



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, June 1, 2016

Day 37

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature
Second Session

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Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
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Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
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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.

Wednesday, June 1, 2016

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Welcome. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour for me today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Mr. Jagjeet Singh Sekhon. Mr. Sekhon is a prominent personality in the Ludhiana region of Punjab. He was elected to public office as a councillor, served for the past many years in various positions in the milk industry of Punjab, a major part of the Punjab economy. Mr. Sekhon is presently serving as director of Milkfed, a major milk production subsidiary. He is accompanied today by Charanjit Singh Dakha, who is a Sikh community organizer here in the city. They've risen. Let's give them the warmest welcome from the Legislature.

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

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I will let the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View introduce first.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much for that gracious passing of the buck.

An Hon. Member: Torch.

Dr. Swann: Torch. Sorry.

Mr. Speaker, I'm especially pleased because this is the second time this year I've had a school come to the Legislature, in this case the fantastic school of Langevin in northeast Calgary. I want to introduce 53 students and six teachers and teacher helpers. Please stand when I mention your name so we can recognize you. The teachers include Kate Logan, Brianna O'Sullivan, and Clark Reid, and the parent helpers include Ms Rani Wong, Mr. Kaushik Banerjee, and Mr. Alex Himour. And all the students: please rise, and we'll give you a warm welcome to the Legislature.

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

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was trying to locate my son over there. I would just like to make a quick addition to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View's introduction. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my son Arjun Singh Gill, who is with his class from Langevin science school. The school is amazing. The teachers and the volunteers do a great, great job. You know what? Thank you very much to the teachers for taking care of my son because I couldn't do this, right? He always beats me at Xbox and all those funny things. Thank you very much. I would ask that he, his classmates, and their teachers again rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. Welcome to all.

The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly an exceptional class of students from Calvin Christian

School, just north of the town of Coalhurst. These young folks, a couple of teachers, and some of the parents are from the marvellously outstanding constituency of Little Bow. I had the honour of meeting with these students and parent volunteers just a few minutes before the House opened. There are few greater honours in this job than meeting with students and speaking with them about the important work that we do here in this House. I also want to acknowledge the teachers and volunteers that made today's visit possible. I ask that you rise as I say your name – I know you're behind me – Mr. Trevor Aleman, Mr. Johannes Gerardus Jacobus Lock, Mrs. Jennifer Moens, Mrs. Michelle van Velthuisen, Mr. Maas van Velthuisen, Mr. John Vande Merwe, Mr. Derk Vossebelt, Mrs. Jackie Vossebelt. I apologize for the pronunciations if I was a little off there. I would ask that the students of Calvin Christian rise and that all them please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 35 visitors from Belvedere elementary school in my riding of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I can tell you that on a yearly basis I visit Mrs. Bogner's class, and it's one of my favourite parts of being an MLA, returning to a classroom to engage with our future politicians, future leaders of our great province. With Mrs. Bogner today are teaching assistant Mrs. Arntson and parent volunteers Kim Nguyen and Ms Ginther. The parents, staff, and students all are doing amazing work at Belvedere elementary school, and I'm very proud to represent them. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups today?

Hearing none, the Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests joining us from Edmonton Northlands. Tim Reid is the president and chief executive officer, and Cathy Kiss is vice-president of corporate relations. Edmonton Northlands is a not-for-profit organization that has been at the heart of Edmonton since 1879. At the beginning of May Northlands demonstrated the depth of those roots when it stepped up to the plate and quickly, efficiently provided a place where evacuees could find rest and safety as they fled the devastating Fort McMurray wildfires. The organization, its leaders, staff, and volunteers epitomize the generosity of spirit that Alberta is known for, and for that I want to personally extend my heartfelt thanks. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three members of the very strong and active Alberta Avenue Community League in my constituency of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I would like to ask Nicola Dakers, Margaret Larsen, and Adam Millie to please stand and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the Edmonton Northgate Lions. The Lions' contributions to Edmonton-Decore are countless. I know I could easily spend the rest of the afternoon telling you about all the wonderful things that they do for our community, from sponsoring community groups and sports teams to raising money and volunteering time with those in need. The Lions are certainly a pillar in northeast Edmonton. Joining us today are Rod Zohner, Marge Berry, Wanda Coates, Greg Clark, Dawn Harper, Harry Clark, Darnell Addley, Ainslie Bovee, Brian Sieben, and Tom Scott. I would now ask all my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two CFL players from the league's greatest franchise, the Calgary Stampeders. Jabari Arthur spent eight years with the Stamps and has two Grey Cup rings. Randy Chevrier spent 11 years with the Stamps and has three Grey Cup rings. They're both in Edmonton supporting the Telus Days of Giving. I ask Jabari and Randy to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

Someone told me that in this city there was another team. I can't remember the name.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand today and introduce to you and through you a group of people that have been outside helping with the Telus Days of Giving. First off, though the Stamps are a good team, the Eskimos are the Grey Cup champions. First, I will introduce two people from the Edmonton Eskimos. I wish you would stand as I call your names: Adrienne Bridgeman, who's director of partnership servicing, and Jed Roberts, who is a former defensive end and linebacker who played 13 seasons for the Eskimos. [interjections] Not done yet. I had a whole list, but everybody was so excited about the Eskimos that they just couldn't hold themselves. I understand. I understand.

The other group that I have here today was instrumental in putting together the kits for kids outside there that most of us contributed to. If you would stand, please: Andrea Goertz, Zainul Mawji, Shadi Sakr, Nicholas Cartmell, Japman Bajaj, Ramiro Mora, and Dan Campbell. I wish you all to give the traditional warm welcome to these people.

The Speaker: Welcome, and thank you.

It seems to me that the two colours seem to be pretty friendly up there.

Lacombe-Ponoka, another guest?

Mr. Orr: Yes, if I may. Sorry if my staff didn't get the notice to you. My apologies.

Anyway, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Thalia Hibbs and her son Harrison Hibbs. Harrison Hibbs is a grade 6 student at Father Lacombe Catholic school. He also plays Canada's two national sports as top peewee defenceman for the Lacombe Rockets this past hockey season and as pivot for his peewee lacrosse team, the Lacoka Locos. Thalia is currently vice-chair of the St. Thomas Aquinas Roman Catholic school board and a two-term trustee.

She's active in her community and her parish, sitting on various committees, and coaches. Please rise as we give you the warm traditional welcome of this House.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

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

End-of-life Decision-making

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On rare occasions we have the opportunity to experience moments so profound and precious that they leave permanent marks on us, fleeting moments that provide not only a glimpse into the human condition but a deep and immersive understanding. These moments etch themselves into our very being and shape who we are. I have been blessed and humbled to be present as lives leave this world, to experience something so awe-inspiring that it reaches into a person and touches their heart and soul.

It was last year when a close family friend, Jeff, passed away from pancreatic cancer. I will forever remember the small and intimate room, the sounds of those final conversations, and those by his side. I was there when the palliative caregiver sat close to his bedside and asked him how he would like his final moments to proceed. They said to him: "You know, we can intubate you and keep you alive for a little bit longer, but you won't have the same capacity. You won't be able to speak to or hold your family." Then they said: "What we can do for you is to make you comfortable so you can pass naturally. You can tell your wife, Katie, that you love her. You can hold her hand. You can be together with your family." That's what he decided at that time, and it wasn't an easy decision.

I remember standing there, watching this conversation so personal and so surreal. I almost felt uncomfortable being there, yet it felt right, that I was supposed to be there. I never spoke with Jeff or Katie about assisted death or even whether it crossed their minds. But I was so grateful for the work that the palliative care team gave them with such comfort and respect and for every moment that I got to spend with him. We are all grateful for what he was able to contribute to his family and his young daughter's life in his final months.

The issue of assistance in dying is one that transcends mere politics and policy. It touches not only our heads but our hearts and our very souls. It is a discussion of grief and loss and pain and life and ultimately is a discussion of our shared humanity . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Calgary-Mountain View.

Fort McMurray and Area Wildfire Recovery

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today it's more than appropriate to acknowledge our amazing province. Four weeks ago in an orange haze of smoke and flame an entire city fled by a single road, some north, some south. After reaching hastily prepared reception centres, many were forced to flee yet again as the wildfire continued to grow into a multiheaded beast. In other parts of the world this might have been an enormous human tragedy as well as an urban disaster, but here in Alberta it was the prelude to an astonishing story of courage, compassion, hard work, determination, a story that showed the world who Albertans really are.

Against all odds 90,000 people were evacuated safely and found shelter in cities and towns across the province. Against all odds

Albertan and Canadian individuals and businesses, already struggling with the financial crisis, answered their neighbours' need and made the Fort McMurray donation campaign the largest in the history of the Red Cross. Against all odds the fire was pushed away from much of the city and surrounding infrastructure. Firefighters toiled day and night to save the city while uncertain of their own families and homes. Their courage has been shown to the world on TV and social media, their bravery inspiring, offers of help from around the world.

Today, four weeks later, against all odds thousands are being allowed back into the city because of the laborious work of restoring essential services in record time by workers from across Alberta.

I join with all members of the Legislature to wish the returnees to Fort McMurray the best possible return as they rebuild their lives and their city, and we mourn with the families of Emily Ryan and Aaron Hodgson, who died in a car accident fleeing the fire.

Albertans are strong, but the strong also suffer both short and long term from the mental trauma of this disaster. It is not weakness to express the need for psychological supports. I urge those who have experienced unprecedented loss and devastation to speak up and reach out over the coming months and years as needed. You deserve the best that our province can give you.

You are not alone. All Alberta, all Canada stands with you.

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

Farmer's Day

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise in this Assembly and celebrate Alberta farmers. Almost 100 years ago the United Farmers of Alberta recognized the importance of setting aside a special day to celebrate and honour our farmers, so now the second Friday in June is Farmer's Day in Alberta. On June 10 farmers in farming communities will celebrate the hard work and contributions that our Alberta farmers make to this great province.

As many of you know, I grew up on a farm just outside of Grovedale and have been proud to be part of a farming community my whole life. Alberta farmers produce food sustainably through value-added production in developing new products that balance increasing food production with being good stewards of the land. Farmers understand that in 20 years the world will still be looking for Alberta to feed them and that we need to take care of our resources today to continue to produce food for generations to come.

Alberta farmers are savvy businesspeople who are accountable for every aspect of their business, including inputs, outputs, value, and quality of products. These farmers take the greatest pride in their products being world class. Alberta farmers are incredibly innovative, and they're always finding new and enhanced ways of producing the food to feed the world.

Alberta's agriculture producers are working with the Climate Change and Emissions Management Corporation, founded in 2009, to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that are attributed to managing biological systems. They have been consulting with industry to create the most sustainable farming practice to further reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

On June 10 I encourage everyone to take the time to celebrate and show their pride for our Alberta farmers. They are producing the food to feed the world, and they are doing an incredible job of it.

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

1:50

Gender-based Online Harassment

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last year there has been a growing awareness of online gender-based violence. Hundreds of thousands of women face online harassment because of who they are and what they say. Women sports journalists and broadcasters, provincial and federal cabinet ministers, even our own Premier have been trolled online with hateful messages and name-calling due to their gender and public profile.

Mr. Speaker, as you and others in the House already know, shortly after I was elected, I experienced hate messages that were explicitly sexist and subject to taunting and online harassment because I am a woman. In May 2015, after forming our government with near gender parity in our caucus, an individual posted publicly on Twitter using the ableg hashtag, "Pretty confident things'll run smooth with so many broads' ladyshipping over the #ableg. Aren't you? Guys? Don't you want broads mitigating?" Another example is a comment directed at a federal female MP: "What a C you next Tuesday. Like seriously just go back to your house and run your car in your garage while you think of another anti oil campaign to attend."

Mr. Speaker, these are hateful comments. They're nasty, gender-based, and demeaning. They are not constructive, and it's no wonder so many women fear choosing politics as their career. In no way do they provide a constructive conversation on policy or political action. For many women things often escalate further. Name-calling, violent messages, rape, sexual assault, and even the threat of targeting family members are sent through online threats to feminists regularly. The practice has become so common that the process of reporting these has become second nature. The intersections of harassment get even more intense for women of colour, queer women, indigenous women, and women living with disabilities. They are targeted even more intensely, and the language used to attack them is almost unrepeatable.

Online communities are working to stand up against gender-based attacks online. Mr. Speaker, as a woman in politics I stand with all women who have experienced gender-based harassment. You are not alone in your struggle. I encourage all members of this Assembly to respect us and treat us with dignity and equality.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

Oral Question Period

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

Carbon Levy

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Premier and NDP government refuse to be honest with Albertans about the full cost of this carbon tax. They know it will make everything more expensive for families at a time they can least afford it. They know that a carbon tax while everyone is hurting will just make everything worse. This is a mess, and Albertans are extremely upset. The Premier claims that indirect costs will only add up to a maximum of \$105 a year but gave no details. Will she tell Albertans if her vague estimates include higher prices on groceries because of increased transportation and heating costs?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise in this House and update the Assembly on why exactly a price on carbon is good public policy. People from both sides of the House, including conservatives such as a former PC Finance minister, somebody

who, I expect, many respect, wrote in an op-ed that “carbon pricing is cost effective – meaning that it achieves emissions reductions at the lowest possible cost to the economy.” He also said that “the legislation is offering sensible ecofiscal policy for Alberta.” I’m proud of the policy, and I think members opposite should be as well. Again, that was Jim Dinning, former PC Finance minister.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I love the word “sensible.” Let’s try applying it here because families are seeing the value of their homes go down. Their wages are dropping, and they have lost their jobs altogether. Rocky View school district has reported that busing fees are already going up, the Calgary school board is raising fees for next year, and the full force of the carbon tax won’t even come in until 2018. Across the province schools will be losing hundreds of thousands of dollars because of the carbon tax and, as a result, will be raising fees. Now, how can the Premier continue to insist that the indirect costs this tax will impose on Alberta families at a time when they can least afford it will only be . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, Albertans are proud of the fact that we are moving forward. The government that they elected knows that climate change is real. We acknowledge the science, and we are taking meaningful action. In terms of other orders of government, again, Naheed Nenshi, the mayor of Calgary, said that it was interesting to hear someone say that the thing that is going to help Canadian investment going forward is the fact that Canada is making real steps on pricing carbon. That’s Alberta. That’s a mayor in a major city in our province, and we are very proud to have the support of them and others, again, including conservatives from across the country, who know that this is the most meaningful way to move forward on addressing carbon.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree that investment in Alberta is a top priority, so let’s make things a little bit better for Albertans. This carbon tax means less money for families. It taxes charities, and it takes money out of hospitals and schools to pay for the NDP slush fund. This government continues to refuse to be honest about the full cost of the carbon tax, and it nickels and dimes families in every corner of their lives. It will mean less money for municipalities, which means less services and higher property taxes. Can the Premier come clean on whether she’s included higher property taxes, school fees, and transit fees in her estimates?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, it’s really nice to hear the Official Opposition say that they care about health care, education, and children’s services because during the past election we heard that there were going to be deep cuts in those areas, far greater than the impacts of being responsible in addressing climate change. Actually, in the televised address just prior to the budget the Leader of the Official Opposition talked about how great the 1990s were. Albertans said they don’t want to move back in time; they don’t want to bury their head in the sand. They want a government that’s going to stand up for health care, education, and our climate, and that’s what they’ve got.

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

Assisted Dying Regulations

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, we know the challenges the province is facing in responding to new legislation put forward by the federal government on assisted dying. On an issue of such severity, emotion, and gravity to so many Albertans it’s important we get this issue right. It’s why I was so disappointed at the last-minute presentation of regulations to a few MLAs as the government asked us to sign off on their motion. Why on an issue of life and death for so many Albertans is the NDP trying to push this motion and regulations at the last minute?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just to recap, there was a Supreme Court decision well over a year ago, and the extension to that Supreme Court decision is coming up on June 6. Alberta is the only province in Canada right now that’s actually having this debate, and I’m very proud of the fact that we presented this to the Assembly. Albertans, I think, expect their elected representatives to engage in this topic seriously and responsibly, and rather than criticizing the timing, I would encourage all members of this House to embrace the opportunity, give the feedback, and consider the very draft regulations that we’ve brought forward for discussion.

Mr. Cooper: What matters here is that the government seemed completely unprepared to release the regulations until the very last minute and almost with no debate. As columnist Don Braid put it, “There’s rarely been such obvious proof of a panic rush at the legislature – and never in a matter so important.” Issues of life and death certainly deserve a lot more thought and care from any government. Will the Premier commit to giving all Albertans a chance to provide feedback on this motion and these regulations before they’re implemented?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the 15,000 people who took time to give feedback on this over the many months leading up to today. Once again, let’s be clear. This is the only Legislature in the country that’s having this debate right now. That’s because we understand how important this issue is, and we genuinely want to hear from the opposition. The opposition can choose to make their views heard, or they can choose not to, but the fact remains that Albertans would be well served to hear from all sides of this House, and that’s why we are giving this opportunity.

Mr. Cooper: How much feedback did you get on this motion?

As the government has already acknowledged, it is important to ensure that the conscience rights of all physicians and medical staff are protected under the new provincial rules. No one should have to be forced to perform a procedure that they have an objection to, but over the past few days many medical professionals would like clarity on whether or not they will be obligated under the provincial rules to provide referrals on this issue. Will the Premier please clarify to all Albertans what the provincial stance is on the issue of referrals?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We certainly take the responsibilities that

are being passed on in terms of the provision of the health care service very seriously. We are ensuring that we protect the vulnerable as well as those who don't want to provide the service. Certainly, they're expected to respect people's choices, as the Supreme Court has granted is their right, by arranging for a timely transfer.

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

2:00 Education Administrative Workload

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education announced his intention to tame the Wild West of school fees. He said that knowing more about the range of school fees and how they are spent would help his ministry lower those fees, but gathering that information has school secretaries, teachers, principals, and coaches bogged down with massive amounts of trivial administration, what they call administrivia. There's still no report on how much parents spend, and the plan meant to lower fees actually is costing schools time and money. What will the minister do to solve the problem he created and get on track to actually reducing school fees?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for the question. Certainly, we are very interested in making sure that we can reduce school fees over time. We made a decision, because of the current economic situation, to put that in the out-years' budgets, not this year's, but it's very important. You know, school boards are using this information to determine and to distill what are instructional school fees. This is the target that many school boards have taken the initiative on, which I'm very proud that they have done, and this is the target that I seek to aim for as well.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In April, in an ATA survey teachers reported that their primary classroom-focused tasks are being overshadowed by constant administrative work. Being overwhelmed by administrivia is taking a toll on teachers' morale and ability to work with students. Comments include, and I quote: due to the workload and expectation of a teacher now it is a ridiculous career choice, and I would never recommend it. End quote. This is unacceptable. What will the minister do to ensure that teachers are able to focus on the work that Alberta families rely on them to do instead of being caught up in endless administrivia?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, as a teacher myself I'm very conscious of making sure that we have kids in classrooms and making sure that the schools and teachers are there to look after them. So the very first thing that we did, right from the beginning, was to fund for enrolment. To be able to do that, we have made sure that we've put more than 1,100 new teachers into classrooms, more than 1,200 support positions. Certainly, that's far better than what this opposition would have done, which is cutting schools . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More teachers and more NDP administrivia.

School boards now will be required to submit financial reports every month, but they will still be expected to align these reports

with government quarterly reports. Several school boards have cited serious concerns with this increased administrivia and increased workload. One board estimates that these onerous and unnecessary reports would require the equivalent of a half-time staff position, and they're worried that tax dollars intended for education should be spent on education. To the minister: how will you reduce administrative burdens to ensure that Albertans' tax dollars are used . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, because, of course, we disburse about 97 per cent of the Education budget to school boards. What better way to make sure that we're spending efficiently than to make sure that they are getting the message to spend the money carefully? That's what we're doing, and certainly it's a mechanism by which we can make sure that every dollar is spent in the classroom, for teachers in front of the classroom. That's what our government has done, in fact, every step of the way.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Coal-fired Electric Power Plant Retirement

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The environment minister uses selective information to support her crusade against hard-working Albertans in the coal industry. An air quality study by the University of Alberta School of Public Health released in November 2015, more recent than the minister's 2012 report that she waves about all the time, shows that coal plants are a minimal source of Edmonton air pollution. To the minister: before you destroy the livelihoods of 10,000 Albertans working in the coal industry based on selective evidence, won't you consider all evidence and rethink your attack on Alberta workers and families?

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have an Official Opposition that likes to deny the science of climate change. Apparently, we have a third party that also likes to reject the science of pollution and health effects of coal-fired electricity, which are well known. There is no end to the science on this matter, that NOx and SOx and particulate matter are a problem. That is why, for example, the Asthma Society of Canada has just gifted this government, honoured us with a leadership and public policy award this year, and the reason for that is that all Albertans will breathe a little easier as we phase out coal-fired electricity.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister is proving that she is using selective information to support her crusade against hard-working Albertans in the coal industry. The fact is that we know that the Liberal minister was in Saskatchewan last week praising carbon capture technology as a way to reduce emissions. The federal Conservative minister exempted some of Alberta's best coal plants due to modern technology use. We know that climate change is real; we just want to fight against things that cause damage to people. Since both sides in Ottawa recognize new technology, why can't this NDP government in Alberta get in touch with science?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the consensus around coal-fired electricity is broad. It's throughout the industrialized world. Most other jurisdictions are also looking at these policies. What we are doing is proceeding with a thoughtful plan for the six plants post-2030 that were not captured by the federal Environment Canada regulations. This is a thoughtful plan

that will proceed in negotiation with the electricity providers and with the communities in question.

Mr. McIver: Well, there you have it, Mr. Speaker. The minister is hanging with the Leap Manifesto party in Ottawa instead of the ones that consider science.

Mr. Speaker, 10,000 jobs will be lost because of the environment minister's demonization of an industry committed to operating in an environmentally responsible manner. To the Premier: since we know that your minister is committed to killing 10,000 jobs and you choose to call your budget, quote, the jobs plan, please describe the 10,001 jobs you will create to undo the damage your minister is determined to do.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the overdramatization of what's happening in this House, if it wasn't so serious and if the misinformation wasn't so out to lunch, would actually be quite funny. But it is so out to lunch and so inflammatory and not honest. Let's remember what conservatives are saying about climate leadership and the work we're taking.

Dr. Starke: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Ms Hoffman: Again Jim Dinning: "The legislation is offering sensible ecofiscal policy for Alberta." We're moving forward in a sensible manner, and we should conduct ourselves accordingly in the House.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have very few hours left, we hope, in this time together, but please be conscious of the tone of the conversation in this room, in the exchange that's taking place. It's not helpful to the meaningful discussion and debate, and I would ask all sides to have respect for the institution.

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Electricity Power Purchase Agreements

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, in one short year this government has proposed massive changes to energy and electricity in Alberta. Despite repeated questioning, the details of what, how, and the economic impacts that we'll have have been vague at best. Albertans deserve to know the options, and they deserve to know the impacts on their cost of living. For example, consumers are now bearing the risk and subsidizing the cost of the power purchase agreements. To the Energy minister: now that all the power purchase agreements have been returned to the Balancing Pool, why will she not at least return the high-cost power purchase agreements to their owners, which would be best for consumers?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. First of all, I need to be clear. These PPAs were not handed back because of the increase to the SGER. These PPAs were unprofitable, and the issue is that the power companies believed in what previous governments agreed to. They believed that they had signed contracts that send profits to them and losses to Albertans. We are taking necessary steps to protect the ratepayers. We're initiating an appropriate proceeding shortly, and all the facts will be before the public as the issues are adjudicated. This is no small issue, and we are being very . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Swann: Once again, Mr. Speaker, the question wasn't answered.

With extremely low-cost electricity, what level of financial subsidy will the government provide to incentivize new renewable energy projects?

2:10

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, we've tasked the AESO to consult with industry experts to recommend a program that will bring on renewable generation, keep costs low, and ensure the reliability of our electricity system. We have received that report and are reviewing the recommendations that the AESO has put forward to us. We will have a system in place to bring renewables online, with our first auction this year. We are pleased that 138 companies participated in the first round of the AESO consultation, and we're excited that companies are interested in doing business in Alberta.

Dr. Swann: That certainly remains to be seen, Mr. Speaker.

Given that uncertainty is exactly what Albertans and businesses don't need, why won't the minister transfer risk back to the power purchase agreement owners and allow them to make the business decision about whether to operate or decommission the coal plants?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I have more to say, I will be happy to update the hon. member and the rest of the Assembly. What I can say now, however, is that we will be taking the necessary steps to protect ratepayers. We will be initiating an appropriate proceeding shortly, and all the facts will be before the public as issues are adjudicated. Again, this is no small issue, and we are being very, very deliberate about how we proceed.

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

Fort McMurray Re-entry Health Concerns

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the fire in Fort McMurray has raised many safety concerns. When wildfires burn homes and businesses, toxic chemicals can be released into the local environment. These toxins may be a health concern. To the Minister of Health: how can we assure residents of Fort McMurray that it's safe for them to return to their community?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for this important question. The re-entry timeline was built on the advice of experts, particularly the advice of our independent chief medical officer of health, Dr. Karen Grimsrud. Her recommendation is that it's safe for people not in the at-risk categories to return to Fort McMurray according to the phased re-entry, with the exception of Abasand, Beacon Hill, and Waterways, as long as people follow the proper precautions, outlined by Alberta Health Services. Certainly, we've conveyed that information to the individuals.

Thank you.

Dr. Turner: Mr. Speaker, given that the residents of Fort McMurray are anxious to return home and that air quality and water quality may become a health concern, to ensure that residents are safe, can the minister update residents on air and water quality?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. There's an app that we can all actually download on our phones. I've been doing it regularly and find it very helpful. It monitors the air quality and conveys that information to you from a variety of communities across Alberta. I'm pleased to report that this morning the air quality in Fort McMurray was a 2, which is really quite good, although it's important to note that there is smoke in the air today. This can cause some irritation in the lungs or eyes, but the air quality is quite good. A great deal of work has been done on the water treatment facilities as well, but a boil-water advisory does remain in effect until further notice.

Again, on the chief medical officer's advice people with medical conditions, including seniors and children under the age of seven, should not return right away . . .

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

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the returning residents may have health concerns or may need to access emergency health care after their return, again to the Minister of Health: how can you reassure residents that they will have access to health care during the re-entry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, access to the urgent care facility is very important. Basic services at the hospital are up and running, and we have established an urgent care centre to complement the services being provided in the hospital itself. The health care team at the hospital includes doctors, nurses as well as a surgical team to handle any urgent, life-threatening conditions, and we're also ensuring that there are mental health supports in those facilities and throughout the community.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Carbon Levy and Vulnerable Albertans

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday my colleague from Little Bow asked pointed questions about the impact of the carbon tax on those who rely on supplements from the assured income for the severely handicapped, or AISH, program. Based on the non answers that were received, it sure does seem like the NDP government hasn't considered the unintended consequences of their carbon tax, so I will ask the question again. Will the minister commit to adding funds received from the carbon tax rebate to the fully exempt income list in the AISH policy manual?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The answer is yes. These payments that they will get from rebates will be exempt.

Mrs. Pitt: Great news, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Those on AISH, though, are certainly not the only Albertans who have to worry about the unintended consequences of the carbon tax. Given that I am also worried for those Alberta seniors who rely on the guaranteed income supplement, or GIS, from the federal government and given that these seniors are provided a monthly nontaxable benefit based on annual income being below a

maximum annual threshold, will the minister promise these seniors that he is working with his federal counterparts to ensure that an unintended consequence of the carbon tax will not be a loss of the GIS?

The Speaker: The minister of seniors.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Certainly, we care very much about seniors, and we're making sure that they will not have any clawbacks, anything like that, regardless of their income going up because of federal changes. We've already moved forward on some of that new regulation to ensure that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, I could go all day long bringing up scenarios that the government hasn't thought of yet.

Given that we've already seen how little this government likes to consult and consider the impact their legislation and ideology – sorry: world view – will have, will the minister commit to cancelling their carbon tax until a full economic impact assessment has been completed?

The Speaker: The minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, there has been an economic impact assessment. It's called a six-month-long review process, chaired by University of Alberta business professor Dr. Andrew Leach and with a number of other very esteemed panelists. We have examined the effect of carbon pricing across the Alberta economy, and that is why a broad cross-section of economists support carbon pricing and what we are doing to reinvest those levy revenues. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm trying to think of something very positive and humorous, but it doesn't come to me. Please, let's try and be a little more cordial and keep the volume down.

Calgary-North West.

PDD Service Delivery

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have seen a pattern in question period of answers from the government that claim that whatever they're doing is okay because our government did it, too, or that we can't ask about a problem because we didn't fix it ourselves. It is the antithesis of leadership, and people are getting tired of it. So I will ask once again on behalf of the PDD community about the supports intensity scale. It is humiliating, it is wrong, and, yes, our government didn't fix it, but your government promised to do just that. To the Premier: will you get rid of SIS . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. [interjection] Hon. member, if you would please keep confined to the time, and when I ask you to sit, if you would sit, I'd appreciate it. Thank you very much.

The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government believes that everyone deserves to live with dignity, safely, and with access to supports they need. As the member acknowledged, that's the issue created by that member's government. I didn't find anything on record when she was in government where she said anything about SIS, but having said that, I commit to reviewing all previous government policies, and SIS is no exception.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it is exactly as I suggested, the same answer every time.

Given that in Alberta in the absence of any comprehensive information from our government the only way we can measure the effectiveness of the transformation plan is a wait-list for PDD services that is growing at a frightening rate, will the Minister of Human Services commit to an open and comprehensive review of the PDD system? A real answer, please.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. I would like to remind all Albertans that the previous government was cutting \$40 million from PDD, and we have added more money into the PDD. Since being in government, I have reviewed standard 8, I have reviewed contract alignment, and no policy of the previous government is an exception. We will review all policies in due course.

2:20

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, given that our current Premier had previously suggested . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, given that our current Premier had previously suggested that our government was only keeping SIS to measure how much they could cut in that department, can we assume that the only reason you're keeping SIS right now is so that you can make cuts?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I previously said, we have reversed the cut made by the previous government to this sector, and we are not keeping the SIS. We are reviewing that process. It's a huge undertaking; 11,000 clients have been put through by the previous government. In due course I will review the SIS. I am committed to reviewing the SIS and bringing in a policy that's more respectful in gauging the supports that people with developmental disabilities need.

Thank you.

Sage Grouse Protection Order

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, the provincial government dropped the ball on the sage grouse strategy, forcing Ottawa to implement a protection order in southern Alberta. The citizens in my riding care about the sage grouse and are good stewards of the land, but the order is creating havoc and standing in the way of sensible development. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: as attempts by successive federal and provincial governments have been unsuccessful, will you empower my constituents to implement some locally driven solutions so that these restrictions on economic development can finally be lifted?

The Speaker: The minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the important question. It is true that many landowners down in southeast Alberta have struggled with that federal protection order, and there have been struggles over time to recover that species. There's no question about it. So we are committed to working with private landowners, to working with grazing lease holders on how we can improve that system. I would be happy to meet with those constituents, maybe over the summer,

in southeast Alberta to see if we can work together with the federal government to solve the problem.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the NDP government claims to be all about diversifying our economy and given that tourism is an important part of the economy at the Elkwater resort in the Cypress Hills, can the Minister of Culture and Tourism please explain the impact the sage grouse protection order is having on recreational opportunities in the Cypress Hills?

The Speaker: The minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and, you know, thank you to the hon. member for the question. It's a good question. I will happily meet with his constituents on this matter and see if we can speak with one voice to the federal government on this and ensure that we are moving forward in a way that recovers that particular species and in a way that ensures good stewardship of the land from private landowners and, of course, the grazing lease holders in the area.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you. Given that highway 61 is on the tentative three-year highway construction plan for widening and overlay of 15 kilometres east and west of Etzikom but that the other 30 to 35 kilometres of widening and overlay heading east to Orion and Manyberries are left untouched and given that the road condition is decaying with truck and bus traffic, to the Minister of Transportation: is the federal sage grouse protection order preventing highway 61 from being repaired?

Mr. Mason: Not to my knowledge, Mr. Speaker.

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

Education Property Tax in Calgary

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The current government hiked property taxes for Calgarians when they increased the Education budget and left the property tax formula unchanged. There is no doubt that education funding is important, but increased property taxes will hurt Calgary. They're already facing job losses, increased personal taxes, and the looming threat of a carbon tax. Why did the government choose to increase taxes and make things worse for Calgarians instead of finding funds for education through savings elsewhere?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were clear that the Education budget is increasing by 2 per cent plus enrolment. That was our commitment, and we followed through on that. We use the same formula for the education property taxes that's been used since 2013, which is that 32 per cent of funding for education comes from education property tax. For some context, in the past, 20 years ago, it was 51 per cent, so it's gone rapidly down over that time period. The formula for distributing this education tax between municipalities has not changed. The amount of money, the provincial mill rate for education . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Panda: Given that Calgary has been able to cut costs for homeowners without reducing services or raiding reserve funds and

since it's clearly possible to reduce costs by being financially prudent without what the government likes to call massive cuts, why does this government think it is impossible to lower costs through efficiencies while protecting front-line jobs when municipalities like Calgary are obviously able to do it?

Mr. Ceci: We are lowering the cost of government. This year we're at about 2 per cent growth in that, so the operational spending is lower than population plus inflation growth, far lower than the previous government's 4.6 per cent. We are keeping the mill rate down. This year it's \$2.48 per \$1,000. Last year it was \$2.50. We understand there's some frustration, of course, from municipalities, in Calgary in particular, but we have a \$10.4 billion deficit, and we can't meet all the needs that everybody has. We are going forward with a plan to increase spending on capital.

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

Mr. Panda: Thank you. The hon. minister used to be a municipal leader, so if Calgary can do it, the government of Alberta can do it. Given that we have asked the government time and again to reduce costs while preserving front-line jobs and services and given that we have provided the government with 10 different ways to do that, when will the Finance minister take our suggestions to lower costs and help Albertans instead of racking up debt, introducing taxes they didn't campaign on, and hurting Albertans?

Mr. Ceci: You know, going back to what we're doing to assist municipalities, a number of things, including work on the MGA – we are working with them on that – on linear assessments, and potentially on MSI. So municipalities have us working with them as a government across many platforms, and they will see a stronger, more predictable funding cycle going forward with this government.

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

Bail Process Review

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday I asked the Justice minister three questions about implementing the Alberta bail review recommendations. The review arose, of course, out of the terrible tragedy in St. Albert that saw an offender out on bail shoot and kill RCMP Constable Wynn and injure Auxiliary Constable Derek Bond. I did not receive even one answer to any of my three questions, so I'm just going to ask again. To the Justice minister: when are you going to implement the recommendations?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question yet again. Apparently, no matter how many times I say it, the member can't understand that things like improving the justice system and educating our employees are ongoing things that will not be finished at some point. We will not at some point have educated every Crown prosecutor or every police officer because those people are still being born.

2:30

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suggest the minister and I move beyond our elementary debate about the simplicity of section 524, but given that what is not in question is that the review includes numerous recommendations about better use of section 524 and

given that one recommendation is that prosecutors always consider seeking bail revocation when an accused on bail allegedly commits an indictable offence, again to the minister: how are you going to ensure prosecutors always consider bail revocation for alleged repeat offenders?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member for the question. Perhaps he can listen to the answer this time. Section 524 is part of our Crown education, which, again, is ongoing. We have sent instructions to all Crown prosecutors to always consider the use of section 524, and we continue to provide ongoing education on this. So that's how.

Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: It wasn't so hard to answer that question.

Given that recommendations 1 and 3 of the bail review report recommend using prosecutors for all bail hearings and given that the federal Crown has already acted on these recommendations by ensuring its prosecutors are available for all bail hearings, yet nothing has occurred provincially, again to the minister: what are you waiting for?

Ms Ganley: Again to the member: this is a complex and complicated issue. It impacts many of our stakeholders, which means that we're going to go out and we're going to have conversations with those stakeholders. We have already struck a working group between the Crown prosecution service and police services throughout the province to discuss this issue and to figure out what works best going forward. I outlined in the press release originally, you know, a detailed plan of which things we had moved on already, which things we were moving forward on, which things we needed to work with stakeholders on, and which things were not in our purview. I might suggest that the hon. member give it a read.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I want to draw your attention to again be cautious. Maybe just a reminder to all of you of Standing Order 23(j), to be conscious of that phrase "of a nature likely to create disorder." I encourage you all to think about what that might mean.

Fort McMurray Economic Recovery

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, the cleanup and rebuilding of Fort McMurray is no doubt going to be a long process. Luckily, the people who live and work in Fort McMurray are extremely qualified and are in the best position to ensure this work gets done. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: what opportunities do Fort McMurray residents have to participate in rebuilding their city?

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the opportunity to update the House on the incredible work Fort McMurray residents are doing to rebuild their city. Residents of Fort McMurray are leading the process of contracting for recovery and cleanup, and they have done an excellent job in ensuring that local employers are being used whenever possible. Both the province and the municipality will continue to give preference to local companies – that's local workers, local businesses – whenever possible, and we are also strongly encouraging private companies who award contracts to do the same.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that businesses in Fort McMurray were already struggling from the prolonged collapse of the price of oil and given that the fire and evacuation have only made things more difficult for these businesses, again to the same minister: what supports will be available for these businesses as the recovery efforts progress?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the important question. In addition to preference being given to Fort McMurray businesses during recovery and cleanup, we're launching a small-business support centre in partnership with the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. The small-business centre will provide small and medium-sized businesses with a one-stop shop to help get the support they need to get their businesses back up and running as soon as possible. We'll continue to work in partnership with the regional municipality, the chamber of commerce, the economic development, their local construction associations, and small and medium-sized businesses.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that some businesses may have been lost in the fire and that these employees will be looking for work and given that we need to make this process as easy as possible for local residents, again to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: what support is available to local residents and businesses as they return to work?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member again for the question. The sooner people can get back into their homes and complete any needed cleaning and inspections, the sooner they can get back to their jobs and businesses. There is a range of supports available through the information centres in Fort McMurray to help make this happen. There are over 700 insurance adjusters and staff on the ground in Fort McMurray and more on the way to help process business and residential claims as quickly as possible. These are just some of the initiatives that we've begun to undertake, but we commit to working with the regional municipality and all partners in Wood Buffalo.

Thank you.

Carbon Levy and Education Costs

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, over the past few weeks I've been hearing concerns from school boards all across my riding about the carbon tax and what it will mean for the operation of their schools. School boards are worried about the combined effect of increased heating costs and the cost of fuel for school buses. To the Minister of Education: will schools be expected to reduce other programs and extracurricular activities to cover the cost of the increased utility prices that you are forcing on them?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. Certainly, I've been working very closely with school boards to ensure that we get the maximum effect of the carbon levy and to make sure that they understand that it's a way by which you can increase efficiency as well. It's a call to look at your systems, be it through transportation or heating and so forth, and increase that efficiency. We will make investments to help them increase

that efficiency. What a great lesson opportunity for kids, and what a great way to ultimately save money for schools.

Mr. Nixon: It sounds like you're going to be building a lot of new schools.

Given that some school boards in my riding are forecasting seeing an increase of over a quarter million dollars in operating expenses over the next two years and given that these increased expenses will come directly from higher natural gas and electricity prices and since Albertans are already struggling to cope with an economic downturn, will this government commit to conducting an economic impact assessment of the carbon tax before downloading these costs onto our schools?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, over these next few months we will be working very closely with schools boards. I'm meeting with them over the next few days as well to talk on these and other issues. They recognize the educational component of this, which is very important. It's a good place, a good ground zero to start turning our economy, diversifying our economy, and reducing our carbon footprint. Who wants that more than anybody else? The children of our province. There are mechanisms by which we can do that. I think in the end we are doing the right thing.

Mr. Nixon: Given that Alberta's winters are some of the harshest our country has to offer and given that our schools already have high-efficiency boilers, furnaces, and programmable thermostats to reduce natural gas consumption and given that students and teachers need a comfortable classroom to both teach and to learn, again to the minister: the NDP speaks about finding efficiencies, but what are schools supposed to do to mitigate the added cost of the carbon tax that this NDP government is forcing on them?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, it's very interesting language, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we are working together with school boards in regard to a strategy which includes education for the kids, for families, for school boards, and for communities as well. It's a question of taking an opportunity here to learn more about how we diversify our economy, increase jobs, realize efficiencies, and ultimately do something for the kids who are actually in those schools in the first place.

Thank you.

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

Agricultural Environmental Practices

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government likes to pretend they are the white knight and say that they're the only ones who ever have tried to decrease carbon emissions in Alberta and that nothing was done before they were the government, which is not true. Ag producers have continuously been reducing their carbon footprint through advanced technology such as zero till and increased production per acre. Does any minister – ag, environment, or economic development – know what the ag industry has done to reduce their carbon footprint?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:40

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, our fall process of engagement included engagement with the agricultural sector,

and that engagement is ongoing as we find ways to ensure that we've got an efficiency program that fits with Alberta's particular agricultural output and particular agricultural mix. I've had many meetings myself with grazing leaseholders, with the Alberta Beef Producers, with the irrigation districts, and with many others on this matter of their greenhouse gas emissions reduction record so far. We know that we are going to move forward in partnership with that sector to ensure that we are all achieving our outcomes together.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the development minister said that nothing had been done before.

Given that Alberta was the first place in North America to place a price on carbon and given that the climate change and emissions management fund has done great work to reduce carbon in Alberta since 2009 and given that agriculture absorbs more carbon than it produces, to the minister: do you know that agriculture in Alberta is actually a carbon sink?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's a good question. It's a thoughtful question because we've had these conversations about carbon sequestration and about the excellent practices that do prevail in our agricultural sector. However, we know that we can do more. We have some energy-intensive production that also happens within Alberta. We're going to work with those sectors to reduce their emissions and therefore their costs as we move forward and make sure that we reinvest all of that carbon levy within this province to diversify the economy and create good jobs.

The Speaker: Second supplemental

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we agree that climate change is real and that humans have an effect on the climate and given that we have done more to actually reduce carbon than this government's carbon tax will do, to the minister: why does this government insist on punishing ag producers with extra tax when they have done way more to reduce carbon in Alberta than this government's carbon tax will do?

The Speaker: Madam Minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we recognize that there has been some good work done in the past, and we're going to make sure that we build upon that work and ensure that we reinvest the carbon levy within various aspects of the Alberta economy, including agriculture. We look forward to working in partnership with various aspects of the agricultural producers in order to ensure that we're making the right efficiency investments, that we're partnering with folks on renewables as well, which is a very exciting part of this package, and ensuring that we're investing in innovation and technology as well.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it may well be that some of you would like to leave the room. We have 30 seconds, and we will continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Louise Dean School Program for Teenaged Fathers

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to share about the Louise Dean school, which I recently had the privilege of visiting. The Louise Dean school is not a typical school. It provides a supportive environment for new and expecting teen mothers to continue their education while at the same time learning many skills they will need as young mothers.

In the ongoing effort to support teen mothers, we often overlook a significant factor in their situation, teen fathers. Bringing teen fathers into the discussion and taking them in and supporting them as well as mothers is hugely important. Study after study has shown that children attain greater success when they come from a supportive environment where both parents are present. They are less likely to end up in poverty. They are less likely to be caught up in addictions. They are less likely to end up in the justice system.

As we've increased the supports available to teen mothers, we have seen a marked improvement in measurable outcomes, yet at the same time we have too often let down the fathers. They have often been stereotyped and pigeonholed as deadbeats, called uncaring or not wanting to be there for their kids, all the while ignoring that these are young people, still teenagers, and in most cases not even entitled to vote for the members in this room.

What we need are programs and services to support them in making better choices and finding success. Government needs to support this happening. An ounce of prevention is always more valuable than a pound of solution. That is why on March 24 I joined the Minister of Human Services and the Minister of Status of Women to help address this very issue. I was honoured to be involved in the event where, together with the Louise Dean school and Catholic Family Service, our government took concrete steps to help address this gap in the care of Albertans: helping fathers.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to recognize the dedicated team at the Louise Dean school for working to improve the lives of young people in this province. Thank you for all the work that you do. Thank you, Louise Dean.

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

Drayton Valley-Devon Job Losses

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was talking to an upset constituent, Perry May,* the other day, and he wants this government to know:

I think with the direction the NDP is heading in, Alberta is headed for an economic disaster. Companies in Drayton Valley have moved out, shut down, and laid off people. A lot of people are not working, some for a long time. Some are on unemployment; some people do not qualify for unemployment. Housing prices have dropped a lot. I have renters that are behind in their rent and are facing eviction with little kids. We have been slow all winter with my company, and in March my company had one job for 12 hours. I built a multimillion-dollar company with no debt, and I think it is not worth being in business in Alberta anymore.

Since my discussion with him I've seen business after business close down in my constituency. Just last week the cogeneration power plant, that ran on wood chips from the Weyerhaeuser mill, in Drayton Valley was shut down, throwing many people out of work and creating a problem for the Weyerhaeuser mill that before Christmas was wondering what it was going to do with all of the wood chips if the cogeneration plant shut down. Of course, many jobs will be lost due to the early phase-out of coal at the Genesee power plant. A former student has had to seek employment in British Columbia, and another gentleman I bumped into at Pigeon Lake said that he had to find work in Yellowknife.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

To be fair, some of the lost jobs are the result of low oil prices, but many are also the result of the policies of this government. Whatever the reason, it is cold comfort to the people that have lost their jobs in my constituency. While this government promises jobs, my constituents seem to simply be losing theirs.

It is imperative that this Legislature carefully consider the consequences on the economy of legislation like the carbon tax. The decisions made in this House are not without consequence, and every time we raise taxes and borrow billions of dollars and see business capital driven out of our province, these actions have real consequences to real people like my constituents of Drayton Valley-Devon.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Proceed, Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have here three letters that I would like to table. Two of them I referred to yesterday. These are the letters from Red Deer Catholic regional schools and also Chinook's Edge school division, where they outline the significant impact that the carbon tax is going to have on classroom educational environment and the reduction in staffing.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of the government's draft regulations for medical assistance in dying, which were released yesterday in response to the opposition's request for more information on the debate on Motion 17.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of an article referenced today in question period on behalf of the Deputy Premier. The article titled Alberta Takes the Lead with Carbon Pricing Policy just happens to be authored by three individuals, including former PC Finance minister Jim Dinning, who is also the former MLA for the gorgeous constituency of Calgary-Shaw.

2:50

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I made reference today in my question to a report from the University of Alberta, Investigation of Fine Particulate Matter Characteristics and Sources in Edmonton, showing that coal is a minimal source of Edmonton's air pollution. I have five copies.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm pleased to rise and table five copies of a letter received in my office on May 31 from hon. Barry House, MLC, president of the Legislative Council, and the Hon. Michael Sutherland, MLA, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Parliament in Western Australia, expressing their sympathy to the people of Alberta on the devastation caused by the recent fires in Fort McMurray. As I introduce this to table, I think with pride as we as Albertans – the world has been watching us. There are 300 South Africans that are helping our province as I speak.

The Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got five copies of the World Bank's 2015 annual report titled Carbon Finance for Sustainable Development, where the World Bank president argues that a price on carbon is one of the best ways to reduce pollution,

“improve people's health, and provide governments with a pool of funds to drive investment in a cleaner future and to protect” vulnerable individuals.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Sabir, Minister of Human Services, response to WQ 1 asked for by Mr. Cooper on May 2, 2016: How many adoptions of children up to the age of 18 years were finalized in each of the fiscal years from 2008-09 to 2014-15 and from April 1, 2015, to December 31, 2015, and of those, how many were children in permanent care of the government prior to being adopted?

The Speaker: I believe, hon. members, there were some points of order made today. The first point of order was, I believe, by Calgary-Foothills.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just referring to Standing Order 23(i). When the minister was responding in question period today, like, she has been calling us out as climate deniers and has been quite regularly calling us – me and my caucus colleagues here have been subjected to that every day in this House. I brought it up to you a few times. Yesterday, unfortunately, the minister was not in the House . . . [interjections]

Mr. Cooper: You can't refer to her absence.

Mr. Panda: No. I'm saying . . .

An Hon. Member: You can't refer to her absence. Apologize.

Mr. Panda: I didn't mean that.

The Speaker: Hon. member, to the chair, please.

Mr. Panda: Yeah. I'm sorry.

What I meant to say is that when I spoke about Bill 20 yesterday, the bill that this very minister is piloting, I put myself on record. You don't need the Blues for that, Mr. Speaker, because you sat in that very chair and heard me saying this. For the benefit of this honourable, wonderful minister I'm going to read this again. I said, “My party said in the last election, climate change needs actions and solutions.” Then I went on to say, “Before the members opposite attempt to get themselves into hot water with a point of order, I would like to say that I believe in climate change. I believe in climate change. It is real, it is happening, and it is affecting the entire world.” This is what I said. I repeated it a few times.

I also said that I wanted to clear the air here. If I am being assaulted verbally and insulted verbally in this House every time she speaks up, I said that I will raise this point of order. That's the reason I raised this. I'm referencing, too, 23(i) which “imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member.” So, Mr. Speaker, I brought it up. I don't know. How do I protect my own rights and privileges in this House if I am constantly – constantly – being assaulted?

I studied science. I believe in science. I worked in an industry for 30 years which has world-class monitoring of the environment. I now depend on myself, and I never drained public dollars to make a living. I am a proud Albertan who believes in science and climate.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Panda: I don't want to be subjected one more time to this abusive language.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think I have the essence of your argument.

The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a disagreement over facts. Certainly, when many members of the Official Opposition caucus share information on the Internet that calls into question the science of climate change and outright denies that the science exists, including claiming that climate change is a hoax, there's a good basis for that assertion of fact. Those statements have been made by Cypress-Medicine Hat, Strathmore-Brooks, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, Drumheller-Stettler. Many members have shared such information.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to the matter?

The House leader for the Official Opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank my hon. colleague for raising his first point of order in the House. I think what we saw is a passionate member of this House who's tired of having words that aren't true shared about him.

I would just like to highlight. He indicated 23(i), and I would just like to add to the debate today 23(j), using "insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." It's very clear that this type of language, whether it's deemed parliamentary, unparliamentary, or not, creates disorder in this House every single time it is used. The hon. member has stated his position. He has clearly laid out the facts on this issue. Every time that he is insulted in this House by the language used by the environment minister, it's going to create disorder. I think it seems very reasonable that the member have the respect that he and all members of this House deserve in not having this type of language that's creating disorder in the Chamber or imputing his motives.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I guess I would make a couple comments. First of all, I think there's some clear evidence that some of the members, not all and certainly not including that member – I take at face value his statement that he believes in the science of climate change and believes that it is human caused, and I believe that some members opposite do believe that. I also do believe, as I think does the environment minister and most of our side, that there are some in the Official Opposition that are very doubtful about the scientific view of climate change as being caused by human activity. I think that that is a reasonable and fair statement to make in the context of the political debate that's now taking place. Furthermore, I believe that it is a matter of opinion or a difference of opinion between members as well.

3:00

In terms of the Official Opposition House Leader's second point, that it is language that is likely to create disorder, Mr. Speaker, we've seen lots of disorder on that side and not always provoked by anything said on this side. Often someone is simply trying to answer a question. To argue now that the disorder is caused by the statements made by the minister, I think, is perhaps a bit rich. I think that all of us have a responsibility to try and control the passions that give us our reason for being here when from time to time we

enter into some serious disagreement in the House. I think that the best form of restraint is self-restraint. I would suggest that hon. members on the other side should remember that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe that the matter that is being addressed in the House today is, as I see from the Blues, the statement that says:

We have an Official Opposition that likes to deny the science of climate change. Apparently, we have a third party that also likes to reject the science of pollution and health effects of coal-fired electricity, which are well known.

On the point raised by the Member for Calgary-Foothills, first of all, I recall the statements that were made by yourself and noted them before. Certainly, under subsection (i): I don't believe that applied because there was no specific reference to a member.

However, I have ruled, I think, at least once or twice with respect to the climate change matter. If I've learned anything in this House, it's that making decisions such as this is with respect to the context and timing of the way comments are made. If we truly do, as the Government House Leader suggested, have self-restraint, I think in this instance, while I may not rule that there is an official point of order, to the minister of the environment, I think that you need to appreciate the point made by the other members. I would caution you on future use of that particular word, please. It clearly does on occasion create disorder, and I would ask that in the future you be more conscious of when and how it is used.

With that, I would hear the second point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, if I'm not mistaken, I believe the second point of order raised today was by myself at the time of approximately 2 o'clock.

The Speaker: Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, please proceed.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, at approximately 2 o'clock, during an exchange between the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, the leader of our caucus, and the hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Health – the Minister of Health and I have been waiting, and I've been scanning the Blues, but unfortunately that particular time period has not yet been put on the Blues. I've been waiting for it. But I do know that the Health minister used the phrase "not honest." Now, I've been waiting for the Blues to determine whether that was made in reference to something that the hon. member said or whether she was referring directly to the hon. member. But it really matters not whether it was referring to something that he said or whether it was referring to him personally.

Imputations of dishonesty are perhaps the most frequently found in the long list of unparliamentary language which starts on page 142 of *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms* and does not conclude for some eight pages further. Certainly, anything suggesting dishonesty by a member is perhaps the most serious use of unparliamentary language in our House. Furthermore, on page 618 of Canadian parliamentary rules and practices, under Unparliamentary Language one of the first things that it talks about is the suggestion of dishonesty by an hon. member.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I understand – and I think that I'll very quickly have another opportunity to speak to this – that at times in the House we have very heated debates, but the suggestion of a lack of honesty on the part of another hon. member, either in what he or she says or, in fact, in what he or she is, is in fact the most egregious form of unparliamentary language that we have in this place, and I

would ask the Deputy Premier, the Minister of Health, to withdraw the comment and apologize to the hon. member.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Health minister was expressing nothing more than a difference of opinion. It was in no way meant as a reflection on the hon. Member. It's just that, a difference of opinion, which, of course, is part of this House's tradition of healthy debate, and that was nothing more than a healthy debate. I hear the hon. member's comments and, you know, take them to heart. Actually, I have a lot of respect for this member for his knowledge of parliamentary tradition, but I do believe that at this time he is wrong and that it was nothing more than a difference of opinion and should be treated as such.

Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, if I could just add to that. I'm actually shocked that the hon. Deputy Government House Leader . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you could wait. Opposition House Leader, were you wishing to speak to this?

Dr. Starke: Okay. I'll cede the floor.

Mr. Cooper: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker and my colleague. I am surprised that we've arrived here. From time to time we see people make errors in the words that they choose to use here, particularly when referring specifically to another member in the Chamber and their honesty. There are numerous cases that we could cite on honesty. Oftentimes as temperatures rise inside the Chamber, the best path forward and the most appropriate path forward is to withdraw comments and apologize.

Now, from time to time we will have a matter of debate, and two versions of the facts can exist, and politics can break out, but what we ought not have in this Chamber is an environment where we call each other or individuals inside this Chamber dishonest or not being honest. So it is disappointing. We certainly could have moved on from this. I hope that the Deputy Premier will be able to be present tomorrow to correct this problem because if, in fact, that is what has happened today, it is not appropriate and not becoming of any member of this Chamber to imply that another member is dishonest.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if the Blues are present yet, but may I ask: who or what was the term "dishonest" directed to? Was it directed to a member or a statement?

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, again, I have been waiting on the Blues and scanning them. The term was not "dishonest." It was "not honest."

3:10

The Speaker: I do not have the advantage of the Blues – none of us do – nor did I hear the exchange because there was too much noise in the room at the time, so I didn't have an opportunity to hear what, in fact, took place. I'm having difficulty making a decision not knowing what the facts are. I think on this point, much to my chagrin, I will need to defer until I do see the Blues.

I think there was another point of order raised by the hon. Minister of Human Services.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must start by saying that it's with profound disappointment that I have to rise on this point of order. I will refer you to 23(j), abusive and insulting language.

During question period the hon. Member for Calgary-North West asked me a question, and to the best of my ability I answered it. During that answer the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster made a comment clearly directed at me, stating, quote, what a loser.

I said that it's disappointing. Ever since I've been in this House the member in question is one of those members whose debate, whose knowledge on different procedural matters, whose articulate arguments on different matters I really look forward to, and I try to learn from those things. Hearing those comments from the member, who is among the most, I guess, experienced members in this House, is really not only against all kind of parliamentary language procedures, against this section, but it's personally offensive to me as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments on behalf of the hon. Minister of Human Services. While it is true in Canadian parliamentary rules and procedures that if either the Speaker did not hear the term or if the term does not appear in the *Hansard* debate records, then there can be no ruling on it.

I will save both you and the hon. member – I think this is a good example of how sometimes in the House things can become heated. I will tell the hon. member that I apologize for the comment that was made. I in no way wish to offend him, and I wish to withdraw the comment although it probably won't show up in the record anyway. But I do apologize.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Orders of the Day Government Motions

Medical Assistance in Dying

17. Ms Payne moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to implement measures to regulate medical assistance in dying consistent with the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada in *Carter versus Canada* (Attorney General) and any legislative measures approved by the Parliament of Canada to ensure that Albertans can benefit from the orderly implementation of this court decision so that:

- (a) Albertans may exercise their rights to access medical assistance in dying;
- (b) appropriate safeguards be put in place to protect vulnerable Albertans;
- (c) conscience rights are respected while ensuring the right of patients to access this service;
- (d) the practice of medical assistance in dying is closely monitored and measures regulating medical assistance in dying are reviewed within one year.

[Adjourned debate May 31: Mr. Gill]

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

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to stand today to speak to this government motion, to debate such an important issue. As echoed by many of the members in this House, my colleagues here today, it's unfortunate that we're rushing through this important debate. Not only are six hours too short for this fulsome debate, but I think these are the wrong six hours. First, in my humble opinion, as members we should have consulted with Albertans and then maybe given six hours to debate on this important issue.

I want to be clear: this Progressive Conservative caucus is not here debating the issue of medically assisted death. The Supreme Court has made this decision. It's the law of the land and has been decided for over a year now. This government knew this deadline was approaching. They knew it a long time ago, but they left it to the eleventh hour so that we don't have a chance to discuss it with Albertans. That's pretty sad.

Nonetheless, our responsibility here this afternoon, in the time we have been given, is to debate a basic set of draft regulations to implement that decision in Alberta. Actually, our responsibility as legislators is more than to debate. It is to provide the government with the information it needs to build a first but functional set of regulations that enable patients who meet the Supreme Court criteria to be able to receive the medical services they need.

Our job as good legislators is to ensure that the regulations enable physician-assisted death for a competent adult person who

- (a) clearly consents to the termination of life, and
- (b) has a grievous and irremediable medical condition [including an illness, disease, or disability] that causes enduring suffering that is intolerable to the individual in the circumstances of his or her condition;

that the regulations enable doctors to perform the required services in Alberta; that the regulations enable and protect doctors to act in accordance with their professional and personal obligations; and that the regulations protect, most importantly, vulnerable Albertans. What we're not here to do right now is to develop or acquire a full set of regulations that cover every conceivable circumstance under which a patient might seek medically assisted death.

This is new ground in Canada. It's new ground for us as Albertans to request physician-assisted death. We will learn what it means as family members, as physicians, as legislators to experience, perform, and regulate this important medical service. It will only be from actual experience in Alberta and in other jurisdictions that we will have the knowledge to develop a full set of regulations, practices, and safeguards about how to enable and deliver this service effectively and responsibly. Let us receive the guidance and expertise of medical experts, ethicists, and stakeholders. As we take this journey together, let us not use uncertainty about the future as an excuse to not comply with the Supreme Court ruling.

I have been an MLA for only a few months, but I am learning that it's an honourable job. It comes with an honour and a duty. A duty is to do the right thing, to be the voice for people who don't have a voice. An honour is to be morally responsible. I'm here to say to members that we have two moral responsibilities today, right now. One is to speak on behalf of Albertans, which many members have carried out by asking to pump the brakes on something of such incredible importance instead of trying to rush through something that will have such a drastic impact on the lives of Albertans. The other responsibility is to those people who are truly without a voice, to those Albertans who are suffering, making it difficult to live and enjoy a decent quality of life each day, let alone track down a busy MLA's and minister's schedule to share their views on such an important topic.

I'm proud of the robust debates we've had during this session as members. Debate on the environment, debate on the carbon tax – and we all remember the debate on Bill 6 – debate on a record deficit in our budget, and the debate on payday lending: issues that impact the lives of Albertans on a daily basis. They all received adequate debate. However, this topic, in our opinion, is more important than all of those topics. This is the most important thing in the universe – it's human life we're talking about – and we're getting six hours?

3:20

I'm proud to represent my constituents in this House by pointing out that many people in Calgary-Greenway were left out of the survey, despite the government's best efforts, due to language barriers, cultural barriers, barriers with technology, and even barriers with the way that the concept of death is framed in one of the most diverse ridings in Alberta. While medically assisted death impacts all walks of life, the majority of it impacts our seniors, who don't have iPads or online and tech-savvy knowledge. They don't plug into, like, online surveys and portals. We must ensure that we get their feedback and their comments on this issue.

As proud as I am to represent my constituents here, I am even more proud to be able to help reduce the suffering of Albertans. This is a privilege usually reserved for physicians in their treatment of illness. It is rare for that privilege and responsibility to be extended to us. We must exercise that responsibility with sound judgment and good intent.

Fellow members of the House, I urge you today – I urge you – to, yes, consider the objections, questions, concerns that you and your caucuses have received from your constituents and do your best to represent those concerns. Take every day this summer to consult if you want to. But let us also remember to represent those Albertans in our constituencies who don't want to suffer one more summer, those Albertans who have been waiting for us, or some government, to act to let them enjoy the right that the highest court in our land has affirmed for them, the right to end their own suffering.

Those Albertans who are most affected by this decision will never be the majority of our constituents, but those Albertans are the ones who need us most to represent their views, so let's listen to them. Although their individual circumstances are different, as legislators we can remove a common barrier for the clearest cases first, while we work out fair and just mechanisms to address the concerns brought up by other members of this House.

In summary, I'm just going to say that this topic means a lot to Albertans. This needs to be consulted on with all of the stakeholders: the seniors, the doctors, the physicians, the families. Six hours on this debate? It's embarrassing. Please, give it another thought, consult with our constituencies, and maybe we can visit this topic in the next session.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), hon member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would be interesting for me to hear a little bit more about why you really believe that six hours is too short of a time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, and thank you, hon. member. The reason why I said six hours is too short is because, you know, we haven't consulted with anybody. We have not consulted anybody. I mean, an online survey of – I don't know – a few thousand people . . .

Mr. Rodney: Less than 1 per cent of the Alberta population.

Mr. Gill: Yes.

. . . out of a population of over 4 million Albertans: I'm not a mathematician by any means, but that's not a passing mark. We need to consult with Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other questions under 29(2)(a) for the Member for Calgary-Greenway?

Anyone else who would like to speak to Motion 17? The Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Government Motion 17. I believe that as a Legislative Assembly the citizens of Alberta through us may never speak on a more important issue than the one we are addressing today. In this motion are two important questions: how best should this Legislature address the issue of physician-assisted death, and how can we best implement physician-assisted death in Alberta? Both are important questions.

Physician-assisted death is about ending a person's life, and there is no more important issue that could come before this Legislature than the state-sanctioned, state-supported ending of a human life. For that reason, anything less than allowing the people a full, democratic opportunity to address this issue through a bill put forth by the government in this Legislature is unacceptable. It is an abrogation of our responsibility as legislators to pass on this responsibility simply to Executive Council. We are charged with the duty to choose a path that will ensure that whatever decision we make on the implementation of physician-assisted death, it will represent the will of the majority of Albertans while respecting the rights of all Albertans.

I do not believe that any Executive Council should be given the power to draft regulations on the safeguards around physician-assisted death or conscience rights of physicians and medical institutions without a fulsome debate in this Legislature. That is what democracy is all about. Each of the provisions that are brought forward in this motion and each of the regulations so recently provided to this Legislature, only yesterday, deserve a robust discussion and consultation with the people of Alberta. Albertans will have to make a decision on just how citizens will exercise their right to access medical assistance in dying.

The Supreme Court has ruled that Canadians have a right to access physician-assisted death, but it did not answer whether the public health care system must provide it or whether taxpayers must pay for it. That is a provincial decision. This will be a decision that Albertans will need to make through this Legislature, and it would appear that this government has already made that decision for the people of Alberta through these regulations of Executive Council.

Albertans should have the right to debate and decide through their elected representatives in this Legislature whether or not they choose to spend scarce health care dollars on physician-assisted death. Instead, should those same scarce resources be put towards increasing the availability of palliative health care that would work to ensure a loving, dignified death rather than create a medical system intent on redefining health care in such a way as to include physician-assisted death?

Built into the preamble of this motion is a reference to Carter versus Canada. This preamble says that Executive Council will seek to bring consistency between the recent Supreme Court case and the Carter case. Bill C-14, put forward to address the Supreme Court decision, says that physician-assisted death could only be accessed by people who face a terminal illness and who are close to death, whereas the Carter case sought a much broader interpretation on who would be able to access physician-assisted death.

This government created a huge problem when it brought to the Members of this Legislative Assembly only yesterday the regulations that will be used to govern physician-assisted death. There is a wise pattern that should be followed by this House. A bill is put forward and debated. If passed, then regulations are written

to carry out that legislation. This process ensures that both the legislation and the regulations represent the wishes of Albertans.

By proceeding straight to regulation, this Legislature will not have the opportunity to discuss the underlying issues and to come to a consensus on how physician-assisted death should be codified and then regulated. Albertans and various groups and societies that represent the vulnerable will never have the opportunity to come before a committee of the House to review the legislation and to make recommendations or to try to amend and make the legislation better.

This government, under the guise of a motion, has limited this debate on the breadth and the scope of who will be able to apply for physician-assisted death to simply six hours. This government has chosen a process that will limit the people's representatives to six hours and a process that has completely frozen out the people of Alberta to have any direct impact on physician-assisted death. This action is the equivalent of invoking closure after only six hours of discussion in this Legislature on a motion that will regulate the death of Albertans. I cannot find the words to express my level of dissatisfaction with this process and with the direction of the regulations put forward by this government.

These regulations are unsatisfactory in the extreme. For instance, regulation 2.1 states:

Before a regulated member provides a patient with medical assistance in dying, the regulated member must

- (a) be of the opinion that the patient . . .
 - iv. has a grievous and irremediable medical condition that causes enduring suffering that is intolerable to the patient in the circumstances of their condition and that cannot be relieved under conditions that the patient considers acceptable.

3:30

This does not bring consistency between the recent government case and the Carter case. This regulation completely ignores the narrow and restrictive approach to physician-assisted death being legislated at the federal level. It opens up the debate of whether physician-assisted death should be available to Albertans who are not simply terminally ill but also now for almost any mental condition. It opens the door to vulnerable Albertans suffering from depression, fear, and anxiety, all treatable medical conditions, as candidates for physician-assisted death.

As soon as you say "in the circumstances of their condition and that cannot be relieved under conditions that the patient considers acceptable," as soon as you say those words, you open the door to any Albertan suffering from a mental illness or phobia that concludes that life is no longer worth living. If you believe this is too extreme, then I would encourage you to educate yourself for there are individuals that have been euthanized in European nations that have adopted the very open set of regulations to govern euthanasia that are seeming to be happening here in Alberta. People that should be receiving help will now be able to choose physician-assisted death, and under these regulations there is no waiting period for those considering physician-assisted death.

I've had two family members in the past 10 years that have found themselves with what was diagnosed as cancer that was believed to be terminal that are alive today. Both went through the cycles of depression that accompany these kinds of struggles, and under these regulations both would have had the opportunity to apply for physician-assisted death. I will speak against this motion because it is my belief that this motion would have made it so much easier in their depression to have sought out physician-assisted death, and it is very possible that both of them would not be alive today had these

regulations been in place when my family was struggling to cope with their illness.

Next, this motion highlights the need for appropriate safeguards to be put in place to protect vulnerable Albertans, yet it has torn down the walls that those safeguards could have provided Albertans. I am very concerned. There is evidence out of countries like Belgium, that have already adopted physician-assisted death, that the safeguards built in to protect vulnerable people there have not been sufficient to stop the deaths of innocent people who had not given their consent.

We have the chance to do this right. When we do not get this right, innocent people will die. The least that should occur is that these safeguards are vetted through a process that puts forth a bill before the Legislature and where these safeguards are reviewed by a legislative committee that will consult with stakeholder groups and everyday Albertans. When the Legislature arrives at a consensus on the appropriate legislation and it is passed, then regulations will be drawn up that will help to carry out that legislation. We must get this right. Too often the safeguards do not ensure that the clinically depressed and the old and the vulnerable are safe, where the safeguards are manipulated and ignored for a whole host of reasons.

In Alex Schadenberg's book *Exposing Vulnerable People to Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide*, using studies from Belgium, he concludes that in Belgium there is evidence that nurses are participating in euthanasia with or without explicit consent and that the demographic group that is dying without explicit consent tends to be those patients whose families want to get on with the death or where the patient is seen as a bed blocker.

I do not believe that the regulations, received only yesterday, will be able to keep vulnerable Albertans safe. Will these regulations have the consent of the majority of Albertans? We will not know because we have not used the proper legislative process that would allow us to consult with Albertans. Will these safeguards be viewed as reasonable and effective before they are placed into regulation? We will not know, nor with this motion are we being given the time to consult and find out. Consultation must occur. We must educate ourselves as a society and as a Legislature.

This motion and the regulations that have accompanied it do not go far enough in protecting the conscience rights of physicians, nor does it respect the rights of religious institutions that provide health services. Conscience rights is a hugely important issue for this Legislature to discuss. Personally, I do not know how any Albertan, government, or any professional college could be allowed to mandate that any doctor or nurse could by regulation, law, or professional duty be forced into either participating in or referring a patient to someone that would provide physician-assisted death. The right to freedom of conscience and how it should be applied and balanced with the right to death should not be decided by Executive Council alone through regulation, nor should the College of Physicians & Surgeons be able to force a doctor to participate in or be forced to refer to another professional a patient desiring physician-assisted death.

Regulation 3 outlined by the government states:

A regulated member who receives an inquiry from a patient with respect to medical assistance in dying must ensure that contact information for the Alberta Health Services care coordination service is provided to the patient, or to another person identified by the patient, without delay.

How can we even consider passing a motion that will enable a regulation like this? Many doctors across this province have made it very clear that they will not participate nor refer a patient to anything that would allow that patient to access physician-assisted

death. Not only do I believe that position is reasonable under the Charter rights, but we have not even been allowed to consult with physicians to see what they would like. On a practical level this could throw whole communities into chaos. In a conversation with several physicians in my town they have said that they are personally unwilling to administer physician-assisted death and even to refer.

In passing this motion, we are willing to place physicians in a position where the only way that they can continue to practise is to leave Alberta. With rural towns already begging for doctors, on a simply practical level these regulations are about to throw our rural communities into crisis if these fine physicians decide to leave in order to preserve their conscience rights.

Our caucus has heard from palliative care facilities that the people that work in them will leave their calling if they are forced to introduce physician-assisted death into their facilities. In an already underaccessed part of our health care system, where only 30 per cent of Albertans have access to quality palliative care, are we really willing to support a motion that will leave dedicated doctors, nurses, and volunteers the only option of leaving their calling to palliative care in order to protect their conscience rights? This government has shown a complete lack of understanding on many issues regarding legislative process and respecting the will of Albertans. Now it is attacking physicians' conscience rights.

The actions of this government on this motion and the regulations that accompany it are out of line. This government needs to step back from this and reconsider this motion and the accompanying regulations so that due process and consideration are applied to physician-assisted death. Anything less, once again, sidesteps the democratic process.

I must conclude by saying this. Euthanasia and physician-assisted death are often a dangerous answer to the very real problem in society that we can call a lack of love. That may sound strange when you listen to the death with dignity arguments, but it is nonetheless true. Why do most people seek physician-assisted death? It's not because of pain. Pain specialists tell us that 97 per cent of pain can be controlled. Talk to physicians that specialize in pain or palliative care, and they will tell you that people seek physician-assisted death not out of pain or the fear of losing control or a lack of personal autonomy but because they fear becoming a burden to loved ones. Yet when people have access to proper palliative care and when they have the appropriate psychosocial counselling and when they know that they are loved, it is then that they choose life until natural death. It is surrounded by love and with the appropriate palliative care that they choose to die naturally, surrounded by the ones that they love.

Love, not this motion, not these regulations, not physician-assisted death, is the answer. Love, it is said, heals all wounds, and I can testify on that issue. Love finds the resources for palliative care. Love supports life. Love does not force the health system and physicians who up to now have preserved life to become physicians who administer death.

It is for all of these reasons that I must and will heartily vote against this motion.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Under 29(2)(a) for the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

3:40

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on Government Motion 17. I'm going to open by talking for a couple of minutes about what this isn't because I think that's as important as what this is. What this is not is this Legislative Assembly making

a decision on physician-assisted death. That's been done, and I think it's important to make that clear. That was done a year ago by the Supreme Court of Canada, and at that point the Supreme Court of Canada served notice to Canada's national government that they had a full year, till June 6 of this year, to put in rules around physician-assisted death or it would be done for them. So we're not talking about whether we agree with physician-assisted death because we have no authority over that. That is done.

Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, this is a watershed moment in Canadian history. While I'm not a big fan of the courts making law, I think what's often true, not always true but often true, is that when the courts end up making a law because of a dispute that gets to the Supreme Court of Canada, very often those decisions change the course of history in Canada and change things permanently that may not have been changed if those decisions were made through any type of political process with any type of government with any Legislature, including the Parliament in Ottawa.

This is important, as my colleagues that have risen have said, because it is life and death, and it can never be taken lightly and never should be. This is exactly where, unfortunately, my unhappiness with the government's actions really reaches a peak. Knowing for a year that this was coming, the government dropped this motion on the table yesterday, seven days – seven days – before physician-assisted death would become the law of the land, two days before the scheduled end of the Legislative Assembly. I couldn't think of anything less disrespectful that this government could offer up to the citizens of Alberta than to leave on the table a life-and-death issue that they've known about for a year without bringing it forward till this late, late date. Incredibly disrespectful to Albertans.

Now, when we asked – and we did ask – to the government's credit we got some of the potential draft regulations around it. Here's the problem. These regulations should have been out in public circulation six months ago, Mr. Speaker, because regardless of what they decided in Ottawa on how to do it, the fact is that the court was going to make this happen. This should have been out for all 87 members of this House to discuss with our constituents months ago, probably six months ago. While this isn't the final word on it, looking at the proposed text for directive from Alberta Health Services – I'll read some of it to you because it's relevant. "Pursuant to section 8 of the Regional Health Authorities Act, I" – and it names the minister, but I can't say the minister's name in the House – "Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors, direct as follows." That minister hasn't been the Minister of Seniors since Groundhog Day, since February 2, four months ago. I'll be looking for an explanation from the government.

If indeed the government and the cabinet had these draft regulations in their hands four months ago, why the heck didn't Albertans have them in their hands? Why didn't Albertans have four months to talk to their Members of the Legislative Assembly to say: "I don't like this. I do like that. This is really important; thanks for including it. Have you thought of this? This could cause an unnecessary death or unnecessary pain for someone who is qualified." Disgraceful. Disgraceful. I can't imagine, Mr. Speaker, anything more arrogant than a government who inflicts upon Albertans the conditions under which they or a loved one of theirs might receive physician-assisted death with two days to discuss it in the House, seven days for all Albertans to really discuss it, and most of that after the House has recessed. Disgraceful, disgusting, disingenuous, political manipulation. I know that's a terrible thing I just said, but I believe it. To have something like this and drop it on the table at the last day without any chance for Albertans to give

their opinion on a life-and-death matter is probably the worst and lowest form of political manipulation that I've seen. Terrible. Absolutely terrible.

Mr. Speaker, you can't excuse that. You cannot excuse that. I know the folks in Ottawa have been – you know what? They left it to the last minute. But that is not an excuse for our province. That is not an excuse for our government, who knew this was coming. This was not a surprise. They had a full year. In fact, it would seem, by the documents, that at least four months ago the government had drafts of potential regulations in hand. Even if a minister stands up later and says, "Well, this was done last week, and that's a typo," that's still not an excuse.

They should have had something in hand six months ago. They should have shared it with Albertans. This should have been a nonpartisan, Albertan discussion about our future. No matter what political party you belong to, and if you don't belong to a political party, no matter what religion you belong to, and if you don't belong to a religion, no matter where you come from in the world, no matter what your sexual orientation is, no matter what your nationality is, no matter where you were born, it's personal. When someone in your life is considering their options at death, it gets personal, which is why I am so very offended by the fact that the government left this to the last minute when they knew it was coming. They knew it was coming.

You know what? Unfortunately, it's indicative of the government's attitude that "we know better than Albertans," consistent throughout the entire time they've been in government. "We know better. Do it our way. You don't need to know any of the facts. There, there, little Albertans. We'll just pat Albertans on the head because we know better." Albertans know better. They always have, and they always will, and they surely know better about the things they're thinking about during the end of life for a loved one.

Mr. Speaker, I could not be more offended, and the saddest thing about this is that it's too late to fix it. If the government did something really rare for this government and admitted they were wrong – and I don't know if they will or not – even if they did, it's too late. It's law in six days from now. It's done. It's over. You blew it. There's no coming back from this one. There's other legislation that they've made mistakes on that they could come back from by talking to the public. There's not time to have a province-wide, decent debate.

I know I heard the minister today talk about: 15,000 people answered the survey. Well, good. They might have gotten that little bit right.

Mr. Rodney: Less than 1 per cent of the population.

Mr. McIver: That's less than 1 per cent of the population, but that is about what they'd like to see.

But in terms of the draft regulations: zero Albertans. Well, maybe the ones on the government side, but outside of this House zero Albertans were consulted on what the regulations are. Zero. On a life-and-death matter, zero Albertans outside of the political process were shown the regulations. Zero. Zilch. Nada. None. On a life-and-death issue. This isn't whether we're going to paint the house blue or red. This is about life-and-death decisions about our loved ones. This is about the pressure that medical staff are going to be under to do or not do these procedures. This is about the incredible pressure that families will be under, and with all of that, this government says: "We know better than them. We know better than the doctors and the nurses and the other staff in the medical facilities. We know better than the families and the loved ones. We know better than Albertans because we have the power, and we're

wielding it, bless our hearts, to put these regulations in place,” with zero time for a decent discussion.

Mr. Speaker, the government has blown it. They’ve blown it in a really serious, offensive way that you cannot come back from.

3:50

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to ask my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays to expand a little more on the four months that the government likely had an idea of what they were looking at in terms of regs and what could have been accomplished in those four months had those been made available to the rest of the members of this House and had we perhaps had the opportunity to go out and have those conversations in our constituencies. It seems like a massive amount of time, and now we are down to the wire, and it’s just a little hard to wrap my head around that. I’m wondering if you could expand on that.

Mr. McIver: Thank you to my hon. colleague from Calgary-North West for the question. Mr. Speaker, again, we’ll wait for an explanation, which we may or may not get, from a minister on whether it was four months, but it should have been at least four or six months. There’s no excuse for it being less. In four or six months members of this House, on all sides, could have talked to people in our social and personal and business circles, including medical staff, including family members and loved ones and friends that have had to make these incredibly gut-wrenching decisions, and said: “What about this? What have we missed? What would have made your loved one more comfortable at the end of their life? What in the regulations could have made your loved one’s decision different at the end of their life? What step should the doctors, the nurses, the medical people, the family members take in order to not make the wrong decision?” To the hon. member, that opportunity has been lost. Again, it’s too late. It’s blown so badly that there’s no coming back from it because there is not time now for that opportunity.

There are so many stories – there are so many stories – of every Albertan who’s died from a serious disease, be it cancer, be it some other debilitating affliction, where an Albertan has suffered greatly and deteriorated greatly at the end of their life, and they and their loved ones had to make incredibly difficult decisions. There are so many stories that the people writing the legislation could have learned from about how you can make a right decision, how you can avoid making a wrong decision, how you deal with the ethical aspects of it, the potential feelings of guilt, the potential feelings of joy at being able to help your loved one. Gone. The government has left it too late with their I-know-better attitude, and I find this incredibly crass and the worst political move I remember ever witnessing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Gottfried: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker. Everything that the Member for Calgary-Hays said is resonating with me. It reminds me of the MLA cafés that I hold in my constituency and the number of people, dozens of people, that came through on another issue that was not well communicated and not well consulted on in this community. That was the best practices guidelines, which caused a lot of concern. We were able to deal with that and address that and inform people well about that issue. I think that’s an important opportunity for us and, I think, not only a responsibility but a commitment and an expectation of our constituents that we have the ability and the time to do that.

I just want to ask the member what he felt about the opportunity for all members of this House, from both sides of this House, to do what is the right thing, which is not only to honour the privilege of representing them but to give them the opportunity to share their concerns, to share their opinions, to share their ideas of what is best for society so that we may bring those thoughts back to the House. I would like to hear his comments on how he feels that that could have been a great opportunity, that has been missed by us in this House, to do the right thing on behalf of all Albertans and our constituents.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, all I would say to the hon. member – and I thank him for the question – is that there are issues that, because of my life’s experience and one thing and another, I’d feel pretty qualified to advise this House on, whether I was on the government side or the opposition side. This isn’t one of those, and that’s why we needed to be able to ask Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, I just want to remind the House that this is very sensitive and very emotional and, as many of you have said, a personal issue. I would encourage you to be cautious about emotion, your management of emotion, and the words you use so that this House can hear that emotion, but let’s also be conscious of the other people in the House and the difficult decisions that as individuals they are having to make.

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we talk about people leaving, it’s nice to actually have a baby in the House.

I wasn’t actually planning on speaking to Government Motion 17 – due to some personal experiences I’m quite torn on the issue – but due to the way this motion has been presented, I feel compelled to speak out against it. The way it was initiated was unfair to Albertans and unfair to all members of this Legislature. I’ve never actually been presented with a formal copy of the motion. I actually received a bootleg copy from one of our staffers, and I think that’s a little bit shameful. [interjection] Excuse me?

The Speaker: Hon. members, through the chair, please, both of you.

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, 15 years ago we lost my dad to Alzheimer’s-related complications. Over a five-year period we watched a once extremely intelligent man deteriorate to the point where he actually forgot how to swallow. Visiting him was very troubling, both for him and for us. While you were there, he would be angry and frustrated because he knew that he should know you but didn’t. By the time you closed the door, he forgot that you were there. He ended up aspirating and dying from complications. I know that given a choice, he would not have wanted it to end that way, and I know that I don’t want to.

This spring we also lost my mother. She lived on O₂ due to COPD for the last 10 years or so. She signed a personal directive denying any intervention at all. She passed quietly, under her own terms, surrounded by family.

Over the last five years I watched my father-in-law and two very good friends die painfully over a long period of time from cancer. In all cases their last days were spent basically incoherent, on morphine for pain, and mainly cared for by family members because we were out in the country and don’t have access to the same palliative care that my mother experienced at the Royal Alexandra hospital. I commend the people that work there; they treated us very well. We don’t always have the same access to

palliative care in all areas of this province, and I think that is a failing.

What I'm trying to say here is that every case and every individual is different. Both of my children are in the medical field. One is soon to be a graduating doctor, and one is a nurse. I would not want to see either one of them legislated into making decisions or participating against their will. I think it's imperative that any legislation include a personal directive that would be honoured if a person, myself included, became incapacitated and couldn't make that decision on their own but had made it prior to that. This is a far too complicated issue to take lightly, and it needs to be fully, lengthily discussed with all Albertans and given proper time in this Legislature. We can't afford not to get this right.

The member said that this is too late. I agree; it probably is. But it is still my recommendation that this Government Motion 17 be withdrawn from this House.

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

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

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in support of this motion, and I do so because of the feedback from many of my constituents, including the Lethbridge group of Dying with Dignity. I believe the first public forum I attended on physician-assisted death was almost three years ago. The previous two local MLAs were not in attendance. The first meeting that I had with a constituent was actually last August or September – I sent a message to my CA to check the actual date, but I haven't heard back yet – but I've been listening to my constituents for a long time.

4:00

The document What We Heard: Medical Assistance in Dying provides the responses from groups and from 15,000 Albertans to the survey. Actually, that's quite a number of people to respond to a survey. In the comments I received from constituents and a recent group-written submission in response to the federal bill, Bill C-14, to amend the Criminal Code, they expressed that they were in agreement with most of the recommendations of the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta, the CPSA. Should the federal bill not pass by the June 6 deadline, the Criminal Code prohibitions against assisted dying will be struck down, and the provinces will have the responsibility for implementing the Supreme Court of Canada's decision without a federal legal framework. The emphasis from those who spoke with me was that they are relieved that the CPSA has taken the initiative to implement many of the Carter recommendations regarding the provision of medical aid in dying to Albertans.

The Lethbridge group felt that advanced consent should be considered valid when made by a competent patient who at the time of the request has a diagnosis for a condition that is or could become grievous and irremediable. Another comment was with respect to waiting periods, which they felt should be flexible. I note that both of these areas are being framed in the federal legislation.

During my lifetime I have witnessed the excruciatingly painful lingering wait for death of a couple of people in my sphere of family and friends. I have listened to them begging their Maker to let them die and be relieved of this earthly pain. My dad died in 1993. I was with him for six days before he died, and I was there when he took his last breath. He was in so much pain that even to touch his bed he winced. This was certainly a tough time for me because I had a really good relationship with my dad, and we certainly did lots of things that I loved to do. He took me fishing. He taught me how to hammer a nail properly. He taught me how to put things together.

All of those things were pretty special in my life. Even though he died in 1993, I still have conversations when I am doing a project at home, and he certainly seems to guide me in the right direction.

I think that when somebody is in that kind of pain – my dad was diagnosed 13 months before he died. The doctor told him that he probably had three months to live, and it wasn't; it was 13. It was 13 really very difficult months. My dad would not have made the choice to die, I don't think, but I know that my dad is really pleased that I am standing here to speak to this motion because he always believed that people had to make their own decisions. But they have to make decisions where there's a framework where they can make those decisions.

I think it's cruel and unusual punishment for somebody to have to go through this and not have the ability to make those kinds of decisions. When dad died, he didn't have the ability to make that decision. I've heard some say that it is God's choice when one dies. I agree because I believe God is speaking through that person when they request medical assistance in dying.

Each of you has to make a decision here on how you're going to vote. I urge you to support this motion and understand that this decision is what is needed and necessary.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a)?

Then I'll recognize the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'd like to thank the government for bringing these regulations forward to debate in the House. I'll be supporting the motion. I agree with medically assisted dying. I have some very personal reasons for that, which I don't think we need to get into.

And I think I support the regs. You know, I know we're not here to debate the issue about medically assisted dying. That's been done by the Supreme Court and by the federal government. That's really not the issue. We're here to talk about the regulations, which I just saw yesterday at 4:30. I'm not sure what the associate minister was trying to say there, but they weren't handed out in the House. I know that two of our guys got it, but I never did get one.

Nonetheless, it doesn't really matter what I think. I would like to have been able to discuss it with my constituents and bring their thoughts forward to the House as well. I know I won't be able to do that now, so we'll debate it. I know there were a couple of good doctors in the House that, with the associate minister, went around and consulted with people – I heard 15,000 people – so I think that was good. But at the time I don't think they had the regs to discuss with people. I don't think they showed them the regulations, so people are waiting to see what they are.

You know, I know this is better than a lot of the provinces, and I do appreciate the opportunity to discuss it here. A lot of them won't even get this much. I think it's great that we pass this. I won't go on because it's been said lots here. There's no sense in repeating what everybody has said, but I do need to be able to say to my constituents that I got up and spoke on their behalf, so that's why I'm speaking. When I get asked, "Why didn't you speak up for us?" I can say: "Well, we were presented with the regulations. They got passed. I didn't have time to consult with you, but I got up and portrayed that message to the House and to the minister." So I've done that, and I'll tell that to my constituents when they ask why they didn't get a chance to speak on it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hearing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the opportunity to speak on this profoundly important matter, in fact, one might say, a matter of life and death. The matter of life and death is perhaps the most consequential and significant decision that we here will debate and make a decision on as members of this place. It is no understatement that a society is judged by how they treat their most vulnerable, and indeed much of this discussion is shrouded in sentiment and compassion and benevolence.

There is a fundamental question that underscores this debate, which is to ask: what is more humane, to eliminate suffering or to eliminate the sufferer? That is at the heart of this matter, Mr. Speaker. That death can be prescribed by a doctor as a treatment option is more than just nonsensical. That we should accept the wilful ending of life as an act of health care speaks volumes about how we treat our most vulnerable.

We should be discussing how we can improve palliative care, not facilitating the desire for death of those who are at their weakest. We should be reflecting on what it is that makes an individual seek the end of their life sooner than the course of natural death.

In another Supreme Court ruling, the *Chaoulli* versus Quebec decision – I apologize; I don't speak French, so I hope I didn't butcher that name – the Supreme Court found that a faltering health care system is indeed a breach of the right to life itself because “access to a waiting list is not access to health care.” That *Chaoulli* decision was even mentioned in the recent Carter decision, which noted that state action could cause death or increase risk of death.

As legislators we need to examine whether failings of the health care system, either in the availability of end-of-life care or in broader access to health care, are to some degree complicit in making suicide appear to be a desirable solution for those who are suffering. To simply accept the Supreme Court's decision as ubiquitous is perhaps the high-jurisprudence equivalent of the naturalistic fallacy that exists in philosophy. To accept that the Supreme Court has spoken, that the matter is closed, *causa finita*, would not only be intellectually dishonest and, frankly, lazy, but it would also be a profoundly inadequate response given our roles as legislators and given the immense gravity of this subject matter.

4:10

High courts in western nations have in the past made what we all recognize today to be completely heinous, atrocious decisions. We all know precisely what these decisions were: those that perpetuated profound inequalities that undermined the dignity of the human person. Simply put, high courts are not infallible by virtue of being high courts. It is integral to this matter that we recognize this, Mr. Speaker.

The same Supreme Court ruled in 1993 in the *Rodriguez* decision that the right to life does not extend to legalized assisted suicide. In that decision the court wrote:

To the extent that there is a consensus, it is that human life must be respected and we must be careful not to undermine the institutions that protect it.

This consensus finds legal expression in our legal system which prohibits capital punishment. This prohibition is supported, in part, on the basis that allowing the state to kill will cheapen the value of human life and thus the state will serve in a sense as a role model for individuals in society. The prohibition against assisted suicide serves a similar purpose. In upholding the respect for life, it may discourage those who consider that life is unbearable at a particular moment, or who perceive themselves to be a burden upon others, from committing suicide. To permit a physician to lawfully participate in taking life would send a signal that there are circumstances in which the state approves of suicide.

That was the Supreme Court, Mr. Speaker, in the majority decision in the *Rodriguez* versus British Columbia case in 1993.

Of course, the more recent Carter decision overturns that verdict. But it would be erroneous to assume that the Carter decision is definitive. In paragraphs 44 and 45 of the Carter decision the court mentions that the Carter case in question was bound by *stare decisis*, or what they criticize as the condemning of a law to stasis as a result of previous precedents. However, they did so by saying:

Trial courts may reconsider settled rulings of higher courts in two situations: (1) where a new legal issue is raised; and (2) where there is a change in the circumstances or evidence that “fundamentally shifts the parameters of the debate.”

Matters of assisted suicide warrant numerous incredibly sensitive considerations. These include questions of mental health, questions of self-interest of loved ones serving as proponents or opponents of a decision, questions about devastating physical illness, questions over the appropriateness of suicide as a response, and questions about how the complexities of individual cases align with previous court rulings and existing law.

Given the immense complexity of this matter it is not unreasonable that we may find the Supreme Court revisiting this decision for the same *stare decisis* reasoning they chose to revisit the *Rodriguez* decision and the Carter decision. It is not uncommon for the court to revisit decisions in subsequent cases. That the right to life extends to an inverse negative, the right to death, is a new interpretation, one that breaks with many other decisions by the same court and many others.

It is also worth noting that in the Carter decision, paragraph 127, the court said, “The scope of this declaration is intended to respond to the factual circumstances in this case. We make no pronouncement on other situations where physician-assisted dying may be sought.” All of this is to say that the very premise of this government motion, that we need to be taking the court's ruling together with any law by Parliament at face value, is, as this motion is worded, inadequate. Simply put, we need to be looking at ways to protect our most vulnerable, the heart of the matter, not ways of merely appeasing a contemporary piece of jurisprudence.

If we truly recognize the inherent value of human life, we need to be asking how we can help those who are suffering. For those who are suffering, we should be seeking those measures that can provide a genuine hope of a benefit. We should of course not be seeking treatments when there is no such hope or when there is a greater burden imposed upon the patient. Withdrawing care in recognition of the inevitability of a natural death is not the same as wilfully assisting with suicide.

One aspect of the motion put in front of us states that the rights of individuals who object to providing medical assistance in dying on any grounds are to be respected. The government needs to be clear up front on what they intend through this. Freedom of conscience and freedom of religion are protected Charter rights, Mr. Speaker. A concise moral objection against assisting with a suicide is likely to arise from the foundational objection to the wilful termination of life in such a manner. A mandatory obligation for a physician to refer a patient seeking assistance with suicide to someone eager to help facilitate it would likely be just as consequential and thus just as disrespectful of the initial objection. Alberta does not need to be looking to give physicians reasons to leave. Respecting the conscience rights of physicians properly is not incompatible with any aspect of the Carter decision or the current draft of Bill C-14 currently before Parliament.

There are two parts of this motion before us today that are arguably on a collision course. One of these is the section of the government motion that says, “appropriate safeguards be put in place to protect vulnerable Albertans.” The other is in the preamble

itself, which says that the government of Alberta would be doing so in compliance with “any legislative measures approved by the Parliament of Canada.” The very legislation that is the subject of this debate is still being debated before Parliament.

In Ottawa the majority Liberal government defeated numerous reasonable amendments aimed at protecting the vulnerable. These included requiring a prior review by a competent legal authority before someone can be killed. This included defeating an amendment requiring a psychiatric assessment of those with mental illness who request euthanasia. These included an amendment reaffirming the freedom of conscience of medical professionals. These are reasonable amendments aimed at protecting the vulnerable and still permissible within the scope of the Carter decision by the Supreme Court. If the members on the government benches opposite from me are sincere about the text of the motion “appropriate safeguards be put in place to protect vulnerable Albertans,” then the legislation that derives from this motion will look to put in place the safeguards that Parliament shamefully failed to include.

In looking at preventing harm to the most vulnerable, we need to look at other jurisdictions where assisted suicide is legalized and there are systemic case studies available. We should be looking at the failings of those systems with an eye to ensuring that we do not fail Albertans in the same way, Mr. Speaker. I was deeply saddened when a report emerged earlier this month from the Netherlands about the type of suicide that is approved. I want to read a few paragraphs from Britain’s *Daily Mail* newspaper.

A former victim of child sex abuse has ended her life under Dutch euthanasia laws because she could not live with her mental suffering.

The woman, in her twenties, was given a lethal injection after doctors and psychiatrists decided that her post-traumatic stress disorder and other conditions were incurable.

It went ahead despite improvements in the woman’s psychological condition after ‘intensive therapy’ two years ago, and even though doctors in the Netherlands accept that a demand for death from a psychiatric patient may be no more than a cry for help.

I cannot for the life of me conclude how legalized assisted suicide was helpful in this circumstance.

Now I want to speak to the haste with which this government is choosing to push this motion and accompanying regulations through, draft regulations that only saw the light of day yesterday, leaving scarce time for assessment, input from constituents or from experts in the field. On any other matter this would be disappointing, but it is so much more than that where it concerns a consequential moral matter. If we look at the significant debates that occurred in Parliament in Ottawa over the past century, moral matters pertaining to life and death were never subject to a rush, never subject to forced closure of debate by a government majority. In all of those circumstances members had the time they needed to speak on the significant matter of moral conscience and discuss due implications, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

The rushing of this legislation is a direct affront to the ability of members to speak on matters of moral conscience, to represent our constituents. Rushing this motion through here and removing the ability of elected representatives to speak on a grave matter like this are affronts to our western democratic traditions. Any decision on life and death is perhaps the most consequential matter that we will face. The fact that the Supreme Court, by all means not an infallible institution, has concluded that a right to suicide is, paradoxically, a part of the right to life should not mean that we should accept legalized suicide as a new moral or new normal.

We have an obligation to serve Albertans, to protect the vulnerable, to protect Albertans’ rights. Studies have shown that those seeking suicide change their minds when their pain or depression is properly treated, and that’s what a humane response here should be, that we find ways to increase the availability and quality of support for those Albertans who are suffering. It is understandable that we would want to look at a case of immense suffering and discomfort and ask why someone would want to carry on living in such a circumstance. Instead, we need to ask if we as a society want to seek an end to suffering by merely eliminating the sufferers. I would hope that the answer is no.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any questions or observations for the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner under 29(2)(a)?

Hearing none, I would recognize the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that this is, unfortunately, an irresponsible approach to life-and-death legislation, and I also believe that it’s incumbent on us to show great respect to the residents of Alberta and, more importantly, to their opinions, which we have not had a chance, since we received these regulations yesterday, to consult with. I personally feel that having that opportunity to speak with my constituents is of great importance to me and to the role that I’ve taken on and the privilege that I’ve taken on on their behalf.

In a debate where we hope to respectfully regulate what I hope would be the flight of people on the wings of angels, indeed the devil is in the details.

It should come as no surprise that the vulnerable rarely have a strong or outspoken voice. They rarely have that opportunity or even that capability to do so and rely often on society and governments and social workers and other people to be their voice, and this is our opportunity to do that as well.

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

With great irony, the date that this legislation, the federal legislation, comes into effect, June 6, is the first day of Alberta’s 30th annual Seniors’ Week. How ironic. I hope to be able to spend time during that week with the seniors in this community, and were we not forcing this legislation through on short notice, in an irresponsible manner, with inadequate time to consult, I would be talking to them. I would be asking them for their time to sit down for a cup of coffee, maybe have a bit of a round-table with them to find out what they feel, what they’re thinking.

These are wise people, Madam Speaker. On the government’s own web page for seniors we are asked to celebrate Seniors’ Week.

Seniors make a difference in our communities every day. From supporting family members and friends to assisting charities and volunteering, seniors are deeply involved in our communities and their contributions benefit Albertans of all ages.

I think that when we’re honouring them, we also need to honour their opinions, their futures, their challenges, and their dignity.

Madam Speaker, I also, sadly, have experience in compassionate end-of-life care. In 1978, when I was attending the University of Alberta, my young 61-year-old mother, a registered nurse who set up the first public health nursing system in Thailand, far away from the home that she grew up in, Parry Sound, Ontario, was diagnosed with inoperable, untreatable terminal cancer. With sincere appreciation for the compassion of so many medical professionals at that time, I believe that the end-of-life care that she received allowed her to pass with the minimal amount of pain possible, and for that I am grateful.

I also reflect on the condition of my own father, who before his death at age 87 suffered from Parkinson's disease, congestive heart failure, had a hip replaced, had suffered a perforated bowel years earlier. Were he not the stubborn, proud man that he was, would he have easily fallen into the description of grievous and irremediable medical conditions? That concerns me.

Madam Speaker, I'm very supportive of the Supreme Court provisions for a compassionate and dignified end to life. In fact, I have to say that I often think that for people to suffer indignities at the end of life is the ultimate cruelty. I think that there are people that need to be able to make that decision, and I think that that is a dignified and respectful option that is being put in place now by that Supreme Court decision. Again, we're not here to debate that. That has already been decided by our Supreme Court.

But I worry about the vulnerable, the mentally or physically infirm, and, even worse, the danger in these regulations of a non terminally ill individual who's having a bad month or even a bad year or even a bad several years exercising this option. Madam Speaker, those of us that have the privilege of working with those less fortunate in our communities have helped those people. We've talked to those people who have been hopeless at one time in their lives or another. I'm sure that everybody in this room has had a chance to see someone dig themselves out of those holes. In many cases we've had the privilege of seeing them recover and thrive in our communities.

I think that that's a commitment that we have, to help them. It's our responsibility to let them have that opportunity. It's our responsibility and our commitment not just to create an environment and a society in which Albertans can thrive but to fully support them, when they're down, when they're feeling hopeless, in achieving their fullest potential. I'm not sure that we find that in these regulations, Madam Speaker. I think we need that time to find out how we can ensure that those protections are in place while also ensuring that people, the terminally ill and those who want to have a dignified end to life, have that option as well.

Madam Speaker, I cannot support this motion until I have adequate time to consult my constituents, including giving time to the wise seniors I spoke about, possibly during next week's seniors' celebrations, and giving them the honour of listening to their wisdom. I will not be supporting this motion.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Oh, my apologies; 29(2)(a) comes into effect if there's anyone who has questions or comments.

Seeing none, go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak on Government Motion 17. This is a very interesting time that we are faced with in Canada and within Alberta, and we need to take the time to do this right. This motion urging the government to implement measures to regulate medical assistance in dying is asking Members of this Legislative Assembly to trust the Executive Council with getting the regulations right. I'm sorry. I will not be able to do that. Assisted dying is far too complex to leave the very regulations that will take Albertans down this path in the hands of so few without proper legislation in place to protect us. This government has shown complete disregard for the seriousness of this topic. Here we are with a government motion that appears to be hastily thrown together in order to quickly get this done before session is over, yet I am supposed to trust that the government has taken this issue seriously.

Madam Speaker, I believe that life is precious. I believe in the sanctity of life, and for that reason natural death is the route I have decided to follow. But that being said, I believe each person has the right to choose whether to live or to die. The decision to live or die is a deeply personal decision. It must be recognized that the decision to live will have limited impact on the rest of society. The decision to live is generally considered to be the normal course of action.

4:30

Madam Speaker, medical treatment has come a long way. Today we are able to extend life significantly through all of our medical advancements. These treatments have allowed us to interfere with natural death, allowed us to therefore choose life. We also have a right to choose not to interfere with the natural dying process. We have the freedom to refuse medical treatment; therefore, we can choose to live or we can choose to die. The question here is: does having the right to die constitute having a right to have someone else assist me, to be an accomplice in my premature death? I would suggest it does not.

Madam Speaker, I am concerned that if we go this route, where I have the right to have someone else assist me in my choice to die, our current view on the sanctity of human life will forever change. I believe this is not in the best interests of a civil society that respects human life. Regardless of what I believe, we appear to be heading down this road. Therefore, there are many issues to consider on this topic, and we need to properly protect all Albertans.

One issue we face if we take this route is to properly protect conscientious and religious rights. By no means should any individual be forced to participate in any manner if he or she cannot do so in good conscience. I have talked to medical professionals that feel they would be an accomplice to murder if they were required to refer a patient to someone who would assist their patient to die. How can we ask that professional to refer their patient?

What about proper consultation? Patients must be protected from being coerced into assisted dying. By no means should this ever be offered to a patient that has not asked for information about assisted dying first. Doctors are highly respected individuals in our society. Assisted dying may have never entered a patient's mind, but in the case where a doctor they respect has offered it as an option, they may now consider it. This could be understood as coercion.

What about a cooling-off period following a diagnosis, a time for the patient to reflect on the seriousness of this decision? What about requiring a second opinion from another doctor not affiliated with the initial diagnosis? How about a review panel to ensure the transparency of the system? Madam Speaker, I believe many checks and balances must be in place to ensure that this choice is not to be made lightly.

Madam Speaker, it must also be clear in legislation that we will protect vulnerable members of our society. I think about children. Should someone that is not yet capable of making mature, well-thought-out decisions be given the ability to ask another person to assist them in dying? Other countries are doing this. We do not hold youth criminally responsible for decisions they make that may end someone else's life because society has deemed them not fully mature and therefore not fully responsible for their decision.

The same could be said for people suffering from mental illness. We must protect the vulnerable who feel they are a burden on others, whether that is seniors or individuals with a long-term disability. We must continue to improve education and awareness for doctors and nurses surrounding palliative care.

Madam Speaker, I've had many discussions with family and friends as well as people within the health profession. Most people have taken very little time to thoroughly understand the possible consequences of assisted dying legislation and the regulations that

will be put into place. When professionals in the field, individuals that have spent a great deal of time working through the intricacies of this topic, appear to be split on which direction is the right path forward, I believe we must be very cautious. We must take the time necessary to properly understand the topic in order to protect the rights of all individuals. There is a lot to be considered here.

I know that many of these questions are being considered by our federal government, but the decision on this motion is far too important to be pushed through this Assembly. Hastily crafted wording on the motion and the subsequent draft regulations have proven to me that the government has not recognized the seriousness and the scope of this complex issue. I believe this Assembly needs more time. I believe this government has not been able to properly prepare and also needs more time. This is a very serious and complex topic dealing with the very sanctity of human life. We need to take the time necessary to do this right.

Therefore, I will not support this motion that would empower this government to implement measures to regulate medical assistance in dying. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, here we are on Motion 17, and I'm not going to stand and debate doctor-assisted suicide. That decision was made by the Supreme Court. I fully realize that. That is not our job to do here today.

Governments across Canada, though, have had a year to prepare for this ruling, and now, all of a sudden, it's a panicked rush. Physician-assisted death in this country, and no laws in place. That leaves us in a very uncomfortable spot right now. We have so many unanswered questions, and we need guidelines; we need regulations.

You know, it's interesting that my colleagues across the way, when they have risen to talk, have talked about the fact that: oh, we've had questionnaires out there, so folks have had a chance to weigh in. Yes, they've had a chance to weigh in on doctor-assisted suicide. That decision was made. Now the conversation is about what the regulations look like, and the fact is that we are seemingly not allowed to have more than a few hours' discussion about what those regulations look like. That is wrong. It's incredibly wrong.

We are thrilled, though, that the government decided to share the draft regulations, the orders in council, the directives. It's a shame that when those draft regulations were done, which was a significant amount of time ago – had those been provided to us, we could have had some very fruitful discussions within our communities of stakeholders who are very interested in having a conversation about this and did not get the opportunity to have a discussion about the regulations, which are extremely important.

There are so many questions floating around. What are the rules around mental illness? What are the rules around disability and dementia? None of those are clear, and people shouldn't have to wait to read an order in council to know what the rules are.

Now, I'm going to relate to you a bit of a conversation I had with a former colleague of mine who knows this subject all too well, and she is sitting in the gallery today. We know that in the last Legislature she had risen and spoken passionately many times and talked about her brother's struggle with Huntington's and the two-year journey that they went through as a family dealing with his Huntington's. He had actually said that he wished to have access to end-of-life options, and those weren't provided. So she was certainly glad to see that that was an issue that had been addressed.

But here is someone who has a history of Huntington's in the family, who, God forbid, one day would face the spectre of dealing with this herself, who is a passionate stakeholder and wants to have that conversation about what the regulations look like because she is someone who has dealt with this, who has a lot to add to the conversation. And she doesn't get to be a part of the conversation.

4:40

You know, I have to say this to the government. There are so many opportunities that you have to include people who have this lived experience in a conversation about what these all-important regulations need to look like, and you're not listening, and it's not the first time that you haven't listened. What we see here is an eleventh hour pass to address an issue that we have had over a year to talk about and what those regulations might look like. These are difficult, difficult, emotional decisions. I do not envy the government for having to draft these, but the fact is that they did not have to draft these alone. There are some pretty amazing people in this province who wanted to come to the table to talk about these regulations, to talk about it through the lens of their lived experience and to be able to help put together regulations that would have a meaningful impact on the lives of the people who will be faced with this terrible, emotional decision.

Make no mistake that this is a critical place to stop, to assess, to decide right now what consultation looks like because having no consultation on the regulations is unforgivable. Please do not make that mistake.

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

Seeing none, I'll call on the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I rise to speak about Government Motion 17, it's come to my attention that this is a serious and incredibly important piece of legislation that is to be debated in the Legislature. As I reflect over this, I am of the mind that our position in this Chamber is one of legislators but that we also have roles and responsibilities, and our responsibility is as representatives of our constituencies and to represent Albertans. When we are only given a small amount of time with the presentation of any piece of legislation, it gives me cause for consternation and concern.

It reminds me of the conversation that I – this subject matter of life and, as many of us know in the rural community, death, brings me to the conversation where, in a 29(2)(a) situation, I spoke to the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster about his occupation and working with animals and treating them in life-and-death situations. When it comes to human life-and-death situations, it kind of makes me think: who in the H do we think we are to define and come to a point where we are going to make or legislate or regulate human life and death?

I've seen human life come forward in absolute squalor. Absolute squalor. People in those countries would live in the quality of bathrooms that we have in this society and think that they were in some magnificent location. Here we are in a relatively wealthy society, and we think that in six hours we're going to stand here and debate and talk about the end or decide upon the end of someone's life and dictate or decide on the quality of how that is ended? We are only a small percentage of a global environment, where people come and go from this global situation that we live in, in squalor and opulence. It's difficult. It's difficult to relate to this.

In my case I was elected as a representative of the diverse constituency of Drumheller-Stettler, and I'm proud and pleased and happy to be here to do that. But we are thrust into these situations

and concerns where we're not given exact and opportune times to relate to our constituents. So it thrusts me back to a discussion about vulnerable people. This is a discussion about ethics and personal convictions, and we cannot properly get feedback from our constituents as to how we are to properly represent them.

I have personal life convictions. I, too, in 1985 stood at my father's deathbed and watched him perish. As other members have given heartfelt and life-yielding experiences of their personal convictions and their personal experiences as to how their parents came to life's end, I certainly understand the passion of that.

Madam Speaker, we need to get this exactly right. This is not simply some condition that the physicians are being presented with. This is final, and this is of great magnitude. Pontiffs and people with great platitudes throughout the world in other societies have made decisions on that. I want to have a chance to hear from my constituents and stakeholders on the specific provisions that these regulations bring forward. This is important. This is final. This is not simply a condition of health care treatment. We do not need to let ourselves slide into some sort of a poor choice of words.

I've seen and heard – and I'm repeating myself here somewhat – personal experiences and perspectives of others in this House, and it's with great respect that I do see and hear that. As an agriculturalist and as a person that has done hunting, I've seen wild animals begin their life cycle and I've seen them end their life cycle. In some regions of the world those animals are treated with some sort of dignity equal to human life.

Who in the H do we think we are to be able to decide this at some sort of a basic level or at any sort of a higher level? Madam Speaker, I'm actually glad to have this opportunity to speak about this and, hopefully, impregnate the minds of members across and members with me with the idea that this is a serious issue. It's massive. It has profound significance for Albertans and families and indeed for our Albertan society as a whole.

Since this debate began to unfold in the public sphere, I have heard from some of my constituents, about this many, by text and by e-mail and written. Five people, Madam Speaker, have had a chance to have input on this, and there are varied opinions. Many of these people, though, are churchgoing people. Does that provide special insight into it? I don't know. They feel it does. It gives them insight into what they believe is another sphere.

4:50

One thing is clear, Madam Speaker – and I'm hoping I am conveying some of it – that this invokes strong personal convictions and deeply held beliefs. There are many complexities and nuances to this discussion, and each deserves to be heard and openly explored. I would invite this government to allow Albertans to have a referendum on this subject matter. This is something that's been discussed by the Supreme Court of Canada, but it's not something that couldn't be singularly effected by the people of Alberta, not necessarily through the supposed greater knowledge that is in this Chamber but by going out to Albertans and allowing them to individually and singularly exercise their right on the answer to this question.

I think it's important, Madam Speaker, to note that every member of this House, with their due diligence to the issue of their responsibilities, should have given some thought over the weight – and I'm hoping to evoke that weight – of what we're here to decide as we go forward in our conversations. They've heard the stories, hopefully, on all sides as well, and I know there are a variety of opinions and stances that reflect the variety of thinking of Albertans at large.

I reiterate, Madam Speaker: is there a fear of allowing Albertans to have a referendum on the subject of this matter, that we're being thrust into six hours of debate on? Is there a simple level of mismanagement? If that may be the case, let's put it to the people. Open and free debate is perhaps the most important thing we can offer Albertans on the topic of assisted suicide. We owe the province a transparent conversation that fully explores all facets of this issue.

Because this is a matter of personal conviction and conscience, I'd like to express my desire to see these conscience rights protected for health care officials and professionals. I've heard the presentation of a physician who has moral and ethical objections, and those should certainly be respected.

Madam Speaker, I understand that there was a poll commissioned by the Canadian Medical Association that showed 63 per cent of physicians would personally refuse to perform this procedure themselves. Even more recently, 29 per cent of doctors surveyed by the CMA said that they did not even believe in referral. This is not, in my opinion, going to put access at risk, if that is what this government is concerned about, but it is a large segment of the health professional population.

We cannot ignore the input of our quality front-line practitioners who work in the medical field day in and day out and see these things with their own eyes daily, if not regularly, unlike each and every one of us in this case. I would speak only for myself, but I've heard from the self-testimonials of others in the Chamber that this is a singular, once in a lifetime, two or three times in a lifetime experience.

These people have great personal experience with this. They deal with it on a more regular basis. These people sometimes tell me that they cannot take part in good conscience. These are good, honest, hard-working health care workers who are anxious, worried, and fearful about how they may have to involve themselves in the process, especially in the absence of any conscience rights provisions in the federal legislation.

This is a vast change in the way medical practitioners approach medicine, and I would note that an overwhelming majority of the health care profession framework does not appreciate the conduct that they are being forced to involve themselves in. They're trained under such conditions that do not allow for this education, and we must all appreciate that their concerns are for professional changes that they have never been exposed to. I believe that this issue is so deeply personal and emotionally taxing on the mind that to require the participation of conscientious objectors would be grossly mistaken.

Furthermore, I do not see adequate safeguards in place for those suffering from mental health conditions. It reminds me, Madam Speaker, of an apology that was given by this Chamber for the treatment that was given to people that were in mental homes in, I believe it was, the '30s or '40s, where people were given a treatment that at that time was believed to be medically proper for their condition. It was not a terminal treatment, but the government then down the road, as recently as a few years ago, was actually forced to apologize for the medical treatment that those mental patients received.

The associate minister herself cited thousands of Albertans who want to see strong safeguards to protect the vulnerable. Madam Speaker, I am fearful that there could be broad and significant unintended consequences going forward. This profoundly significant motion should be presented to all Albertans, and I will not be supporting it.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am very pleased to be able to speak about the issue of the medical assistance in dying topic. I've read through the material that we've had, I read through the report on what we've heard, the results of the survey. A lot of the questions, a lot of the points that were brought up, I think, if not totally answered, at least have certainly been addressed reasonably. I'll just go through a few of them with you.

The question about age was brought up: would there be people under the age of 18 being involved, or would there be any possibility of them having access to medical assistance in dying? The consensus was that, although more than half of the people surveyed supported the idea that people younger than 18 might be eligible, really, there was also a lot of concern that determining minors' abilities to understand the nature of the request and its consequences could be challenging. I think it's far more likely and reasonable that, in line with the Supreme Court ruling and the federal government, medical assistance in dying in Alberta would be limited to mentally competent adults aged 18 or older.

Of course, that introduces the topic of competency along with age, and an assessment of competency would be essential to determine if people qualify for medical assistance in dying. A number of survey responses talked about how applicants would need to complete an assessment of competency or mental capacity while they were cognitively competent enough to choose to request medical assistance in dying. There would have to be proof that people were able to make the decision, they could think through it and make the decision on their own.

Stringent assessments confirm if the applicant is able to fully understand the nature and consequence of their request. It would not be a rushed process. It couldn't be. It would have to be careful enough to be sure that people understood what it was they were asking and the consequences of it. The type and scope of the assessment and deciding who will administer it would be very important, and that's one of the processes still to be completely determined as we go along.

5:00

Every person who applies for medical assistance in dying support would be referred to a physician or other health care professional who could make the arrangements for the assessment and the rest of the process. An end-of-care team was recommended as possibly being very helpful because that could include a physician, a psychiatrist or a psychologist, a social worker, and, if the person wanted it, a spiritual care provider. All those people could be a team to help make the process suitable and effective for the person requesting the support. One survey respondent suggested that having staff trained in psychosocial end-of-life assessments would be a valuable support. Someone who has worked on end-of-life planning would know something about it.

Finally, the person making the request for medical assistance in dying would need to be certified as being competent by more than one physician. This might require having one of the physicians meeting with the person by teleconferencing, okay? In that way, the process would be accessible to those living in rural and isolated areas. It's absolutely true that otherwise that could be quite an obstacle. Having to meet face to face with two different physicians, for a lot of people, would be very difficult. That would make the playing field definitely uneven.

Another important part of the process is for the person to have a reflection period after the initial request during which he or she would have time to consider the request that they had made. At all times – and this is so important in all assessment – and at all points in the medical assistance in dying process the person at the centre of the process has the right to change their mind. This is vitally important, and it's essential in making sure that people are acting with informed consent so that nobody is rushed or pushed into anything.

One area that needs to be dealt with and was talked about was the issue of people who are experiencing mental illness and seeking medical assistance in dying. This is a very tricky area. I totally agree. One of the ways that some of the respondents in the survey addressed this was by saying that special cautions are needed in these situations, with the worry being that mental illness and addictions may potentially impair judgment, understanding, and appreciation of the consequences of their action. How exactly the cautions would have to be formulated is something that would be developed down the line, but we all know that that would be an area that needs to be particularly addressed. It may not be possible to establish some people's autonomous decisions if they're experiencing mental illnesses or addictions. That's a reality, too. It might just not be possible from the outside to tell if they are capable and are making a really good, informed decision for themselves.

Another concern having to do with people having mental illness or addictions is whether these illnesses or conditions are remediable or not. In other words, a person may believe that they will never recover from their condition, but most mental health workers believe that irremediable cases are rare. That, again, would need to be looked at very closely.

The conclusions reached by survey respondents were that additional time is needed to more thoroughly understand the issues of administering medical assistance in dying to people with mental illnesses. It was also recommended that if medical assistance in dying was made available to people with mental illnesses, at least one of the assessing physicians would need to be a psychiatrist. That would go a long way in helping to make sure that the person's mental illness was not being a factor, not making them unduly lean toward a request that they may not have truly appreciated.

I hope that helps something. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to join in the debate on Government Motion 17. From the outset I want to thank the Associate Minister of Health for providing this opportunity. On April 6, some eight weeks ago, I asked if we were going to have a debate in the Chamber. I didn't get an answer at the time, but here, now, in the dying days of this spring session, we are given that opportunity, and I would like to thank her for that. Yesterday I urged the minister to table the draft regulations and allow us to debate those in the House, and she has done that as well. Again, it would be wrong for me to not acknowledge that and thank her for it.

But I have to say that the late timing and the rushed nature of this and so many other aspects of this debate have revealed that this government is badly fumbling this vitally important issue. It's not like you didn't know it had to be dealt with. It's not like this came up as some sort of surprise. Ever since the Carter decision of February 2015 it's been clear that the provinces would be responsible for the regulatory framework that would establish the parameters for physician-assisted dying. That's been on our agenda since that time. In British Columbia shortly after the Carter decision

they established an all-party committee to develop the regulations on this issue because it is complex. It's a complex medical, legal, ethical issue. You know, while I'm grateful for the opportunity to debate this issue, I have to say that I am very frustrated that it's happening in such a rushed and disorganized manner.

You know, Madam Speaker, I've really been thinking about making this speech since 2012. Shortly after I was elected in 2012 was the first mention in this Chamber of physician-assisted death, physician-assisted suicide. I knew there would come a day when I would have an opportunity to speak on this. I have strongly held opinions on this. There are hundreds of questions that need answers, but I'm going to focus on four. First, what has been the experience in other jurisdictions? Second, what provisions are in place to protect vulnerable Albertans? Third, what does this do for palliative care? Fourth, what about the effects on medical professionals?

It's called now medical assistance in dying. It seems that we've had a progressive shift in the euphemisms to describe this. It used to be called euthanasia. Then it was called mercy killing. Then it was called physician-assisted suicide and then, up until recently, physician-assisted death. The Carter decision has set Canada on a path that other jurisdictions have already travelled; namely, Oregon in 1997, Holland in 2002, and Washington state in 2007. In every case the decision to take this first step on this slippery slope was made with the noblest of intentions, the relief of unrelenting and unremitting suffering for patients for whom a cure was not possible. As a veterinarian, Madam Speaker, I understand the desire to provide that relief.

In all cases the intent was, as the Member for Calgary-Elbow has indicated, that this would be rare and that there would be rigid safeguards and that vulnerable populations would be fully protected. But that hasn't been how it has worked out in real life. In Oregon since 2005 the number of deaths by assisted suicide has doubled, and lethal prescriptions have increased by 76 per cent. During that same time frame the population of Oregon has only increased 7 per cent. In Washington in the period from 2009 to 2012 assisted suicide increased by 130 per cent while the population increased by 18 per cent. In Holland, a nation of only 17 million people, in the five-year period from 2005 to 2010 assisted suicide numbers increased 64 per cent, from 2,319 to 3,809, and in that same five-year period prescriptions for what they call terminal sedation went from 11,000 to 17,000 per year.

Madam Speaker, the numbers show that instead of being rare, in jurisdictions where it is now legal, physician-assisted death is becoming increasingly commonplace. Even more troubling is the relaxing of the original restrictions that were placed on this practice to protect vulnerable populations. This has happened in virtually every jurisdiction. Looking specifically at Holland, for example, the eligibility criteria have shifted from those that are terminally ill to those that are chronically ill, from those that suffer from physical illness only to extend it to mental illness, to mental suffering, to physiological distress, and now to where it is available to those over 70 who are simply tired of living.

5:10

In a troubling paper in the journal *Current Oncology*, noted University of Ottawa palliative care specialist Dr. José Pereira noted that "euthanasia has moved from being a measure of last resort to being one of early intervention. Belgium has followed suit," and so has the state of Oregon. The situation has progressed so far that the United Nations has found that the euthanasia law in the Netherlands is in violation of the universal declaration of human rights "because of the risk it poses to the rights of safety and integrity for every person's life."

Madam Speaker, you can understand why there's concern. You can understand why Albertans want to see the regulations that will govern this practice in Alberta and that will guard against the disturbing trend that has happened elsewhere.

Now, many other jurisdictions – Scotland, England, France, South Australia, the state of New Hampshire – have all decided to not go down this road because they don't want to see this tectonic shift in the relationship between patients and doctors. It's because of the inability to adequately protect against this inexorable slide.

Now, this is not the case in Canada. The Supreme Court has ruled, and it is left to us as legislators to establish the regulatory framework to govern this practice. And here I must disagree with the associate minister when she said in her opening comments, "Our responsibility in this matter is actually quite small." With the greatest of respect, Associate Minister, it's not. It's not small at all. In fact, a number of Canadian Senators, who started debating Bill C-14 today, some of whom have served in public life for decades, have stated that this will be the most important issue that they have ever debated in their careers as public representatives. Madam Speaker, I agree with that. As elected public representatives it's imperative that we take that same responsibility that we have been given on this matter and that we learn from the lessons that others that have travelled this road have tried to teach us.

What about protecting the vulnerable? Well, Madam Speaker, as I've outlined, other jurisdictions have gone down this road, each embarking on that journey with assurances that vulnerable persons would be protected and that no one would make this decision under duress. Everyone starts out with good intentions, but in practice the safeguards have progressively been watered down and subverted.

In our order in council, that we were given yesterday, under clause 2.2(c) it requires two independent witnesses to sign and date the request for medical assistance in dying. Now, that seems eminently reasonable. In fact, it has been used in other jurisdictions. But in Oregon, for example, 58 of 61 persons that requested medical assistance in dying received one of the required signatures from a physician who was a member of a pro assisted suicide lobby group. In Holland and in Belgium networks of physicians offering consultations on medically assisted dying have formed even though they have no specialized training in palliative care and no personal connection to the patient. The proposed regulations as we're debating them today do nothing to prevent this situation.

Madam Speaker, advocates for persons with developmental disabilities are also justifiably concerned, so much so that a coalition of advocacy groups has formed to develop the vulnerable persons standard. This standard argues that our constitutionally protected core values and rights in this country impose on government an undeniable obligation to make sure that vulnerable persons are protected with real safeguards. Suffice it to say that the Vulnerable Persons Secretariat will be watching the Senate and every provincial Legislature, including ours, in an attempt to protect those in our society who rely on us, on those of us in authority whose job it is to protect the most vulnerable.

Third, what about palliative care? Well, Madam Speaker, we need to focus on the quality of life, and that includes the quality of the final days of that life. Palliative care needs to be improved, made more accessible. We need to have those critical conversations about end-of-life care available, and we need to have that care available throughout the province. Recent statistics reveal that most Canadians do not receive palliative care as their life's journey reaches its inevitable conclusion. In Ontario four times as many patients die in intensive care than palliative care. In that same province 10 times as many patients die in acute care as in palliative

care. In fact, in Ontario only 6 per cent of patients that die pass away in palliative care.

Now, palliative care can and should be a beautiful thing. Even veterinarians, who have always had the option of euthanizing their patients, can and do seek to offer palliative care to their patients. In fact, a recent study showed that veterinary students receive three times the hours of instruction in analgesia and pain control that human medical students do. So we need to focus more on palliative care. We need to make sure that patients are supported and loved so that they never feel that they are a burden, which is easily one of the greatest fears that seniors face when they get sick. We've all heard it from our elderly friends and relatives. They say: I just don't want to be a burden.

Finally, what about medical professionals? My colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed quoted from the Hippocratic oath in his eloquent speech yesterday on this issue. Doctors take that oath when they earn their medical degree, and no doctor practising today entered the profession with the knowledge that at some point they might be called on to assist with the death of their patients. There's not a doctor anywhere who knew that that was part of the deal. People enter the medical field because they want to care for patients. They want to heal. They're trained to heal. They're trained to care. None are trained to assist with the death of their patients. I'm worried about the physicians in this province who are about to take on this burden, and I'll tell you why.

Veterinarians have always been called upon where it is appropriate to end the life of our patients. I will tell this Assembly that this is a profound experience. It changes you, and it may come as a surprise to members that veterinarians as a profession have always had a suicide rate higher than the general population. In fact, that suicide rate is four times higher than the general population. Our rate of mental illness and suicide is twice that of other medical professionals.

So what makes us different? Well, there are a number of things, but one issue that always comes up in the discussion is that veterinarians are the only health care professionals that are called upon to end the lives of their patients. That takes its toll. Nearly everyone in my profession knows a colleague who has taken their own life. In my case it hits close to home. The veterinarian who hired me as a fresh-faced, newly minted, 22-year-old city kid to work in an 80 per cent rural large-animal practice some 33 years ago committed suicide in 2002. I gave the eulogy at his funeral. There is something that is so very profound about the toll that it takes on ending the life of your patient. I don't think anyone in this room can really understand that, and there's no way that I can describe it adequately. But I guess I can tell you that my wife, who is also a veterinarian, could always tell the days that I had performed a euthanasia because she would see and she'd say: you had one today, didn't you?

I know many people who have told me that they didn't want to become a veterinarian because they couldn't bring themselves to euthanize a patient. Whether directly or indirectly, prescribing the death of a patient will have an effect on our physicians. This is especially true for physicians in small rural communities. I've known doctors that have delivered two, three generations of the same family. These doctors become an integral part of their community, and how much more difficult will it be for them to be called on to sign the papers, to assist the deaths of those patients that they have cared for.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to conclude my comments by saying this. The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled, and physician-

assisted death is the law of our land. I'm not debating that. Whether I agree with that law or not, as a law-abiding citizen I respect that law. It is our job, though, as legislators to ensure that the law is upheld and that we place safeguards that are fully maintained and safeguards that are workable to protect the vulnerable in society. That's the other half of the Carter decision. These regulations simply do not do that. While the College of Physicians & Surgeons has developed a 19-paragraph, six-page document of advice to the profession on medical assistance in dying, it quickly notes that "this advice does not define a standard of practice, nor should it be interpreted as legal advice."

There are still many, many unanswered questions that these hastily prepared draft regulations simply do not answer. Madam Speaker, this is a profound subject that has understandably created a great deal of anxiety for many Albertans. As legislators we have the opportunity in a free vote – and I stress that this is a free vote; I certainly hope that none of the caucuses have been whipped on this vote – to vote freely on the wishes of our constituents and our own consciences. For me and my constituents I cannot support this motion, and I urge members of all parties to vote to defeat it.

5:20

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Questions or comments?

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak on Government Motion 17. My constituents in Little Bow have, in no uncertain terms, made clear that they have profound concerns with the assisted-suicide legislation that is currently before the federal Parliament.

There are two particular concerns that I wish to speak to, that we look to ensure there are adequate protections in place for those who are most vulnerable, those who have the most to lose as the result of this legislation, and the second is that we adequately respect the conscience rights of medical professionals in our province. The matter before us involves the government enacting a policy on the wilful termination of human life. I cannot think that there will ever be a more significant matter before us as legislators, and it is peculiar that the government is rushing this.

I want to bring to the attention of members here the recent comments of Dr. Kevin Hay, a family physician from Wainwright, Alberta. This physician served his profession for over a decade as the representative forum delegate for the north area of the central zone, formerly the East Central health region. Since the Supreme Court's Carter decision on February 6, 2015, the physicians' representative forum spent all of 20 minutes – that's right, a paltry 20 minutes – on this issue. When a motion taking a stand on the matter was tabled, it was tabled indefinitely, meaning that it would never come up for debate. What this means is that even physicians have not had adequate time to debate this incredibly grave moral matter. Without their input, the AMA opted simply to adopt the Canadian Medical Association position.

Madam Speaker, the frenzied hurry to push this matter through at all levels of government has left physicians without proper time to weigh in on the matter, and by rushing this legislation through here, without giving adequate time for us to consult with our own constituents, with our own communities, this government is depriving Albertans of the precious few opportunities that exist to weigh in on this delicate matter.

At the core of this debate is a question about the value of human life and how we as a society value human life. What does

compassion really mean? Does it mean that we do all that we can to help those who are in pain, or does it mean that we do all that we can to end the pain by ending those who have it? Simply put, we are devaluing human life if in the course of this discussion we are not giving due consideration to the adequacy of care that is available in our health care system. It says more about our society that someone in a time of suffering has concluded that they no longer have dignity, that the dignified option is the wilful ending of human life.

A September 2000 article that appeared in the *Toronto Star* discussing the international gathering of palliative care physicians that took place in Montreal noted that “studies have shown that most people who ask to die change their minds after being treated for physical pain or depression. But about 4 or 5 per cent continue to want euthanasia or physician assisted suicide.” If we are to accept those studies, it means that 95 per cent of those seeking assisted suicide are doing so as a result of not being adequately treated in the health care system.

The motion put before us by the government does not go nearly far enough in protection of the vulnerable. The mere mention that there be “appropriate safeguards” is simply not enough. What we are dealing with is the inversion of the duty of medical professionals to care for the most vulnerable, their obligations to provide health care now being transformed into an ability to terminate life, by definition the precise opposite of health care.

The consequence of the Carter decision by the Supreme Court is the termination of section 241(b) of the Criminal Code, which prohibited assisted suicide. As Parliament is debating a law on assisted suicide, it is worth particular note that the majority government in the House of Commons has been defeating amendments that had aimed to protect the most vulnerable. We have an onus to protect Albertans, and while the Supreme Court may have struck down a section of the Criminal Code pertaining to assisted suicide, that should not and cannot preclude us from doing what we can so that the wilful termination of life is not normalized.

This government motion should be looking at ways to encourage proper treatment of those seeking assisted suicide so that their suffering is properly alleviated. At its current stage in debate the federal legislation does not include a proper mental health evaluation for those seeking assisted suicide. In other words, it is possible that untreated depression is leading someone to conclude that their suffering, their illness, can only be remedied through death. We need to ensure that there are proper safeguards, especially with regard to those who are unable to speak for themselves.

A recent opinion piece that appeared in the *National Post* contained the following, which I wish to convey to members here:

Once you have normalized suicide, from a tragedy we should seek to prevent to a release from suffering we should seek to assist, it is logically incoherent – indeed, it is morally intolerable – to restrict its benefits to some, while condemning others to suffer interminably, merely on the grounds that they are incapable of giving consent.

Once assisted suicide becomes the law of the land, we as Albertans are faced with a choice. Do we become complacent with normalized suicide, or do we continue to recognize it as a tragedy to be prevented? In simple terms, this is a time for choosing, and we must also ask whether we are a society that respects freedom of conscience or if we are a society that does not.

The motion presented by the government speaks to respecting the rights of those in the medical community who disagree with assisted suicide. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms recognizes freedom of conscience as a fundamental freedom. It was recognized in the Canadian Bill of Rights before that. It’s a right

that traces back to the Magna Carta of 1215 from England, part of a legacy of ordered liberty on which our freedoms and indeed our country are founded.

Indeed, it goes against the grain of over 800 years of history to force our physicians to act against their conscience in carrying out the wilful termination of life. Not only does it arguably undermine the very definition of what constitutes health care; it also undermines the original wording of the Hippocratic oath, the pledge that has guided physicians throughout modern history. Freedom of conscience must be universal because we have to recognize that a conscientious opposition to assisted dying is likely founded on a conscious objection to the termination of life in that wilful manner prior to the onset of natural death.

It is equally against the grain of that freedom to force someone to refer for such a service if they do not wish to carry out that service. Either we recognize freedom of conscience or we do not. Some issues are indeed clear. As provincial legislators we need to recognize that there are some developments, higher court rulings for example, that are beyond our jurisdiction, but health care is very much a matter of provincial jurisdiction. What we have before us are clear questions of how we take care of our vulnerable, how we respect a fundamental right such as freedom of conscience, and, most importantly, how we value life.

If we are a compassionate society, if we want to have a compassionate society, it’s difficult to believe that we can become complacent and welcoming to the wilful termination of life. How we treat and how we respond to Albertans who are suffering is the legacy that we leave behind.

Madam Speaker, I will not be supporting this motion. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Rodney: Madam Speaker, it is indeed under 29(2)(a), so this is comments and questions. Fifteen thousand Albertans indeed have responded to this issue. That might sound like a lot, but it is not; 4 and a quarter million other Albertans have not had the opportunity to have their say. Yesterday the government told us that our job is to be the voice of Albertans on this. However, they have not given us the opportunity to return to our constituencies to discuss the regulations, that were tabled just yesterday. I’ve been told by many that this is a travesty of democracy.

5:30

That being said, *Hansard* will show that every single member of the PC caucus has spoken to this bill, often very passionately, with great life experience. Obviously, in listening to our speeches, you know that our members are not being whipped, and that is a good thing.

I was very happy to hear the thoughts of the leader of the Alberta Party and the leader of the Liberal Party and many members of the Wildrose but only two of the NDP private members and the Associate Minister of Health . . .

An Hon. Member: That’s wrong.

Mr. Rodney: Through the chair . . .

An Hon. Member: Three.

Mr. Rodney: Oh, wow. It’s a whopping three. Think about that. [interjection] Who has given the time and application – I will go through the chair because I have some things to say, and I want to

hear from this member. I challenge that member right there to stand on his feet and represent his constituents.

I was even happy to hear from the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. She asked me a question under 29(2)(a), took four of the five minutes. That's fine. I'm very, very disappointed that given her rank and her portfolio she's not taken the opportunity to address this House on the issue in the time allocated to her. I wonder how the hon. member feels about this. I also wonder how the hon. member feels about the fact that despite his rank as the longest serving member of this House, we've not heard from the Government House Leader.

As you know, as the second-longest serving MLA of this House I jumped to my feet to speak to this motion at my very first opportunity. I apologize that I had to fight back some tears, but I trust that you will respect the fact that it was very balanced with research, and I felt honoured to contribute the little that I could to the tip of this iceberg.

I wonder how the hon. member feels about the fact that given that this is a life-and-death issue, we've not heard from the Minister of Education, the Deputy Government House Leader, the President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, the intent of 29(2)(a) is to respond to comments made by the previous speaker. I think you're drifting a little bit beyond that, so if you could stay on topic, please.

Mr. Rodney: I know that you worked with *Hansard*, but it's actually to offer comments, and this is part of a preamble to a question.

. . . the ministers of Human Services, Seniors and Housing, Indigenous Relations – you see that these are all related to this issue intricately.

Mr. Mason: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Rodney: . . . the minister responsible for democratic renewal . . .

The Deputy Speaker: We've had a point of order, hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: That's very nice. We'll deal with it in due course, right?

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead, Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Have a seat, member.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we'll deal with the point of order.

Mr. Rodney: Well, you know what, sir? I'm not referring to an absence, and don't waste our five minutes.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member.

Go ahead, hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, the member is talking about who has and who hasn't spoken. We wanted to provide an opportunity particularly for the opposition to comment with respect to this matter. We had discussions with the House leaders in which we agreed to cede most of the time to the opposition so that they could make their comments with respect to that. That hon. member knows nothing about what he's talking about, and he is abusing his position. He's abusing the five-minute question-and-answer period to try and cast aspersions on the members of this government.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, did you wish to respond to the point of order?

Dr. Starke: Yes, Madam Speaker, I do wish to respond. Well, there is no point of order here, and that is because under 29(2)(a) the Speakers, both yourself and Mr. Speaker, have allowed tremendous latitude in the use of 29(2)(a). We've seen that throughout this Legislature. We've seen 29(2)(a) used for a variety of different ways and reasons. I would submit that my colleague was moving towards asking a question of the previous speaker, which is entirely within the realm of 29(2)(a).

With regard to the comments of the Government House Leader on the discussions that we have had, we have encouraged at all times – even in the discussions that we had as House leaders, there was indication that there would be debate, and there was never any specific indication as to how many members from each caucus would specifically speak although, you know, in the case of our caucus, I indicated that I suspected that all of our members wished to speak, and they have.

However, there is no point of order here, Madam Speaker. My colleague is using 29(2)(a) well within the bounds of the already established, very lenient guidelines and the great deal of latitude that has been established within this Legislature during this session, and I would ask that you allow him to continue to the conclusion of his remarks.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the point of order?

Well, I agree that there has been a great deal of latitude given on the use of 29(2)(a) in terms of comments. I'm a little concerned, hon. member, that your comments were starting to stray into relatively personal comments towards individual members, and I think that that could be a rather dangerous area to get into, so I would urge you to get to your question.

Let's move on. I would say that there's no point of order on this particular issue.

Mr. Rodney: Happy to. I will share with you – and you may know this from your time sitting upstairs, Madam Speaker – that this corner of the room has been far more personal in these sorts of attacks. This is not an attack, but in the past we have been called out by name of constituency. I have not done that, and I will simply say this: the ministers in these ministries are directly related to this issue.

I was asking if this member would like to hear from some of them, and I was listing some of the ministries so that people could hear that, for instance, when it comes to democratic renewal, Service Alberta, Status of Women, Minister of Advanced Education, or perhaps the Premier – as they have challenged us to represent, perhaps they would like to represent their ministry.

Actually, it's too bad I couldn't get quite to the end of my question because I wanted actually to pay tribute to people back there for their backgrounds in nursing, telecommunications, broadcasting, journalism, LGBT community, nonprofit community, indigenous communities, activism, social work, sociology, mental health – you see how this is related, don't you? – Canadian Cancer Society, public policy and analysis, Good Samaritan Society, community development, collaboration analysis, homelessness, Children's Heart Society, insurance agents, developmental disabilities, search and rescue, occupational health and safety, school counselling, a union representative or two, and, of course, more than one member, including the chair, of the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee. This is ringing bells, isn't it? You have experience and expertise that you can share.

Madam Speaker, as you know from my speech yesterday and, obviously, from today, I have very strong feelings, and I am challenging that side to . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, the time is finished for this order of business.

Are there any further members wishing to speak to the motion?
Seeing none, the hon. minister to close debate.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to start by offering my sincere thanks to the members who spoke on this very important and personal issue for sharing their concerns and suggestions for ways to navigate this new and evolving area of law and medicine. I would also like to extend a deep and heartfelt thank you to all members who shared their personal stories and experiences with family members and loved ones at the end of their lives as well as some very touching stories of personal professional experiences.

The Supreme Court of Canada's ruling on medical assistance in dying comes into effect this Monday. The federal government has the primary responsibility for legislation in the area, and we intend for any framework we put forward to fit within their legislative framework. Unfortunately, that framework isn't yet set and may be subject to court challenges. In the meantime Alberta must be prepared. Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services have been working diligently on this issue, and supports and processes are in place for Albertans.

It was really important for our government to hear from the opposition, to have this conversation in this House in whatever form we were able to. This is in addition to the thousands of Albertans that we have heard from, including a variety of stakeholders such as faith-based institutions, regulatory colleges such as the College of Physicians & Surgeons, and individuals with direct, first-hand experience in medical assistance in dying.

Madam Speaker, medical assistance in dying is an evolving area of law and of medicine, and our government will continue to hear from Albertans on this deeply personal and difficult decision.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 17 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:40 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Ganley	Miller
Babcock	Goehring	Miranda
Carlier	Hinkley	Nielsen
Carson	Hoffman	Payne
Ceci	Horne	Renaud
Clark	Kazim	Rosendahl
Connolly	Kleinstauber	Sabir
Coolahan	Loyola	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Schreiner
Dach	Malkinson	Shepherd
Dang	Mason	Sucha
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Feehan	McKitrick	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	McLean	

Against the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Rodney
Anderson, W.	Jansen	Schneider
Cooper	MacIntyre	Smith
Cyr	McIver	Starke
Gill	Nixon	Strankman
Gotfried	Pitt	van Dijken

Totals: For – 41 Against – 18

[Government Motion 17 carried]

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, in view of the hour I move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 7:30 this evening. Thank you.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m.]

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