



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, November 22, 2016

Day 50

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Second Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker

Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees

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

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

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Clerk

Philip Massolin, Manager of Research and
Committee Services

Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and Director of
House Services

Nancy Robert, Research Officer

Gordon Munk, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel

Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms

Gareth Scott, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel
and Legal Research Officer

Chris Caughell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms

Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of *Alberta Hansard*

Executive Council

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

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	McKitrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schneider

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

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

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

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Cooper	Littlewood
Ellis	Nixon
Horne	van Dijken
Jabbour	Woollard
Kleinsteuber	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	McIver
Dang	Nixon
Fildebrandt	Piquette
Jabbour	Schreiner
Luff	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Connolly

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

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

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

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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

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

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Loewen

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

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, November 22, 2016

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect or pray, each in our own way. Hon. members, November is the month of the Holodomor commemoration, a time when millions of Ukrainians lost their lives. We commemorate this tragedy in order to ensure that it is never forgotten. Let us today be reminded of the strength and tenacity of the Ukrainian people who helped settle this province of Alberta.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Alberta Property Rights Advocate

25. Mr. Carlier moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that:
1. The 2015 annual report of the Alberta Property Rights Advocate office be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship for the purpose of conducting a review of the recommendations outlined in the report;
 2. The committee may, without leave of the Assembly, sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued;
 3. In accordance with section 5(5) of the Property Rights Advocate Act the committee shall report back to the Assembly within 60 days of the report being referred to it if the Assembly is then sitting or, if it is not then sitting, within 15 days after the commencement of the next sitting.

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to speak to Government Motion 25, referring the annual report of the Property Rights Advocate to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship. First off, I want to say that I intend to vote in favour of this motion, and I urge my colleagues on this side to do the same. However, as a member of the Resource Stewardship Committee I want to highlight for the Assembly some issues we encountered back in August and October.

We had vigorous debate in August and October because we had a situation where stakeholders wanted to have meetings with the committee about issues important to them and we weren't allowed to invite them because of a little-known standing order that prevents us from doing more than one item of business at a time. I refer to Standing Order 52.04, "An order of the Assembly that a Bill, regulation or some other subject matter stands referred to a Legislative Policy Committee shall take priority over any other hearing or inquiry."

Now I'd just like to read my comments from the October 24 Resource Stewardship meeting, where I had this to say out of frustration from our side. It says:

Mr. Hanson: Yeah. I just want to clarify what I think Mr. MacIntyre is looking for. When we are given a mandate by the Legislature to deal with one item, like we're dealing with right

now, it's just that when, you know, we've set dates for consultation and we've set dates for the Ethics Commissioner's report, in the meantime we've got three or four months sometimes where the committee is just sitting and waiting for these reports to come in. What we would like to do is simply be able to address other issues that Albertans want us to talk about in the meantime, while we're waiting, with no interference at all with the committee. But as the standing orders read right now, we're kind of paralyzed by that mandate. What we'd like to do is just recommend to the Legislature to relook at the standing orders to give us a little bit of leeway in times when the committee is sitting and, you know, waiting for reports to come in so that we can address some other issues.

That's the end there, from *Hansard*.

I just note that we will have to pause our review of the Lobbyists Act to deal with the property rights annual report, and I think there's ample time to do both of these items concurrently. I just find it a little surprising and a little frustrating that this is exactly what we tried to get done back in August and October and were outvoted by the members of the government.

Mr. Panda: They do that all the time.

Mr. Hanson: Yeah.

All we got all summer was government MLAs saying that they couldn't possibly do that, and I just wanted to note for the record how ridiculous I think those statements are. Albertans expect us to get all the work done even if it means doing more than one thing at a time, which now we seem capable of doing.

In closing, I hope the Government House Leader hears the frustration we have with the rules and that he remains committed to implementing the necessary changes to the standing orders that would allow the legislative committees to adequately deal with the work and therefore better serve Albertans, doing more than one thing at a time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to Motion 25?

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Carlier: Yes, Mr. Speaker, to close debate.

[Government Motion 25 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 24

Forest and Prairie Protection Amendment Act, 2016

[Adjourned debate November 10: Cortes-Vargas]

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to Bill 24? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Yeah, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for that. It's an interesting and an honourable day to be rising in the Legislature to speak to the government's proposed legislation, the Forest and Prairie Protection Amendment Act, 2016. It's a broad piece of legislation, and we are here today to discuss amending the act. This is a laudable piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, as far as it goes, and as I've mentioned previously, amending the document was one of the recommendations coming out of the tragic Slave Lake fire of 2011. That fire gave rise to the Flat Top Complex report, and that report as well as the events of this spring during the Fort McMurray fire bring us here today.

This likely will not be the last time this act is amended, as much as I wish otherwise. As events unfold and technology advances, this document, much like the Flat Top Complex report's other recommendations, will be modified as time passes. Some might call it a living piece of legislation in some regards. That in no way diminishes the work being done here today, which is critical to the process.

There is a paragraph from the committee at the beginning of the Flat Top Complex report, and it seems relevant, Mr. Speaker, to our discussion today. "Adversity can be a cruel teacher; however, adversity creates an opportunity to learn, and learning is the catalyst that inspires people to evolve and adapt to new opportunities, threats and realities." As we consider this, it would also be a good time to take a careful look at the numerous recommendations of the Flat Top Complex. Important ideas were borne in this document, including the advancement of the FireSmart program. Now, it was mentioned several times how, during the Fort McMurray fire, several instances of fire-smarting a property had been instrumental to those properties being saved or damage being mitigated by adopting FireSmart techniques. The government's own website has categories for fire-smarting homes as well as businesses.

Mr. Speaker, this point cannot be stressed enough. The program and its techniques could have had the ability to mitigate the devastation of a fire. Is it the magic bullet? Will it be the answer in every situation? Of course not. It is simply one more tool at our disposal that could help in a similar situation. The town of Slave Lake believed in it so much that they spent almost \$20 million to fire-smart their community and are advocating for a FireSmart learning centre to be based in their community.

10:10

This program should merit more consideration by the government, as should the rest of the recommendations from the Flat Top Complex report. This report deserves more than lip service and \$4 million in budget cuts. As we receive the reports from the Fort McMurray fire, let's try to ensure that those recommendations are treated as an investment in further prevention rather than a line item in a budget. Natural disasters are something that we can never anticipate, but hopefully a little foresight and preparedness can certainly help us to mitigate those effects.

That's what we're trying to do here today. We are trying, through, hopefully, some positive changes to this act, to mitigate some possible problems before a situation or the situation arises. It's how we mitigate them within those changes that we may disagree on. As were many of my colleagues in opposition, I, too, was troubled that this government seems to believe that they always know best and, as such, voted down every amendment that had been brought forward by opposition parties, no matter how common-sense and practical we may feel them to be.

If making legislation that much stronger is the goal of this government, then dismissing reasonable amendments out of hand shouldn't be threatening to any party in power. It's almost as if the government learned very little from their days in opposition and is heading down the same path that brought down the last government. Mr. Speaker, I was here for that cycle. Reasoned debate is one of the tools used here in the House to try to make legislation work for all Albertans, not just government insiders.

We had an instance where a member of the third party brought forward a reasonable amendment to simply put a timetable on a forest officer requesting a fire control plan so that the business knows within two weeks if its plan would be acceptable or not. Mr. Speaker, I have reached out to try and find in the town of Hanna where there is a forest control officer. Hanna is in the centre of my jurisdiction, and Hanna is a prairie town. As many

of the members opposite and many members on this side know, we live and die by the words, so sometimes the wording of legislation going forward is important. This seemed reasonable enough that my party supported the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti's amendment. Having a fixed timetable is a reasonable expectation in legislation. For example, when you get a parking ticket, you have a time allotted to dispute it or pay it by. We all have to file taxes by a certain date. It's a reasonable and a straightforward idea, at least to most of us.

The second part of the hon. member's proposal was that any forest officer or guardian have a limit of one year that an area may be cordoned off for investigation, again, what we believed to be a reasonable proposal and a reasonable time frame. Many of us spoke on how the forest would grow, seasons would change, and the area would simply evolve back to a state unlike it was when the investigation started. The cordon is useless after a year, so why restrict a forest like that? It didn't change the bill's intent; it simply gave a fixed timetable. We live within fixed timetables in every aspect of this House: term limits, speaking limits, how long we can debate, how long we sit. The list goes on, Mr. Speaker. It's amazing that once again a reasonable amendment was dismissed and voted down without due consideration simply because the government has the power to do so.

Our side has proposed a few amendments that would clarify some ambiguous terminology. Replacing the term "thing" with the more precise term, at least in our opinion, Mr. Speaker, "wood product" was not in any way trying to derail the legislation but was simply improving an area that could easily be interpreted as vague or ambiguous. "Wood product" is a perfectly acceptable term, that, I may add, is used in similar legislation in Saskatchewan. As noted by my colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills when we introduced this amendment:

When writing legislation, we need to ensure that balance is struck, and certainly, in my opinion and the opinion of my [esteemed] colleague, when we . . . say "thing," [in our opinion, Mr. Speaker] that doesn't strike the right balance. If we use terminology that we're more familiar with as well as terminology that is used in other jurisdictions like Saskatchewan, that is significantly more clear and provides guidance and direction and a little bit more clarity around what would and would not be appropriate.

It certainly was understood what the members were trying to achieve on this side of the House, but unfortunately some government members did not grasp the concept that, yes, "wood product" does cover things like piles of logs, raw logs, trees, et cetera. Perhaps the member couldn't see the forest through the trees there, Mr. Speaker.

Wanting to remove any ambiguity or possible misinterpretation helps forest professionals do their jobs and helps to ensure they don't get carried away. It doesn't hinder it, in my opinion, and that's what these amendments were striving for. Amending legislation is about learning what needs to be fixed in a previous version and amending it to make it work, hopefully, even better. That is our goal here, Mr. Speaker.

While I certainly dispute what this legislation is as good as, we could have made it, in fact, hopefully, better. The act will be a better piece of legislation than it had been previously, and as such my colleagues and I will vote to pass this bill. But I would also remind the House that there is more to do to make our communities and foresters and, as the bill discusses, prairies even safer from wildfires.

With that, I thank you for the opportunity to rise and speak, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler?

Seeing and hearing none, I recognize the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on Bill 24, the Forest and Prairie Protection Amendment Act, 2016. Of course, with the concerns we've had with the recent forest fire in Fort McMurray, it's very timely that we're dealing with this right now. There are a lot of great things in Bill 24 that we agree with and are happy to see are in there. We're happy to see this moving forward.

We had an opportunity to make things, we feel, just a little better with this bill, but of course those amendments that we suggested have been voted down by the government. Now, one of the amendments – and some of the amendments were put forward by the third party – had to do with timelines, the different timelines that areas could be cordoned off for. They suggested a timeline of a year. The different timelines that a forestry officer should respond to a fire plan: 14 days. In fact, these are more than reasonable amendments, that would have helped make this bill a lot better.

When I look through this bill, I see a change that adds off-highway vehicles into this act. Of course, we know that the minister already had the ability to add off-highway vehicles and restrict them at any point they wanted. Of course, maybe this makes it easier, but the opportunity was already there for the minister to restrict off-highway vehicle use.

Now, when we get to the fire control plans in 23(1), this is what it says, Mr. Speaker.

A person carrying on or having charge of an industrial or commercial operation on public land or within one kilometre of any public land shall at the request of a forest officer submit a fire control plan satisfactory to the forest officer, within the time determined by the forest officer.

I'll just go on to read subsection (2) also.

If a person referred to in subsection (1) fails to comply with the request of the forest officer within the time determined by the forest officer, the Minister may, by order, suspend the industrial or commercial operation of the person until a fire control plan satisfactory to the forest officer has been submitted to the forest officer.

10:20

Now, it would have been nice, and maybe we'll get some clarification today on this issue, to see – what this does, Mr. Speaker, is that it puts a lot of burden on the forest officer if there are no guidelines for the forest officer to follow when it comes to this issue. Of course, the amendment that was suggested was that within 14 days of submitting the fire control plan, the forest officer would have to respond and tell the industrial or commercial operation whether it was satisfactory or not. Now, I think that would be perfectly reasonable, especially when you consider that if the plan isn't suitable, the minister may by order suspend the industrial or commercial operation. When you have such a serious repercussion for not having a satisfactory fire control plan, I think it only makes sense that once they submit one, they would like to know as soon as possible whether it's appropriate or not so that they can adjust it, change it, make it better, do whatever it takes to comply.

The existing part of this regulation is a little bit vague, I think, when it comes to operations on public land or within one kilometre of any public land. Now, in areas, for instance, like where I live, there is a lot of public land intermixed with farmland, agriculture, and that sort of thing, so this could come into effect for a lot of different farm-based businesses, farms, which are businesses, too.

By not having that clearly defined – say, for instance, an industrial commercial operation where there could be an opportunity to create a fire. There could be home-based businesses that operate within a home or within a small shop or something that have no opportunity to create a fire, that a forest officer could come and say: okay; I want a fire control plan.

I think what would be interesting, Mr. Speaker, is to find out what the guidelines are going to be for these forestry officers so that they have something to work with while they are performing their duties, because they're very important duties. Now, of course, I live in a community where there are forestry officers. I know them. I trust them. I have a lot of respect for them. But I think they would even want some guidelines to go on so that they know what their job is and what they're responsible for.

Now, we haven't had any opportunity to hear from the minister in this regard, so hopefully today we'll be able to hear something. We've debated this I don't know how many days now. Probably five or six or seven different times we've debated this. Maybe today we'll hear some more from the minister on some of these concerns that we have.

Then, of course, in regard to these fire control plans: is there any appeal process for them? That would be interesting to know, too, especially when you have something as serious as having a business shut down. I think that would be something that would be good to hear, too.

Now, we also talked about the diseased and infested products. That's kind of interesting, the word "products" there. It says underneath that heading, "A forest officer may, without a warrant, seize any thing that the forest officer has reasonable grounds to believe harbours a forest pest." Our concern was the word "thing," and we made an amendment to suggest "forest product" rather than "thing" because we felt, especially without an explanation of why the word "thing" was used and substituted in there – was there any situation that caused this? We know that forest pests, you would think, would be found in forest products, not in things, necessarily. Of course, the title of that is Diseased and Infested Products, so using the word "product" or "forest product" underneath the heading Diseased and Infested Products would probably stand to reason.

Now, we also discussed how with the transportation of aquatic species that we don't want in Alberta, there's similar legislation there for restricting the movement of these invasive species, that we don't want. Of course, the wording of that is a little more clear as far as what the possible ramifications are and what they can do. I think my suggestion at the time was that maybe we should be looking at that legislation and seeing how that would apply in this situation here with forestry products that could harbour these forest pests.

If we go on to subsections (2) and (3) in this same part, where it talks about – like I say, subsection (1) talks about: "A forest officer may, without a warrant, seize any thing that the forest officer has reasonable grounds to believe harbours a forest pest." Well, subsection (2) says, "The Minister may order the destruction of a product seized under subsection (1)." Of course, it's suggesting to change "product" to "thing" again. Again, it's not necessarily just about seizing a thing; it also talks about the destruction of the thing seized.

Going on to subsection (3):

No right of compensation exists against the Crown or any person in respect of anything destroyed under subsection (2), but the Minister may provide such compensation in the amount or at the value that the Minister considers fair for the destroyed [thing].

So again we have a situation here where anything may be or could be seized, could be destroyed, and it's up to the minister's discretion

whether there's going to be any compensation and the amount of the compensation.

Now, again, I don't see anything here specifically in this section as far as whether there's any opportunity to appeal any of these decisions, so I think, you know, that as far as respecting the rights of Albertans, maybe we could have some clarity on that.

Again, Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of good things in this bill. We're happy to see this bill being brought forward because it does bring some good things to the table. We would have liked to have seen some of our amendments passed to make this a little better. It would be nice to have more clarification from the minister on some of these things because maybe some of them make perfect sense, but until we hear an explanation as to why these changes were made, then we don't know exactly why they are here.

Now, of course, probably the number one thing, Mr. Speaker, is that we need to make sure that fires like the Slave Lake fire and the Fort McMurray fire don't happen again. We need to do everything we can. Some of these things may help situations like that from coming up again, but I'm hoping that in bringing this Bill 24 forward, the department and the minister have included every possible thing they could to make sure that these fires don't happen again. We know that we can't stop all the fires. We know that there's human error involved. We know there are natural forces like lightning that happen, that create forest fires. We can't stop every forest fire from happening, but what we can do is reduce the opportunity for a disaster to happen.

10:30

Again, I don't know that I see a lot of things in this bill that have to do with suppressing fires once they start. There are a lot of things about keeping fires from happening, which is good. We need that. That's the first step, undoubtedly. But what we'd like to see is how to keep these fires from doing the damage like was done in Slave Lake and Fort McMurray. I would hope that as we move forward, this becomes basically a living document where as we discover and find new ways to keep these fires from causing the damage like has been done, we'll bring them forward and we'll take care of them as soon as possible.

I think that what we're here to do is make things better for Albertans, safer for Albertans. That's what we feel on this side of the House, and I'm sure that's what they feel on that side of the House, too, Mr. Speaker. What we do here has a direct consequence on Albertans, on how they live their lives, how government policies and regulations impact them. So I think the best thing we can do is to erase any possible misunderstandings or ambiguity. That's not too much to ask. It also isn't too much to ask to make sure that we're doing everything we can so that these fires, that have created so much damage recently here in Alberta and affected so many lives, don't happen again, that we do everything we can to make sure that that doesn't happen again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Are there any questions to the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I would recognize the Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity this morning to speak to this bill. It's something that's a bit near and dear to my heart because over the years at the family farm we've had a couple of incidents. It reminds me, actually, of one here just a couple of years ago, when we had a spontaneous fire incident on the property next to me. It happened at about 11 o'clock at night, and we're madly rushing around trying to get equipment

started and running and getting the fire department out and working like crazy until 4 in the morning to keep the fire from going straight across our grasslands and taking out the house and buildings and all the neighbours with it. It's something that's very important, and we've seen that happen this past year, obviously. It's a devastating thing when it happens. It's a frightening thing, and I think everyone knows that.

Anyway, just to get into what we've got prepared here today for me, I wanted to start, of course, like everyone else has by taking the opportunity to thank our firefighters and first responders all over the province. I mean, after all, they're the ones that are dealing with these devastating effects of wildfires first-hand. I think often as regular Albertans that we don't really realize how blessed we are to be living in this province with these kinds of people. They have so much to be proud of.

With the fire this summer, devastating as it was, it was an opportunity to see our world-class firefighters at their best. I think we saw an awful lot of people work very hard and do a fabulous job in one of the most frightening things I think anyone has ever, ever seen in western Canada. The fact that there wasn't more damage and desolation as a result of this fire is amazing, and it's a testament to their hard work and dedication. Once again, to all the fire responders, first responders, all the people involved, all the people and volunteers, all the different communities: we thank you from the Assembly of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we often forget that decisions we make in this Chamber really matter and that there are real-world consequences, if you want to call it that, when we change legislation, or, in this case, sometimes when we fail to change legislation. While I commend this government on taking action against wildfires – wildfires are actually a significant problem in Alberta – it would have been nice to see more concrete action. This government is taking steps, albeit small ones, to combat wildfires – there's no doubt – and I wanted to state that very clearly. I recall watching the evacuation on television last spring and seeing how close the fire came to swallowing up thousands of people as they tried desperately to leave. This was, quite simply, frightening. Everyone did their best, and it's just too bad we weren't able to do more at that time.

I think this bill would have been something that we could have worked upon to do a bit more. It's well intentioned – I don't think anyone questions that – but there's so much more we could have done here with the debates we've had over the past few hours and days on this. While wildfires are a fact of life, we shouldn't have to accept that what happened to Slave Lake and Fort McMurray was inevitable.

The devastation that these fires wrought on those communities was, I believe, preventable insofar as if we as a province had perhaps been more proactive and possibly could have at the very least mitigated and reduced some of the impact of the wildfires on those communities. So today I cannot help but feel that we may have been missing an opportunity to make this bill better. I think other speakers have mentioned this on our side of the House this morning, and it seems to be a common thread of comments with respect to what this bill had and what it could have had.

I want to emphasize a point my hon. colleague made earlier. Fire prevention and the recommendations contained in the Flat Top Complex report and the numerous other reports on wildfires published over the years should be treated as an investment, not simply an expense. I know that one of the first things any investor worth their weight in gold will tell you is that there's no such thing as a sure thing. I think it's safe to say that whoever coined that saying wasn't aware of the Flat Top Complex report and the FireSmart program.

The FireSmart program was developed to reduce the negative impact on human health and safety, communities, homes, industries, and landscapes. The current FireSmart grants max out at a hundred thousand dollars per community, I'm told. The question is: are we maximizing our return on investment when a single fire incident can cost tens of millions of dollars? Perhaps not.

The fact is that many of the recommendations within the FireSmart program are really common-sense things, like using asphalt shingles on houses instead of cedar shakes, plaster instead of vinyl or wood siding on new and renovated homes, or using coloured rocks in your garden and flower beds instead of tree bark. These are simple investments that could be made or at the very least actively promoted by the government. Fire mitigation is as important to preventing wildfires and the impact of wildfires as flood mitigation is to preventing and mitigating the effects of a flood. At the very least, it is an investment in peace of mind.

I'm disappointed that the government rejected, as my colleagues have said, some of our many quality amendments, too. I try not to take it personally, but when the government defeats every and even the most common-sense and practical amendments that could have been made to the legislation, that could have made it so much better, a person begins to wonder why. Why do they do that? I can tell you that as a member that's been here for over three and a half, close to four, years now we've seen this time and time again.

Why do we have this type of misguided thinking in this House, thinking that you could get, I suppose, when you buy into a claim that only the government caucus members can be real legislators? The government seems to always reject ideas from the opposition outright. Am I saying the legislation is bad, that it should be defeated, this legislation, that is? No, I'm not. But I am disappointed that the government let the opportunity, nonetheless, to make the legislation even better slip by.

10:40

Obviously, more needs to be done in Alberta to prevent wildfires from devastating our communities. There is no question about that. Bill 24 is certainly a step in the right direction, Mr. Speaker, but there needs to be serious questions asked. Is this legislation enough? Why did the previous recommendations to prevent wildfires fail to be implemented? We've had the lessons of the past. The Flat Top Complex report taught us that. The Slave Lake fire taught us that. Where did we perhaps slightly fail in reacting to this situation? How could we have done better? These are the questions that will remain for some time, and I know that everyone that was out there volunteering and everyone that saw the results later probably themselves thought: how could we have done more? It's a serious thing, and it is a very worthwhile comment and thought to consider.

I'd like to finish off by saying again that I'm happy to see the government take some action here to improve fire readiness. Even if they're small steps, it's steps that are worth while to do. For that reason, I will be supporting this bill.

Thank you for your time this morning, Mr. Speaker and to all.

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

Are there any other members who wish to speak to Bill 24? Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, you have already spoken, have you not?

Mr. Hanson: Not on third reading, sir.

The Speaker: Okay. Please proceed.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of points I'd like to make. You know, listening with interest to the discussion and debates that we've had so far, what I've come to understand is

that the best way to fight a fire is fire prevention, and I think this is what we really need to focus on with this bill.

Now, during the debates I asked a lot of the members opposite, when they got up to speak and they talked about fire tragedies in their area or they spoke about the wonderful assets of the forests and the tourism in their areas and adjacent areas, what their thoughts were this spring when the budget came out and they saw very significant cuts to both the wildfire budget and the water bomber budgets. You know, I understand their reluctance to give me an answer to that question. I'm not really surprised that they wouldn't speak against their own government's budget. [A child vocalized] It wasn't that bad. Anyway, like I say, I didn't expect them to criticize the budget even though their constituents were very concerned about the cuts that were made there.

I also noted on numerous occasions the concern I had with cuts to the Transportation budget, specifically with regard to mowing along Alberta highways. You know, I'm very concerned about this, and a lot of my municipalities as well have raised concerns regarding the leaving of tall grass and debris, not only for how it increases the risk of animal strikes but I travel the highways quite a bit and you'll see people flicking cigarette butts out the window all the time. I know that it's something that's very, very difficult to police. I didn't see any mention of it here in this bill, and I don't know what the regulations are that we could use to stop that. But it just seems to me that it's kind of counterproductive to make cuts to budgets and then talk about trying to reduce wildfires on the prairies and forests when one of the highest risks of fires starting is man-made and a lot of times on highways people just not even thinking, flicking cigarette butts out the window.

Like I say, allowing the debris to build up along highways, cutting budgets to wildfire fighting, and messing with the water bomber contracts just seem to be going the wrong direction when it comes to protecting our forests and prairies. Like I said when I started speaking, you know, the best way to fight a fire is to prevent it from starting in the first place, so it just seems to me that we're kind of going in the wrong direction when it comes to working against prevention. I don't think more regulation is the answer. Better planning and learning from the very expensive and heartbreaking lessons of the past would be the best step forward.

So I would really encourage the government in next spring's budget to maybe reinstate some of the funding that they have for cutting the debris and grass along the highways, maintaining our wildfire budgets. You know, we're moving the firefighting season up by a month, so maybe we should also be looking at making sure that our water bomber contracts are in place. If we run into another spring like we had this spring, the devastation is going to be there if we have a wildfire breakout. We need to be prepared for it, and it should be part of that budget. Again, very important – I can't stress it enough – cutting the grass along highways is a major concern.

Thank you very much for allowing me time.

The Speaker: Hon. members, any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) for the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills?

Seeing none, are there any other members who wish to speak to Bill 24? The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm grateful that we have this bill before us, actually. In a former life I was a firefighter, a rural firefighter, which meant that we fought everything that was a fire, whether it was a forest fire, a house fire, a car on fire, anything. We responded to everything. We were an hour away from any other source of assistance, so whether it be medical emergencies or fires or, you know, whatever, the local volunteer fire department had to respond. It was located in British Columbia,

right in the midst of the boreal forest, so forest fires, of course, were a big part of what we did.

I'm grateful that the department is conducting a postmortem on that fire and that we have this bill before us. Just to tell a little bit of a story, as a fire department we always performed postmortems. I think that there isn't a fire department anywhere, whether it be urban or rural, that doesn't do postmortems on every single action that they do. Sometimes it's called debriefing; sometimes it's called postmortem. The goal of the postmortem is always: how can we do this better? How can we do it faster? How can we respond with more assets to that fire? When you're talking about fire, as we witnessed in the Fort McMurray fire, seconds count. Seconds count. Getting as many assets and the right assets on the fire scene as quickly as possible to control it, to even steer it if you can't put it out is extremely important.

One of the things we always looked at in our postmortems was: did we have the right assets on the fire scene at the right time, how could we have improved getting those assets there, and what assets did we actually have at our disposal? One of the things about forest fires that's different than, say, a house fire is that you have at your disposal a lot of assets that you as a fire department may not actually possess. For example, when we were at one particular fire, it was quite a ways away from a source of water. Ordinarily, when fighting forest fires, we will start sucking water out of any body of water that's around just to get enough water on it. In this particular fire we were a little bit limited, but there was a gentleman who ran a water hauling business just a couple of miles from where we were fighting this fire. We literally got on the phone, got a hold of him – his name was Jim – and said: Jim, how many water trucks have you got, and can you get them to this fire now? Within 20 minutes we had tens of thousands of gallons of water. That was an asset that we tapped into to help us put this particular fire out, which had started from a skidder catching on fire out in the bush.

In the Fort McMurray fire, because of the sheer size of this massive beast, an enormous amount of resources had to be brought into play as quickly as possible. I think that everyone who was watching this fire realized that there was an asset deficit. In the early days of this fire there was definitely an asset deficit. It may not be that the firefighting people up there didn't have these assets in-house but that there were assets up there that could have been tapped into but weren't. I believe that as things go forward in the postmortem on this fire, the water bombers issue, the contracts for water bombers, is going to be a significant factor in assets that were there, available to us, but were not made use of in a timely manner. Water bombers, to be effective, have to be brought in very quickly and early in a fire. They have a limited ability to knock down a major fire, as we saw. That requires boots on the ground. That requires an enormous amount of heavy equipment to be brought to bear. Now, if you've ever toured up there in that area around McMurray and going as far north as Fort Chip, there is a massive amount of heavy equipment up there, and that heavy equipment is an asset. It's part of a fire team's inventory even though you don't own it.

10:50

In the postmortems that we conducted in our fire department, we actually made an inventory of equipment that wasn't ours. We had three sawmills in our area. They had tons of heavy equipment over there. We actually went and saw: what have they got that we can beg, borrow, or steal if there is a really bad fire? Of course, it required their co-operation, but they were eager to co-operate and help. If there was something that was beyond the capability of the equipment that we had, here was an inventory that we could tap into and get. If we needed Cats, if we needed loaders, if we needed

whatever, it was a wonderful thing to have that huge amount of assets at our disposal as a fire department.

As the postmortem on this fire is explored, I really hope the department digs deep because we have a couple of facts that we cannot escape as Albertans. We have a massive boreal forest. It is huge. We have all kinds of things that can start that forest on fire. We are going to have more forest fires in this province – that is a fact of living with a boreal forest – and it is possible that we are going to see fires again of the scope of the Slave Lake fire and the Fort Mac fire.

Since these are, in my opinion, inescapable realities, it behooves the government to do some really serious soul-searching in how both Slave Lake and Fort Mac were handled, to take a look at the command structure. I'm aware that in the first 10 days of the Fort Mac fire there were a whole lot of meetings taking place here in Edmonton and not a whole lot of activity when it came to helping the 80,000 people that were fleeing Fort Mac. There were meetings and meetings and meetings, but unfortunately there wasn't a lot of stuff in motion. It took time for things to get in motion to the degree that was necessary for the volume of people that we had to deal with and help. Of course, things did ramp up, and all was good, but a function of effective planning is to get mobilization happening within moments of something major like this. In other places in the world where they experience catastrophes on a regular basis, whether it be earthquakes, whether it be tsunamis, whether it be whatever, they make some pretty detailed plans on mobilizing assets, mobilizing help to their people, and it's this kind of planning that I would hope will come from the postmortem that's going to be conducted on the Fort Mac fire.

I commend every front-line first responder that went to fight that fire: the ambulance, the police, the aid workers, the citizens of Alberta that just rose up and started shipping food and shipping clothes and Pampers, you name it. Anything and everything that was needed was moving. Alberta as a province rose to the occasion, and I think it made every one of us very proud to call ourselves Albertans during that fire. I especially, though, want to commend the firefighters who stood like a wall against that fire. There were times when decisions were being made by those men and women on the front lines with nothing more than a hose full of water standing between them and an absolute wall of fire. I know what that is like as a firefighter. To anyone here who has been a firefighter, you know what it's like when you're standing there and you and the team make a decision: "We are not moving. That fire is not coming past us. We're going to stand our ground." I know that there were decisions like that made by those brave men and women every day during that fire. I love them, I commend them, and I'm very proud of them.

I'm in support of this bill. I think this bill is a good beginning. I believe there's much more that should be done and, hopefully, will be done. Of course, you know, we were very disappointed that the firefighting budget was cut during the budget. We were very disappointed that statistically and historically we spend about \$500 million a year on firefighting in this province and this government seemed to just ignore that reality and only budget for a fraction of what was needed and then justified the reduction, only then literally weeks later to be faced with a wildfire that consumed millions and millions and millions of dollars. Like the Boy Scouts say, you should be prepared.

We have a history in this province. We have a boreal forest. We cannot escape the reality that we will have fire. This government is duty bound to put things in place where we can deal with those fires effectively. If you budget \$500 million and you don't happen to use it one year, happy day. But if you don't budget for it, I think that you're living in a fool's paradise. It is vitally important that in future

budgets the government take the time to plan for fires and to have fire plans in place, good ones. You know, we had to evacuate during the Slave Lake fire; we had to evacuate during the Fort Mac fire. I don't doubt that in the future we're going to have to see evacuations again. Those kinds of plans need to be put in place. There needs to be appropriate funding and assets ready to mobilize for the sake of our citizens.

To the good people of Fort McMurray: you know, there were no lives lost as a direct result of that fire, and I know from talking to the people in McMurray that there is really only one reason, and that is because of the enormous amount of training that oil sands companies and other companies in Fort Mac and area put their staff through. The evacuation was orderly. It was just amazing to see that many people move out of a city that fast, that orderly. They were calm, they knew exactly what they were to do, and I applaud the training that our oil sands companies and other companies in Fort Mac and area have put their staff through. I will say that that probably saved a whole lot of lives right there, that very fact that they had that kind of training. So I applaud our oil sands companies and the others up in Fort Mac that provide that excellent kind of training for their people.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, just let me say that I do support this bill, but I do want to make it clear that this is a good start, that there's some road to go on this particular file. I want to echo my esteemed colleague's statements regarding amendments from the opposition. You know, partisan politics is, unfortunately, a reality. However, when it comes to issues like this, where we're talking about the health and the safety of the people of Alberta, I believe it behooves the government to get down off their partisan high horse and take a good listen to the amendments that come forward from everyone in this House. We all have skin in this game, and it would be, I think, only reasonable to expect the government to listen to the amendments, that have been well thought through and provide an opportunity for this government to improve the legislation that comes before this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there questions under 29(2)(a)? I wondered if maybe the Finance minister had a question for him because he was talking across the hall.

11:00

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I do have one.

The Speaker: You have a question under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Ceci: I do. Thank you. When I was listening to the speaker, he seemed to have some inside knowledge about the activities that didn't go on, in his mind, from the Provincial Operations Centre, or the POC. He seemed to talk about the front line as if it somehow guided itself, that all the front-line responders were acting on – I don't know – intuition. Does he not think that there was co-ordination from the Provincial Operations Centre with the people on the ground in Fort McMurray the whole time, right from the beginning? He seems to suggest that, you know, everyone else was off on vacation and that the only people there in Fort McMurray were doing the work. I just don't know where you get that information. I'd be really interested if you have some inside information to that being the case. If not, why would you impugn the Provincial Operations Centre and the work they did?

Mr. MacIntyre: Mr. Speaker, to clarify, I by no means am suggesting that POC was on a holiday. What I am suggesting is that in the days immediately at the very front end of that fire there were

resources that were necessary to assist the people who were fleeing – specifically food resources, places to stay, materials that were needed – that were not being mobilized in a timely manner, and in the inquiries that I made regarding those specifics, repeatedly I was told, “Yes, we're meeting about that; yes, we're meeting about that,” but there were no wheels turning.

The towns up in that area – the town of Boyle, the town of Athabasca, the town of Lac La Biche – those communities, without POC's intervention or assistance or anything, rose up to help those people while POC got their act together regarding getting materials and food and the other things necessary for a population of 80,000 people that needed somewhere to stay. I'm not talking about the fire suppression resources or firefighting resources that POC was taking care of in their command and communications structure. I'm talking about, Mr. Speaker, those 80,000 to 90,000 Fort McMurrayites that were on the road looking for somewhere, that had to evacuate. POC was not moving fast enough to get these people fed, watered, sheltered, clothed, but the local communities up there did. They're the ones that saved the day.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? My attempt at humour caused them to speak.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising, of course, to talk today about Bill 24. I've spoken about Bill 24 . . .

The Speaker: Excuse me, hon. member. Could I get guidance from the table? I understand that you have spoken before on Bill 24.

Mr. Nixon: Not to third reading. I have not spoken to third reading.

The Speaker: Just a moment until we check.

Hon. member, I've been advised that the exact date was November 10 on which you spoke on this item. That's the information that we have on the record.

Is there another member who wishes to speak to Bill 24? I have on the list, possibly, Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Nixon: He already spoke, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. I didn't check his name off.

Are there any other members who would like to speak to third reading of Bill 24, Forest and Prairie Protection Amendment Act, 2016?

Seeing none, I would ask the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry to close debate.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today and move third reading of Bill 24, the Forest and Prairie Protection Amendment Act, 2016.

I want to thank all members on both sides of the House for the discussions about this important piece of legislation. It is clear from comments made throughout the debate on this bill that members are supportive of the enhancement of wildfire prevention, enforcement, and operational activities.

The modernization of this act is an important step in reducing the risk of human-caused wildfires. As we pointed out earlier, approximately 70 per cent of wildfires over the last five years have been linked to human activity, and this legislation will introduce measures that will help reduce the risk of human-caused wildfires and enhance firefighting operations. They include strengthening penalties to serve as a deterrent, simplifying the process to restrict recreational activities when fire conditions are hazardous, officially

designating March 1 as the start of wildfire season, and clarifying operational roles and responsibilities.

During the second reading debate and in Committee of the Whole we discussed several aspects of the legislation. I'd like to take some time to address some of the discussion points to make sure there is clarity. During debate there were questions about the provisions related to delegation of authority. What we want to ensure is that front-line staff, who have the most experience with how this legislation works on the ground, have the ability to make decisions where appropriate as part of their day-to-day duties. Of course, higher level decisions will still be made by the minister as required.

In terms of the part of the bill that addresses the wildfire season, starting the season one month earlier than before will allow our wildfire managers to identify potential issues and ensure fire permits are obtained earlier in the year. An earlier wildfire season start will allow our wildfire managers to be ready to respond when the spring comes. It won't in any way affect the contracts we have in place. These contracts are multiyear, ensuring the resources are available as needed and can be extended into the fall based on hazard. This government will continue to ensure we have all the firefighting resources we need to keep Albertans safe from the risk of wildfire.

During this last wildfire season the government enacted an off-highway vehicle restriction to help reduce the likelihood of wildfires started by exhaust or hot debris. This was done using a provision of the act mostly reserved for forest area closures. The new provisions in this act will allow us to implement an OHV restriction in the same way that we do a fire ban right now. We are essentially simplifying the process.

I was incredibly pleased and honoured to introduce Bill 24 in the House on the same day that the Premier recognized the Fort McMurray wildfire first responders. This bill will help them do their job, and I'm proud to stand in this House today for its third reading. We will now move on to updating the act's associated regulations over the winter, in time for next year's start of wildfire season on March 1.

Again I would like to thank all members for their support on this bill and for their support of our wildland firefighters.

That concludes my comments, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a third time]

**11:10 Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading
Bill 30
Investing in a Diversified Alberta Economy Act**

[Adjourned debate November 10: Mr. Cooper]

The Speaker: Are there any members who wish to speak to second reading of Bill 30? The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise on second reading of Bill 30, Investing in a Diversified Alberta Economy Act. It sounds like a wonderful plan. We hope this one actually has some effect because, you know, what we've seen from this department in previous bills hasn't been all that effective in creating jobs. So we're really, truly hoping that this one will have a little bit more effect.

The tax credit, if it works, unfortunately won't do nearly enough to cancel out the negative effects that we're seeing from the upcoming carbon tax.

An Hon. Member: Levy.

Mr. Panda: Tax.

Mr. Hanson: It's a tax. [interjections] Now we're talking semantics. Albertans know that a tax is a tax is a tax. [interjection] Yes, if it quacks like a tax and waddles like a tax, it's a tax. I understand that the reason for calling it a levy is so that you can implement it on other levels of government like municipalities.

You didn't just flip me the bird, did you, Minister?

Mr. Ceci: No, no. I was trying to listen to you.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you. I appreciate that. [interjection] I am very sensitive to that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as I was listening to the chorus of song, I thought it would have been a great piece of music that I ought to tape for one of my grandchildren to fall asleep to, but let's try and stay on topic.

Hon. member, I'm sure you'll want to focus your discussion on the chair.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to do that. I had no idea that my comments would have that effect.

Anyway, as I get back to this, if this proposal actually has the desired effect, it's not going to be enough to counteract the effects of the carbon tax and the tax increases on businesses, individuals, and corporate taxes that we've seen in the last 18 months. Although it is a step in the right direction, we really think that some decreases to corporate taxes to make Alberta a little bit more attractive for investment and also, you know, holding back, eliminating the carbon tax until the economy improves a little bit would help go a long way to improving things.

Now, Alberta is facing a jobs and economic crisis, and steps must be taken. We agree with that a hundred per cent. I don't think there is anybody in this House that would argue against that. You know, I support that initiative a hundred per cent.

Nonrefundable tax credits, not grants or loans, are something that fits in with my way of thinking, especially in these economic times. Adding more money to the budget: you know, we're already facing \$10 billion in deficit this year, so I don't see any value in increasing that. I did receive some correspondence from one of the chambers in the province that had some concerns about it. They would like to raise a concern that many of the members have expressed since the program was originally announced. Specifically, there's been discussion about the government's intention to artificially limit the pool of businesses that would be eligible to participate in the program. The evidence suggests that investor tax credits work best when the government adopts a hands-off approach and instead places the onus on private investors to make the final decisions on risk, efficiency, and ultimately where to deploy their capital.

Now, this is a message that we've been trying to push across for the last 18 months, for sure. The private sector, given the proper incentives to invest money on their own – like, we're talking about, you know, making our province the most attractive place to do business and set up a head office. That is the best initiative for increasing business development and creating real jobs in the province. We would agree with these statements that keeping a hands-off approach from government is probably the best to allow the public sector to do what it's always done in Alberta, which is to increase jobs and invest in our province.

Going on, another point was that productivity is a big problem in manufacturing and that the CITC will help Alberta's 9,000 manufacturers compete with foreign business. Again, when you have a statement like that, which is what we should all be interested in doing as part of government, and then you set people up to fail

with a carbon tax that other jurisdictions that we're competing against don't have – I'll be addressing that in a statement tomorrow. We're actually losing some businesses here in Alberta because they're competing with Saskatchewan and British Columbia, where they don't have these punitive taxes, or they do have a carbon tax, but it is revenue neutral.

Like I said, you know, Mr. Speaker, I understand the difference between the terms "tax" and "levy" and that the word "levy" is there so that we can penalize our municipalities. You know, I understand, and municipalities understand, too. Albertans aren't fooled by the difference between the words "tax" and "levy". We're not fools, and Albertans aren't fools. They get it. You know, you can wordsmith all you like, but a tax is a tax. The modest programs will not offset, again, the general chill in investment caused by the government's other antibusiness economic policies and tax hikes.

Personally, I will be supporting this because it is a step in the right direction. It isn't taking new money and putting money into the system; it's actually allowing private investors to invest and get tax credits for it. But when you throw in a carbon tax, dramatic minimum wage increases, start suing Alberta-owned power companies, shutting down coal, killing communities, record deficits and borrowing, you can't fix all that with, you know, a \$70 million tax credit. I just don't see it. Again, it is a step in the right direction, so I will be supporting it at this point.

Thank you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please.

Are there any questions to the member under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I would recognize the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand today and discuss Bill 30, Investing in a Diversified Alberta Economy Act. Now, it is good to see that with the problems Alberta is facing with the loss of jobs – over a hundred thousand jobs lost in the last year, year and a half since this government has been elected, and of course that doesn't include the contractors that are either unemployed or underemployed that won't show up in those numbers. So it is good to see that this government is taking one small step forward in attempting to create some jobs.

These are nonrefundable tax credits. They're not grants or loans or loan guarantees, so that's good to see, that it's very specific as far as what they are. Now, they've listed the different industries that they want to see this go towards, and there's probably some debate on maybe having more businesses covered under this, though it is good to see that they haven't picked specific companies. I think that part is good. We don't want to see government picking particular companies that they want to take care of with any kind of tax incentives or anything like that. It's good that they've opened it up to industries in general, but again we probably would like to discuss at some point: why not more industries?

Now, some of this may help as far as tourism. Of course, tourism is important in Alberta. It obviously creates jobs. I think we had the minister of tourism talking some months ago about the U.S. dollar, how the U.S. dollar rising increases tourism here in Alberta because, of course, people from outside the country, from the U.S. in particular, obviously, can come into our country, come into Alberta, and their dollar buys more because their dollar has a higher value. Now, when you talk about a carbon tax and how it actually increases the price of everything, that actually has a negative effect on tourism. If the U.S. dollar rising increases tourism, then it only stands to reason that if the U.S. dollar rising allows them to buy more when they're here, obviously adding a carbon tax on that

increases the price of everything and would actually drive away tourism.

11:20

I've enjoyed the discussion here on the tax and levy, but what I'll do maybe is read the definition of a tax: "A compulsory contribution to state revenue, levied by the government on workers' income and business profits, or added to the cost of some goods, services, and transactions. That's right off Google. When I type in "tax definition" on my iPhone, it's the first definition that comes up. Imagine that.

Mr. Panda: Oh, you'll have to look at that through the lens of the NDP world view.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah.

Mr. Panda: You may read it differently.

Mr. Loewen: It also says that it's "a strain or heavy demand." I would think Albertans agree that it is a strain and a heavy demand. It's a burden, a load, a weight, a demand, a strain, pressure, stress, imposition. All right here.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I wonder if you could get all those words into a standing order that we could use for the future.

Mr. Loewen: We could work on that.

Now, when I go to "levy," the first line here says: "Impose (a tax, fee, or fine) 'a new tax could be levied on industry to pay for cleaning up contaminated land'." This was an example they used. Right off the top, "Impose a tax, fee, or fine," is the definition of "levy." I know that the government likes to talk about levy or tax, and they say: it's not a tax; it's a levy. I mean, I think we're pretty clear on what it is, and I know Albertans are really clear on what it is.

Getting back to Bill 30, after all this time and this government bringing forward multiple bills with no economic analysis, I would hope that this one has an economic analysis. If it is, in fact, there, where is it? Can we see it? Is that possible, an economic analysis on something to deal with money and the economy?

It's unfortunate that this program is only going to target certain sectors. Again, we'd like to see why it wasn't broadened to include more sectors of the economy.

Another thing we're unsure of: is it first-come, first-served, or does the minister pick which companies come up? That's not really clear. It would be nice to see how that works. I'm not sure how that works. Hopefully, the minister can clarify that for us.

Now, it does seem like there's a lot of ministerial interference in this as far as the minister making a lot of different decisions. Is it just oversight, or is this actual interference? I think that's a fair question that it would be great to hear the answer to.

Now, one thing we do know is that a fair, low tax across the board would be the best for the economy. Is that something all businesses could benefit from? It would be across the board. It would be a sustainable strategy. It would be something that businesses could rely on.

There does seem to be a fair amount of red tape for these venture capital corporations. They have to go through this process, of course: registration, ministerial approval to change the share structure, ministerial approval to raise capital, and then the minister may impose conditions on that. Also, the minister can direct how many employees and wages as conditions before an investment in a business is permitted. Now, if that is, in fact, true, which is what it appears to be, then I think it restricts businesses in their ability to

operate in a profitable manner so that they can create jobs and work in this economy.

Now, it does say – we're not sure why – that venture capital corporations can't have a controlling stake in the small business. Maybe there's a good reason for that. I'm not sure. But it would be good to hear what the minister has to say on that.

What happens if the business becomes ineligible for the tax credit? Must they divest? How does that work at that point? I'm not sure if that's clearly spelled out in the bill. It'd be good to see that, too.

One thing that's certain, Madam Speaker, is that this program, this bill, won't undo all of the uncertainty that investors have in investing in Alberta. Right now these corporations and individuals that have large enough amounts of money to invest in our economy, to create jobs – they don't want to invest in a jurisdiction where there's this kind of uncertainty. We have a government that comes in, starts raising taxes, starts changing rules, starts trying to rip up contracts, and all these different things that don't provide stability for our economy.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Madam Speaker, there are still a lot of questions. Again, it's good to see that the government is doing something with, you know, an attempt here to create some jobs and to get some investment in Alberta. But, again, unless they can prove to companies and individuals around the world that have that money to invest, to create the number of jobs – we're looking at over a hundred thousand jobs, again, not including the contractors that are underemployed or unemployed. That's a lot to make up with a small program like this.

The investors need to have confidence. They need to know that this government isn't going to change the rules in the middle, that they're not going to rip up contracts. I don't believe this government has been showing that. These investor tax credits will work best when government has a hands-off approach. As long as the government is still meddling and still interfering, we risk losing even more investment. It's better when the private investors make the decisions on where to put their money. That's what's best. That way they can decide on their risk level.

Madam Speaker, like I say, it's good to see a start here. This might be the start of, you know, job one created by this government. It would be good to have some of these questions and concerns answered. Again, it would be great to see this government kind of change the feeling in the investment community so that they can come back to Alberta, invest, have the confidence, and create the jobs that Albertans need.

Thank you.

11:30

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for questions or comments.

Seeing none, the next speaker I have on my list is Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, our province is facing a jobs and economic crisis. We've said that over and over again. Every Albertan in this province recognizes that we have some very serious challenges as a province. Anyone who has been in this province for 40 to 50 to 60 years – we've kind of been here before in the past, but this time it is different. It's very different.

It's interesting that we have this bill before the House. I find it a little bit ironic that even the title of this bill, Bill 30, Investing in a Diversified Alberta Economy Act – given that this government is single-handedly responsible for so much divestment in this

province, I find it ironic that they are now trying to attract investment to this province, but they're trying to attract that investment without going back and undoing the very things that have caused the divestment in the first place. I find that rather ironic.

Recessions do not cause divestment. They don't. If the low price of oil was, in fact, the reason for divestment, then our neighbour Brad Wall would have nothing to brag about, but in fact he has a great deal to brag about. He's facing the very same kind of price of oil that we are, yet Saskatchewan's economy is rocking 'n' rolling. Yet this government continues to bury its head in a dark place and look at the price of oil and say: well, that must be the reason why everything is falling apart here. Well, this province has had low oil prices in the past. We've experienced these kinds of things before. But if you look also at our history, you will find government intervention, governments doing what governments should not be doing, as the single biggest factor in divestment. So now we have this government attempting to put a Band-Aid on a hemorrhage. It is a Band-Aid on a hemorrhage.

We have this Bill 30, the Investing in a Diversified Alberta Economy Act. Well, I have a news flash. You know, Alberta's economy has been diversifying for years and years and years. Take a look at our agricultural sector: innovation from start to finish. Take a look at oil and gas resource development: innovation all over the place, diversification. We even have somewhat of a tech industry in this province. All over the place we have diversification. Believe it or not, Alberta was going down the renewable technology road before the NDP learned how to spell "renewables." We were actually on that route, and we had thousands and thousands of installations of renewable and alternative energy technologies throughout this province long before the NDP dreamed up the climate action plan. Albertans are an innovative people. Albertans are always looking for diversification.

Albertans, by our very DNA, look for opportunities. That is the reason why we have the Alberta that we have today, because people from all over the world came to this province because there were opportunities. The reason that we had those opportunities is because in the history of our province, going all the way back to 1905, what you see is Albertans seeing what we've got for resources: how can we optimally use those resources for the betterment of our families, for the betterment of our children, for the betterment of our communities? Governments of the day tried their best to create a climate where those opportunities could be realized, and that took investment. It took all kinds of investment from outside and from within this province.

But now we have a government that seems to think that without the government doing something, nothing happens, that the wheels just won't turn. The reality is this, Madam Speaker. Economic wheels, the economic wheels of our economic engine, turn without the government's intervention. What stops the wheels turning is government intervention because the people of Alberta are people who recognize opportunities and will capitalize on those opportunities and make the wheels turn if the government would kindly get out of the way. But we have a government in place today that has an ideology that somehow – the private sector is almost being vilified all over this place, and profit is just a four-letter word. Yet profits support our charities, profits provide jobs, and profits fuel all kinds of things in our society and amongst our people. Profit is a good thing. It pays everyone's wages, and it pays taxes.

But this government looks at companies and the men and women that own those businesses as some kind of golden goose: we're just going to squeeze that old goose as hard as we can and somehow get more golden eggs out of that goose. Well, guess what? Eventually, if you keep squeezing the goose, you squeeze the life out of it, and

that's what we have happening in this province right now. So along comes Dr. Government with a pill called Bill 30, Investing in a Diversified Alberta Economy Act, because they've killed diversification, because they've killed investment in this province, and now, realizing it, they come up with a little Band-Aid to cover the hemorrhage. That's really all this thing is. It is a Band-Aid on a \$40 billion to \$50 billion hemorrhage out of this province.

It didn't have to go very far. That investment, a lot of it, found a friend next door in Regina. Remember that they're getting the same price for oil that we are getting. I know that in the magnificent riding of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake we have a lot of Sylvan Lakers that are working now in Saskatchewan. They're still living in Sylvan Lake, thank God, but they are actually working in Saskatchewan because there's nothing here. Some of them are working for the very same companies because those companies found a friend. They found a friend in Regina that understood business, understood basic economics, and created a climate that we once had. We had it, and this government within just a few months totally kicked the legs out from under our economy.

On the 22nd of October, 2015, we had a new Minister of Economic Development and Trade. He was given a whack of money, taxpayers' money, in a budget, millions and millions of dollars. Well, months go by; months go by. We're waiting for the big jobs announcement. Nothing. It's amusing over here. We go: you know, one job – one job – was created. Then we came to another budget cycle, and lo and behold, not having created any jobs, the government's solution was: well, let's give that minister way more money. Somehow throwing money at that is going to create more jobs. Well, news flash: if you've got someone in a position of authority that doesn't know how to create one job with \$100 million, giving that person \$200 million isn't going to automatically result in more jobs being created.

11:40

An Hon. Member: Two jobs.

Mr. MacIntyre: Maybe two.

Money is not the problem. The problem is a government that is so antibusiness in their ideology that it seems like every week that goes by, they're hitting one sector or another with something that is chasing away investment or taxing that which does happen. So they tax it and tax it till it stops moving, subsidize it to get it moving again. This is the socialist mantra, and it's harming this province.

Yes, we have a jobs and economic crisis all right, and, yes, there are steps that this government needs to take, and those steps actually need to be in reverse. That's where those steps need to be. They need to back up, and they need to realize the harm that's being done. You know, you cannot solve a problem until you recognize the cause of the problem, and until this government owns that their ideologies and a bunch of their policies are aggravating an already bad situation, until they own that, they're not going to fix the problem. Band-Aids like this aren't going to solve that problem.

We've got a Minister of Economic Development and Trade that's been in the saddle since the 22nd of October, 2015, and how much actual diversification has happened? What's the return on the investment that's been placed in that minister's hands? It's not looking good. It's not looking good at all.

Now I want to talk just a little bit about venture capital and red tape. You know, in creating a business-friendly environment, one of the things that a government can do is reduce the kind of overbearing regulatory measures – we call it red tape – that are in the way of those economic wheels that I talked about earlier. There are different jurisdictions around the world that have red tape reduction strategies where if a new regulation comes in, they have

to get rid of one, so when you've got one more piece of red tape, there's another piece of red tape that's got to be done away with. They do that because they recognize that red tape is a hindrance to economic activity. Some attempts were made in this Legislature from this side to put in place some kind of red tape reduction, and of course this government voted it down.

I just wanted to talk briefly about venture capital. There is a part of this particular bill dealing with venture capital companies. They, as I understand it, cannot have a controlling stake in a small business. Well, I've been involved in some venture capital projects overseas, and, you know, we didn't have a problem giving a controlling interest to the venture capital company that was investing millions and millions of their money in our business. It's a situation where the venture capital company will come in, they'll take an interest in the company, and they'll invest money in the company.

But they have usually a short-term exit strategy where they will be in an ownership position in that company for three years, five years, seven years and then they want to back out, because the business model for most venture capital companies is that they're not interested in owning a whole bunch of companies and running those companies; they are in the business of renting money. They will rent your business that money for a fixed period of time, and then they want to come out and take their money and profit with them and go do it somewhere else again. This is their business model.

So I don't understand the rationale saying that VCs can't have a controlling stake in a small business. Like, I just don't understand that. Is it that the government doesn't understand venture capital as a sector, as a business model? I expect that that is probably the reason. But from a small-business person or even a larger business person's perspective, we don't have a problem giving a controlling interest to a VC because there is this window of opportunity here: we need their money; we need their investment.

Often venture capital companies bring more than just money. Most of them, the ones that are really successful, have a team, and when they invest in a small company, like they were doing for the company I was a part of overseas, they brought with them some expertise that we didn't have in-house. So along with the money came this wealth of knowledge and connections that were extremely valuable, and it was more than worth giving controlling interest on a temporary basis to this VC.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments for the previous speaker under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to just thank the member for his comments. I found it very interesting to follow his speech. As always, the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake has a lot to say on this important matter.

I found it most interesting as he was discussing how this bill does not go far enough, particularly not far enough to deal with the damage that we've already seen in our province because of some of the actions that the current government has taken; for example, the carbon tax, something, I know, that we hear a lot about as we travel around – I know all members of this House are hearing concerns about that – as well as tax increases that we've seen on businesses and individuals since this government started; a dramatic minimum wage increase, which I know is, like, one of the number one things I hear about back in my constituency, deep concerns about the impact that that's having on small businesses in our communities and on youth unemployment now because of the actions of this government; as well as shutting down coal. So is this bill going to

go far enough, Madam Speaker, to deal with the coal shutdown that is being brought forward by this ideological government that's seeing communities like Hanna completely wiped out?

I know, Madam Speaker, that you know that over the last week at the AAMD and C this government was probably the first government in history to be booed like that at an AAMD and C conference. That shows how concerned people are with the damage that's going to happen to certain communities in rural Alberta, in particular in regard to the coal shutdown. I'd like to hear from the member if this bill goes far enough to address that as well as, of course, the record deficits and borrowing that is coming from this ideological government, the borrowing against my kids' future and my grandchildren's future, something that I know I hear often about from my constituents, a deep concern about the long-term impact that that's going to have on Alberta. Will this bill go far enough to deal with that? I'd like to hear from the hon. member on that. As well, of course, we do know that well over a hundred thousand people have lost their jobs since this government took power, not to mention all the contractors that are out of work. The number gets really, really high as we start to look at the unemployment across our province. This bill: does it take care of that?

The last thing, Madam Speaker, I would like to hear from the hon. member on is the fact that this minister has brought forward stuff before, in the past, that they've had to scrap because it was completely ineffective. Do we see any evidence in what has been brought forward by the government now to show that this will be effective this time, like economic analysis, those types of things, or is this just more of the same empty promises for Albertans?

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, you wish to respond?

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you. Thank you to the hon. Member for Rimby-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. There are a number of things that were brought up there, and I'll just quickly go through them if I may. This business of levy and tax: one of the things we heard from the councillors who attended the AAMD and C just a

few days ago was their disappointment at how this carbon tax is impacting them. They consider it to be a tax on a tax, as do some of the school boards, because, as we all know, school boards and counties and municipalities get their funding from taxation, and now this government is carbon taxing a tax. It just seemed to them to be absolutely ridiculous that the government would look at tax revenue as a source of a tax grab. It's just absolutely ridiculous to them. It is a tax. You can try to butter it up and call it a levy all you want. It's a tax.

Just to briefly touch on what government can do differently regarding the shutting down of coal, right after this government took office, there was an immediate move to vilify the coal industry. It was immediate, within weeks. We saw a dramatic increase in the carbon tax under SGER, and coal never had a hope. It didn't matter. I asked the Minister of Energy, I asked the minister of the environment, and I think I may have even asked the Premier: if clean coal technologies are available, would you allow, then, for us to continue with coal? The answer was clearly no, which is odd because here's something that could be diversifying our economy.

11:50

In diversification, effective diversification, you take the strengths that you've got and you build on those strengths. We had a very vibrant coal-fired electrical generation sector, that was providing inexpensive baseload right across this province, and cheap electricity means competitiveness in the marketplace. But instead of saying, "Okay; what can we do to make that better?" that's not the approach the government took. Instead, this government is going to put thousands and thousands out of work.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. In honour of the ceremony that we are having today, I would ask for consent of the House to adjourn till 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:51 a.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	1915
Orders of the Day	1915
Government Motions	
Alberta Property Rights Advocate	1915
Government Bills and Orders	
Third Reading	
Bill 24 Forest and Prairie Protection Amendment Act, 2016	1915
Second Reading	
Bill 30 Investing in a Diversified Alberta Economy Act.....	1922

Alberta Hansard is available online at www.assembly.ab.ca

For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875