) | McLean, Hon. Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND) |
| Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP) | McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND) |
| Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND) | Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND) |
| Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND) | Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND) |
| Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W), Official Opposition House Leader | Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND) |
| Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND), Government Whip | Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W), Official Opposition Whip |
| Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W), Official Opposition Deputy Whip | Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND), Premier |
| Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND) | Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W) |
| Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND) | Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W) |
| Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (ND) | Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND) |
| Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC), Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip | Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND) |
| Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND) | Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND) |
| Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC) | Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W) |
| Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND) | Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND) |
| Filtebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W) | Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC) |
| Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND) | Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND) |
| Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC) | Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND) |
| Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND) | Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND) |
| Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC) | Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W) |
| Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND) | Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND) |
| Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC) | Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND) |
| Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND) | Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND) |
| Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader | Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W) |
| Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND) | Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC), Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader |
| Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND) | Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W) |
| Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND) | Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W) |
| Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W) | Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND) |
| Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC) | Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL) |
| Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W), Leader of the Official Opposition | Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W) |
| Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND) | Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND) |
| Kleinsteuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND) | van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W) |
| Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND) | Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND), Deputy Government Whip |
| Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND) | Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND) |
| Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W) | 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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| Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel | Nancy Robert, Research Officer | Gordon H. Munk, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms |
| | | Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i> |

Executive Council

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| Rachel Notley | Premier, President of Executive Council |
| Sarah Hoffman | Deputy Premier, Minister of Health |
| Deron Bilous | Minister of Economic Development and Trade |
| Oneil Carlier | Minister of Agriculture and Forestry |
| Joe Ceci | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| David Eggen | Minister of Education |
| Richard Feehan | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Kathleen T. Ganley | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Christina Gray | Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal |
| Danielle Larivee | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Brian Mason | Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Transportation |
| Margaret McCuaig-Boyd | Minister of Energy |
| Stephanie V. McLean | Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women |
| Ricardo Miranda | Minister of Culture and Tourism |
| Brandy Payne | Associate Minister of Health |
| Shannon Phillips | Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office |
| Irfan Sabir | Minister of Human Services |
| Marlin Schmidt | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Lori Sigurdson | Minister of Seniors and Housing |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Ms Miller
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

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| Cyr | McKitrick |
| Dang | Taylor |
| Ellis | Turner |
| Horne | |

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schneider

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| Anderson, S. | Hunter |
| Carson | Jansen |
| Connolly | Panda |
| Coolahan | Piquette |
| Dach | Schreiner |
| Fitzpatrick | Taylor |
| Gotfried | |

Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee

Chair: Mrs. Littlewood
Deputy Chair: Ms Miller

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| Anderson, W. | Nielsen |
| Clark | Nixon |
| Connolly | Renaud |
| Cortes-Vargas | Starke |
| Cyr | Sucha |
| Drever | Swann |
| Jansen | van Dijken |
| Loyola | |

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

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| Drever | Pitt |
| Hinkley | Rodney |
| Horne | Shepherd |
| Jansen | Swann |
| Luff | Westhead |
| McPherson | Yao |
| Orr | |

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

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| Cooper | Littlewood |
| Ellis | Nixon |
| Horne | van Dijken |
| Jabbour | Woollard |
| Kleinsteuber | |

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

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| Cooper | McIver |
| Dang | Nixon |
| Fildebrandt | Piquette |
| Jabbour | Schreiner |
| Luff | |

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Connolly

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| Anderson, W. | Kleinsteuber |
| Babcock | McKitrick |
| Drever | Rosendahl |
| Drysdale | Stier |
| Fraser | Strankman |
| Hinkley | Sucha |
| Kazim | |

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

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| Carson | Loyola |
| Coolahan | McPherson |
| Cooper | Nielsen |
| Ellis | Schneider |
| Goehring | Starke |
| Hanson | van Dijken |
| Kazim | |

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt
Deputy Chair: Mr. S. Anderson

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| Barnes | Luff |
| Cyr | Malkinson |
| Dach | Miller |
| Fraser | Renaud |
| Goehring | Turner |
| Gotfried | Westhead |
| Hunter | |

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Loewen

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| Aheer | Kleinsteuber |
| Babcock | MacIntyre |
| Clark | Malkinson |
| Dang | Nielsen |
| Drysdale | Rosendahl |
| Hanson | Woollard |
| Kazim | |

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 24, 2016

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 10 Fiscal Statutes Amendment Act, 2016

The Chair: We are considering amendment A4. Are there any speakers to this amendment? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Madam Chair. I appreciate that. I'm rising today to speak in favour of the amendment. Now, I do want to start off by pointing out that I do disagree personally with raising the limit to 18 per cent. I think that's too much, and if I had my way, we would not have to do that. But the reality is that the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks is trying to bring forward some sort of limitation. What the government is bringing forward right now is nothing, so they will eliminate the limit altogether and have zero limits, and the sky is the limit.

While I think 18 per cent is too much, at least there is some sort of a limit with the amendment that the hon. member is bringing forward. Now, you don't have to know the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks for too long to know that he would agree with me that he would like to see no limit at all, but for the same reasons I suspect that he is trying to bring forward this amendment.

Now, for me, Madam Chair, it brings to mind an example in my personal life that I think is applicable, and that is an example that I'm sure the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster will concur with as a veterinarian. Many a country pet dog has passed away prematurely waiting for the kids to return home from school on the school bus. Now, it's romantic for people who grew up in the city and didn't have a chance to be able to go down their own driveway and wait for the school bus to come or to watch your kids do it. It's really nice. It's a really cool experience. And dogs love to wait at the edge of the driveway for the kids to return home from school. Seriously. I mean, many a dog has unfortunately been hit by the school bus because of it.

Now, in my life we had two dogs in my family, two English mastiffs. Look at me, Madam Chair. I don't have small dogs because I would look a little weird if I was walking a chihuahua, but I have two English mastiffs, Nikita and Yukon. Both are pushing 270, 280 pounds, and I love them very much. They're really special dogs, and they're members of the family, as I know many members on all sides of the aisle will consider their dogs. They love to wait for my twins, Austin and Chyanne, to return from school on the bus. They will go there, so we've had to train them how far they can go to wait for our children to return on the bus. We've had to set limits on how far they go because we don't want them to get hit by a bus.

Now, my wife and I disagree on how far they should go. My wife is scared. We live in a place just outside of Sundre where we regularly see grizzly bears and we regularly see mountain lions on our property. Every year we'll have a couple come through, so my

wife, Tiffany, is understandably concerned about those animals and our kids at the bus stop. That's part of our dogs' job. That's why we own such big dogs, because they're able to protect our children outside when they're walking, sometimes in the dark, from the school bus. She tries to extend the limit to the fence. That's her rule. She says that the dogs can't go past the fence, past the cattle guard, and then they can wait for the kids. I think it's too close because they get excited, they try to run out, and I don't want my dogs to get hit. I like them at our garbage can. We have a big dumpster on our farm that's a little ways away from there, and I've set that as the limit. But I lost, Madam Chair.

My wife has been able to set the final limit for the dogs, but she still set a limit. She still set a limit. While I disagree that the limit should be as far as the fence, I had to compromise to be able to still set a limit. Otherwise, the sky is the limit, and the dogs are going to end up on the street, and just like many of our neighbours, we're going to lose our dogs.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, by bringing this forward, is not saying that the debt ceiling should be 18 per cent. He's saying that if the government insists on making it unlimited, a government who, by the way, Madam Chair, just recently said that 15 per cent was going to be enough when they raised it and are already back here less than half a year later having to raise it again, if that government is going to ask for the sky as the limit, with no limits at all, then the hon. member is going to attempt to bring forward something that at least puts in a limit. Similar to my dogs, at least there's a limit at the fence, and they're not out on the street.

The second thing that I want to talk about – and I think that this is what people that I talk to in my constituency find most offensive about this type of situation – is that the government sets a law, and then they break the law, and then they set a law again, and then they break the law. Then here they are again. They're just going to eliminate the law. It's too much work to break it and have to come back and hear a guy like me talk about this, Madam Chair, about how they broke the law. So that's what they're going to do, but people in Alberta, I can tell you, are offended by that.

Now, the third party – and I think they'll agree with me on this because they brought it up before. There was a similar law on elections that was set in this province, and there was a loophole and an ability for the previous Premier to be able to call an earlier election. In hindsight I think the third party would agree that that was a mistake, and it's part of the reason why we're all sitting here with you guys in government right now. [interjections] You might think it was a great idea, but many people that I talk to in my constituency don't think it was a good idea. In fact, they were deeply offended by the idea that the government could break their own law even if there was a loophole constitutionwise and they could do it. Even if they could, you know, not follow their own law, people where I come from were very, very disappointed in that, and I'm sure all members heard that a lot during the election.

With that said, just because you can break your own law, that doesn't mean that you should. If that is the path this government wants to continue down, setting no limits – “The sky is the limit; we can do whatever we want; we're annoyed and don't want to have to come back to the Legislature and keep asking for an increase in the debt ceiling; get rid of those annoying opposition guys; we'll just do whatever we want” – well, you should ask the third party, because Albertans don't like that. It smells wrong to them, and they will remember in 2019 that you were doing the exact same thing that the previous government did with the election law. They'll be very disappointed, and I suspect you're going to have to answer for that.

In closing, Madam Chair, it's important that we still set limits. Sometimes we're going to have to compromise because the limit

will be farther than we like, but to have no limit at all is dangerous, and somebody might get hit by a bus. Not following a law just because you can find a loophole or a way out and go to Albertans with “Oh, we’ve got a loophole; we’re the government; we can change the law; we don’t want to follow the law”: they’re not going to accept that. They’re going to be extremely disappointed, and I think the government should be ashamed of themselves and consider at least setting a limit.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. What I thought was interesting when the 18 per cent was brought forward was how the eyes in here got big, thinking: “Wow, that’s a lot. It could be \$3 billion in debt repayment at 18 per cent.” It’s huge, isn’t it? Well, we felt the same way at 15 per cent, so 18 per cent is a random number to help with setting some sort of limitations to the ceiling that we are talking about.

Just to clarify, our caucus doesn’t agree to 18 per cent. We just want some sort of limitation. I don’t think that that’s too much for Albertans to ask, and since the government seems to have no idea on how to get its spending under control, where do we go from here? Well, obviously, a 15 per cent debt ceiling was not enough, we will see. I think what’s most frustrating for me and my fellow caucus mates is that we felt, when you set and when you voted for that 15 per cent, that it would be broken and that it was already rubber-stamped anyway and that you knew that the government had no intention of staying within that debt ceiling. That’s extremely frustrating to those of us who could see that. We felt it, we knew it, and we knew that that was going to happen, and to be setting it with an unlimited ceiling at this point completely lacks in accountability to Albertans, that you serve.

There’s no ceiling for this government now, so how are Albertans supposed to trust you? This is a question you should be asking yourself as you go forward with this because it will be one that you’ll be answering in your constituencies once you surpass the 15 per cent. The 15 per cent was already really, really difficult for people to understand at the beginning.

This amendment is an attempt to help you understand the privilege you have in holding the trust of Albertans’ money in your hands. I’d like to know and pose a question as to when the accountability of the government changed. When did you find that it was okay to do this? You’ve seen it in the past. I’m sure that many of you have probably been frustrated by past mistakes and have probably even stood up to previous governments about these same situations, and now you stand here defending a choice that is actually going to cost your constituents, our constituents, more money than any of us ever expected.

7:40

Just to give it a little bit of perspective, if you look at it from the point of view – and I mentioned this in my last talk – that in this province we pay right now per capita \$2,000-plus more per man, woman, and child, I’ve already stated that already with just that, that’s \$8 billion a year we have extra per capita. Then if you add in the \$2 billion in repayment, which is \$2,000 per family per year, that is your deficit right there, just those two numbers added together.

I don’t understand how it is that you go into your constituencies and explain this to the people that you represent. How is it that you’re going to explain to them, going to the bankers, that you’re not putting money into schools, that you’re not going to be able to

put it into hospitals, that you will not be able to put it into programs, and that you will not be putting it into infrastructure? You’re going to be paying back a debt that you’re saddling my grandchildren and yours with. This needs to be explained. I don’t understand this kind of management. You’re repealing it after only six months. This is an addiction to borrowing, and it’s out of control.

You need to send a message to Albertans that you are responsible and that you have a plan to control your debt levels, hence the reason that there needs to be some sort of ceiling. Like I said, the 18 per cent was just a random number because anything at this point would be better than having no debt ceiling whatsoever. You are using people’s needs against them to justify your lack of management. What is going to happen when you don’t follow through? Albertans are wanting to know how high you’re actually willing to go, and we are challenging you there. That’s what that is. It’s a question to find out how high you’re willing to go, because if you’re not willing to set a ceiling, the sky is the limit, as has been mentioned before me.

I literally begrudgingly support this amendment and only because there needs to be some sort of limitation to what is capable by the government. Honestly, the amendment as it is: I support it because we need a limitation. That’s the reason why I’m supporting the amendment. Please consider, as you go forward, putting some limitations on yourselves and showing Albertans that you have the accountability that you promised when you were elected.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think that if you were going to put a name to this amendment, it would be called Manage the Damage because that’s what we’re trying to do. What we’re trying to say here is that we want to limit the damage. I want to support the bill in the sense that we want to limit how much can be borrowed, how much this government can actually go into debt. We want to manage the damage on this one.

You know, when I had my kids, for, I think, everybody that’s in here who has kids, if you didn’t tell the kids that they had a bedtime, they’d stay up till 1 o’clock, 2 o’clock in the morning. Then they wouldn’t get up in time for school. So you have to put limitations on them. Same thing with speed limits. We have speed limits there for a purpose. If a person is doing 200 kilometres per hour or 250 kilometres an hour in a 50-kilometre zone, pretty soon you’re going to have an accident, and it’s going to be a fatal accident.

That’s what I’m afraid is going to happen with this Bill 10. We’re not managing it if we just leave it open, so I’m for the amendment to have limitations put onto it. For me, I would like the limitations to be even lower, but we need to be pragmatic at this point in time because we’re already at a place where we’re going to be looking at 15 per cent. We’re trying to give the government an out, somewhere to go to so that we can move on and give confidence to Standard & Poor’s, to all these credit agencies, so it can help our economy in this province. That’s a really important thing.

You know, when we looked at this – the Member for Calgary-Elbow was talking a little bit earlier, a couple of days ago, about a mortgage on a house and that this was about a mortgage. He said that the budget is like a mortgage, that going into debt and having these things is like a mortgage, and he said that some debt is good. If you look at Alberta, in 2004 this house that we have, Alberta, was paid in full. We were debt free. We didn’t owe anybody anything. At that point in time going forward, we would be able to budget for what those things are. If you want to use the analogy of a house, you know that with a house you’ll need shingles in five years, say, so over five years you would budget for that.

That's the same thing that the government should be doing, budgeting for these inevitable things that are coming up. You have to have a plan, a wise and prudent plan that goes forward, and that's with the government as well. We have to have something that would look at it. We had a rainy-day fund in place in case some catastrophe happened. We had a rainy-day fund to look after that. That's what a wise and prudent person would do, Madam Chair, the same thing as what the government should do. They have a budget. Our house was paid in full, and we had a rainy-day fund. We had something to look after these things.

Now we're removing all the debt ceiling; we have an unlimited debt ceiling. I don't find that wise. For that reason I'm going to say I support having the debt limit on this one and not having an unlimited debt ceiling. We just need to manage the damage.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is another amendment being put forward by the Wildrose that is showing our contempt for what is happening with Bill 10. The fact is that the 15 per cent limit to fund our operational spending is really an insult to Albertans. The fact that it's being removed is beyond contempt. The fact that we have to reinstate it with even a higher number is even beyond comprehension. Now, you're saying: "Why is this such a tragedy? Why exactly do you feel, Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, that this one bill will hamper future generations for many, many years to come?"

Let's look at exactly what 18 per cent is. That's almost \$66 billion, \$66 billion that we are limiting Alberta to in its borrowing. Now, let's look at this number. It's a stunning number. The fact is that it's so large that we can't comprehend this number. It is so large that we can't even comprehend it. Let's break this down into something that we can comprehend, something that an average Albertan will understand. What we're looking at is that the government was projecting somewhere around \$50 billion in debt. They had given themselves 15 per cent to GDP, which was about \$50 billion, somewhere in there. Now, we said: what if your plan doesn't work? What if you guys eventually realize that you can't actually do what you're saying? That means that you're going to have to come back to us and raise the limit. In less than a year, less than six months you're back here again saying: "We need to raise the limit." No. Actually, why raise it? Why even put a limit in there when we can just obliterate it, get rid of it?

7:50

Now, let's bring this back down to what an Albertan can really move forward with as an example, something that we can actually work through here. Let's equate this to what it really is. It's a credit card. It's our line of credit to be able to pay to keep the lights on. Let's bring this from the limit of \$50 billion down to \$50,000, still a stunning number for any Albertan household – a stunning number – but we'll throw that out there: \$50,000 for a normal Albertan household.

Let's say that you get into trouble and you need to bail yourself out for a few months. You know what? I can tell you that families in my riding right now are feeling this because they're out of work, and we understand that. We understand that right now a lot of people are probably using lines of credit and credit cards to get by. Is that the solution to their problem? Maybe short-term to help get them out of this no-work stretch that they're in, but I will tell you that it is not working as a long-term solution because in the end they know that they have to pay off that credit card. Now, \$50,000, \$80,000, \$66,000, whatever the number is, they are limited to that

number. They can't go beyond it because – you know what? – the banks don't let them go past what they can afford.

That's the nature of debt, but somehow this government has worked out that it doesn't have any cap. It doesn't need one because it feels that it's going to do better and be able to pay this off some day in the future, but they won't tell us when, and they won't tell us how. This is a mistake. Not having a cap is a mistake. We need to make sure that we go back to Albertans every time we need to raise our debt limit and say: do we have a plan to pay that money back?

Let's get back to my example of \$50,000 for a normal person with a credit card just so we can understand this number. Now, let's say that on average it takes a family about \$1,000 a month. That's five years to pay off that credit card. But you know what? It's not at zero interest. Credit cards go at 18 per cent, so we're looking at a perpetual circle that they can't get out of. Right now I hear this all over: "Well, it's low. Interest rates are low. Why not take advantage of these low interest rates? We'll pay it back later." You know what? All those credit cards do the same thing. They start off with 5 per cent, and they go after a year to 18 per cent because the intent is always to pay it off in that year. Always. So what happens is that that family is stuck with that \$50,000 credit card.

Now, let's look at the options that family has. The option the family has is to take that debt and roll it into something they own, an asset, and finance that asset which has value. This is the route that a lot of families go, this temporary solution: get it into a mortgage that's held against an asset. We hear consistently from the government: we're going to borrow like it's a mortgage. The problem is that the mortgage doesn't have an asset attached to it. It has no house; it has no car; it has no boat. It has nothing attached to that asset. When we are looking at where we're going, we actually need to sell stuff to pay for this loan. Guess what? Unless we're going to start selling bridges and interchanges and schools and hospitals, that's just not possible. The fact is that we know that when we do sell this stuff, we never get the value we put into it. We sell it for a fraction. It is not a house.

When people get into debt with credit cards, they have an out. Now, what happens when you don't have that asset-backed liability is that you go bankrupt. That's the next step. When you can't get out of the cycle, you don't make enough money, you can't save enough, you go bankrupt. This is the direction that we see provinces and countries across the world going in. Is this a direction that Alberta should be going? No. The answer is no. The fact is that when we're looking for a direction for Alberta, it should never be: let's spend money and put it on credit and hope our children will pay it off. That is wrong.

The fact is that when we look at paying this off – we're looking at \$60 billion, \$70 billion, \$80 billion, \$100 billion – who is going to pay that off, especially when we can't sell the resources? That is an actual concern someday in the future. We're not going to have the ability to pay off those debts that we accumulate right now. That money isn't going to be there.

The fact is that we need to live within our means. If we can't live within our means, we're ensuring that our children someday will have to look at bankruptcy as an option. That means that someday when we start looking at what we're handing down to our children, what legacy we're handing down to our children, we're looking at debt. That's the legacy we're handing down. We're handing down credit card debt. What happens is that if you can't pay it off, it goes into something like a junk bond: 8, 10, 12 per cent interest, which is something that we're actually seeing in European countries right now. Somehow we think we can avoid this bullet, this magic bullet, because we think we're better.

Where is this magic income going to come from? Is it going to come from resources? Are resources always going to be there? I would say probably not. So where do we need to go with this? The fact is that we need to reduce our spending. If we are looking at the future, we need to set ourselves limitations, and that is where credit cards come in. They set limitations for us based on our earnings, based on what we own, based on the ability to pay that money back. Right now we're taking it and throwing it away. We are literally going in a direction that has no limitations on borrowing, and that is frightening. We're looking at massive junk bond status with our debt someday in the future, which takes money out of our social programs, takes money out of our schools, and it takes money out of our hospitals.

This is not a direction that I want to send my children. Our children deserve better. They deserve to be respected, and they need to know that we were good stewards with their money. That is not what we are doing right now. We are not good stewards. We need to be better. Now, we can point fingers at who we think is to blame, but in the end this government needs to make sure that it's accountable for the decisions it's making, and it is making a very poor decision right now.

Let's get back to credit cards. Credit cards: \$50,000, \$80,000, no matter what number you pick, in the end it needs to be paid back. We don't have the assets backed; we don't have the revenue coming in. We need to set limits on ourselves because we're the only ones that can do it. Nobody else can set these limits except for us here over this next little while. These limits are important because we need to be making sure that Alberta knows where it's going with its financial position, and we are not going in the right direction when we remove a debt limit.

It is like a bank saying: "You know what? We trust you. We're not going to set a limit. Why bother? We know that you're good for the money. You don't have the income, but someday maybe. Hey, you know what? Your house has no equity left because you took it all out, but we think it's going to grow. You know what? We think that maybe that time-share probably has a value someday. Even though – well, hey, you know what? – all of the time-shares in that condo unit have gone broke, we'll give you the credit. We're going to give you credit based on nothing." That is what you are asking for when you get rid of the debt limit.

8:00

We need a responsible government to move forward. That means debt limits. Now, whether it is 10 per cent, 15 per cent, or 18 per cent, we need to put something in place to ensure that Albertans know that we're at least holding some accountability. But all we hear is: "This is a mortgage. Albertans can sell stuff off someday to pay it, like what Greece is doing right now." That's sad.

It's truly sad that we are moving our children toward a decision on: how exactly are we going to educate our children, how are we going to have health care for our children, and how are we going to keep care of us when we become senior citizens because we've squandered the money? I do not want to put my little girls, Amelia and Charlotte, in the position that they feel they have to somehow have less of a lifestyle because we couldn't be responsible enough to move Alberta forward in the right direction. Yes, oil is low. Nobody will disagree with that, but the fact is that this isn't the only contributing factor when it comes to debt in this province. We need to be making sure that Alberta has the means to be able to pay this money back. When we actually have more debt than we can stomach, isn't it the time to change direction? It's already too late.

What I am asking is that we actually challenge the government. When are you going to balance the budget? How are you going to

balance the budget? What time frame are you going to pay this money back on the debt that you've accumulated? I'm going to guess that the answer is: "We don't know. We don't know, Scott. We don't know." That is sad. Why is it that this government can plan on moving forward an incredible new spending spree yet can't come up with how it's going to pay back this debt that it's accumulating?

Now, when we start looking towards the future, I don't want to be the one sitting down with my daughters and explaining to them what bankruptcy means. Yes, there are countries across the world that have gone down this direction. But where exactly is it that we think that we're better than everybody else when we make decisions that have no actual business plan? We need to be looking forward to the future. We need to be setting goals. We need to be doing this stuff, yet we have a government right now that ignores what exactly we're trying to achieve here: responsible government. When we have interest outpacing our education spending, when we have interest outpacing our hospital system, where should those funds have been funnelled towards? Not interest.

In years to come we're going to have infrastructure that we can't maintain. We're going to have nurses that we can't pay. We're going to have union employees without pensions. This is what happens when bankruptcy happens. This is where we are going towards without any debt limits. This is why we have had four downgrades of our credit rating, because of irresponsibility. It is something that we need to change course. I am hoping that the government is actually listening to where we are trying to change the directions towards.

When we start looking at exactly what the goal here is, it comes down to tax, more tax, more tax, more tax. Eventually you have nobody to tax, and that is sad. That is the direction that we are headed because in the end we think that we can actually tax ourselves to prosperity. You know what the answer is? You can't. We've been through this enough times in other countries that we understand that in the end, when it comes to taxes, you can actually tax people out of your country. You actually can do damage to the base that you hold so dearly, to make sure they support the services that we have, to be able to provide for our most vulnerable, to be able to provide for our education system, to be able to provide for our hospital care. Why can't we see this now? There is a real opportunity that sees that we need to change direction. How many more warnings do we need before we actually take a step back and say that maybe this isn't the direction we're going in?

When it comes to borrowing, we're hoping that some day royalties are going to bail us out, but it appears that in every direction we're going, that's not going to happen in the near future. The only place next is to start taxing, taxing, and more taxing until . . .

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah. Madam Chair, I was really enjoying the member's speech. I was wondering if he would care to elaborate further.

The Chair: Just a reminder that there is no 29(2)(a) in committee, so . . .

Mr. Fildebrandt: That was just a speech.

The Chair: . . . he can continue speaking. No problem. Go ahead.

An Hon. Member: I think he left off at taxes.

Mr. Cyr: It's funny. I thank you. I have a reminder from the government that I left off at taxes.

In the end, it is a good point that the government has brought up, that we are actually trying to help. We don't want to see Alberta go down the wrong road. We don't want to see Alberta repeating the mistakes of prior governments. What we do want this government to do is to start using restraint. Start using restraint.

Now, we hear all the time that there is nowhere to cut. There is no room for spending less than \$50 billion even though we're bringing in only \$40 billion. There's no room. We've got to fire everybody. That isn't true. Wildrose has brought forward that we can surely find one cent for every dollar, two cents for every dollar of cuts. There have got to be places that we can start bringing some real change to Alberta. When we start looking at protecting Alberta, we need to start looking at how we can reduce our spending and bring it in line with what Albertans expect us to do.

Let's go back to the credit card. I'm sure everybody is thrilled to hear about the credit card. In the end, let's bring it down to something that I myself can quantify, because \$50 billion, \$100 billion, \$300 billion like Ontario, are just huge numbers that we can't actually put any real number to that we can understand. It's just too big of a number. So let's go with \$50,000. Let's say Alberta did, for instance, decide that it wants to sell off its assets. Let's use that. Let's use bridges. Let's use hospitals. Let's start using that. Now, the question is: what do we sell? What goes first? Well, the easy stuff, right? Greece is seeing that. They get rid of the historical sites, right? That seems to be the first place to go. The next one is toll roads. Why not go there, sell off those?

8:10

You know what? That's not even paying the principal. You're just doing it to pay off the interest, like what's happening with Greece right now. Greece is going down a spiral that we can't even imagine. They have incredible, huge unemployment with their youth, and we've got incredible expectations when it comes to the standard of living, and the two just don't go hand in hand.

With this credit card, even if I sold my car, sold my house that's fully leveraged, sold my boat, now I'm still on the street with no money to be able to support myself. I have no ability to be able to move forward to make sure that my children will be taken care of. I have no ability to be able to go any further. This is actually something that I am seeing in my riding. People, actually, right now are living in our shelters, they are living in people's basements, and because it's summer right now, they're living in their – well, I would like to say cars, but they don't have those either yet, so what do they have? Tents. Backyards.

These are very unfortunate times. These are circumstances that these men and women got into that are very unfortunate. What as a government are we doing to help? The fact is that when I continue to go to the ministers and say, "What are you doing to reduce the 10 per cent unemployment rate in my riding?" the answer is: a tax credit, a jobs program that failed. That doesn't help them pay off their credit cards. That doesn't help them get into a new place when they do finally find a job because in the end they can't get out of debt.

Now, here's the thing: this is summer. They're living in that tent. Lots of people are living in that tent, so what is the next thing they're going to do when winter comes?

Mr. Connolly: Winter is coming.

Mr. Cyr: Winter is coming. Thank you very much. Yeah. It's sad.

The fact is that they are able to get by in the summer, but when winter comes, what are they going to do to actually find a place to live? These places just aren't available.

Where are we going to find jobs? Right now the prospect of finding a job is nonexistent. They go to Alberta Works and spend three or four hours every day making up resumés, sending out e-mails, and getting out the message that they want a job. They send it to a hundred companies in the area, and you know what their response is: "There are no jobs. As matter of fact, not only are we not hiring right now, we are letting people go." That's sad. It's sad for these single mothers, these single fathers, for these people that are out of work, these families. They're coming to me, and they're saying: what can I do, Scott? My answer is: Alberta Works. That's unfortunate.

You know what? We've got the government right now saying: we extended your unemployment benefits by five weeks. Five weeks. Problem solved. That's no solution. When we're looking at moving forward and we're looking at our neighbours, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, why are they still growing and we're shrinking at a rapid pace? [interjections] Well, thank you very much. We do have a wonderful carbon tax, which I'm sure is going to help them.

Let's look at the neighbours. This is actually reality in my riding. People right now can't sell their homes because there's nobody to buy them, and you know what? These families are leaving an empty house in my riding and moving to Saskatchewan, moving to B.C. This is a tragedy because these are highly skilled people. These are people that are moving out of our province, and they can't buy houses in the provinces that they're moving to because they are stuck, anchored to a house that they can't get out of. This is a reality across northern Alberta. Maybe you haven't felt it in your ridings, but I know I have. This is a real tragedy, that we are losing – we are losing – Albertans at an alarming pace, and we're ending up with incredibly high vacancy rates.

What are we doing? We're creating instability. You want to know what's unstable when it comes to bills like this? It throws a question into what our government is doing. When you have bills like Bill 10 brought forward – let's just get rid of the debt limit – who's going to invest money in an unstable province? We are seeing that repeatedly. We are looking forward, and we're saying to the government, "Please, bring stability back," and you're doing anything but. We're looking at carbon taxes, we're looking at personal taxes, we're looking at minimum wage increases, and we're looking at wonderful taxes in every direction we're going.

What company is going to want to invest in Alberta right now? I can tell you that they are announcing projects in 2019, and you know why? Because they're hoping that there's a change in government. That, I can tell you, is the direction you guys are going towards.

Getting rid of a debt limit is only showing how irresponsible you are. We need to look both to the east and to the west and see that – you know what? – they have an incredible amount of money coming in from resource revenues, and guess what? Guess what? They still are growing. The only place we're growing is civil servants.

Mr. Hanson: And debt.

Mr. Cyr: And debt.

Mr. Fildebrandt: And taxes.

Mr. Cyr: And taxes.

An Hon. Member: And shame.

Mr. Cyr: And shame. I have a lot of people contributing here. This is great. A whole lot of sharing happening.

When we start looking towards – ultimately, what we're looking to do is trying to create an ability for people to get back to work that's through creating stable legislation. This Bill 10 is creating nothing but instability within Alberta. Let's bring a debt cap in. You're not happy with 15 per cent. What number are you happy with? Eighteen doesn't seem to be that number. We're not happy with either number, but you know what? There's at least some accountability that we can use. This is something that will bring stability back to Alberta.

I guess the question that you need to ask is: after we vote down this amendment, that you are planning on voting down, and once you vote in Bill 10 to remove – remove – the debt limit, are we going to see another credit . . .

Mr. Taylor: Downgrade.

Mr. Cyr: . . . downgrade? Thank you.

Are we going to see more interest paid, less ability for us to pay that money back, greater likelihood that we become junk bonds?

What are the east and west doing that we're not doing? They're bringing stable governments. I'll reiterate that. We need stable governments. We need to make sure that companies feel that they can actually feel safe with the money, prosper, make profits, pay taxes, pay their fair share, whatever you want to say. In the end people working is what we need in Alberta, which is what we need in my riding, and this is something that this amendment helps.

8:20

Does it make me sad that I would be voting for this amendment? Absolutely. Does it make me sad that my colleague, the shadow minister of Finance, had to actually bring this forward? Absolutely. The fact is that he was willing to say that we need some limitation. We need to make sure that there's something, some way of actually paying for our credit card debt. We need to have a payment plan. We need to move forward. We need to actually show that we are a responsible government.

We need stability. We need stability so that I can have jobs being created in my riding again. This is something that is fully within the government's control, yet it continues to let us down. This is something that you actually can move forward. Is there any reason – I know that there are northern riding and Calgary MLAs from across the aisle that are voting to ensure that this instability continues. That means no jobs – no jobs – and more debt because what happens is that this is a spiral out of control that you are creating, and you need to stop the spiral. You need to come up with a plan. You need to set limits for yourself. That's what a responsible government does. That's what a responsible family does.

We need to make sure that in the end, when we accumulate debt, we pay it back because what happens is that – this is a failure that we cannot accept because I want to actually know that I handed this province off to my daughters, Amelia and Charlotte, knowing that I actually gave it in a better situation than I received it, and right now I can't say that. I can say that my oldest daughter is 10 years old and is sad to see where our province has gone in the last 10 years.

We had rainy-day funds. We had contingency funds. We had all this money. We had the Alberta heritage trust fund. We had this money saved. Now, what happened to it? What happened to it? We can look at irresponsible government, and we can look at where you're going, which is the same direction. The same direction.

Some Hon. Members: Worse.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. Worse direction. I have been corrected.

They are going in a worse direction because in the end socialism doesn't work. We need to have fiscal accountability, and what we need to be making sure is that – in the end a responsible, stable government is what we need to bring forward.

We have one of the biggest governments per capita in Canada. There's got to be a way that we can bring it down. There's got to be a way that as Albertans we can move forward and get through these tough times together. How can we do that when we've got no reason to because we can just get rid of the debt cap altogether?

In the end I am sad that either my children's children or their children's children are still going to be paying off what we've accumulated in this three-year period. That means that right now we are at the peak of Alberta's future. These next three years are at the peak of Alberta's future, and at some point once you hit the peak, you've got to come back down that mountain. That is where we're headed towards. We're headed towards less health care for everybody. We're headed for less education for everybody. We're headed towards a worse Alberta than I grew up in. This is unacceptable. This is something that – we actually have an ability to change direction.

I encourage everybody in this room to vote for this amendment. They need to be responsible. You are going to regret not voting for this amendment three years from now. I can tell you that three years from now today's recorded vote on this amendment will be held against everybody in this Chamber that didn't vote to make sure that we had an actual credit limit in place because in the end people will say: "Why? Why is it that you didn't have foresight. Why is it that you didn't actually speak a little louder in your caucus? Why are you not moving and doing anything that actually will move Alberta forward?"

How are we going to move? What direction are we going to move? I can tell you that the direction we're moving is more debt and instability. That means that not only is it sitting at 10 per cent unemployment in my riding, I can only expect that it's going to grow. There's no plan. There's no plan. You have no plan. How is it possible that we have, as a government that has got \$40 billion a year coming in, no plan for that money? We absolutely have got a plan to spend more than we make. That isn't a plan. That is a route to failure, and that is the direction we're going. You will be held accountable for that decision that you are making today. You need to stop.

In the end you are going to find over this next three years that not only are you unable to meet the targets you're setting for taxes and continuing to raise the taxes, but you're going to find that you are making less and less taxes, which – guess what? – we saw. Now, everybody says: low oil, low oil. What if this cost for oil stays at \$45 or \$50 for the next 10 years? What's your solution? Fifteen per cent PST?

The Chair: Any other hon. member wishing to speak to the amendment? Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much. I'll keep mine short, Madam Chair. Basically, it comes down to, you know, 7 per cent, 15 per cent, 18 per cent: whatever number you pick, it doesn't really matter. The real question is: how can Albertans trust this government to do what's right for Alberta? They won't even abide by their own legislation. They set the debt limit last fall at 15 per cent through legislation. They all voted for it unanimously. We sat here and watched it. How do they expect us to sit here representing Albertans and allow them to change this law and take away any accountability? Simply repealing section 3 without any maximum is irresponsible, and it's shameful. It is not what Albertans voted for last May. I would challenge all of you to go actually talk to

Albertans and see what they really think of your limitless debt ceiling. I challenge you to do that.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to this amendment? Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Yeah. You got it. That's right. Thank you, Madam Chair. I have to support this amendment but not because I agree with the number. The reality is that what's been proven here tonight is that it doesn't matter what the number is to the members opposite. Any number would always be unacceptable. My colleague from Bonnyville has challenged us a lot on the need to set a limit. My question is: what limit will you accept? There is no limit that seems to be acceptable.

I believe there's a reason for that. I believe that it's because the members opposite are afraid to set a limit. I understand that you're new to government. I understand that you're extremely inexperienced, that you have no knowledge of how to do these kinds of things. I also understand that none of you have ever come close to managing a \$50 billion business, not to mention a \$5 million business or even a \$5,000 one. [interjections] Yeah. I doubt that.

8:30

Any limit is better than no limit. You cannot just appropriate to yourself any amount of money that you want to take. We said six months ago that 15 per cent was dangerous because it would not last, and obviously it hasn't lasted. It didn't last six months. We said that as soon as you had 15 per cent, you'd change it to 18 per cent. Lo and behold, here we are. Next time it'll be 20 except you skipped that. Now all of a sudden you went immediately to any limit. The sky is the limit. How prophetic was that? You didn't even need a crystal ball. The reality is that the members opposite have no understanding of how to create wealth, only how to spend it. They're like those who have won the lottery except that soon it's all gone.

I remember a story in the paper a few years ago of a glamour marriage from Hollywood ending up in divorce with a \$20 million settlement offered, and within five years the \$20 million was gone and they were filing for bankruptcy. That's exactly where you're taking our province. Those who have a DNA of dependency can't possibly be expected to manage the people's money well, who have a politic that the government owes me and all of us and that any amount will do forever and ever and ever.

There is this idea out there that the government has a limitless amount of money and they never have to pay it back. There are even theories out there that try and promote that. Well, I guess if you're a sovereign government and you actually have the ability to create money and print it with paper presses, you can try and delude yourself with that story, but subsovereign governments like provinces don't have that option.

What are the people of the province supposed to do when politicians break their own promises, when politicians say things and then completely do the exact opposite of that? The only thing the people can do is require laws to constrain them because the politicians won't constrain themselves.

Unfortunately, horses are like that. If you give horses the opportunity to eat too much rich food, endless amounts of grain, they'll stand there and they'll eat and they'll eat and they'll eat until they kill themselves, literally. They will eat grain until it founders them, and it is fatal. You have found yourselves a great bin of grain, and you think that you can just consume of it endlessly and there are no consequences, there are no results. There are consequences. There are results. There needs to be some sort of a limit to your

spending or you're going to destroy yourselves and our province. So we must set some sort of a restraint on people who cannot restrain themselves.

I will vote in favour of this amendment.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll be short as I speak to this amendment. This bill is a dangerous precedent. The government put legislation in place a few months ago that would not allow them to borrow more money for this province than an amount that was equal to 15 per cent of the gross domestic product. That's called a cap. That's a cap, a cap that gives Albertans some kind of idea that their government can't and won't abuse their power and borrow more money than the math works out to in the formula that was presented.

However, Madam Chair, this government, before they rolled out their latest budget, came forward with newer legislation called Bill 10, which was presented and all of a sudden took away the cap, the 15 per cent debt-to-GDP formula. It took away the cap that Albertans had come to realize was their government's legislation to not borrow more money than 15 per cent of the GDP. All of a sudden the government decided that it was going to remove that cap and put no debt ceiling on their borrowing.

At this moment, of course, that means that the Alberta government can borrow any amount that it sees fit to run the government of Alberta, no restraint required. Alberta's debt will be about \$58 billion by the next election. That's bad enough, Madam Chair, but borrowing for the operations of government is downright scary. The day-to-day operations of Alberta's government are now beholden to those that have lent money to this province.

You know, we used to have a phrase around here that Albertans were proud to use, that little buzzword, the Alberta advantage. For years Alberta had a favourable investment climate that helped make it an economic powerhouse. It became a place where investment dollars flowed because the possibility of return was expected. The policy choices that this government has made have made Alberta a less desirable place for investment, perhaps at one of the worst times possible. So long, Alberta advantage.

Large-scale debt is problematic for future generations of Albertans. Frankly, doing this to the next generation is simply immoral. By designating the next generation as the one responsible for paying off the debt, the government is willingly depriving them of those advantages that I spoke of a moment ago.

And now Alberta's credit rating is being downgraded, a development that has troubling consequences as well. But the credit downgrades of late are no surprise. We were warned early in January that a high borrowing agenda would lead to trouble. Our caucus pressed this government to try and rein in spending, and repeatedly we were basically laughed at. A moderate budget was an option that the government could have tried. They could have protected front-line workers while reining in spending to show creditors that there is some semblance of fiscal competence.

Now, I believe I have several caucus members that may want to speak yet today, so I'll take my seat, Madam Chair. But before I do, I must say that I have every intention of supporting this amendment and not because I believe that the government of Alberta should put forward a number of 18 per cent of gross domestic product as a limit for borrowing. I'm certainly not interested in suggesting that the government should impose that number.

I support this amendment because it suggests a debt ceiling. Bill 10 right now has no debt ceiling. The government turned down 15 per cent. What is the magic number? Is 15.5 per cent the number?

If it is, why not add it to the bill? If it isn't 18 per cent, please give us an indication of what the number is that would satisfy the government. That is what is behind this amendment, an outrageous number. If the government won't support that number, please tell us what that number is.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I have listened closely and with rapt attention, as I always do when I'm in the august presence of all of my fellow MLA colleagues. I hope to bring a little bit of perspective to this because, I have to say, I get frustrated listening to debate like this in this Assembly.

We have what seem to be two pretty polarized views of the world. On one hand, we have the Official Opposition, who believes that the government probably wants to destroy Alberta, that this is really some global socialist plot to ensure that our province finds its way to bankruptcy, and that probably it's the ghost of Che Guevara who's pulling the strings behind the scenes somewhere. But, you know, on the other hand, of course, we have the government, who's brought forward Bill 10. It's removed the debt cap that they put on themselves barely four and a half months ago. That shows, I think generously, a lack of experience and, perhaps less so, an inability to get a real handle on the spending of this government.

So I'm torn. I'm torn as to whether or not I want to actually support this amendment. While I believe that there should be some sort of cap, I find it interesting that our friends in Wildrose will rise and say: "We're proposing this amendment. We don't really like the number, but we're still proposing this amendment because it's better than nothing." I mean, I don't know if 16 is a better number than 18.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yes, it is.

Mr. Clark: Yes, it is. Of course, it's a better number; it's less. Of course, that's wonderful.

But it's a bit of an odd debate, I have to say. It seems like it's a good opportunity, I suppose, to just stand up and continue to hammer on the government on the things they don't like.

I would love, actually, to hear from the government in greater detail why, in fact, they think that they can't find their way to meet their 15 per cent debt-to-GDP cap when they've only said that they're going to get to 15.5 at worst case. That's not a huge amount, actually, and I really don't think that that's too much to ask, for the government to constrain spending just that much.

8:40

It doesn't need to be incredibly painful. It doesn't need to mean massive front-line service cuts. You know, the Member for Calgary-North West and I were just having a bit of a conversation here about some of the small ways that this government can find efficiencies. Really, it comes down to looking after the pennies so that the dollars ultimately look after themselves.

I mean, something I'll put to the Minister of Health: one of your objectives is a youth mental health website. That's a great idea. We should do that. But you know what? Our friends in B.C. have already done it. The AnxietyBC website for youth and teens is a fantastic resource. Have we looked at licensing that instead of building our own?

I bet you there are countless examples like that all throughout government where we could simply reuse something that someone else has done. As a result, we could save at least tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands if not millions of dollars all throughout government. Just because it's not invented here in Alberta doesn't

necessarily mean that we don't need to find ways of doing things more efficiently and more effectively. I really think that that's something this government hasn't done well enough, challenging the public service to find ways of doing more with less.

I think that these debates are sometimes enlightening, often entertaining. But I think that at the end of the day I would like to see some sort of debt cap reinstated. Whether 18 per cent is an appropriate number or not remains to be seen.

Those are my comments, Madam Chair. I'll sit back and listen to the rest. Thank you.

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. Looking at this amendment, I have to say that I'm torn and for obvious reasons. I think even the mover of the amendment has already agreed with me on this, so I feel fairly confident in what I'm saying. I don't like the number at 18 per cent.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'd like it zero.

Mr. McIver: Unlike the member that moved this, zero is the wrong number because debt is a tool that needs to be used judiciously in order to build infrastructure, but it also always has to come with a plan to pay it back that's credible.

Unfortunately, the current government has been using debt as something that's out of control, like a child whose parent pays their credit card every month and they never have to see the bill because somebody else pays it. In this case the government is actually responsible to that parent because that parent is the taxpayers and citizens of Alberta, and that's a terrible way to treat them, to take a cap off the debt. It's a terrible way to treat them. [interjection]

And right away the Health minister chirps in with the only solution the Health minister has, to lay off teachers and nurses, which actually speaks volumes about the imagination of this government. They only have one lever. They only have one lever. Every problem looks like a nail, and they only have one tool. It's a hammer, and the hammer is that either they're going to spend their brains out or they're going to lay off teachers and nurses. They have no other solutions. Yet they think that they are qualified to govern this province although the Deputy Premier has only one solution to every problem, to lay off teachers and nurses. Bad solution, Deputy Premier. Terrible solution, Madam Chair. That's what I'm saying.

Back to this. The government thinks that they should take all restraint off of borrowing. That is a terrible decision, and one that they've chosen to make. Incredibly irresponsible, incredibly disrespectful to Albertans, and really incredibly disrespectful to every child and grandchild in Alberta that's going to depend upon the government to deliver services to them in future years. While spending your brains out right now may buy lots of gifts for Albertans, Albertans are going to be sadly missing those gifts in a few years when the debt has to be paid back. They're going to need schools then, too. They're going to need hospitals then, too. They're going to need seniors' homes then, too. They're going to need roads then, too. The government of the day is going to be severely handicapped in their ability to provide those things because of the irresponsible financial behaviour of the current government.

There is one argument that says that any cap is better than no cap at all. I think I heard the mover say this, so I'm guessing the mover won't be offended by my saying that as well. On the other hand, we need to learn the lessons of history, Madam Chair, and one of the lessons of history, in my opinion, is to vote for what you want. Don't vote for what you don't want, because when you see something you don't want and you want to change it, so you choose to vote for something you don't want . . .

Mr. Mason: It could be a mistake.

Mr. McIver: You're right.

... it could be a mistake, Government House Leader. That's how we got an NDP government, people voting for what they don't want. Thank you. You finished my thought for me.

Madam Chair, the Government House Leader actually made my argument for me before I could even make it. The point that I was coming around to is that a year ago people were angry at the PC government – and I get that – and a lot of them didn't want to vote for us because of that. The problem was that they didn't like the other choices on the menu either, so what they did was vote for something they didn't like, and now they have what they have.

Madam Chair, I am left right now with a similar decision: vote for something you don't like or for something else that you don't like. I have to say that I don't like 15 per cent, and I don't like 18 per cent, and I don't like no limit at all. So rather than voting for something I don't want and repeating what the public did a year ago, on May 5, when they elected the current government, I think I am actually, with all due respect to the mover of the motion, going to be forced to vote against it.

Mr. Fildebrandt: But you'd said that you'd vote to make it less bad.

Mr. McIver: But it doesn't make it less bad. It's 20 per cent more.

Madam Chair, the Government House Leader actually has the courage at this point to wag his finger and say that it's reckless. His government is the epitome of reckless. If you actually open the dictionary and look under the word "reckless," you will see a picture of that Government House Leader or that Premier or surely some subset, if not the entire government, because that is the epitome of reckless.

What we have here, unfortunately, is also reckless. With all due apologies to the mover of the amendment, this is how we got an NDP government, folks. It's people voting for something they don't like. Today I choose not to vote for something I don't like, which is an 18 per cent debt limit. I don't like no debt limit either, but that's not on the menu. If it was, I surely wouldn't vote for it. This is a problem. The 15 per cent is a problem, and 20 per cent worse than the 15 per cent, which is the 18 per cent, is a bigger problem. It's reckless. It's harmful to Alberta. It will take us further down the debt rabbit hole, when we know we have a government with no intention of paying it back.

While I'm sure the mover's intentions are good, the last thing – the last thing – I want to do is to give this particular government any sort of licence to increase their borrowing by another 20 per cent, particularly when they've made it abundantly clear that they have absolutely no plan now or ever to pay penny one of it back. So out of respect for Alberta's seniors, that are going to need care in the future, out of respect for Alberta's children and grandchildren, that are going to need everything in the future from education to health care to roads to seniors' homes to social services, I cannot in good conscience vote for something I don't like because, as I'll repeat one last time, (a) I like saying it and (b) because I love how much the government dislikes hearing it, that would be the same as voting for the NDP, and I can't possibly do it.

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think we've hit that time of night where things start to get pretty loopy in here, which is when they tend to also get a bit more exciting. I'm very pleased to see that the Wildrose is starting to rub off on the leader of the third party. His aversion to giving the NDP an inch on debt certainly

warms my heart. I really do appreciate seeing him take a stand against debt here. It might not be as hard as the stance of the Wildrose, but it is certainly a move in the right direction.

8:50

Now, there are two options in front of us right here. There are two options. One is to have a debt cap of 18 per cent, and the other is a debt cap of infinity. Those are the options that we have in front of us. It's not 15 or 18. If this was 15 or 18, the choice would be very clear to me. I think a 15 per cent debt cap is far too high. That's why every member of the Wildrose voted against the legislation which enabled the 15 per cent debt cap in the first place. We didn't believe in raising it to 15 per cent. We didn't believe in legalizing borrowing for the operations of government. We believe that you should balance the budget and not just the operational budget; the consolidated budget needs to be balanced.

But there are two options in front of us. One is an infinite level of debt with no restrictions on borrowing whatsoever, and the other is an 18 per cent limit on debt. Now, 18 per cent is about 18 per cent too high. I believe that we need to balance our budget and pay down the debt and be paid in full once again, but in the meantime it is the job of the opposition not just to criticize the government but to propose helpful solutions. It's to propose helpful solutions, and in the absence of any limit to borrowing whatsoever for the government, I believe that an 18 per cent limit is better than an infinite limit, Madam Chair. It's the job of the Official Opposition to ensure that the legislation is less bad than it would otherwise be. That is why the Official Opposition will vote for this amendment.

But regardless of what the government does, we'll be voting against this bill. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: Moving on to the bill, are there any further amendments, questions, or comments with respect to Bill 10?

Then I will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 10 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 move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 10. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

**Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading**

**Bill 10
Fiscal Statutes Amendment Act, 2016**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today and move third reading of Bill 10, Fiscal Statutes Amendment Act, 2016.

The act will allow our government to implement the Alberta jobs plan, creating the conditions to employ 100,000 people right across our province. By implementing this act and the Alberta jobs plan, we'll be supporting families, investing in infrastructure, diversifying our energy industry and markets, and supporting Alberta business.

Now is the time to act. Let's get Albertans working again. I ask all members of this House to support this bill.

With that, Madam Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, I want to thank all hon. members for a very enjoyable, edifying, and entertaining evening.

I will move that we adjourn the House until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 8:56 p.m.]

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