



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 7, 2017

Day 3

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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

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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)	Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
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Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)	Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
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Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W)	Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)	Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (ND)	Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC), Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip	Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
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Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)	Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader	Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
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Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (ND)	Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W), Leader of the Official Opposition	Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)	van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Kleinstauber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)	Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND), Deputy Government Whip
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)	Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)	

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 7, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you. M. le Président, c'est avec fierté que je me lève à la Chambre aujourd'hui pour introduire two schools from Beaumont. Thirty-five students are here today from l'école Beau Meadow school and l'école Bellevue school. The students are accompanied by their teachers, Mme Brigitte Marshall and Mme Danielle McCallion, ainsi que de leurs chaperons Mrs. Pam Nelner, Mrs. Rachel Gregor-Stang, Ms Tracy Callahan, and Mrs. Hannah Klar. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure and a great honour to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly the students, teachers, and helpers visiting the Legislature today from Velma E. Baker school in the beautiful constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek. Could the teachers, Mr. Philip Singh and Mr. Bruce Grant; helpers Mrs. Christine Braun, Mr. Alex Fisher, Mrs. Kelly Nicolson, Mrs. Andrea Carreiro, Mrs. Muna Ali; and the students please rise and accept the warm wishes of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

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

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Master Warrant Officer Garry Wood, CD; Master Corporal Hugh Hayes, CD; and Corporal Rebecca Campbell. Master Warrant Officer Wood has served in the military for 33 years, served two tours in Bosnia, and is currently the equipment technical quarter-master sergeant at Lord Strathcona's Horse. Master Corporal Hayes has served in the military for 14 years and is currently serving with Lord Strathcona's Horse out of CFB Edmonton. Corporal Rebecca Campbell has served in the military for seven years and also serves with Lord Strathcona's Horse as a supply technician. I would like to thank my guests for their service to Canada, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Les Landry and his service dog, Annie. Les Landry is a well-known advocate for expanding the access to service dogs for people in Alberta that need them, and we're thankful for his work. I'm sure many of you know him. Please join me in welcoming Mr. Landry and Annie to the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you a friend but, more importantly, the mayor of the village of Amisk in my riding of Battle River-Wainwright, Mayor Bill Rock. He's here in Edmonton taking in the AUMA convention. Of course, following a rash of crimes that have happened in his community, he would like to find out what the government is going to do to keep his community and communities like the village of Amisk safe. I would now ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, it is my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a large contingent of forestry stakeholders. Today we have 20 hard-working mayors, Reeves, and councillors from different towns, counties, and municipal districts that have forestry as a major industry, supporting the livelihoods of thousands of Albertans and the respective local economies. With them are 17 equally hard-working board members and officials of the Alberta Forest Products Association, an industry that has been providing jobs to thousands of our citizens. Alberta's forest sector represents a great story for our province because it's one of the most sustainable industries on the planet and a major contributor to our economy. I would ask them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Samantha Pearson. She's the director of the sexual assault centre at the University of Alberta in the magnificent riding of Edmonton-Riverview. The centre strives for a campus free of sexual violence, providing free, anonymous, and confidential support for members of the university community who are survivors of sexual assault and abuse. Samantha is a graduate of the University of Alberta, as I am, and has been volunteering with the centre since she was a student, after seeing one of the centre's awareness presentations. She's dedicated and optimistic and proud to say that she is helping make the University of Alberta a safer place. Samantha, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all of the Assembly two friends of mine: first, His Worship Pat Alexander, the reeve of beautiful Clearwater county, which I am proud to represent inside this place; and, with him, His Worship Terry Leslie, the mayor of my hometown of Sundre, who is also with me here today celebrating the one-year anniversary of the attempted shutting down of the Sundre hospital, which, I am glad to say, is still open to this day because of the hard work of both this side of the House and that side of the House. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly several dedicated and passionate Albertans who work with survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. I'll ask them

to rise as I say their names and to remain standing till the end: Mary Jane James, the executive director of the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton and the team at SACE; Deb Tomlinson, CEO of the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services; Jackie Foord, CEO of the YWCA Edmonton. I also have the great pleasure of introducing Elizabeth Halpin, a survivor who has courageously shared her story and is an inspiration to us all. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Wildrose on Campus Calgary Film Screening

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. "Feminism is cancer." At least, that's what the Wildrose club at the University of Calgary would have you believe. Yesterday that's what they wrote on their invitation to a film screening about the men's rights movement called *The Red Pill*, funded and supported by Breitbart and Milo. It's a fundraiser they were cohosting with the campus federal Conservatives for a men's rights group. Now, these so-called men's rights advocates belittle the advancement of women and promote hatred and violence. One of their leaders in the U.S. advocates legalizing rape so that, in their minds, women would learn to protect their virtue.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, the language used by these people online degrades women. They use slurs and insults, calling women special snowflakes, social justice warriors, and other unparliamentary language. Where have we heard that before? It is a sickening message any time, but on the eve of International Women's Day it is a sobering reminder of how far we need to go.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition is outraged when anyone suggests that they're far-right social conservatives, but holding fundraisers like this shows just how out of touch they are with Albertans, especially Alberta women. While we work to get more women on boards and in leadership roles, they nurture hateful language. While we take action on domestic violence, they say that feminism is a horrible disease. That is the Wildrose. They've proven time and time again that they can't keep their true colours from showing, and that's whose ranks the PCs want to join?

On the upside, seeing as how their prospective dance partners for a united right just drove out the only woman in their caucus, I would say that they're getting the unity part right.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Rural Crime

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, the people of my riding need help fighting crime in their communities. Many of our communities have been hard hit by crime that has started with this economic downturn, and we need this government to do something and do something more.

Let me paint you a picture of how bleak this situation has become in Amisk. The local ATB has recently been robbed twice. Additionally, last year there was an armed robbery at this bank. A gun was pointed at an expectant mother in an attempted vehicle theft. The post office was broken into, robbed, and vandalized, and the crimes aren't slowing down. There have been many more criminal complaints. In just the past few weeks the local officials

are coming together to say that enough is enough. This issue of rural crime is very real and very serious, especially in this economic downturn as it persists.

On February 21 I invited the Justice minister to meet with local officials and make some important choices on rural crime. The minister ignored my request, and the problem hasn't gone away. The NDP has made a priority of everything from taxes to free light bulbs, but this government needs to understand that it has no greater duty than protecting the people of this province.

I'm proud to welcome the Amisk mayor, Bill Rock, to the Legislature today. Together he and I are calling on this government to take action to protect the people of rural Alberta, who feel vulnerable and violated. Yesterday we had an emergency debate in this Legislature about the opioid crisis that is happening right here in our own backyards. I want to commend my colleagues in this House that have been calling for action on this opioid epidemic for years now and remind them that these issues only get worse when we ignore them.

Let's not ignore this. Let's face this heartbreaking issue with swift, strong action that leaves no room for doubt that this Legislature won't ignore rural crime.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Calgary Gravel Pit Operation

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to great planning and budgeting by the previous government, the Edmonton Anthony Henday has become a reality, and three-quarters of the Calgary ring road is now complete. It was our very own PC leader who was the minister responsible for engineering the historic agreement on the southwest Calgary ring road with our friends from Tsuut'ina. But nowhere on his plans or even on the plans of the current Ministry of Transportation has there ever been any evidence of a huge gravel pit and asphalt plant to be placed right behind the fine residents in Bridlewood.

Many weeks ago I wrote to the minister in charge now, and I sent him 13 pictures illustrating the monstrosity. I personally asked him about it, and I was told: we are looking into it. Now, residents in the area sure wish that he had done exactly that a long time ago. If he had, he'd know that there was absolutely no public consultation about this and that all the residents ever received were household notices after the operation had already begun.

It's to run nonstop, Mr. Speaker, for several years, from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. every single day. Now, the noise and smell from a project of this magnitude will impact the quality of life of these residents in extremely negative ways. This is fraught with damage to air quality, including potential carcinogens, and we have no indication whatsoever that environmental or health studies were ever even conducted. A number of residents have been told by the company that this was supposedly a fortuitous decision, if you can believe it, and Alberta Transportation indicated that it is unfortunate that the company did not inform them of the plans until after public consultations were already done. The department expressed disappointment over this, but that is not enough.

With the full support of the community association and on behalf of their residents I formally request that the minister intercede and have the company move this operation to a site which is much more appropriate for all involved this month. By the way, there is another site I'll have questions about tomorrow.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Black History Month

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just over one month ago I joined over 400 Albertans here for Alberta's first official recognition and celebration of Black History Month. It was a powerful moment that paid tribute to our original settlers of African descent and those who continue to come here from around the world, men and women seeking to escape racism, prejudice, and hatred due to their ethnicity or choice of faith and to build better lives in our province. I was honoured to be joined by some of my colleagues from across the aisle.

A few days before that, members from all sides of this House stood with members of Alberta's Muslim communities to condemn the slaughter of six Canadians at prayer in their mosque in Quebec. Mr. Speaker, Alberta is home to nearly 75,000 African Canadians, and 113,000 Albertans practise the Muslim faith. I'm proud to be working with my colleagues to make their lives better through truly inclusive government and support for families.

But, Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry to say that some here are choosing to make the lives of these Albertan families worse. For their own political gain they stand with a so-called media organization who celebrated Black History Month with a video of a correspondent in blackface arguing that it was historically a sign of respect for African culture, an organization that is a constant source of fear, hatred, and misinformation about the Muslim community. Members of this House have granted them interviews, appeared at their rallies, and paid them to distribute fundraising e-mails. That is not the face of a modern, inclusive Alberta. That is the same face of ignorance and prejudice that black Albertans have fought for over a century and that they and others are forced to continue fighting today.

So I commit that if any member of this House stands with those who spread this kind of ignorance and prejudice, I will call them out because families in our province deserve a government that supports all Albertans, a government that moves us forward instead of trying to drag us back. That is what we've promised, and that is what we will deliver.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Order, please. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Students' Association of Mount Royal University

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to offer my congratulations to a group of young Albertans for their leadership and commitment to fostering engaged citizenship on the Mount Royal University campus, the Students' Association of Mount Royal University, also known as SAMRU.

As some of you know, when I was a science student at Simon Fraser University, I served as president and vice-president of the Interactive Arts and Technology Student Union. It quickly became clear to me that it was important to focus on the needs of students, and that's why I'm proud to be part of a government that is working to make life better and more affordable for our postsecondary students.

Over the past year I've been able to attend various SAMRU organized events designed to create a healthier, more inclusive campus. I continue to be impressed by the calibre and diversity of their events such as their Black History Month workshop that explored indigenous and black relations in Canada and encouraged students to spit yo' game and talk yo' stuff. I'll let you figure out what that original quote was. And last October I participated in SAMRU's Student Connect event that brought politicians to

campus to meet and speak with students about being community leaders.

Student unions are also laboratories of leadership. They are places where lessons about policy are learned and confidence is built. Like our Legislature, they're places where Albertans meet, debate their values and ideas, and perform citizenship by voting, which is why I must applaud the over 1,700 Mount Royal students who marked their ballots in last week's SAMRU election. Although a slightly lower turnout than last year, it's a significant improvement over the 1,000 who voted in 2015 and speaks to the student association's work to get out the vote.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the members of this House join me in recognizing the important work performed by student unions and congratulate this year's winners: Madelaine McCracken, VP student life; Cordelia Snowdon, VP academic; and Shifrah Gadamsetti, president.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Crime Prevention

Mr. Jean: There's no question about it. Crime is on the rise in communities all across Alberta. The most recent StatsCan data shows an 18 per cent rise in crime in Alberta just in 2015, including a 12 per cent spike in violent crime. Very troubling. The 2016 data from the Calgary police shows that property crime and personal crime continue to rise. Albertans feel vulnerable while the accused walk scot-free. Rather than accuse us of fearmongering, will the Premier listen to the police, acknowledge a growing crisis of crime across Alberta, and start putting in the resources that we've asked for to keep Albertans safe?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government believes that all Albertans deserve to live in safe and resilient communities. The police work very hard to keep those communities safe. While we have seen a recent upswing in crime, it's important to keep in context that this is still lower than the crime rates were 10 years ago. You know, we are very concerned to see any increase. We work very closely with the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police and the RCMP to ensure that we're able to provide them with adequate resources, and we will keep working in that collaborative way.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that Albertans don't trust the NDP. They're too busy worrying about spending millions of dollars on light bulbs instead of addressing this serious issue. The president of the Alberta Crown Attorneys' Association has said that in 2017, 200 significant charges have been stayed due to a lack of resources, charges including assaults, violent crimes, and DUIs. That's on your watch. Will the Premier release to Albertans the total number of trials stayed under this government and detail what charges accused criminals are simply walking away from?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government is committed to ensuring that Albertans have a safe and resilient justice system and that it's able to work as well as possible. We will

continue to work with the association. It's true that we need to find efficiencies within the system, and we have been doing this in order to address these ongoing problems. We have also been looking very carefully at the resources necessary to pursue these aims, and we will be coming forward – I hope the opposition will support that.

Mr. Jean: The fact is that under the NDP watch, under this government's watch, accused murderers have been let go free of charge before even going to trial. Assault charges against police officers have been stayed, and so have several DUI cases. This means that our streets are less safe. Gun thefts are up. Property crime is up. Personal crime is up. Violent crime is up. This government needs to lift the veil of secrecy on a system that is failing Albertans. Why won't the Premier give Albertans the full picture of the state of our justice system by publicly reporting the total number of charges stayed since taking office and what exactly those stayed charges were?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Our government is committed to being transparent on this issue. I have been out in the media several times on this. We regularly release numbers detailing the number of Jordan applications, whether they've been successful, whether they've been abandoned, and what the outcome was. We release those numbers all the time. We are absolutely committed to addressing this issue. We have worked very hard to find insufficiencies and to put in a triage system, but what is necessary is more resources, and I hope that the opposition will support that.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Energy Efficiency Programs

Mr. Jean: It's very clear that the NDP need to figure out how to brighten up their dismal approval ratings, but I can assure you that no amount of free light bulbs is going to accomplish that, not with a carbon tax increasing the price of everything, making everyone in Alberta poorer, as they've done. The new plan is to take billions of dollars out of Albertans' pockets and give back a fraction of it in free light bulbs, installed, of course, by an Ontario company. Not the brightest idea, I would suggest. Can the Premier please tell us how she will ensure this doesn't turn into a boondoggle of a program, or is she simply leaving us all in the dark?

Ms Hoffman: What is it, Mr. Speaker? Groundhog Day in here? I think the member's staff gave him last year's envelope.

Now, the member is worried about his job – we understand that – but he needs to get his head in the game. Yesterday the Wildrose called feminism a cancer, and you guys want to join them. So let me ask the Leader of the Opposition a simple question: why is your party spending its time calling the fight for women's equality a cancer on our society?

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition. First supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is right. Absolutely unacceptable. But Albertans want to upgrade products at home. They've been doing it for years. And now more than ever they are making the switch in an attempt to survive the carbon tax. It's going to be difficult. What's driving Albertans crazy is the fact that the

NDP government seems to think they need to go into our homes to change our light bulbs using our money. It may come as a shock to this government, but Albertans actually want to save money on their energy bills, and they're going to have to because they're going up. Why didn't the Premier trust Albertans and give them a program to upgrade their homes on their own?

Ms Hoffman: I wish I could say good try, Mr. Speaker, but it's weak, weak, weak. A strong opposition is good for democracy. It happens again and again with you guys. The Wildrose is spending more time having to apologize than doing their jobs. So why won't the member stand in this House and admit that feminism isn't the problem? The problem is within his own party.

Mr. Jean: The NDP must listen to talk radio. If they did, they'd hear caller after caller talking about how ridiculous the Ecofitt program is. Albertans have been buying new bulbs, new thermostats, and a lot more for years. They're savvy. Those Albertans who took the time to upgrade before the NDP economster was created: well, they aren't going to see a dime. They're justifiably upset. Will the Premier commit to putting an end to this Ecofitt fiasco and taking the time to create an energy efficiency program that doesn't penalize Albertans for using their own initiative to save energy?

Ms Hoffman: In the last few months the Wildrose compared . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last few months the Wildrose compared the climate leadership plan to the Ukrainian famine. Then they attacked the Premier of Ontario when she visited this very House. The leader of the party joked about beating up women. Now they're comparing our struggle for equality to cancer.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Hoffman: Another day, another half-hearted apology. Will the Leader of the Opposition actually show some leadership, put an end to these Wildrose bozo eruptions?

The Speaker: Third main question.

Municipal Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Jean: The building Canada fund is a crucial federal program for Alberta's municipality, and I hope this government will take this seriously because it helps to build the infrastructure that our communities rely on right across Alberta to survive. As recently as August 2016 the Minister of Infrastructure provided assurances to the AUMA that \$300 million of that fund would be allocated for municipal projects. However, in a letter to AUMA members just last month the Infrastructure minister stated that he will not honour his promise or the commitment of \$300 million. To the Premier: why is this happening?

Ms Hoffman: Our government is making life better for everyday Albertans by building new schools, hospitals, and roads that communities need to thrive and to grow. That's why we've put shovels in the ground on nearly 300 transportation projects, more than a hundred school projects, plus postsecondary and health facilities. Our government is the most generous in the country when it comes to funding municipalities. Even in the midst of the current downturn our government is investing. You know you guys would cut. Stop playing martyrs.

Mr. Jean: Nice read, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta's municipalities have been counting on the \$300 million for critical infrastructure projects. The NDP government's decision to instead use those funds for provincial projects and the province's deficit is disappointing, to say the least, especially to those municipalities. The NDP doesn't trust Albertans to install light bulbs, and now they don't trust municipalities to build local projects. We've seen what centralized power in the hands of the NDP looks like, and Albertans don't like it. Why doesn't the NDP restore local decision-making at the local level for municipalities so this money actually gets out the door?

2:00

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I met with the AUMA today, with the mayors' caucus from around Alberta, and we talked about the issue of infrastructure funding. Alberta spends, for example, about a third more than the next highest province on a per capita basis on its grants to municipalities. Furthermore, \$260 million of federal infrastructure money has already gone to municipal governments, and more to come. We've applied, furthermore, for funding for the Springbank reservoir to protect Calgary from flooding.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Jean: The NDP just can't seem to help itself when it comes to meddling in systems that previously worked well. The building Canada fund, before the NDP government, was an effective way of flowing through infrastructure that were necessary projects for local communities and that were deemed as a priority for a local municipality. The fact is that local government knows best what projects are urgently needed, or at least that was the fact before the NDP world view came into play, where they know best. Can the Premier tell me why her government doesn't trust local municipalities to know what their projects, their needs for their local municipalities are?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, one of the projects that we've applied for under the federal infrastructure program that the member is talking about is the Springbank flood mitigation project to protect the city of Calgary from flooding. We know that members opposite don't support that. They would rather give the money to someone else and let Calgary flood, but we're here to protect Alberta families. [interjections] We're here to make sure that they get the infrastructure they need. That's what this government stands for.

The Speaker: I think the young students are leaving because they thought it was too noisy in here.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government talks a big game when it comes to making life better for Albertans, but the opposite is true. At the AUMA breakfast this morning I heard from municipal leaders who are upset that \$300 million in the federal building Canada fund that was to go to municipalities never got there. Withholding the \$300 million has meant that \$900 million in projects didn't get built because it's usually a three-way split between governments. To the Minister of Infrastructure: given that your Infrastructure budget was underspent by more than a billion dollars, why did you deny Alberta municipalities this much-needed funding when you didn't even use it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Nothing could be further from the truth. As I mentioned in my earlier answer, over \$260 million of that federal infrastructure money has already flowed to municipalities. We've asked for more, including for the Springbank diversion project that I referred to. This government funds municipalities' infrastructure needs to a much higher level than any other province in this country. Quite frankly, for the members to suggest otherwise is simply to mislead the public.

Mr. McIver: It's a shame to hear the minister tell municipalities that they're wrong because they're the ones that told me they're not happy. I'm disappointed that despite keeping \$300 million in federal funding, the provincial deficit is still going to hit \$10.8 billion this year, further proof that this government can't help itself when it comes to reckless and irresponsible spending. Given that this money did not go to municipalities like it was supposed to, can the minister tell us: what did you spend it on, please?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Conservative opposition would like us to reduce the deficit, but when we try to reduce the deficit, they object. Not only did we reduce the deficit by \$600 million, but we provided \$260 million for municipal projects. This government is making life better for Alberta families. We're spending money on infrastructure to meet the needs for transit, for roads, for housing, for justice facilities and hospitals and other health care facilities that that government ignored while it was in office. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. McIver: The minister is reducing the truth.

Alberta municipalities depend on stable, predictable funding, which is why the previous government created the MSI program, which provided 10 years of stability. This morning the Municipal Affairs minister couldn't tell AUMA mayors what next year's funding is going to be like, one year out. This shows a complete lack of competence on the part of the new minister. Given that Alberta municipalities are struggling with the economic downturn and the NDP carbon tax, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: when will you finally give some clarity to these municipalities on MSI, or will it even exist next year?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I appreciate the question from the opposition member. Unlike what they're trying to say, the taps aren't turning off on March 31 like they're telling everyone. They are continuing. For the next budget cycle they will have their funding for MSI. As I said this morning, if the opposition member was actually listening as I have been doing to municipalities, we are going to work collaboratively with them going forward to find something that's sustainable, not a 10-year Band-Aid.

Thank you.

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

Opioid Use

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we debated the increasing number of deaths each year for the past five years caused by opioids. The government calls it everything from an epidemic to a crisis, but it refuses to call it an emergency. The definition of an emergency in the Emergency Management Act is, quote, an event that requires prompt co-ordination of action to protect the health of people and limit damage to property. End quote. Health and crime

statistics say that this is an emergency. To the Premier: why is the government the only one who won't call this an emergency?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I was really pleased to be part of the discussion in our House yesterday as we talked about some new ideas. You know, I was certainly pleased to hear from most of the opposition their support for supervised consumption services, which are viewed as leading best practices for how we can help stem the tide of deaths from the opioid crisis. I agree with the member opposite that we need to be doing more and continuing this hard work that we've started to protect Albertans and to make sure the supports are in place. We're going to do that no matter what.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, two of the courageous survivors of this crisis, Petra Schultz and Rosalind Davis, said that this government's refusal to act on the call for an emergency is, quote, unacceptable and the inadequate response perpetuates the stigma about opioid-related deaths. End quote. The government insists that a state of emergency isn't appropriate in this situation. Clearly, the government can do more to help and mobilize resources without kicking down the doors. If the government has all the resources it needs, why is the opioid crisis continuing to worsen? Why are you failing?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I hear people call for a public health emergency, I hear them wanting to know that their government understands that this is a serious issue, a top priority, and that we are taking action. Is there more to do? Absolutely, and it is top of mind for this government. Earlier today I met with Marliss Taylor of Streetworks and Jennifer Vanderschaeghe of Turning Point in Red Deer to discuss practical, on-the-ground solutions that we can do to help save Albertans' lives, ways that we can support front-line workers who are working to support people who use substances day in and day out so that we can help to stem this tide.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the reason we're failing is that the government's response to this emergency has been piecemeal at best. During the emergency debate it touted more incremental, one-off measures. Harm reduction is good; it is not enough. The government has provided no comprehensive plan. It is unwilling to admit that the opioid crisis has become an emergency. Focused leadership is what is lacking. The NDP campaigned on leadership for what matters. Well, certainly, these nearly 500 lost lives last year matter. How many deaths will it take before you call it an emergency?

2:10

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to disagree with the member's categorization of our approach as piecemeal. We have moved forward on harm reduction by expanding access to naloxone for people who need it. Yes, definition of a Band-Aid. It's going to save a life when it's needed. That is one part of our plan. We've been working on opioid dependency treatments, Suboxone and methadone, which are top-of-the-line clinical evidence for helping people who are living with opioid addictions. That is the treatment that is needed, and we are working to expand access to that treatment.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Postsecondary Students with Disabilities

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Jason Lang scholarship is awarded to any postsecondary student in Alberta who earns a 3.2 GPA on a full course load. In 2007 the course load eligibility for students with documented disabilities was reduced from an 80 per cent course load to 60 per cent in accordance with a Human Rights Commission decision. In 2009 the previous government ignored this decision by reverting the criteria for the scholarship back to 80 per cent, leaving many students with disabilities ineligible. To the Minister of Advanced Education: will you commit to including . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, thank you.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. friend for the important question. Our government is making lives for students better by providing support to students who are seeking to further their education, and we're continually looking for opportunities to improve our programming. As he mentioned, Advanced Education is currently conducting a system resource review, which includes learning supports such as loans, grants, scholarships, and awards, and the Jason Lang scholarship will be included in the scope of that review. We understand the extra challenges that students with disabilities face and that financial support for this population must support their unique needs, and we're committed to making our postsecondary system . . .

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

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: are there other programs and scholarships for disabilities with the Jason Lang scholarship in the review you are currently conducting on student grants?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thanks again, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that important question. There are a number of resources available to support students with disabilities, including both federal and provincial student grants for students with permanent disabilities. The Canada student grant provides \$2,000 a year to assist with education and living costs as well as up to \$8,000 a year for services and equipment. Additionally, the Alberta grant for students with disabilities provides an additional \$3,000 in funding for each student. All these grants provide nonrepayable assistance to students who may not otherwise be able to access postsecondary education and are administered by Student Aid Alberta through the Student Aid Alberta Service Centre.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. To the same minister: what programs are available to help students with disabilities transition into the world of postsecondary education?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, each of Alberta's public postsecondary institutions provides services to students with disabilities to minimize barriers to education. These include various accommodations provided as necessary on a case-by-case basis. The appropriate accommodations are identified in consultation with professional staff at each institution, the student, their physicians,

and other professionals working with them for care and support. Accommodations can include extensions of exam time limits and private exam spaces, modification of course loads, and additional equipment. All of these help students with disabilities have a more successful transition into colleges and universities as they make their lives better.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Government Communications

Mr. Fildebrandt: Today the government's official propaganda wing testified before the Public Accounts Committee. We asked real, simple questions about the extent of partisanship in this historically partisan branch of the public service. Government has parachuted NDP apparatchiks into dozens of positions across the government that are supposed to be nonpartisan. For the most part they refused to answer our questions, so I'll ask the government directly. How many employees in the Public Affairs Bureau have partisan ties to the NDP?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question that's being asked is one that I'd say was directed to the appropriate body. It's a public agency, the Public Affairs Bureau, and they are working as public servants, and it's important that we respect their professionalism as public servants. I wish the members opposite would show a little bit of professionalism as well.

Mr. Fildebrandt: They're not professionals; they're party bureaucrats, Mr. Speaker.

They are using their position in government to spend taxpayers' money . . .

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: Continue.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Do I get to start again?

The Speaker: No, you can't start again.

Mr. Fildebrandt: They are using their position in government to spend taxpayers' money to convince people to vote for the Progressive Conservative Party. Those words were spoken exactly five years ago to the day, when the Government House Leader was in opposition. Now the NDP are spending tens of millions of dollars to convince people to support their carbon tax. Can the Government House Leader stand up, look me in the eye, and tell me with a straight face that they're not doing the exact same thing?

The Speaker: I would ask whoever . . .

Ms Hoffman: I'll start, and if the Government House Leader wants to answer . . .

The Speaker: Hon. Deputy Premier, I wonder if you would look me straight in the eye, though, rather than the other side. Please proceed.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll start, and I'm sure that if the Government House Leader wants to respond to the third one, he'll have an opportunity to. The Public Affairs Bureau is a professional communications branch. It supports campaigns about things like seat belt importance and public health. I think it's important that we pay attention to what they have to say. I know Albertans

want to hear what the campaigns are and make sure that they're hearing clear communications from a professional communications branch.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Professional communicators who used to be party campaigners.

Alison Redford was set to go down in history as the most wasteful Premier in Alberta's history. She squandered \$4 million on wasteful government propaganda over her entire term. I say "was" because this Premier has budgeted \$10 million on a single ad campaign. Given that over Christmas I went to watch a movie where people literally booed as they were subjected to this kind of propaganda – Albertans aren't buying it, and they want them gone – won't the government just save us the money and cancel the propaganda ads?

Mr. Mason: Well, I'm glad that the hon. member watches movies other than on Rebel media, Mr. Speaker, because he might get a bit of an education.

Now, the Public Affairs Bureau are professional public civil servants. I have a point of order with respect to this matter because the impugning of professional civil servants by the opposition is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

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

Farm and Ranch Worker Regulation Consultation

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's announcement was that two technical working groups developing recommendations on how employment standards and labour relations should be applied in the agricultural sector as a result of Bill 6 have now finished their report to the government. We have been told that the next step is to provide feedback on these recommendations through a web portal for the next four weeks. To the minister: why is there no attempt to have face-to-face feedback with Albertans such as town halls?

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Farming is more than a job; it is a way of life, and this government recognizes that. We have heard from some very balanced technical working group tables that members of those tables included voices representing employers, farmers, experts from various fields. They had such fulsome discussions at these groups, and I'd like to thank all of the members for the work that they did at those technical working groups. We are now taking the reports that came from our technical working groups and asking Albertans to give us feedback on the work that was done at these technical working groups.

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

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are still four more working groups, two of which are reviewing the applicability of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, another one on best practice for agriculture, and one on education and training and certification, and given that these groups have not completed their consultation and that no expected date for completion has been outlined, to the minister: when can Alberta farmers expect to see these consultations completed?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I have said from the beginning and this government has

said from the beginning of the process that we're going to take the time that is necessary to make sure that we get this right. As the member I'm sure recognizes, some of those issues are complicated, especially in occupational health and safety. The nuances in agriculture have to be examined to make sure we get it right, and I'm very happy, as is the Minister of Labour, with the hard work that these technical working groups have done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it's been over a year since Bill 6 legislation was passed and given that parts of it are already being implemented, such as WCB, and given that the regulations for this legislation have still not been completed, to the minister: when are you going to have the regulations in place for Alberta farmers to be able to follow?

2:20

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is important that we get this right. We're continuing to take the time. I've heard from the opposition that they would actually repeal this legislation that will protect farm workers. This government believes in the protection of farm workers as all workers. We're going to continue to do that work. We're going to continue to make lives better for Alberta's farmers, ranchers, and workers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, for the past few months I've been hearing disturbing reports from members of the Bill 6 round-tables about whether this government has been taking their input seriously. The concerns being voiced are that should there be no consensus, the government will simply toss out any views that don't mesh with their ideology and create regulations as they see fit. To the minister: what assurances can you give these round-table members that their hard work and efforts will not simply be sent to the burn barrel as so much trash?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Again, there were 72 members total for these technical working groups – they have put in hard work – a variety of interests right across Alberta. I thank them for their hard work. They were not able to reach consensus on everything, but the ones they do, we're going to be able to have all Albertans examine, looking for that input. The opposition had criticized the consultation process. They were wrong on that. We've had fulsome consultation and are looking to the results.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, given that per the government's press conference yesterday consensus was not reached on all round-tables and given that if there is no consensus, the final decision on which recommendations to accept lies with the government, which means that choices will have to be made, to the minister: for those round-tables that didn't reach consensus, will the minister side with views that mirror their ideology, or does the minister plan to break the stalemate in some other way, and if so, what will that be?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The members opposite would have preferred these

technical working groups to be made up of all the same people. They weren't. There were very diverse views right across – labour, workers, farmers, ranchers, experts in health and safety – that all made up a part of that table. The discussions were robust. That they didn't come to consensus in all the recommendations is natural, but with all those views, on the ones that they have, we're looking forward to those recommendations and hearing from all Albertans as we always said we were going to.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Southern Albertans are struggling, and this government's bad policies . . .

The Speaker: My apologies. I was jumping ahead.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in yesterday's press conference the minister stated that government will decide what regulations come out of the Bill 6 round-table reports, certainly on reports that have points where consensus hasn't been reached, and given that even if the vast majority of Albertans submit their opposition to certain recommendations, the government will have the final say, to the minister: how do you plan to respond to complaints from some table members that fear that the results of these consultations are ultimately predetermined?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know the opposition has gone on record saying that they will repeal this legislation if and when they ever get in power, that they would deny basic workers' rights to these workers, and I'm assuming they would deny basic rights for every worker in Alberta. For that, I say: shame. This government, I as minister, will continue protecting Alberta's workers, will continue making lives better for those workers. [interjections]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Please keep the volume down.
Now the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Carbon Levy

Mr. Barnes: Thank you. Southern Albertans are still struggling, and this government's bad policies have made things worse. The carbon tax has increased the cost of everything. This government refuses to provide any evidence that this tax won't just force industries to relocate. Recent public policy research identified that families, couples supporting kids or relatives are the biggest losers of the carbon tax. This tax won't help the environment, has harmed our economy and our job creators. To the minister of environment: when will this government put Alberta families first and abolish the carbon tax?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, we learned over the weekend that members opposite seemed to have problems interpreting the dictionary. We learned that again yesterday in terms of the definitions of words. Why don't I just help out the opposition with a couple of definitions of our own? Made in Alberta is a plan designed by Albertans. It means a plan that is carefully structured around our unique economy. It is Alberta's climate leadership plan. I'll give you another definition: made in Ottawa, which is the sum

total of the opposition Conservative Party's so-called plan to deal with climate change. That is not our approach. Our approach is to make sure that we are moving carefully, creating . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, study after study shows that this government doesn't care about the damage they're causing. Given that good Medicine Hat employers like Rosenau Transport have been forced to pass along the expense of the carbon tax and given that this government's own estimated cost per family of the tax never bothered to consider the price increases that the tax has put on every good from farm equipment to groceries, again to the minister of environment: how can you claim that your efforts to mitigate a tax with impacts that you refuse to acknowledge have made the carbon tax easier to swallow?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member asks about the business climate, so it's very interesting to me that that's why we cut small-business taxes by a third. They would increase business taxes by that third. We have put money in the pockets of Albertans, starting on January 5 with the rebates, moving along with various energy efficiency programs for farms, for schools, for nonprofits. [interjection] They would take money out of those pockets, and they would cancel all of those ways that people are saving money on their . . .

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, please keep your volume down. Thank you.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, the day after the carbon tax was implemented, my office received call after call from petroleum service stations across the province shocked and confused as to why they needed to apply GST on top of the carbon tax. Given that this government had the option of lobbying the federal government to exempt the carbon tax from the GST and given that we're now forcing Albertans to pay a tax on a tax, Albertans are left wondering: when will this government stop lining the pockets of bureaucrats in Ottawa and start working for Alberta families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we understand that a strong economy and a clean environment go hand in hand, and part of that is creating good jobs both in our energy industry and in our emerging industries. That's how we secured approvals on two pipelines. The Wildrose still believes that their dead-end approach will work. [interjections] That failed to get pipelines built. They would repeal the very plan that secured those two pipelines.

The Speaker: We're certainly having a robust afternoon.
The Member for Calgary-South East.

Addiction and Mental Health Emergency Responder and Family Supports

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We spent the afternoon in the House yesterday debating the need for an emergency response to the fentanyl crisis. In order to get to that point, every member of this House agreed to have that debate, recognizing that there is a crisis. Yet the government has failed to respond by calling a public health emergency to co-ordinate resources to save lives. Since the minister and the government won't call an emergency, my question

is: where is the support for the true emergency worker, emergency medical services, how much money has been allotted to them during this crisis, and how much in additional resources?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We are incredibly grateful for the work that first responders, including firefighters, paramedics, police, and peace officers, are taking in responding to this crisis. We have been working very diligently to ensure that they have the mental health supports that they need to help process any of the trauma related to the work that they do day in and day out. I'm regularly meeting with members of emergency responders, representations from across the province, to make sure that we have those supports in place. One of the key things that we've heard was the desire . . .

2:30

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Fraser: Given that addiction and mental health issues are extremely complex and that it's certainly a tragedy for those that are suffering from addictions and mental health problems but that it is equally tormenting for the families that love them, to the same minister. You've outlined some help for addicts. Can you tell Albertans: where are the supports for families of those suffering from those problems? They're also hurting. Can you tell me if you're supporting them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. One of the first things that our government did when we came into office was to create the valuing mental health commission to review some of the work that government had been doing on mental health supports and to make sure that we had a more co-ordinated system. What we found was a very fragmented system, without supports for families. Our government, since the adoption of that report, has been working diligently to make sure that we have supports across the province so that it doesn't matter which part of Alberta you live in; if you need mental health support, that help will be available for you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you. Given that during the emergency debate we heard multiple stories about the tragedy of addiction in families – and I referenced one such family during my speech – and most members of this House recognize that their families and all families are at risk, to the same minister. Families are calling this government to action. Can you outline what steps are being taken with our youth to educate them and their parents to prevent the issues that our province is currently facing?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very important question. Our government has been working very closely crossministerially to make sure that we've got supports available in schools and have that education piece available in addition to some of the public advertising that we've been doing on the concerns around the dangers of fentanyl as well as the take-home naloxone program. I am always very eager to meet with other members of this House and with members of our community about ideas for things that we can be doing that will help to improve the supports available as well as the services . . .

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

Indigenous Child and Family Services

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there is an overrepresentation of indigenous children in care and that the Ministry of Children's Services is responsible for overseeing the delivery of child intervention services on-reserve, funded by the federal government, to the Minister of Children's Services: please explain how the government works with indigenous and federal partners to support indigenous youth in care.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for a very relevant question. We all know that the overrepresentation of indigenous youth is a heartbreaking reality of our child intervention system, and we know that all children, no matter where they grow up, deserve a safe, healthy, loving home and opportunities to thrive in strong communities. Now, while the number of indigenous children receiving services over the past few years has decreased, we know that there is more work to do. A ruling by the Human Rights Commission has asked the federal government to increase funding for on-reserve service delivery. We will continue to work . . .

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the funding for supports is less on-reserve versus off-reserve, to the same minister: how is programming such as family support programs offered on-reserve?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I feel very strongly that where an Alberta child or family lives should never dictate the level of support that they receive. We need to do better for these children, for our youth, and for the families. As a former front-line service professional this issue is near to my heart. Our government is working with First Nations partners and other orders of government to make sure indigenous people have the support they need. For instance, Children's Services is working with Kapawe'no First Nation to develop a pilot program to license child care on-reserve. We are working with the Bigstone Cree Nation to establish an on-reserve reunification home . . .

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the federal government is responsible for providing funding for on-reserve programs, to the same minister: what work is being done to advocate for more program supports on-reserve?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the reasons this government created a stand-alone Children's Services ministry was to maintain and strengthen supports to indigenous children, families, and communities. We are also focusing on the root causes affecting the safety and well-being of children, including poverty, addiction, mental health concerns, and family violence. We're committed to working with indigenous partners and the federal

government to ensure that indigenous families have fair access to the support they need. We will continue to look at this issue as part of our ongoing work on the UN declaration and the TRC's calls to action.

Thank you.

Access to Information

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, we have heard time and time again from the media, the opposition, and from the Privacy Commissioner that the NDP refuses to improve our province's access to information. Last session the Official Opposition asked the Justice minister what she was doing to clean up the mess in her department, but it was no surprise to us when we didn't get an answer. The Privacy Commissioner's recent report clearly shows that she still has a problem. Minister, it's been two years now. Why should Albertans trust you to get the job done?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government values the importance of transparency and access to information. It was clear from the reports that the backlogs had built up over a number of years. We've been increasing the number of full-time positions. We're increasing those positions from 10 to 18 in order to get this backlog cleared. I hope the members opposite will support the resources necessary to do that.

Mr. Cooper: Given that last year Canadian privacy experts described Alberta Justice as a rogue organization due to their manipulation of FOIP requests and since Alberta's Privacy Commissioner stated as recently as two weeks ago that the NDP government needs a top-down culture change to address a "lack of respect" for freedom and information, to the Premier. Your Justice minister is falling short. The experts say that you need a top-down culture change. When will you listen to those experts?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, it's always fun to see how people can pull one area within a report to try to create some massive drama. But the truth is that our government has worked diligently to increase investment in the area of FOIP. The number of FOIP requests, for example, in Executive Council has gone up threefold in the last two years, and we're working diligently to address those by putting the resources and the people where they're most needed. I hope that when they push for cuts in all ministries again, if they do the same as they did last year, they'll remember that they're proposing cutting things like FOIP, that we're actually investing in.

Mr. Cooper: Given that last fall the Premier stood in this Assembly and assured us that "transparency and openness are exactly what [this] government is endeavouring to do" and given that the Privacy Commissioner's report has found that FOIP requests sent to the Premier's office are delayed due to lengthy and unnecessary processing delays, to the Premier: is it a lack of leadership, or is having a trustworthy government simply not a priority?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government is putting our money where our mouth is, so when it comes to increasing access, we're doubling down on efforts to make sure that we have the right resources aligned to be able to meet with the FOIP requirements. They would cut those offices. The same people that they're expecting to do more and more and more they have no respect for. All they want is to try to create some drama and some

speculation when the truth is that we're putting our money where our mouth is. We're aligning resources, and we're committed to following the legislation.

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

Social Service Provider Staff Safety

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In early February a 60-year-old woman was viciously attacked at the Elk Island youth ranch. The beating took place at 11 p.m., and the RCMP were not called until 1 a.m. Understandably, the minister was unable to answer critically important questions about the incident immediately after it occurred. It's been a month now. To the minister: was there a delay in emergency response because she was working alone that night?

The Speaker: I'm not exactly sure where this line of questioning is going. It could be a sub judice issue, so I would seek the guidance of the government as to how they may choose to answer this.

2:40

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Out of respect for that, I'll just say that I respect the personal sacrifice of our front-line workers that undertake to support and protect others, but absolutely we all understand that that sacrifice should never mean that people are not supported to do their job safely. Certainly, we've been working with the facility to ensure the safety of both the staff and the residents. As an independently contracted service provider, certainly, Elk Island youth ranch is in the best position to speak to the specifics. However, we continue to ensure the safety and well-being of both the staff and residents . . .

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

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that just days before the attack the judge presiding over a fatality inquiry for the murder of a care worker in Camrose released seven recommendations and given that the Premier indicated that this government planned to act quickly to hold itself accountable for recommendations from fatality inquiries, to the minister: what have you done since February 1 regarding these recommendations?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Of course, we watched with interest the recommendations that came out of that particular fatality inquiry. We are aware that one such recommendation was that the government begin tracking such recommendations. The reason for that was that under the former government they had never been tracked. So we have committed to come up with a system to do that tracking to increase transparency, and that's what we're going to do.

Mr. Gill: I'm talking about the recommendations released on February 1, Minister, not the previous government.

Given that two youth in care at the centre have been charged with attempted murder and given that one of them has since pleaded guilty to assaulting other workers in the months leading up to this attack and given that ensuring that workers know the histories of those in their care is a fatality report recommendation, again to the minister: was the care worker aware of the youth's history of violence, and was she trained to deal with it?

The Speaker: Please proceed, hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, in response to this terrible event our government has been working with the facility. We put a conditional status on their licence so that we would have oversight of their day-to-day decisions. There are a number of investigations and reviews currently under way: occupational health and safety, the RCMP, and Children's Services is reviewing policy and licensing requirements and accreditation. We will certainly be acting quickly on any findings because, as I stated, our government believes that no one's life and safety should be put unnecessarily at risk when they go to work. We're committed to taking a closer look at how we support safety for contracted service provider staff.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Carbon Levy and Agribusiness Costs

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, two-thirds of Albertans do not want this punitive, destructive carbon tax that's been levied on them. Examples of business costs skyrocketing have increased dramatically since its inception. I sit on the Alberta's Economic Future Committee. We are dealing with how to promote value in business and agriculture. The comment that we heard more than any other from presenters was that this carbon tax is making business increasingly noncompetitive.

On the weekend I sat down with the owner of one of the largest exporters of dehydrated forage products in Alberta. Their company produces dehydrated alfalfa and other forage products for both domestic and foreign export. They also send dehydrated corn and barley silage into Asian and Middle East countries. This is a niche market that they created. This should be an Alberta success story. This is as value-added as it gets.

Unfortunately, the implementation of the carbon tax is imposing a huge competitive disadvantage on this Alberta exporter. During the month of January alone their natural gas bill increased by over \$20,000 from the carbon tax. This cost cannot be passed on to consumers. Imagine: \$260,000 a year in increased tax. The carbon tax has also increased trucking rates to the plant by 8.3 per cent. The annual cost of the carbon tax on this business is higher than the profit margin. This plant operates year-round and has 50 full-time employees. Millions have been invested in the dehydration equipment. If this entrepreneurial agribusiness disappears from Alberta, a huge market for Alberta hay producers disappears with it.

Mr. Speaker, the negative realities of this crippling tax on business and families are becoming clearer by the day. Across that imaginary line they call the 49th parallel, those folks don't pay a carbon tax. This Alberta company cannot be competitive in this market in a carbon tax environment. You are killing business, Premier. Axe this tax instead. Act like you care about . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Bill 2

An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce first reading of Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence.

Bill 2 proposes amendments to the Limitations Act that would eliminate legal deadlines for commencing civil claims related to sexual and domestic violence. These changes include the following types of claims: sexual assault and sexual misconduct or nonsexual assault involving a minor, an intimate relationship, or a dependant.

Mr. Speaker, the decision to come forward is extremely personal and can be very difficult. Survivors of sexual and domestic violence should be empowered to do so on their own terms. The proposed amendments would put Alberta in line with the majority of the country. However, this change would also make Alberta a leader across the country in addressing sexual misconduct in intimate relationships. This is a change Albertans have asked for. This government listens to Albertans, and we are taking action to address their concerns.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, not all Albertans were elated to receive their carbon tax rebates. I have a bank draft made out to the Provincial Treasurer for \$100 from Mr. Stan Olszowka of St. Paul, Alberta, and he writes:

I am refunding my carbon tax refund. To accept it on my part would be like accepting blood money for over educated stupidity.

This money could be used to develop refrigeration units to stop global warming.

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm disappointed to table this document dated September 28, 2016, that shows that the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, the executive director of the Wildrose Party, is an active member of the Wildrose on Campus club, with the subtext: "As the executive director of the Wildrose Party I probably should be involved with our Wildrose on Campus group." I have the requisite five copies.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table two articles – one is called *Is Wildrose Still Cool to the Reality of Man-made Global Warming?* and the other one is called *Wildrose Still Seems to Be Flirting with Denials of Man-made Climate Change in 2017* – in response to a Standing Order 29(2)(a) question I was asked by the Member for Calgary-Lougheed and in response to my question to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

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

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a Twitter message from Wildrose on Campus titled *Feminism Is Cancer*. "You and I both know that feminism is cancer. To create a dialogue on campus, we have decided to take action." It's an advertisement for *The Red Pill*, a movie on men's rights activists. I table five copies.

I have a second tabling, Mr. Speaker, a little explanation of *The Red Pill* by MRA – that's men's rights activist – Roosh V. This is titled *MRA Roosh V Wants to Legalize Rape to Teach Women a Lesson*. That's what happens when you take the red pill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As promised yesterday, I'm pleased to table this article entitled *Wesley Band Hosts Meeting to Discuss Community Solutions for Drug Problem*, the gist of which is that "this is a crisis we don't even have a name for in our language" and that "we need to battle this demon upon us."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of an article I referred to yesterday from the *Globe and Mail* called *A Killer High: How Canada Got Addicted to Fentanyl*.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I believe we may be at points of order. If I recall, I think there are a total of three points of order.

The Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise to speak to a point of order. I will be speaking specifically from Standing Order 23, "uses abusive . . . language of a nature likely to create disorder." That's 23(j) for those of you following along at home. I will speak to both points of order that were raised by my hon. colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre here, on the first one predominantly because I have some significant concerns about language that the Minister of Health used. She used language that was likely to create disorder and, in particular, made allegations about members of this Chamber.

Let me be very clear that no one in this caucus thinks or agrees with statements that were made by members of Wildrose on Campus. The statements that were made are totally inappropriate, completely wrong, and do not represent myself or any member of this caucus. I had the opportunity this morning to rise in this Chamber and also denounce those comments, and I am in agreement with my colleagues that those comments are totally inappropriate.

However, today in question period the Minister of Health said that the Wildrose said that feminism is a cancer. No one inside this Chamber has ever or would ever make the statement that was made by members of an association that is no longer connected to the Wildrose. For the Minister of Health to imply that it was said by a member of this Chamber is not likely going to create order. I cannot be more clear that I, the House leader of the Wildrose Official Opposition, and our caucus denounce these sorts of statements. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I feel personally responsible to do things that create an environment where more individuals, including those of all genders and females in particular, would feel welcome and safe to engage in the political process.

Making allegations like the Health minister did today is not going to create order in this Chamber. I think the Health minister understands that. I think the Health minister understands a lot about my personal motives and my personal beliefs. For her to make such a claim, that would imply all members of this Chamber had made statements like that, is not going to be part of productive discourse in this Chamber.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to start by saying that I accept the hon. member's assertion that he and other members of the Wildrose caucus have disavowed themselves from those statements. Nevertheless, what the hon. Deputy Premier was saying is that there are repeated what she called bozo eruptions

coming from the Wildrose membership, which indicates a deeper problem, and this was just one example.

Other examples, as we know: the famous examples before the 2012 election relating to the lake of fire for gay and lesbian people or on the denial of climate change, and we've seen some language by, actually, caucus members around that as well. There are a number of other instances that the member has cited, including the willingness of members, including the leader of the party, to appear on Rebel media, which is noted for its spread of anti-Islamic hatred and, as well, homophobia and a number of other things that I think Rebel media has talked about, yet we've yet to see members opposite disavow that particular organization. They attend the rallies – the Deputy Premier pointed that out – as well as appear on their online programming.

The Deputy Premier did not use unparliamentary language. She referred to very specific matters that have happened. Now, whether or not individual members opposite support or agree with any of those things is not what the Deputy Premier was talking about. She wasn't talking about members opposite; she was talking about the party. She was talking about views that are within the party that keep popping up from time to time that are very disturbing and very contrary to the views of most Albertans and certainly the ones that we represent. So I would submit, Mr. Speaker, that there is no point of order.

I would just like to quote from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, which is very clear that while the opposition may not like an answer, it doesn't mean that it's a point of order. It says:

The Speaker ensures that replies adhere to the dictates of order, decorum and parliamentary language. The Speaker, however, is not responsible for the quality or content of replies to questions. In most instances, when a point of order or a question of privilege has been raised in regard to a response to an oral question, the Speaker has ruled that the matter is a disagreement among Members over the facts surrounding the issue. As such, these matters are more a question of debate and do not constitute a breach of the rules or of privilege.

Mr. Speaker, with the greatest of respect, I don't believe that the Deputy Premier impugned members opposite but, rather, was talking about some basic problems within the political party itself. I think that her answer was not unparliamentary, and I would ask you to so rule.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I want to ensure that I'm on the same page. There were, in fact, two points of order, that we're dealing with now. As I understood, the first one was about a comment made concerning, I believe – I have a copy of the Blues with me here: "Why is your party spending its time calling the fight for women's equality a cancer on our society?"

Can I just get a clarification that we're dealing with both points of order together, hon. House leader?

Mr. Cooper: I will withdraw the second point of order because it's on a very similar topic. My concern was the minister saying: Wildrose said feminism is a cancer. That's what I believed was said. It's certainly not true. I don't have a copy of the Blues. I'm not sure if that is the only reference in the answer, if that's what you call it, that you have access to now or if, in fact, those words were said. Those are the words that I had heard. But this is the only point of order that I will need to have dealt with on this issue.

3:00

The Speaker: Well, just for the sake of clarity, thank you, hon. member, for making that point. The Blues have it so that we all are dealing with the same document.

I believe the point that was being focused on in the first point as well as the second was:

Yesterday the Wildrose called feminism a cancer, and you guys want to join them. So let me ask the Leader of the Opposition a simple question: why is your party spending its time calling the fight for women's equality a cancer on our society?

Then there was a second reference, which I believe the Government House Leader addressed, which was the "Wildrose bozo eruptions."

Let me just say this. In its purest sense this probably is not a point of order but a difference of opinion. However, the language used in those kinds of comments is not helpful to this House agreement on arriving at good policy. You all know which buttons to push on the other side. If you choose to do that, it just consumes your time. You can get the anxiety of the place. In this particular instance I don't believe it was a point of order. However, particularly when you're answering these kinds of questions, I would caution you, hon. House leader, that your members be more cautious about the words that they are using.

Point of order 3. I believe you raised this one, Government House Leader.

Point of Order Reflections on Nonmembers

Mr. Mason: I did indeed, Mr. Speaker. I raised it in response to comments made by the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks with respect to the Public Affairs Bureau. I heard him refer to members of the Public Affairs Bureau as partisan bureaucrats and, I believe, also partisan hacks. There were a number of other terms that were used along a similar vein.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to distinguish between a criticism of the organization and an attack on the public servants who work within it. If the opposition feels, as it may legitimately do, though I don't agree with it at this point, that the Public Affairs Bureau or any other agency or department of government is behaving with a bias towards the government, that's one thing. However, when a member stands up and singles out the individuals that work for an organization and labels them, he not only demeans those individuals, who have no recourse to defend themselves, but also undermines their ability to do their work. I think that is unacceptable. I've seen on a number of occasions that this particular member is unable to distinguish those two things. To him, in my experience, they're one and the same, and he can't stop at that line where the organization ends and the person begins.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of references in the rules to nonmembers, people who are not in the House and are unable to defend themselves. *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms* on page 151, section 493(4), states, "The Speaker has cautioned Members to exercise great care in making statements about persons who are outside the House and unable to reply."

O'Brien and Bosc on pages 616 and 617 states, "The Speaker has ruled that Members have a responsibility to protect the innocent, not only from outright slander, but from any slur directly or indirectly implied."

On June 25, 2015, Mr. Speaker, you yourself cautioned members, stating, "Members must remember that when they refer to people outside of the Assembly, those individuals have no ability to respond to the allegations that may have been made in here."

Your predecessor, Speaker Zwozdesky, in 2012 made similar cautions. For example, on November 26 he said, "We should not be referring to people who are not here and not able to defend themselves."

Mr. Speaker, I certainly don't have a problem ruleswise with the members criticizing an organization of government if they feel that it's demonstrating a bias. I may not agree with it, but that's fair game. But to label the individuals as hacks and to suggest that they are partisan people who are there in order to promote one party over another is simply beyond the pale. It should not be accepted in this House, and I would ask that you so rule and that you ask the hon. member to stand up and withdraw the remarks and apologize to those individuals as well as to the House.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise to discuss a point of order here. I think if we have learned anything this afternoon with respect to what is a matter of debate and what isn't, clearly you have just ruled on what is a matter of debate, and I think we have seen that here again.

The member opposite made a career out of criticizing this particular department, and that is exactly what we saw today from the Member for Strathmore-Brooks. In fact, he used some of the Government House Leader's own words from five years ago, when he was doing the exact same thing. What did happen this afternoon was that the Member for Strathmore-Brooks did not point out any of the individuals that do have significant ties to the NDP that currently work inside this department. It would have been very easy for him to do that because it is well known that there are lots of partisan connections to individuals who are currently working in the PAB. What happened was that the Member for Strathmore-Brooks asked a very important question on how this branch of government, which has been historically partisan, is continuing to do so.

I don't think there is a case that is more clear with respect to an issue of debate as what we have before us this afternoon, and for the Government House Leader to suggest anything different is a new set of reality for the Government House Leader from when he was in opposition to when he was in government, where he used to express concern around the exact same things that the government is currently engaging in. Now he's defending the very behaviour of those individuals. Clearly, this is a matter of debate, one that I anticipate more debate to take place on in the future. I would hope that you, too, would rule that this is just that, a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Any other members?

Well, let me just be clear as to what the Blues say. To the Government House Leader, I see no nor did I hear any reference to use of the word "hacks." What he said was: "They're not professionals; they're party bureaucrats, Mr. Speaker. They are using their position in government to spend taxpayers' money."

Again, you're both zero for zero. This is also not a point of order, in my opinion. The earlier positions that were taken, as I recall, were with respect to where individuals were named, and even today in this House I heard the use of a person's name that probably could have been left out of our discussion in this Chamber. But in both cases the tone, the use of words is not very constructive and not as respectful as the goals that I know all of you are aspiring to, and you don't need me to tell you yet another time to exercise your caution and your respect for each other by avoiding such language.

3:10

Orders of the Day

Transmittal of Estimates

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I received a message from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the government for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2017, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the 2016-17 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2. When supplementary estimates are tabled, section 4(5) of the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act requires that an update to the consolidated fiscal plan be tabled.

Accordingly, I also wish to table the 2016-17 third-quarter fiscal update, which serves as the updated fiscal plan. The quarterly fiscal update provides a framework for additional spending authority for the Legislative Assembly and for the government.

Mr. Speaker, these supplementary supply estimates will provide additional spending to 18 government departments. When passed, the estimates will authorize an appropriate increase of \$1.6 billion in expense funding and \$125 million in financial transactions funding for the government. The largest share of these amounts will fund the Fort McMurray wildfire disaster. These estimates will also authorize the transfer of \$141 million, with a net transfer of \$120 million for the previously approved capital investment vote to the expense vote across 14 departments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Ms Jansen moved, seconded by Ms Miller, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois Mitchell, CM, AOE, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Debate adjourned March 7]

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's my pleasure today to rise to respond to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor Lois Mitchell's gracious reading of the Speech from the Throne. That speech began by recognizing that we are a diverse province but that in our diversity we share common values, those of compassion, hard work, and justice, and that we at our best are an open and inclusive society, one province, one people on a common journey towards a common feature. I say "at our best" because, admittedly, that's an ideal we haven't always risen to. I think back to the Famous Five, who had to fight for women in our province to have the right to vote and to eventually be elected to this House.

I think back to the First Nations, who walked this land before us, where we stand today on Treaty 6 territory, and after signing those treaties, by whose grace we stand here today, were corralled onto reserves, their children forced into residential schools and their voices not fully heard in our democratic process until 1960.

I think of the many immigrants who came here to build better lives and found themselves confronted with prejudice like the Alberta senior I spoke with at the recent celebrations for Black History Month, a son of the original Exodusters, who told me that his first language was Ukrainian due to the close ties forged between his family and local Ukrainian families as they both faced discrimination.

I think of the Klein cuts of the 1990s, when thousands of Albertans – doctors, teachers, nurses, child service workers – were thrown out of work, tuition spiked, and Albertans suffering with addictions and mental illness were turned out into the street.

I think of the debate in this very Chamber where members of this House stood to argue that vulnerable LGBTQ-plus youth should have to go to court to earn the right to form a peer support group in their school. Mr. Speaker, I dare say that those were moments that did not make life better for many Albertans and their families.

However, there are times when we live up to our ideals. As Her Honour read in the Speech from the Throne, last year “Albertans came together in a time of extraordinary danger. As the Wood Buffalo wildfires tore through communities, we stood as one, as fellow citizens with a shared responsibility to each other.” Indeed, I’m encouraged to think of the thousands of Albertans who donated time, money, and goods to support the residents of Wood Buffalo.

I think of the thousands of Albertans who rose up to demand that the government of Alberta amend Bill 10 to provide true support for LGBTQ-plus students in our schools.

I think of the 400 people who attended our Legislature’s first official recognition of Black History Month, the dozens of articles and stories I saw in our local media celebrating the stories and contributions of Albertans of African descent.

I remember standing here in this Legislature shortly after our election when our Premier on behalf of the government of Alberta apologized to the First Nations people for the injustices visited on them through the residential school system.

I think of the thousands of Albertans who formed community organizations, social agencies, volunteered their time to triage the damage that was wreaked by short-sighted cuts in the funding of our systems of community support and mental health, organizations that have become such important partners with government in delivering street-level services and addressing issues of substance use and homelessness.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is at its best when we work together, when we stand together, and when we are committed to government that includes and looks out for all Albertans, a government that, when faced with a crisis, doesn’t abandon its responsibility to protect and maintain the core services Albertans rely on, a government committed to making their lives better.

Mr. Speaker, we’re well aware of the impact the historic drop in the price of oil has had on families in our province, and since our election we’ve been working to help protect them through this economic downturn and make their lives better. We’ve maintained stable, predictable funding for health care and education, protecting key services and vital jobs that support everyday Alberta families. While we’ve instituted a freeze on salaries for cabinet ministers, MLAs, political staff, and management in the civil service, we have not resorted to the sorts of sweeping layoffs that devastated Edmonton’s economy in the 1990s, affecting many families in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Speaker, we’re well aware of the integral role that the energy industry plays in our economy and the need to ensure that it can continue and be a sustainable source of good jobs and prosperity in a carbon-constrained future. That’s why we worked with industry, First Nations, and environmental groups to develop the climate leadership plan, a plan that will put our province at the forefront of

innovation in clean energy and sustainable resource extraction while protecting the environment and all those who depend on it; a plan that secured the approval of a new pipeline to the west coast, a pipeline that will help ensure that we get the best value for our product, supporting good, mortgage-paying jobs in our province; a plan that will create even more in the development of a robust renewable-energy industry and support communities as we transition away from coal-fired power generation; a plan that supports Alberta families in reducing their energy use; a plan in which all Albertans work together to build a stronger, more sustainable economy for our future.

Of course, our modernized royalty framework also provides new incentives, helping to reduce costs and improve efficiencies, and has led directly to an increase in drilling activity and the jobs that that provides.

I was happy in the last session of the Legislature to have the opportunity to co-sponsor legislation to establish the Alberta investor and capital infrastructure tax credits, programs that will help to attract investment to grow our growing start-up and technology industries, many of which get their start at Startup Edmonton and TEC Edmonton right here in Edmonton-Centre, industries that help to diversify our economy and provide good opportunities for young Alberta families.

Our increased investments in infrastructure are also supporting good jobs in construction while maintaining and increasing our stock of much-needed hospitals and schools.

3:20

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we’re looking out for those that need an extra hand. I have the honour of representing our government as a member of the stewardship round-table for EndPovertyEdmonton. In discussions and recent reports EPE noted that the new Alberta tax credit and the increase in minimum wage are important steps towards lifting hundreds of families in our city out of poverty and giving them the opportunity to truly thrive in their communities. These are concrete actions that make life better, not only for those particular families but for all Albertans, as we work together to build stronger communities and local economies.

We’re investing over \$1 billion to upgrade and increase our stock of affordable housing and will shortly be releasing Alberta’s first affordable housing strategy, a plan to ensure that all Alberta families can afford a dignified place to live.

Mr. Speaker, we’re investing in many other areas to support those in need. I spoke at length yesterday about how proud I am to see our government’s commitment to implement the principles of harm reduction. As stated clearly in the Speech from the Throne, we will move forward with supervised consumption services and other harm reduction measures to address the rising tragedy of opioid overdose deaths. I was very happy to hear several members of the third party rise and declare that they also support these sites and these principles during our emergency debate yesterday. I look forward to hearing members of our Official Opposition also voice their support.

We’ve increased funding to FCSS, which funds many important community organizations around our province. We’ve increased funding for women’s shelters in multiple municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to making life better for Alberta’s families. Every week I see all of my colleagues, these other 53 men and women that I have the honour of serving with and, indeed, members of the other parties in this House, out serving their constituents, out working in their communities. I can’t tell you the number of times I’ve gone to events and had opportunities to go out and meet with groups and been told: we’ve never had an MLA here before. I am so pleased to see that all members of this House have

begun to have a renewed commitment to the people of Alberta, that they're spending time on the ground listening to the people, working with the people who work on the front lines, who know the work that needs to be done.

Our government remains committed to working with them, to supporting them, to ensuring that we continue to build the facilities we need, provide the services that are required and that we are there to support them through this difficult time, a difficult time, Mr. Speaker, that we will come through together. We are united as Albertans. Our government is there to support, to make Alberta's families' lives better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments for the Member for Edmonton-Centre under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, I would recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As always, it's an absolute privilege and honour to be in this House to speak to the people of Alberta and lay out a vision as well as critique the government's budget, in this particular case, the thorn – the throne speech. I didn't mean to say "thorn speech," but I understand how that came out, sir.

With respect, you know, it was only two years ago that I had an opportunity to see, for instance, our health care in action. Mr. Speaker, I sat beside my son for four or five months while I watched him die, and it was a tragedy. But what I really saw was a health system that failed my family, failed my son, and fails an amazing number of people in Alberta.

Since the time that I've had the privilege of being the Leader of the Official Opposition, I've travelled the province. I don't stay here in Edmonton under the dome too long, Mr. Speaker, because you get what is called dome disease. That's when you don't understand what the people of Alberta are truly looking for. The people of Alberta have told me, when I've travelled the province – and I've spoken to them in many dozens and dozens of town halls and spoken to literally thousands of people just in the last six weeks and in the previous two years – many stories, many examples of how the health care system has failed them.

Mr. Speaker, I had an opportunity to see seniors in my own community that had been promised, over three times by three different Premiers, a seniors' long-term care facility. Over a 10-year period those promises were broken time and time again. That's why I got back into politics, because politics is important. Policies that this government brings forward are very important. They impact the lives of people: health care, education, forest fires. Yes, seniors, the people that built this great province and this great country, have been ignored by successive governments for too long.

We need a government that will respond to the people based upon what the people need and respects the people, all people, all Albertans and governs for them all equally. A good government truly is practical, is pragmatic, makes decisions based upon the best interests of the people at the time. They are not ideological right. They are not driven by ideological left. They make the decisions based upon the circumstance the people are involved in.

I've watched democratic principles that our party and Albertans strongly believe in be threatened: the principle that the people should make the decision and have the ultimate say. I knew in my heart that Albertans deserve so much more, Mr. Speaker. That's why I've dedicated my life now to make a better Alberta, to make it better for future generations, to make sure that families are supported by their government and supported by their health care system. I knew I could no longer stand on the sidelines.

Although a lot has changed in the past two years, there is one thing that will always stay the same: my resounding belief in the spirit and the people of Alberta, the spirit of our pioneers, our sodbusters, our men and women that drill for oil, that drive the big trucks, all of these people that have built the greatest place in the world to live, work, play, and raise a family. That's Alberta, Mr. Speaker. That's the Alberta I love, but I have seen some of it being dismantled, and I am concerned.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I saw what I would say – just about a year ago, one of the most significant times in my life, I saw the people of Fort McMurray flee their homes to run into the arms, the open arms, of other Albertans. It was a moment of significant pride for me to see the firefighters, the emergency workers, the RCMP personnel that were not just saving lives but saving homes and property at their own risk.

I do serve a caucus, Mr. Speaker, that is a proud caucus, one that works extremely hard, that is focused on the principles of making sure all Albertans are served equally. I believe I work right now in a caucus where some of the best values, some of the best things of who we are as Albertans are truly found. They've walked hand in hand with our agriculture workers, our energy sector workers, office assistants, small-business owners. They see the same things I do because we are going across the province doing town halls.

Although it's a great privilege to be able to do what I do, I've never seen in the eyes of Albertans such despair, such lack of hope. Albertans want something different, and they're worried about what this government has done in the last two years. They are concerned, and I don't think anybody in this House, including the government, is not aware of that concern.

I went to Grande Cache just a few months ago. I talked to a person that had owned and run a restaurant for many years, a small-business owner, closing their doors, and would not sign a new lease, Mr. Speaker. Just this summer it's up, and they are gone because they don't trust what's happening. I had a couple come to me that had just moved out of their home into their car. They were living in their car – living in their car – in Alberta, the promised land, because they were kicked out of their house. They couldn't afford it, had not had a job now, I believe, for about 10 months.

3:30

It's very concerning, Mr. Speaker, and I think the largest concern is that what this budget is doing, what the throne speech is doing, is throwing the problems onto future generations. That's what I'm concerned about. We're spending more money than we've ever spent. Bigger deficits, bigger debt: somebody has to pay that. It's not going to be these people, and it likely won't be us – we won't be able to pay it off, but we will pay for it – because it's going to take far too long.

The longer you travel down that road of debt and deficit and borrowing money, the longer it takes to get back the other direction. Mr. Speaker, I think we have to reach up as a group, as all MLAs in this place, especially the government, and recognize that if we don't turn around and go in a different direction, there is going to be more significant pain, more Albertans that move into their cars, more small businesses that don't renew their leases.

I see people without hope who are desperate for a brighter future. They're resigned and frustrated – and I don't blame them – because they've seen very little help out of this government. Now, I've heard platitudes, and I've heard things and plans and suggestions. In fact, we had a job plan that came up with one job after nine months, the minister's job. That was the only job it created, Mr. Speaker, although it cost a lot of money. That's why we can't get this wrong. We've got to get it right. That's why I truly don't understand why the government doesn't reach out to the opposition

and say: “How can we do it better for all Albertans? How can we work together to create a better budget?”

Let’s not have any more unemployed Albertans. We’ve already had a hundred thousand unemployed Albertans in just 16 months. We say that by conservative estimates there are 200,000 Albertans unemployed right now, today, and very few of them – well, about a hundred thousand of them can only get unemployment insurance. Mr. Speaker, 65,000 jobs in the last year, over 20,000 in January alone, were lost. I’m concerned because we don’t seem to be doing anything or learning anything from our mistakes. I’m sorry; it was 45,000 full-time jobs lost since last year.

You know, this carbon tax is troubling me as well. We have a carbon tax that by all estimates is going to be costing families in Alberta at least a thousand dollars out of their pocket. Well, the rubber-stamping of Ottawa’s carbon tax is now bringing that number up to \$2,500 per family. That’s going to come out of our pockets, every Alberta family’s pockets, Mr. Speaker, out of the money they currently earn. They aren’t going to have the money, that \$2,500, to pay for their priorities, to take their children to sports or drama classes or ballet. The things and the priorities they want to spend on for their children are no more because this government has taken \$2,500 out of their pockets per year and are going to pay it on projects that we don’t know much about. A small, small portion is going for these green projects but, the truth is, a very small portion compared to the large part that’s coming out of Albertans’ pockets.

I did hear the economic development minister stand up in the House yesterday and say that he has – and I quote – the back of the coal workers across the province. Now, Mr. Speaker, these coal workers drive trucks. They do. You know, whether you go on highways 63, 55, 40, 881, or anywhere across the province, you can’t ride bikes on those highways. I would say that there are very few coal plants that you can ride a bike to from your house. In fact, very few Albertans outside of the major urban centres and some of the mid-sized centres are able to use bikes because of the infrastructure involved and also because they live and work so far from each other.

We have large distances to travel in Alberta, especially in rural Alberta. That means that for rural Albertans this carbon tax is going to cost a lot more. We don’t have those opportunities that other places do have although we do have a great quality of life. These Albertans pay for their own gas, and with gas prices going up, it’s going to mean even less money in their pockets.

The NDP have made everything more expensive, whether it’s food in your grocery store that’s going to be more expensive because they had to pay more to get it shipped in, Mr. Speaker, or more for construction, for farming, for ranching, for industry. All of these will be more expensive, and Albertans ultimately pay the bill.

Now, I’ve heard them talk about big industry: “Oh, big industry is going to pay some of that,” or “These guys are going to pay some of that,” or “You know, it’s going to be revenue neutral.” Well, it’s not. The \$3 billion, the \$5 billion, whatever billion dollars they want to make it, will come out of Albertans’ pockets, Mr. Speaker, and those Albertans don’t make the money these folks do. Maybe they should try to take some of their money and understand how the rest of the people live in Alberta, how they live week to week, paycheque to paycheque, month to month.

We do have one of the largest consumer debts in North America as well. So as interest rates become higher, as all of these different policies come into play, whether it’s the accelerated shutdown of coal, whether it’s the carbon tax and the doubling of the carbon tax in just a short period of time, whether it’s the uncertainty in the

marketplace that they send by way of things like royalty reviews, these things hurt, and they hurt Albertans.

You know, I had an opportunity recently to go to the United States and go, particularly, to Washington and New York, and I did it on my own dime. I had an opportunity to speak to many investors, including other people in the U.S. State Department and industry and other areas, energy in particular. In speaking to these other investors from right across New York and even Toronto, they told me in private meetings, one-on-one. I said: “How can we get people to invest in Alberta? How can we bring back the Alberta advantage, where we received billions of dollars in economic activity and investment each and every month for years?” Alberta was the golden goose. I said: “How can we get them back? How can we get them from the TSX? How can we get them from New York?” They said that it was simple: “Change your government.” They said that to me, Mr. Speaker.

You see, most Albertans and most Canadians and the people in the investment community are smart. They know that we sit on the third-largest oil reserve in the world here, 1.9 trillion barrels of oil, Mr. Speaker, and we know where it is. All we have to do is manage it properly as a resource that belongs to the people. It doesn’t belong to these people. It belongs to the people of Alberta. These people have a fiduciary obligation to manage it properly, but what did they do? They capped it. It was already oversubscribed, over 100 megatonnes, and they capped it. They broke more contracts. That’s not the signal you send to the investment community.

Without the investment community investing in Alberta, we don’t have businesses. It would have been just as well for the Premier to have stood up outside the Legislature, here on the front steps, with a big sign that read: Alberta is closed for business. That’s exactly what they’ve been doing, and it’s not helpful because those businesses, those investors that come into Alberta, that create jobs, are the ones that ultimately will create employment for Albertans. It’s not the government. We’ve seen what they’ve done. They made a job plan, created one job, and that was for the minister. One job, Mr. Speaker. That’s ridiculous. It took them eight to nine months to figure out that it wasn’t working. They could have just come across the floor and asked. I would have told them that that’s not going to work.

I’ve been in business for years, Mr. Speaker, many different kinds of businesses, and I can tell you one thing that I don’t do. I don’t rely on the government for handouts because they don’t work. Creating an environment of low taxation, low regulation, removing red tape, cutting taxes and individual taxes so that people have more money in their pockets, so they’ll take that money out and spend it: that’s what we need. We need a government that understands that their philosophy, increasing taxes, is only hurting the people of Alberta.

All these pet projects, Mr. Speaker – and I don’t even want to get on the free light bulb situation, but let’s talk about that just for a moment. We have this government that’s focused on free light bulbs installed by a company from Ontario. That’s creating employment. And what’s happening? We have 100,000 Albertans that are seeking unemployment insurance. I would say that at least 50,000, a conservative estimate, can’t get employment benefits anymore because we have a federal government that’s not listening to us, and we have an Alberta government, a local government, that’s not working with us.

3:40

Both levels of government are working against the people of Alberta and our industries. They need to reverse direction, Mr. Speaker. They need to stop thinking they know better. They need to stop believing they can spend Albertans’ money better than

Albertans can. Albertans know what they're doing. They're smart; they're savvy. They're so savvy that they're not going to spend any money in Alberta until this government is gone. That's how savvy they are. They recognize the steps that they're taking.

Free light bulbs and a hundred thousand Albertans that are trying to collect unemployment insurance: I think they have their priorities mixed up, capping our oil sands while we have a hundred thousand workers in the oil sands leaving town. We have a community that had 2,100 homes destroyed by fire. Free light bulbs, Mr. Speaker, while we can't even build our homes in Fort McMurray: how ridiculous.

What do they say, Mr. Speaker? They call us the embarrassing cousins on the international stage – and it wasn't one of their backbenchers; it was their Premier, their leader; that tells you what their attitude is – or, better yet, that we were in the Dark Ages before they came to government. Well, the way they're going with our industries, especially our oil and gas industry, the only thing left will be to burn wood like in the Dark Ages. But, of course, there'll be a carbon tax, so we're probably not going to be able to do that.

Mr. Speaker, they capped our oil sands, they've raised costs for small businesses significantly, they've raised personal and business taxes, and they brought in the ever-popular Bill 6. I can promise you that every time I mention that in any town hall across any community in Alberta, I get applause by saying that I'm going to take it away and destroy it, which we will do within 30 days of a Wildrose mandate.

Our balance sheet has gone off the edge of a cliff. Downgrades have happened. Laugh if you want, but we have had our finances downgraded, and we're in for more. Do you care? No. Mr. Speaker, we had somebody stand up from the NDP and say: it's not going to affect us. Well, why don't you ask some people that have had credit how much they'd like good credit? It makes a big difference: you borrow for less, your payments are better, and everybody wants to lend you money.

But we're going down a different path. I've shown you that path. It's so far down there that it's out the door and down the driveway, and we need to come back. This throne speech: \$60 billion is what we're going to owe when that government is gone. Now, that's \$2 billion in interest payments each and every year. Two billion dollars, Mr. Speaker. That's \$1,800, approximately, more or less, for every single family in Alberta to pay that they didn't pay two years ago.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you know what's happening to interest rates. I know you're a sophisticated man. You know that the United States is going to put up their interest rates, and we have to follow. We don't have a choice, or else we're going to be living in inflation.

Right now we have the lowest interest rates that I've ever seen, but I remember 19 per cent. I am that old. I remember paying 19 per cent on a mortgage, and I remember, too, Mr. Speaker, that when I looked at that mortgage payment and that schedule for payments, I couldn't believe how little of the house I was paying off. It was all going, almost all of it – I think 90 per cent when I started – towards interest payments. That's exactly where we're going with this government, interest payments, like Ontario at \$310 billion, more or less. That's a billion dollars a month in interest.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm not just throwing out numbers to throw them out. A billion dollars: I could build so many schools for that for the people of Alberta, in health care hire nurses, front-line workers that actually get things done, that accomplish things, that don't just fill in NDP paperwork and increase regulation. These are things that really matter. A billion dollars in borrowing every six months: they can say what they want, but it is going to cost Albertans a lot in the long term for our structural investments that are necessary, whether it's infrastructure or schools or hospitals.

We're going to be spending \$2 billion a year not on those priorities but going towards big banks. I can't think of anyone that I'd rather see not have my money than big banks except for NDP governments.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to take much more time, but I would like to say this to you. Compare free light bulbs with what's going on in Medicine Hat or Calgary, where we have 30 per cent of the buildings downtown vacant today – two years ago they were full – or 200,000 Albertans that are unemployed. I don't think they care about free light bulbs, and they certainly don't want any Ontario companies sending people into their homes to install them, and I think that goes for shower heads and thermostats.

I think right now this government should take a very serious look at what they're doing, what they've done, start talking to the other members in this place, and consult properly with us because we are so far down that road, Mr. Speaker, that it's going to take my great-grandchildren to get us anywhere near back to where we are today even.

I believe that under a vision of a Wildrose government, we can be number one in health care again, we can restore outcomes and make sure we work with a great bureaucracy and public servants that care about their work and care about their job and don't just care about a paycheck. Our public servants are the best in the world, but they're operating in a system that will not work. It cannot work, Mr. Speaker, not when you have one manager for every five employees. That's called paperwork, and they do paperwork to accomplish paperwork to accomplish more paperwork but don't worry about outcomes. I've seen it. It's terrible.

I did hear some bellyaching from the other side. They're right. It's not the worst case in Alberta, AHS. So Alberta Health Services is not the worst. The worst is the government itself, who has three workers for every one manager. Yes, Mr. Speaker, three workers for every one manager. I'm not even going to tell you how much they get paid on average because you are going to get so upset that you'll jump out of your chair.

Mr. Speaker, all we're suggesting and all we've ever suggested is: let's not cut; let's just freeze. Let's freeze wages and freeze hiring. Let's look at 2 cents out of every single dollar. We proposed 2 cents out of every dollar. They weren't interested in that. We proposed \$2 billion in savings just over a year ago; 10 ideas on how to not destroy one job in Alberta but how to lessen our bill by \$2 billion. They ignored every single one of those suggestions except one, which was a reduction in the small-business tax. Thank you for that. One thing out of 10. They could do better by just listening to us on this side.

We came forward with a 12-step jobs action plan. Not one of those steps was taken, Mr. Speaker. I would say that we had pretty good foresight because since we came forward with that plan, we've had 60,000 or 70,000 people lose their jobs. Full-time jobs, not part-time jobs. Full-time jobs. These are jobs where people go out to work and bring back the bacon to support their family. Not now.

You wonder why so many people are at home and depressed? It's because they don't see any hope from this government whatsoever. This government is not going out and listening to them. They are going out and telling them. Bill 6 was no different. The carbon tax: well, I think we can clearly see where Albertans are on that and free light bulbs. Mr. Speaker, these people are so out of touch that they might as well go and govern in Ontario. I think they'd be more at home there.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to take a lot of time, but I do want to just ask what we get for all of this extra spending that we do. As I've mentioned many times in this place before, we spend about \$2,700 per man, woman, and child in Alberta more than

British Columbia. We spend between \$8 billion and \$10 billion more every year than B.C. does when you adjust for population; \$8 billion to \$10 billion. We're on just over a \$52 billion budget. That's a lot of money. I have been to B.C. I don't think that's any capitalist bastion. In fact, I would suggest to you that since it costs a lot more to, for instance, pave highways and create highways there than it does in Alberta and it costs a lot more for other services, it doesn't really make sense that we're 20 per cent more expensive. We need to avoid long-term debt, and we need to go in a different direction. We need a government that responds and listens to the people.

3:50

But what do we get as a result of all this extra spending? Well, Mr. Speaker, we get one of the highest rates for wait times for key surgeries out of all of Canada. Highest. The only ones that may be approximately the same are the Maritimes. All the rest are better. Go next door to Saskatchewan: three months. Go on the other side, to B.C.: three months. Here in Alberta: eight or nine months. Yet we spend 20 per cent more.

Our education system is more focused on creating lawsuits, fiddling around with experiments, using our children like guinea pigs in the classrooms instead of getting back to the basics. There is nothing wrong for a child that doesn't do their homework for them getting a zero, Mr. Speaker. There's nothing wrong with that. That's what happens in the real world. You don't show up for work, you don't get paid unless you work for the NDP, I suppose.

We need to protect choice in education. We need the freedom for parents to be able to decide for their children what's best. We don't need bureaucrats in downtown Edmonton telling people in rural Alberta or anywhere in Alberta what their parents should do. We need them to allow freedom of choice so parents can decide what's best for their child so their child can decide the future for themselves, and parents know a lot better than bureaucrats do. You know, it was not very long ago, in fact, when I went to school – okay, that was a long time ago – that we were number one in the world in education. I think most of the people here received that education. Number one in the world. And today, Mr. Speaker, we're not even in the top five. Quebec has a better education system than we give our own children, and we spend a lot more on our education than they do.

The Justice file, Mr. Speaker: I don't want to get too started on this, but do you know that the courts, as a result of a court decision, because of a backlog in our Crown prosecutors and this government not giving enough resources to our Crown prosecutors in our justice system – that's exactly why – a murderer was let go just a little while ago? Two accused of sexual assault were let go because they couldn't get to trial because there weren't enough resources, not enough Crown prosecutors or judges or resources generally, and now we find out just a little while ago that there have been 200 cases in Alberta that have suffered the same fate. In fact, many people were let go for impaired operation, DUI charges. Those people didn't even get a slap on the wrist. They were let out without a trial because of lack of resources, and they're back on the streets along with many violent criminals that should go to jail and should stay in jail. That's because this NDP government is not taking our justice system seriously.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Communities feel less safe. Crime is rising across the province, even violent crime, and we get a great idea from the NDP: let's give out free light bulbs while the justice system is being starved, while the health care system is a broken system that doesn't work, and while our teachers are not given the resources and the tools to teach

our children and make them number one in the world. Madam Speaker, they can laugh all they want, but the truth is that they know it. They hear it whenever they leave the dome. I don't think they do that very often, but I can assure you that I do, and when I get a chance to travel the province and to talk to people, I'm astonished by how they feel about this government and the lack of representation they feel they're getting from them.

We need a government, Madam Speaker, that doesn't bring in new taxes without a mandate from the people. Wouldn't that be interesting if the people actually got to vote on the ability to bring in a new tax? You know, this carbon tax is just a 3 per cent PST in disguise, and they know it. Albertans know it. It's not helping. Increasing taxes is taking money out of people's pockets, and it is starving businesses. A government that recognizes that money in the pockets of Albertans is better than in the hands of bureaucrats is what a Wildrose government would do, a government that believes in the unbridled potential of our province and a government that works relentlessly for the people of Alberta on their priorities.

I do believe that Alberta can come back to a place of unparalleled greatness. We want to lead a government that doesn't just tolerate poverty, Madam Speaker, but champions opportunity and tries to eliminate it. I want to fix the health care system so that no other children, no other grandchildren, no brothers or sisters die as a result of negligence. I want to make sure that no other family ever experiences what we did. I want to make sure that when Albertans go to the hospital, they're not seen as simply a number, as a statistic; they're seen as a family member, as somebody that matters and matters to fix not just to treat. It's not about just showing up and finding a comfortable bed. It's about showing up and getting better. That's what our health care system is missing.

I do want our education system to be the best in the world, just like our health care system, and there's no excuse. We have every natural advantage, including the people, including natural resources, including space.

The Alberta advantage. I've over the last year decided what I believe the Alberta advantage was, and I said "was" because it's no more. The Alberta advantage was where everybody in the world wanted to live in Alberta, wanted to raise their children in Alberta, and wanted to work here. The opportunity to move to Alberta meant so much more to people than it does today.

I believe with this vision, the vision of what I'm proposing, it will lead to the greatest job creation that this province has ever seen, the opportunity for people to be able to take their lives back, to be able to find a job in the pursuit they want, and to be able to be educated in that pursuit and for us to be able to have long-term sustainable investment from our government in those core services that are so important to the people of Alberta.

No one in this House believes those core services are not important. Nobody wants to destroy our health care system or our education system. Nobody. We just believe that there are different ways to get to the sustainability. The path out that door and down that lane, Madam Speaker, is a path that is going so far away from where we are right now that it is threatening significantly our ability to provide those core services.

Sooner or later banks will not lend us any more money. Sooner or later we will be paying so much in interest that we will not be paying off principal. That's why we need to turn in that other direction. That's why the Wildrose is here. That's why we fight like we do, Madam Speaker, with words in and out of this House across the province, because we believe Alberta can be great again. And it will be great again. It will be after the next election and the NDP are gone.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's so welcoming by you. It's great to be able to rise and speak just for a moment. First of all, I'd like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for his remarks and his comments. I think one thing that we can certainly all agree upon is just how passionate the Leader of the Opposition is about our province and how he brings such an incredible skill set to his role. I'd like to thank him for his leadership of our caucus and of our party. The work that he's doing plays a critical role not only here in the House but right across the province.

One of the things that I know that he's been doing over the last number of months is travelling across the province. We were together in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills last week and had a couple of events, with close to 500 people attending. There's a real sense of excitement around the vision that the Wildrose is casting and the work that's being done. I know that he had the opportunity to spend time in places like the north as well as Drumheller, Stettler, Hanna, Grande Prairie, Calgary. He really has the chance to hear from such a wide range of Albertans. I'm just curious to know if he might share with us just for the couple of minutes that remain here what exactly is the feedback that he's getting from Albertans. What is the feedback that he's hearing with respect to the direction the government is taking, and what is he hearing about where Albertans are in their desire for the Wildrose and the Official Opposition to take a prominent leadership role in the future of our province?

4:00

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that. I would like to just talk about the facts. Now, the member is right. I did attend two particular events and did speak to about 500 people. With those 500 people – you're not going to believe this – we sold 120 memberships. We asked ahead of time, and most of them were already members. I don't know what that means, but most of the 500 people that came out were already members of our party, yet another 120 bought memberships.

What that says to me clearly is that they're interested in a change, that they want to be more politically involved than they've ever been in the past. It doesn't matter where I go in the province, whether it's Grande Prairie or Fort McMurray, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Calgary or Edmonton, we're selling a record number of memberships because people recognize, I think for the first time in a long time, in generations here in Alberta, that they need to be involved, that they need to join the Wildrose because whatever happens in the future, Wildrose will be a significant part of it.

They've told me that they want a government that responds to the people, that is practical and uses common sense, that makes sure that they're there for the government not in an ideological bend left or right but one that actually solves the problem for the people that is happening at the time. Right now, Madam Speaker, everyone is worried about the economy. Everyone. They said the same thing. The last question my friend asked me was: what are they saying for the future? These Albertans that I speak to are very intelligent, very smart because they're saying exactly what the investment community said to me in Toronto and in New York and Washington: change Alberta's government. That's what we plan to do.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the throne speech? The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise to speak in response to the Speech from the Throne. I am proud of our government, which in tough economic times is working to make life better for Albertans by doing things like capping electricity rates, freezing tuition, protecting health care, expanding apprenticeship and training, cutting small-business taxes, and avoiding reckless cuts to health care, education, and infrastructure. We are protecting and improving the things that make a difference in the daily lives of Albertans.

Several aspects of the throne speech are particularly relevant to the constituents of Wetaskiwin-Camrose, one of which is working with indigenous communities. Between 16 and 20 per cent of my constituents are First Nations living in Maskwacis and Wetaskiwin. It is for this reason that if you could indulge me, Madam Speaker, I would like to have an unofficial opening of this session by starting with an elder Cree prayer. [Remarks in Cree]

A very short prayer just thanking our Creator for the protection that they offer all men, women, and children equally.

I and our government stand with and amongst the Maskwacis leaders – and I'm not just name dropping here; these are my friends: Chief Kurt Buffalo, Chief Darrell Strongman, Chief Randy Ermineskin, Chief Irvin Bull – working for justice, language and culture protection, economic growth, seniors' care, housing, clean drinking water, education, health care, and mental health support.

I have been honoured to have taught so many but have learned so much about life and living from friends such as Lucy Kammer; Dennis Lewis; Jason Currie; statesman, lawyer, and Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner Willie Littlechild; grand chief for Alberta Craig Makinaw; political activist Katherine Swampy; social activist Chevi Rabbit; and hundreds more who came out to vote and voted for the New Democrats. They organized rock the indigenous vote against neglect, discrimination, and previous government arrogance and mistreatment.

Working with First Nations, we will continue to address the principles of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. We will implement both Jordan's principle, which is a principle that you help first regardless of your jurisdiction, and we will do Gladue reports, as required by the Supreme Court.

Previously, the habit of the provincial government was to refer all indigenous issues to the federal government. This practice will end. All Albertans are Albertans, and we will be the most transformative in developing relationships with First Nations. We will work to ensure that service levels on reserves are brought up to the service levels off reserves. We will foster the collaborative model, which is characteristic of the traditional indigenous way.

I am proud of the work done by the Wetaskiwin regional school division to foster inclusion of First Nation students and families living within the school district. I would like to congratulate the Montana Cree Nation students attending Red Deer College doing the innovative apprentice welding program, and I would particularly like to congratulate Patrick Buffalo for his recognition by the Alberta Chambers of Commerce with an eagle feather award for outstanding business entrepreneurship by Samson Management Ltd. In conjunction with Alberta Education and Maskwacis four nations are forming one education authority to provide consistent, quality education for their 11 schools' students.

Many of my constituents are voicing approval of our clean energy and climate change initiatives. Their actions are speaking louder than the noisy Alberta bashers. The city of Camrose has recently installed the second-largest solar panel system in Alberta on its

recreation centre roof. Augustana campus' new performing arts centre has installed new, innovative exterior wall photovoltaic cells and a new system of LED interior lights, which was the first system not only in Alberta or Canada but in the world. Augustana continues to put up more solar panels on the roof of additional buildings. Camrose is the home of three solar panel installation companies formed in the last year, creating new employment and adding new clean energy self-sufficiency for more and more Camrosians.

Individual entrepreneurs see business opportunities, and some of those visiting my office would say: Bruce, I did not vote for you because I've always been a PCer, but I am excited about new businesses that your government is encouraging. For example, these constituents are moving forward on more efficient furnace baffles; carbon fibre and value-added products; fuel additives which reduce CO₂ emissions, improve mileage and life of engines; and new ways to recycle tires to create new value-added items. And I predict that there will be more.

The county of Camrose already uses biomass fuel to heat their administration building. Let me congratulate city councillor Bill Sears for his personal leadership on renewable energy projects.

Wetaskiwin, likewise, is extremely progressive with regard to green energy. The city would like, in fact, to become the home of the Alberta Energy Efficiency agency, so this is just a gentle hint, wink, and nudge to the ministers responsible for climate change, labour, and economic development. Wetaskiwin city hall has an electric car charger that's free for citizens' use, heats its city hall with geothermal heating, and has solar panels on several city buildings, including the recreation centre and drill hall. Wetaskiwin has replaced every single streetlight with LED lighting.

Bruce Ganske of Wetaskiwin is looking at setting up a school to train certified solar panel installers, and I would like to also recognize Wetaskiwin city councillor Bert Horvey for his leadership in clean energy.

4:10

While the Alberta bashers brag about the opposition to the carbon levy, we are seeing what was once a trickle turn into a groundswell of support for entrepreneurial stewardship, environmental stewardship, jobs, and economic growth. It is heartwarming when growing numbers of constituents come to tell me that they have been on the efficiencyalberta.ca website and have registered for new lights and will change their windows or put up solar panels. By the way, two of the four nations at Maskwacis have already installed solar panels on their administration roofs and hope to soon start on their residential buildings.

The feedback on our government's action on economic development reminds me about how on Family Day for Alberta I had the opportunity to witness the signing of a letter of intent between J and H Aviation of Wetaskiwin, whose owner is John Jeffries, and Shengda Xiang Yun Aviation of China and their manager, Feng Ge, for a \$200 million project to build an airplane assembly plant in Wetaskiwin to produce eight-seater passenger planes. Economic diversification will strengthen our economy and bring jobs to our unemployed.

The Speech from the Throne highlights other achievements, creating jobs not only in the petrochemical sector but also approval of the two pipelines and the two petrochemical plants, which, of course, will help. It is impressive that tax credits will also help business expansion right here in Alberta. It is exciting to support emerging sectors such as aviation, craft brewing, and high-tech food-processing centres such as the one in Leduc, which will support Alberta's agrifood industry. Likewise, Cavendish Farms of Lethbridge will create good jobs for Alberta farmers. The new federal Canada-European trade agreement has the potential to

significantly expand our beef exports to Europe by millions of dollars. Our agriculture and economic development ministers will continue with trade missions, helping to make Alberta a destination for trade.

The recent Conference Board of Canada projection for Alberta to lead all provinces for the next four years in gross domestic production bodes well for all of my Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituents and all Albertans. Alberta led the country in private-sector capital investment in 2016. Alberta will lead the country in economic growth in 2017 and 2018, according to TD Bank as well as other banks.

Alberta has the highest weekly earnings in the country. Alberta has the highest employment rate in Canada. Alberta just led, with the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, its largest trade mission in history, and in the last year our exports have increased by more than 13 per cent while the rest of Canada's have decreased by 3 per cent. Alberta has among the most educated workforces, including the highest concentration of engineers in the country. Alberta has the fastest growing population in Canada. Alberta has one of the youngest populations in the country. Alberta has one of the lowest taxes in the country, with a \$7.5 billion tax advantage over Saskatchewan, which is the second best. Alberta's debt-to-GDP ratio is the lowest in Canada. Alberta has the largest economy in western Canada, bigger than British Columbia and Saskatchewan combined. Wetaskiwin for the last two years has set building permit records despite the recession.

Madam Speaker, I have not yet begun to deal with how my constituents are positively thrilled about the reduction of school fees announced in the throne speech. This past Sunday evening six cabinet ministers and over a dozen government MLAs were in attendance at the Alberta Rural Education Symposium. That evening we reaffirmed our commitment to the future ready initiative: freezing tuition, working with parents to modernize our curriculum, expanding access to student loans, and investing more in apprenticeship and training. Resounding applause welcomed the elimination of those basic school fees, our pledge to restore stable, predictable funding, and our commitment to the construction of more new schools.

We were also able to share our commitment to child care and child protection, to better support students in achieving academic success. In fact, the principal at Norwood elementary school in Wetaskiwin complimented our government for providing the pilot lunch program in his school. He has seen how students who are properly fed are more successful when it comes to behaviour and academic achievement. Albertans have confidence in our government when it comes to guaranteeing quality education.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to another robust sitting of the spring Legislature, where, time permitting, I will have the opportunity to bring forward to the floor a motion other than a government motion and a private member's bill. I have a new desk, looking at the morning sunshine, much closer to you, Madam Speaker, and also Mr. Speaker. I will be keeping my heckling within bounds, maybe.

It is an honour to be here, Madam Speaker, representing the constituents of Wetaskiwin-Camrose. I thank them for their trust in me.

Tomorrow is International Women's Day, and I would like to thank the women of my life. My wife, Janet, who is so passionate about justice, the environment, health care, and education, is my strongest supporter but also capable of holding me accountable in ways no opposition could. I am proud that the Speech from the Throne was delivered by a woman. Our Premier is female. Half of our caucus are women. Half of our cabinet are women. Half of my constituency association are women. My office, on the fifth floor,

is where we commemorate the Famous Five women. While much remains to be done to have gender equity, I believe Alberta's strength is the growing number of strong female leaders. I salute all the females of this Legislature for their dedication and commitment to social democracy and justice.

On that note, Madam Speaker, I conclude my remarks. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. If we could just ask you to table tomorrow your prayer in Cree and English so that it can be recorded.

Mr. Hinkley: You want it in English right now?

The Acting Speaker: No. Tomorrow, please.

Mr. Hinkley: Tomorrow. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I will call on the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We hear that our government is going to solve all our problems through this throne speech, but it seems like they've left out a few important things, that I think I would like to take a few minutes to actually bring forward to Albertans.

Now, I went to the Alberta government website, and there was a nice highlight section for this throne speech. I'd like to go off those highlights, if you will. The four highlights are creating jobs and supporting jobs, making life more affordable, protecting public services, and making Alberta a better place for everyone. These are admirable.

Now, I'd like to start with point 1. If the government is interested in creating jobs and supporting them, then I would suggest that the NDP start listening to Albertans. They are telling them that the direction they are taking us in will only lead us to misery, not salvation. The NDP hasn't figured this out yet, that government doesn't create jobs, but it does get in the way of those who do. With the record unemployment in our province, if this government went to a residence, they would find proud, intelligent, hard-working people looking to get back to work.

As the government continues to grow, we are already weighed down by a crippling bureaucracy that just needs to get smaller. Drawing money out of our economy to pay for your pet projects, that have no economic cost analysis done to achieve a goal, that have no goals attached, is what is actually costing us jobs.

4:20

An article in the *Calgary Herald* on March 4, 2017, by Mark Milke, called Alberta's Carbon Tax Is Already a Failure, explains that the premise of the NDP carbon tax is flawed. The passage I will quote does a great job of explaining how our current government is implementing barriers in front of our job creators and for those that are so desperately needing to get jobs.

Here, Alberta's carbon tax is oddly self-defeating. If a government wishes for people to change behaviour, it must levy a tax so punitive that it modifies actions, i.e., less carbon-based activity.

The province obviously intends that as the outcome. Every year the carbon tax is increased, the more punitive it becomes, including for charities such as food banks.

But to offset the higher costs for some, the province is subsidizing just over 1.1 million people. The province claims that will positively affect about 60 per cent of households.

The plan is thus inherently contradictory: The province will tax everyone more in an attempt to change behaviour. It will then subsidize at least one person in 60 per cent of Alberta's households. That [is counter] the government-intended behavioural nudge.

So the government is saying that it wants to stop people from creating greenhouse gases, and then it subsidizes people to do that. That does seem to be contradictory.

The only result that this government has helped when it comes to jobs is their ability to see that my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake is paying the price with high unemployment and a staggering number of empty houses on our real estate market. Instead of stating how the NDP will create jobs, what I would like to hear is: how will you stay out of the way of our job creators?

Point 2. As we move to the point where we need to identify what the government is doing that will reduce our households' costs and will help to make our lives more affordable given that a number of Albertans have lost hours of work, had salary rollbacks, shifted to part-time jobs, or just don't have a job, making life more affordable must be a priority. In 2015-2016 we saw higher personal taxes and business taxes fully implemented. At the start of 2017 we added a carbon tax, that added to our burden. My question to the government is: how does adding more taxes help Albertans? How does it help Albertans thrive? These taxes, that are there to save us, end up being passed on, through purchases of goods and services, to our families. It doesn't matter who you are.

Yet the NDP has assured us that cutting our spending is not the solution, and I will quote the government on that, where they say:

Under former governments the rate of yearly spending growth increases was as high as 11 per cent.

Your government stopped that practice.

Through diligent action and targeted reductions, we are bringing the rate of spending growth down, thoughtfully and prudently.

Guess what? There's nothing prudent about only reducing how much you increase your spending when you're running an \$11 billion deficit. We're still waiting to hear how this will lead to a more affordable life for Albertans.

Why can't this government learn from other provinces' mistakes? Ontario is still learning that if you spend recklessly chasing down a hopeless ideology, it leads to many families choosing between feeding their children, having their utilities cut off, or paying mortgages and rent. If the NDP wants to help make life more affordable, they need to stop blaming the last guys. Axe the carbon tax and the renewable-electricity plan, and reverse most of the legislation that has been a direct attack on our oil sands. This would be a good start. It would also put us back on the road to the Alberta advantage, which will help to keep money in Alberta's families' pockets so they can get through these trying times instead of standing in food bank lines.

Point 3 is protecting public services. This is one point that is actually near and dear to my heart. How do we protect the services that we all value for future generations? Nowhere in the throne speech is debt accumulation or management even mentioned. This is truly astounding. We talk about preserving our public services when we are accumulating approximately \$12 billion in new debt just this year. That's borrowing about one-quarter of your spending. I understand that this isn't the budget speech, but I hear our government has a plan in our throne speech, and it is expected that we start to look down to future generations.

Unsustainable debt doesn't protect public services; it does the exact opposite. It puts everything we hold dear at risk, and it puts what past generations have done in jeopardy, irresponsibly, recklessly. Our parents worked hard to ensure that what was handed

to us would allow for options in the future. If they had been as irresponsible as we are today with the accumulating debt, you would be forced to make even tougher choices. But since you inherited a big credit card with almost no balance, you're just running it up and kicking the giant can down the road. By having stable government through a sustainable, balanced budget, we can ensure that the level of services that we have today will be available tomorrow. If we don't start planning the balancing of our budgets now, we're putting at risk the jobs of our doctors, nurses, teachers, and public employees tomorrow.

The NDP has rapidly increased taxes under the mantra of vague statements like "getting our fair share." Once elected, in the 2015 Speech from the Throne the NDP shared their vision of what a fair share was.

As its second act our . . . government will introduce Bill 2, An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue. This bill will ask those who have benefited the most from the boom times in Alberta to now contribute a little [bit] more so that our schools and health care can be spared from chaos and reckless cutbacks. Corporate taxes on [our] largest and most profitable corporations in Alberta will be increased from 10 per cent to 12 per cent; small-business taxes will remain at the current rate, 3 per cent; and progressive income taxes will be reintroduced in Alberta for those earning more than \$125,000.

Now we've seen what it means when the NDP says: fair share. This means tax increases, especially for job creators.

Then we have the 2016 throne speech, where they announced a carbon tax, that again radically increases our taxes.

[The] government will introduce the Climate Leadership Implementation Act to . . . force and effect [the] key elements of Alberta's new climate plan. Every penny raised by this plan during this period of low energy prices will be reinvested back into the economy to create jobs and to promote diversification in our economy.

It looks like we fell off that bandwagon. The NDP considers taxes collected as investments in Alberta. The Wildrose Party considers them as discouraging investment in Alberta. Well, we have seen two years of so-called NDP investment collection now, and all we have witnessed is high unemployment and low actual investment in Alberta's jobs and the economy.

4:30

Our government stated in their 2015 platform that if we raised tax profoundly, we would see balanced budgets within three years. That promise is long broken. They aren't even trying to talk about how to balance anything now. If we avoid the word "deficit," the NDP government considers it to be hidden, and it will just go away.

Let's be crystal clear. Taxes are now the largest expenditure for Alberta's families, not food, not energy, not housing but taxes. With the increase in our tax rates, we haven't seen the success that the NDP promised. That much is clear. All we have seen is continued public service hiring at a time when our food bank use is at an almost record high or record high. This is what happens when government ignores the foundation of low taxes, what has brought success to our great province. Now they are doing irrefutable harm to our Alberta advantage, which makes families in our province and public services more vulnerable.

Point 4, making Alberta a better place for everyone. I must mention that as the shadow minister for Service Alberta I didn't see several major topics this government needs to address. But the one that comes to me as the most serious, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, is nearing a, quote, crisis situation according to our Privacy Commissioner, and nothing is mentioned. We also just had a fentanyl debate, where we are questioning what exactly "crisis" means.

So we have a government that has stated its intent, making Alberta a better place for everyone, but it doesn't begin to address its own lack of following the rules of law. That's shocking. The February 23 . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Is anyone wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Loewen: Yes. Thank you very much to the hon. member for his response to the Speech from the Throne. I was interested in all the comments that he had and would be interested in hearing more if he'd like to continue.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The February 23, 2017, investigation report by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta is called Investigation into Alberta Justice and Solicitor General's Delays in Responding to Access Requests. Page 3, paragraphs 7 and 8, read as follows:

Among the most concerning of the findings from this investigation, however, are the comments related to the investigator about the lack of respect for access to information across the Government of Alberta (GoA). It is easy to regard access to information as a nuisance, particularly when workloads are increasing and staff levels are not; however, access to information is also a cornerstone of democracy and, as has been said, "democracy dies behind closed doors."

With this in mind, I will repeat a comment I made in the 2013 submission to the Government of Alberta's review of the FOIP Act. In a section titled "Strong legislation is not enough . . .", I said that I "encourage the GoA and heads of all public bodies to lead by example and adopt a culture that respects and balances both access to privacy, and to ensure adequate resources are allocated to administering the FOIP Act and fulfilling legislative obligations."

A second report was done on the same day by the Privacy Commissioner on February 23, 2017. The investigation report was called Investigation into Executive Council and Public Affairs Bureau's Delays in Responding to Access Requests. Page 3, paragraph 4, reads:

The investigation confirmed that the Public [access] had not met legislated timelines in responding to [applicants], and it became clear that a number of factors contributed to these delays including processing practices that involved unnecessary preliminary reviews and internal consultations, as well as lengthy approval processes.

Madam Speaker, it seems pretty clear from this that we have a government that has astoundingly disregarded government transparency and accountability. This is a slap in the face to every Albertan. We have a bureaucracy that is not taking the FOIP as law. Even the Privacy Commissioner has found that it appears that they are not only not taking their jobs seriously, but they are actively preventing FOIP staff from following the law. The government is on the record in a CBC article named Information Commissioner Slams Alberta Government for Poor State of Freedom of Information on February 23, 2017. The quote goes:

She was "disheartened" to read Clayton's criticism. She said the government accepted the reports' recommendations and was already implementing some of the main ones, specifically by hiring more staff in Justice and Executive Council.

"I think a big part of it is putting your money where your mouth is, and make sure you have the staff there to support the work that needs to be done to fulfil the requirements under the law and [our government's] commitment to transparency" . . . A

Justice spokesperson said the ministry now has 14 FOIP staff, up from 10 in 2015, and it plans to hire four more.

This isn't a new problem. It's long standing enough that they already plan to hire more FOIP staff, but that's not going to change the culture, attitude, and political obstructionism. This government's answer has always been to add more money, then hope it fixes the problem. Now, in this particular case I am not saying that the government shouldn't be reviewing the staffing levels based on the workload. I am saying that I want to see a commitment to this Assembly, Albertans, and our Privacy Commissioner that they will add measurement to the FOIP process to ensure that Albertans can see a measurable benefit. We need to see more than putting your money where your mouth is. We need to see results, not more platitudes.

If the government wants to make Alberta a better place for everyone, it should start with actually giving Albertans access to the information on the government inner workings. That is entrenched in law. I appreciate this opportunity to outline . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

The next member that I have to recognize is the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am honoured to rise as we gather here on Treaty 6 territory and the traditional homeland of the Métis in response to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne. As we begin this session, I suspect that all members of this Assembly are reflecting on the conversations that they have had in their communities and reflecting on the priorities that Albertans hold dear. Those priorities are undoubtedly shaped by global economic realities. Alberta, being a resource economy, has felt the shift in the global price of oil more sharply than many of our Canadian counterparts, to be sure. But this means that the fundamentals matter most now. Albertans are looking for job creation, and they are minding their pocketbook. It is these priorities that I am happy to see in the Speech from the Throne.

Madam Speaker, these are the same priorities for this government. This government has cut or amalgamated government agencies, frozen salaries of cabinet ministers, MLAs, political staff and management in the civil service. This government has been working diligently to streamline spending across government, all while protecting the services our families rely on.

Madam Speaker, I think we can all agree that job creation is one of the foremost duties of any government. In this throne speech we see a commitment to continue to work to support small businesses, entrepreneurs, and job creators. I know that many in this Assembly are anxiously awaiting the report from the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future on agribusiness and how we can expand on what is already the world's best agriculture sector. Last year I was pleased to hear of the expansion of the Agrivalue Processing Business Incubator and Food Processing Development Centre in Leduc. I don't envy the Member for Leduc-Beaumont having to repeat that all the time. The Northern Alberta Business Incubator, or NABI, in St. Albert contributes so much to the community of St. Albert. As such, I was pleased to hear that the government was committed to expand more business incubators across Alberta and in our communities to help get good ideas off the ground.

4:40

This government is also committed to infrastructure. Madam Speaker, as you know, there are many projects in my community that were announced several Premiers ago but had not made any progress. Ray Gibbon Drive was first discussed by the Social Credit, and W.D. Cuts junior high school was approved for a

modernization by Premier Getty. While I continue to work toward Ray Gibbon Drive, I'm happy to share with you that I joined the Minister of Education at the ribbon cutting of the modernized W.D. Cuts just a few months ago. These investments are putting Albertans to work and will enable greater economic activity in the future. These investments in infrastructure are making Albertans' lives better now and are ensuring that we are ready for the future.

I was also pleased to hear that this year's Speech from the Throne focuses not only on job creation but on supporting the pocketbooks of Albertans. When I rose to last year's Speech from the Throne, I talked about the need for affordable housing, and I hear that both Spruce Grove and St. Albert along with communities across this province are continuing to pursue affordable solutions for all Albertans. This government is helping these efforts with the creation of an affordable housing strategy.

Madam Speaker, in conversations I have had with Albertans as they come into my office or when I knock on their door, they have expressed concerns about the growth of school fees. You see, many families in my communities and in communities across this province are hard pressed to cover these fees when they come due in September. The reduction in mandatory school fees is a great step forward.

Now, as you know, Madam Speaker, I am proud to see that this government has followed up the commitment to maintaining funding per student for schools and to build additional schools in our communities with the initiative to ensure that Alberta's education system is more affordable for all Alberta families.

Albertans are also pleased with the initiative to cap electricity fees. We've seen massive spikes in the cost of electricity in the past, and this was of great concern to our families. I am pleased to see that this government is taking action to keep Albertans' electricity bills below the average price families have paid in the past decade. In short, Madam Speaker, we are working to ensure that the peaks we saw in the past are not quite as high.

Now, I would be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to talk about a file that is quite important to me. As you know, I am very proud of my Métis heritage. In recent years I have worked to reconnect with the culture and community my ancestors were pushed away from, but I hesitate to claim an indigenous experience. This work has led me to take a strong interest in the continued efforts our communities and governments are making towards truth and reconciliation.

I was proud to attend the signing of the framework agreement between the Métis Nation of Alberta. This agreement commits to move forward on a nation-to-nation basis and to continue our work toward reconciliation together. I was happy to see that the government has also signed a new agreement with Treaty 8, committing to work on several key priorities that will truly help to make the lives for the people of Treaty 8 better. I look forward to seeing more agreements along this line in the future.

Now, one of the recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was to implement Jordan's principle. Jordan's principle is a priority in our government's work on the UN declaration and the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action. This principle was initially developed for health care, but I believe that there is great potential for Jordan's principle to be implemented across the board to better the lives of families. Everyone deserves to be supported and to live a safe, healthy life with opportunities to thrive in their community.

As you know, Madam Speaker, Jordan's principle is the idea that governments should ensure that everyone has access to vital services regardless of whether they live on- or off-reserve. No one should suffer because of a dispute between different levels of government over who should pay for medical care. I hope that this

government will continue working with indigenous leadership and with the government of Canada to ensure that no one experiences delays or denials of services due to jurisdictional disputes.

In this Assembly we know that there is an outstanding gap between the education of indigenous youth and everyone else. Madam Speaker, I know that the Minister of Education has been working hard to reduce that education gap. We have seen the establishment of education authorities on-reserve to bring the level of funding up to that of any other Albertan student. All students deserve an education, and I am proud to see that the Department of Education is working to ensure that our indigenous students realize the same levels of education as our other students.

Now, as you know, Madam Speaker, many First Nations communities right across the country are, sadly, left without access to safe drinking water. Many First Nations communities here in Alberta are left with boil-water advisories and have been for many years. That is absolutely unacceptable. I was very excited to see that the throne speech made a commitment to work with First Nations and with the federal government to address the need for access to clean drinking water on reserves, and I look forward to seeing more details on how this government will proceed on that.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I believe that it is government's highest duty to make life better for Albertans. As such, I was happy to hear commitments on job creation and on affordability. I was also proud to see that this government is continuing action on truth and reconciliation and especially on providing clean drinking water for our First Nations.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. This is the second time today in the House that I've heard references to attending ribbon-cuttings and how proud this government is of the schools that they've built. I'd like the member to expand a little bit on his apparent knowledge of the construction industry. I'd like you to tell me how long it takes to design a school, how long it takes to obtain the land and the permits to build a school, how long it takes to award some pretty significant contracts to get a school built, and then how long it takes to actually build the school. I think that when you start checking those dates, you're going to ask yourself: how can this government possibly take credit for any of the schools that have been opened in 2016?

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, just under 29(2)(a) if I might, there's no obligation on the part of anybody to answer any prosecutorial-type questions that somebody might want to ask. The hon. member needs to know the rules.

You know, Madam Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's comments with respect to the Speech from the Throne. As we've said, there's been a significant increase in the capital plan under our government, and to give credit to the past government, the plan that they had put in place was already relatively robust. They had much neglect to make up for from the Klein years and had actually increased infrastructure spending. Because of the recession, we thought it was important to increase capital spending for a period of time in order to put people to work and to take advantage of low prices on construction tenders. That certainly has been paying off very well as tenders have been coming in about 10 per cent lower, and we're able to get more done for the taxpayers' dollars. The previous government had invested, you know, at the peak, so they

were competing with private industry. They were paying premium prices, competing for capital and labour. We've decided to adopt a countercyclical approach and invest when private industry has cut back and try and keep people working, and I think that that's working, you know, very well.

4:50

Obviously, we've continued with most of the projects that were in the capital plan at the time that we were elected. We've continued to do that, and we've made sure that the funding is available for those, and we've added new ones, Madam Speaker. For example, the previous government had cancelled plans to go ahead with the cancer hospital in Calgary. We've resurrected that project and are going to be working very hard to meet the needs of Calgarians.

There are a number of other projects. There is new investment in housing, in affordable housing, new investment in seniors' care that wasn't really there in the past either. We've expanded upon the previous government's expenditures and their program in order to keep people working but also to build critical infrastructure that Albertans need. They need housing that they can afford. Families need that. Really, we need to take better care of our seniors and keep them out of acute care, very expensive acute-care hospital rooms. We're doing that, and we're doing so much more, Madam Speaker. This is about making life better for Albertans, and we're doing that.

You know, with respect to the questions of the hon. member I'm sure this is not an LSAT. This is not a test that is administered by the hon. member to our members. Each member is entitled to stand up and say what's important to them, what's important to their constituents. It's not up to the opposition to try and administer tests on basic knowledge. I might ask the hon. member about his knowledge of labour law, for example, and I'm sure he would struggle with that. He might struggle with a number of other areas that we might raise. The science of climate change might be one of them, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. Government House Leader.
The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Spring is a season of new beginnings, when the long winter begins to dissipate and the buds begin to break through. A throne speech, likewise, can be the sign of a new beginning. It can present an opportunity to recalibrate, to readjust, to refocus. Unfortunately, the government missed the opportunity and instead doubled down on the same old misguided agenda, the same old talking points, and the government is still blaming everything on the price of oil. Of course, it's a factor, but incompetent governance, something the Premier does have control over, is the real issue along with unencumbered spending.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Instead of concrete plans on tackling that ever-growing debt and deficit, the throne speech self-congratulated the government on cutting the growth of government spending. This statement is telling insofar as it exposes this government's ideology for what it is, classic tax-and-spend socialism. Bob Rae couldn't be more proud. Only this government can look at an increase in spending and call it a reduction. Mr. Speaker, when you look at the graph of spending in this government, it goes up, but this government comes into this House and says that that's a reduction. It is because this government subscribes to the idea that the budget will balance itself, I guess.

Now, from the throne speech again: "Your government understands this is its core responsibility, to make life better for everyday

Albertans.” Well, I’ll tell you that somebody better call Burger King because I just found their Whopper. This government has made a lot of grandiose claims over its 20 months, but this one takes the cake. They are correct in that government’s first priority should be to make life better for us. Unfortunately, that is where the truth stops. Let’s have a look at this government’s record.

One of the first moves this government made after its election was to call for a royalty review. As the province entered the worst recession in a generation, this government took a hammer to investor confidence. It takes a special kind of someone to look at an entire industry sector that is facing a major downturn and think that it is the best time to establish a royalty review. What followed was the downgrading of Alberta’s credit rating from triple-A to double-A plus and then, finally, from double-A plus to double-A. Instead of looking to our eastern neighbour, Saskatchewan, for inspiration, this government instead looks to the financial pariah, Ontario, the jurisdiction with the highest subsovereign debt in the entire world. They look to them for financial leadership.

The government did get one thing right in their throne speech. “Albertans are worried about the basics: paying the bills, keeping or finding a job, saving for retirement and their children’s education, and caring for loved ones.” However, I find it alarming that we have a government that looks at Albertan families, sees that they are struggling, sees them finding it harder and harder to pay their bills, heat their homes, and put food on their tables, and in response commits to take even more from them. Have they no shame? This government has introduced the largest tax increase in the province’s history, a carbon tax that they never campaigned on, increases to corporate and personal taxes, and a multitude of other taxes and fee increases. In nearly every way this government has made life for the everyday Albertan more difficult and more expensive.

And what does the government do with the money it takes from the hard-working Albertans? It spends it on ridiculous lawsuits with power companies in an effort to cover up its failure to read their own power purchase agreements before instituting their ill-conceived carbon tax. Another of this government’s claims is regarding its long-standing support for our province’s oil and gas sector. By long-standing I guess they mean since 2016.

On June 18, 2015, the Leader of the Opposition asked the Premier, “Can the Premier confirm that building more pipelines to move Alberta’s energy to new markets remains this province’s top intergovernmental and international priority?” The response from the Premier was sad, to say the least. She didn’t answer the question. She talked about the environment, but she didn’t say that this government’s top priority would be getting pipelines.

Now, on November 23, 2015, I asked this question of the Premier. “Will the Premier now start advocating for the Northern Gateway pipeline? Will she start advocating for the Keystone XL pipeline? Or does she prefer that the oil stay in the ground?” The Minister of Environment and Parks answered that question, and you can guess what the response was: more double-talk, no answer, no support for pipelines. So when this government comes in with the Speech from the Throne and says that they have long-standing support for the oil and gas sector, that’s simply not true. The party with the longest record of unwavering support for oil and gas is the Wildrose, a fact that I’m incredibly proud of.

As a province we are too dependent on selling our energy products to one customer, our southern neighbour, the United States. The government’s climate leadership plan gets pipelines? If that was true, what happened to Northern Gateway? Maybe if you’re Meat Loaf, two out of three ain’t bad, I guess, but for Albertans it was just another opportunity passing us by.

In spite of Alberta’s climate leadership plan the federal government still cancelled the approval of the Northern Gateway pipeline.

What was this government’s response? Nothing. They said nothing. Crickets. When the rubber finally met the road, this government blew it like an overinflated tire full of hot air. On this side of the House we proudly support pipelines in all directions because pipelines are the safest and most environmentally friendly way to get our products to market. The government promises that “Trans Mountain is not the end of our market diversification efforts.” No, the end of this government’s market diversification efforts was the Northern Gateway.

The government recently announced their latest boondoggle, the residential no-charge energy savings program. It’s the program where certified installers go house to house installing light bulbs, power bars, and night lights. Not only is this program a gross misuse of taxpayer funds; it shows a total lack of respect for Albertans’ intelligence. Electricity came into widespread use in Alberta in the 1920s and ’30s. Since that time Albertans have been changing light bulbs in their own homes without any difficulty. It is preposterous to believe that since the implementation of this government’s carbon tax just two short months ago the average Albertan has somehow forgotten how to install a light bulb or plug in a night light.

5:00

I’ll close with this question. How many Albertans does it take to screw in a light bulb? The answer is none because we’re going to pay the government to do it for us, I guess.

Now I’ll move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 1 An Act to Reduce School Fees

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to introduce today Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, for second reading.

In 2015 our government campaigned on a platform that we would make life better for Alberta families, and among our major commitments was a pledge to invest in reducing the burden of school fees on Alberta families. I am so proud today to advocate for this bill, which follows through on this commitment at a time when Alberta families need it most. I am a teacher myself and a parent, and I have seen first-hand over the years and experienced the impact that fees have had on Alberta families. They went unregulated for far too long, and they acted as a barrier to public education.

I know, just as a high school teacher, for example – it was more than 10 years ago – that when the fees were still running into the hundreds of dollars that many of the kids, when they hit the end of the line signing up in September, you know, were embarrassed to not be able to pay that fee. Of course, individual schools might try to compensate for that and quietly talk to people. But, Mr. Speaker, that’s not a way to run the financing of schools. Certainly, it’s time for us to make a change on this, and together – I’m so very proud of my caucus and cabinet and our Premier that finally we’re here to start cleaning this up.

This bill, through a series of amendments and the creation of a new school fee regulation, will effectively eliminate school boards’ abilities to charge on two specific types of school fees, instructional supply or material fees and busing fees for eligible students travelling to their designated school. If proclaimed, this legislation would also provide the government with increased authority over all school fees.

The savings that come out of this legislation, Mr. Speaker, will be seen immediately this fall and will total more than \$50 million annually. That's more than \$50 million moving into the pockets of our families that have kids in school. This is money that families can spend on groceries and clothes for their kids, on their mortgages, or that they can put aside into savings.

As important is the long-term work that will be driven from this bill as well. Our government intends to consult further on school fees with parents and school boards, and together we will redefine what public education is and what parents should or should not be paying for.

Each year school boards collect more than \$200 million from Alberta families in various fees. Bill 1 would reduce this by 25 per cent, and we have intentions of making further reductions in the years ahead. The bill will prevent charges for things like textbooks, workbooks, paper, and so much more. Parents may know these fees by various descriptions across the province: instructional fees, instructional material fees, basic fees. There are so many different names. Regardless of what they are called, they cause a significant financial strain on our families.

Take, for example, the impact of school fees on one family, Brandi and Hardeep Rai, the proud Edmonton parents of five children between the ages of six and 12. The Rais have three children attending Parkland school division and two in Edmonton public schools. They pay hundreds each year in fees: a combination of instructional fees, lunchroom fees, and technology fees. These fees continue to rise every year. The instructional material fee in Edmonton public is set at a school level in elementary, and it's usually quite modest, but it rises to \$50 a child in junior high, and then it moves to \$145 in high school. I had the pleasure of the Rai family coming to watch us as we introduced Bill 1 last Thursday. This bill will save them some money this fall. There's no doubt about that, and over the long-term Brandi believes that it could amount to about one thousand dollars or more in savings just for that one family.

Mr. Speaker, it's significant, and you know, it's high time that we did this. Certainly, I think that school boards were always trying to put the best foot forward for a strong public education for all of the students that they were responsible for. But, quite frankly, the long-term sort of unstable funding that they had to live under really caused school boards to try to stabilize things with individual fees. They tried their best, but of course the first thing that we did as a new government was to ensure that we funded for enrolment, that we projected long-term, stable funding so that school boards could be reassured that they didn't have to keep jacking fees up over the long term.

Mr. Speaker, this is the next phase along the way to rationalize the financing of our schools, to reduce school fees. I mean, just taking this one basic ISM fee and then financing the busing of students to their eligible schools is more than \$50 million. We know that there is more work to do, but certainly what a significant start. It's not easy to do this during these difficult economic times, but then, of course, if our government is having a difficult economic time, we can only imagine that families are having a difficult time of it as well.

We're pretty proud of this move forward. I know that it is a reasonable and measured response to school fees, and it will help us to reduce school fees further and rationalize and equalize the school fee situation across the province over time.

The bus situation is another issue that we're starting to address here with Bill 1.

We note that poor planning and a lack of funding from previous times, previous governments led to delays in building projects and so forth. You know, it should be noted that with our capital project

builds, more than 50 schools are being opened here in the fall. Yes, of course, over time the previous government did announce and build these things, but we built a rational approach by which we could build and have those schools open on time at a much greater rate than was projected before.

Once I got a full picture of what was going on, there were more than 50 per cent of school projects that were late. We brought that down very significantly by building a much more rational approach together with school boards and Infrastructure and the Department of Education to ensure that we could have those schools open on time, to cut those ribbons and to allow thousands of kids to enjoy new schools right across the province.

You know, it's interesting. Just as an aside, Mr. Speaker, at every turn I made sure if a school was being built in an opposition riding to invite that opposition MLA to come and participate in the festivities and also to invite and have the former MLAs that helped to build those schools and planned for them attend those festivities and have them acknowledged in the various school openings that we had over the last number of months. It's very important to recognize that. It's very important to recognize the difference between reaching out and being fair to what is actually happening on the ground or, otherwise, making some sort of snide and unfair comments about taking credit where you're not able to do so.

Our government – what we do do is make sure that we reach out and give credit to all people who are involved in building a more progressive Alberta by building schools and putting teachers in those schools, too. You can't just build a bunch of rooms and buildings and doors and windows. We, through funding through enrolment, actually put schools and support staff and everybody else into those programs as well and to finance their enrolment over time.

You know, it's a little lesson in humble pie, which is a much easier thing to digest and eat than a bologna sandwich, which I was tasting previously. I hope that everybody is reminded about that as they move forward.

5:10

An Hon. Member: What's wrong with bologna?

Mr. Eggen: Well, no. I'm a fan of bologna. I don't want to denigrate bologna sandwiches. With a fair bit of mustard in there, they taste pretty good.

Anyway, back to looking in terms of the busing. You know, we're looking to make sure that we are helping because the circumstances, Mr. Speaker, in many places, especially where we saw rapid growth, places like suburban Calgary and Edmonton and other places like Rocky View, say, for example, is that you had a school being built, but it was oversubscribed as soon as the school went in. So they would hold lotteries – right? – for kids to be able to go to those schools. You can have a circumstance where you live right across the street looking at the school, and you lose the lottery, and you end up having to be bused many kilometres away. By paying for that busing for eligible students, I think we are providing a degree of fairness and are opening the door to more school fee and busing reform and transportation reform down the road, working together with school boards and parents and families.

That was a very interesting time last week. We've seen lots of good support from school boards and parents' associations across the province in regard to taking a stab at reducing school fees. We had the Alberta School Councils' Association that told me that families report that their annual school fees sometimes will cost more than Christmas, Mr. Speaker, for kids and for families, people taking out loans for their school fees in the fall, borrowing against their houses just to send their kids to public school.

I also was just, as many of my colleagues were as well, at the Rural Education Symposium here in Edmonton last Sunday. We had a chance to speak to more than 200 school board representatives from right across the province. Again, they were echoing the same enthusiasm for reducing school fees, and they really thought it was a big step forward because, of course, for our level of government and trustees and so forth, this is a perennial problem for them, Mr. Speaker, dealing with school fees and bus fees and so forth. So, you know, we're reaching out to ensure that school boards are getting that support, that we're covering from the government to do so, and that they're not compromised in any way with other programming or teachers and all of that kind of stuff.

You know, I want to reassure Albertans every step of the way that our program to reduce school fees here will not result in any compromise in other education programming that we have here in the province, that we will make sure that kids are getting the education that they need, and that the reduction of school fees is only a net benefit to them and their families to have that access to public education that they so deservedly should have.

Anyway, we're moving on, and there are questions, and we will help to try to resolve those over time. School boards have requested the opportunity to have their say in the development of regulations related to these fees, and, Mr. Speaker, we're happy to do so. We will work with them because, of course, they know where they are at better than anybody else, and they know where they need to build their fees and to have regulations that allow some greater equality across the province.

What I did hear was a recognition that the amount charged in school fees each year widely varies, so we are intending to take action on this as well. As I've said, our initial focus will be on instructional supplies and material fees because that's where we see the greatest measure of equity possible. You know, I won't pretend, Mr. Speaker, to say that from school board to school board there's not some differential in the immediate year or two or three of building this out because, of course, some school boards charge a lot more fees, some places charge fewer fees, and so forth. This isn't just a way to save money for families across the province. This is also a way to try to pull these things in, to have them responded to in a more equal manner across the province.

Almost every school board charges a fee at some level. We do recognize two school boards that don't, and we will be giving them, based on their population, some equivalency of compensation for them to build programming. Those two school boards in northern Alberta, you know, of their own choice – and I thank them for that – had already eliminated school fees. We will, based on population, compensate them in the appropriate manner so that they are part of this initiative as well.

The removing of the fee will lead to immediate savings for parents in nearly 600,000 Alberta families, Mr. Speaker, so it's a pretty good deal. There are many sitting in this House here now, if you have children, that might, you know, see this benefit yourselves and for all of your constituents, right? It's a pretty big deal. Like I say, the Rai family is a good example of literally hundreds of thousands of families that will derive a benefit from this.

I just want to carry on. Of course, you know, we're talking about the importance of technology in our schools – it's very important, too – and we want to make sure that our students are ready for their future careers in a diversified economy.

This is where the new school-fee regulation comes in, to allow us to start to set some rules for fees and justify to families what the money they do spend is going towards. This regulation would affect all fees, Mr. Speaker, charged by school boards. Right now various sections of the act refer to the charging of fees: for example, section 30 deals with fees charged by public boards for early childhood

services programming, section 34 addresses fees charged by charter schools, and section 60(2) addresses field trip fees. Amendments to these sections would ensure that school boards charging fees for these purposes must follow requirements of the new school-fee regulation.

After section 39 Bill 1 would also add a section that would expressly provide the minister – that's me – with regulation-making authority with respect to school fees. There is currently no such authority under the School Act. As I already described, a number of existing sections within the act currently authorize boards to charge fees; however, these fees are not legislatively regulated. This proposed section contains a listing of authorities in addition to general powers that the minister would specifically be able to address through the regulation.

These additions, Mr. Speaker, are broad enough in scope that they would provide the authority to deal with all matters related to school fees. For example, section 39.1(2) of the act would allow the minister to make regulations respecting fees parents may be charged by boards, including but not limited to authorizing the charging of fees, defining fee types or costs, limiting the amount of fees or costs that they may be charged by the board, the refund of fees or costs, the waiver of fees or costs, the establishment of policies and procedures by boards in respect to school fees, school fee reporting by boards, and penalties or sanctions for a board's failure to comply with the regulations respecting fees or costs.

Specific to transport fees, or busing fees, Mr. Speaker, the amendments are in section 51(3). This section currently allows boards subject to the current transportation regulation to charge fees. Through the amendments the boards' current fee-setting authority to charge transportation fees would be shifted somewhat. Instead of explicitly being permitted to charge fees, they would not be able to do so unless they adhere to the regulation, including the new school-fee regulation. This provides greater ability to regulate certain transportation fees, which, like I've outlined before, we certainly intend to do.

Now, for the amendment that will along with the forthcoming regulation lead to the elimination of instructional supply and material fees, section 60(2)(j) of the School Act currently allows a board to charge parents for instructional supplies or materials. Bill 1 would repeal this section, Mr. Speaker. The new school-fee regulation would then establish which fees may or may not be charged.

5:20

Finally, section 124 currently provides parents with a mechanism to request a ministerial review of matters pertaining to fees after an appeal to the school board. Through these amendments parents will continue to have the right to request a ministerial review of these matters but only after a specified process has taken place. This new process will outline requirements boards must follow to address the parental concerns regarding fees or costs. This review process will be another mechanism to hold boards accountable for requirements regarding school fees.

Overall, then, this legislation will strike a balance between making life more affordable for Albertans with families immediately and giving us flexibility to see further reductions and rationalizations over time.

Since I tabled Bill 1 last week, Mr. Speaker, I've seen lots of support from parents and from school trustees and from teachers and many more quarters of our society. Albertans know how important this legislation is. There's high anticipation for it, and I'm very, very proud to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Wildrose has been pushing for all mandatory fees to be scrapped since 2012, so I am extremely, extremely grateful to see this government step up and make changes so that public school boards can stop charging fees for instructional materials. Fees should not be charged for instructional supplies and other basic needs. This is a most welcome and sensible change, so thank you.

This is a massive win for Albertans as well, so I congratulate the government on its ability to find the efficiencies within the government and to fund, well, it's actually \$54 million or so so that the burden of this bill is not shifted onto the school boards. Boards are already struggling with increasing costs due to the carbon tax and are trying to find a way to provide a quality education for all of our students, especially at this time when we have scarce resources. Each school board has done their best to work within the fiscal constraints with insufficient funding, lack of autonomy with respect to so much of the funding that they do receive.

Next to parents our teachers are the most important and influential people in the lives of our kids. I would personally like to take this opportunity to thank our teachers for their hard work every day, their adaptability to changing environments and expectations. I would like especially to thank the people of Alberta and the public school boards for their dedication and their contribution to this bill through their lobbying and pressuring this and previous governments to find ways to be able to meet the growing financial pressure.

We are immensely privileged to be here in Alberta and to live here, but we are facing extremely challenging times, so this bill is a good start, and again I'd like to thank the minister for tabling it.

I do look forward to full discussion and debate on this bill, and, as always, I have some questions, so I'm going to jump right in. I'd like to look first at transportation, and this is a highly, highly complex funding model. I have to admit that when I first looked at it, at the funding manual, I literally went cross-eyed. Kudos to the government for wading in, but I'm wondering if the public may not be better served if the funding model could be simplified. It might be something you want to think about, going through this process, so that we actually understand what the provisions in Bill 1 for transportation mean.

Some of the questions that I've heard from school boards include things like: do all public schools benefit from this bill, or are there just a chosen few? The minister was mentioning that he had met with rural schools, so I look forward to finding out what that means for rural school boards, that travel literally millions of kilometres each year. As for our urban schools, what does this mean for urban school boards, that may not travel as far but who transport thousands of students every year?

Also, what does this mean for parents who send their children to a specific program outside of the mileage parameters that meet educational requirements of the child but that is not a designated program? I mean, I have personal experience with this. My youngest son did not go to his designated school because of the disabilities that he had when he was younger. We were fortunate enough to be able to go through Renfrew services. That's quite a distance from Chestermere, as you can imagine. I'm looking forward to having that discussion to find out what the parameters are of that, especially if there's not a designated special education program in that area. A lot of public schools actually provide special education programs, but as I'm sure the minister would agree, Mr. Speaker, the parent is obviously the best person to make the decision as to the education of their child, especially if there are specific requirements for that child. So I look forward to having that discussion as to how that's going to be determined and if the parents will be consulted in that as well.

Also, what does this mean for families whose children take urban transportation? Also, there are families who drive their children to school because the bus rides are too long and the walk distances to the congregated bus sites are too far. We have lots and lots of rural folks who have driveways that are miles and miles long. I'm sure any of you who've door-knocked in rural areas know how long some of those driveways can be on a cold, stormy day when you're walking up there. You know, having little munchkins walk down those long, long driveways is not always feasible. Just curious about that, too.

One of the number one messages that I heard from the education stakeholders is that one funding model – and this is really important – does not meet the idiosyncratic needs that we see across the province. We just have to make sure that this model looks at all of the various and thumbprint issues that each of these school boards has. So I look forward to the consultations on that to see how that's going to go forward.

When it comes to a transportation funding model, one size fits no one. Again I go to the transportation funding model. It's very, very complex. So I'm looking forward to those discussions.

What measures will be built into the regulations to allow the school boards some flexibility in using the funding to meet the needs of their communities? I believe I heard the minister mention that school boards may be or will be consulted and included in that discussion to figure that out and how that's to go along within the regulations. I'm sure the school boards will be pleased to hear that that consultation will happen.

On another note, I applaud the government for finding efficiencies to underwrite the \$54 million that is being billed for this cost. Many of us would like to know where those efficiencies come from and if we will see similar new efficiencies each year to cover the ongoing costs associated with this bill. I believe I heard the minister say that this is an annual thing; it will be year after year. Again, I look very forward to the discussions on finding out where those efficiencies were found. If you found \$54 million this year, will you find another \$54 million next year, adjusted, of course, for the increasing costs of the carbon tax and then, of course, the successive years that follow and the sustainability of making sure that school boards and parents are going to be able to depend on this program that reduces fees in schools?

I have a lot of questions about the transportation fees, and I look forward to learning more about that as we go through debate in this House.

I also have a couple of questions about the instructional material fees. My main question is: what is a basic instructional fee? These reductions in school fees: are they limited to the provided list within the bill? If so, we could see some trouble as future ready, as the minister would know, sets out a vision of education that moves well beyond the four walls of the classroom and the school. To bring future ready alive, school boards will have to offer a wide variety of options for students to allow them to take advantage of the dual credit opportunities, to participate in learning activities outside of the school, and to apply that learning to life outside the school. Teachers will also have to provide a whole array of learning opportunities that fall well beyond the realm of photocopying and workbooks.

5:30

The minister was mentioning about field trips and technology and other things. We just need to understand if those are included or not included in the fee reductions. Again, I look forward to discussions to find out the logistics and some clarity on where these dollars are being spent. While on one hand this government looks to foster a

new and forward-thinking model of education, we are hoping that that funding will follow with that mandate.

There are a couple of troubling things, and this just goes to historical issues within this Legislature, with a bill coming forward and the consultations following. Much of this bill will be fleshed out through regulation, which doesn't happen in here. The government has followed this pattern of consultation since they were elected, and it's disturbing. While the intent of the bill is laudable, the implementation may fall short of its intention. Again, we would encourage that many, many of these things that the government is thinking about doing be brought forward here in the debate of the bill so that we can have some stakeholder outreach and have some feedback while we're all in the House to discuss this together.

Given the unsettled climate within the education community these days – I mean, we have, as you know, been very vocal about the secrecy with the curriculum rewrite, with regard to associations that are impacting the curriculum rewrite; the union and lobby groups, Mr. Speaker, that are pushing governments to defund independent schools; public school boards calling for Catholic schools to be incorporated into the public model; and many, many other conflicts. I've heard concern that this bill will be passed before appropriate consultation has given shape to the substance and the provisions of the bill.

There's also some confusion – we've heard this, and I don't know if the minister has heard this as well; again, I look forward to hearing what the minister has to say about this – about why the bill is being tabled now. Previously I believe the minister had stated that the election promise of reducing school fees by 50 per cent would not see the light of day until 2018. So while I'm very grateful, I am curious as to the reasoning behind this. With 50 per cent, we would have seen a much larger reduction.

Is the bill a partial recognition of the devastating impact of the carbon tax on school boards and families? Better yet, the government could just scrap the carbon tax and add in this reduction of fees, and you would have a perfect recipe to make life better for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I do indeed applaud this government's actions in introducing this bill, and I truly, with all my heart, recognize that this is a step in the right direction. But I believe that all of us in this House need to take some time to be convinced that the government has considered the full implications of the provisions of this bill, and I'm very much looking forward to more discussion and receiving some of the answers to the questions that I've asked.

Thank you so much.

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to stand here in support of Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, in second reading. You know, it was one of the key campaign promises. Being in a suburban riding in the south end of Calgary, I really heard from a lot of constituents that it was something that was very important for them, something that they would rely on us as well to make sure that we follow through.

You know, it's funny. Many of us here are blessed to be parents, have heard the great news of finding out about motherhood or fatherhood, and many of us here have held a newborn baby in our arms. The number one thing that we never really thought about when this was coming down the pipe was: what's my busing fee going to be? If I live near my designated school, am I going to lose the lottery? Realistically, it becomes a very big shock when you get closer and closer to that first day of school and you find out what the burden is going to be, especially if you have a larger family.

You yourself, Mr. Speaker, said once that you don't know where you're going unless you look at where you've come from. I'm going

to reflect back and share sort of my experiences as a young parent. I've shared some of them before in this House, about being a 21-year-old and having my first child. It was an exciting time. We made the choice to move back to Calgary from Ottawa after our son was born. We never really thought about school fees in Alberta, what was happening and how they were gradually and gradually increasing, especially when it came to busing fees. To be honest, as we moved forward on buying a house, we wanted to make sure that our kid had a good school, but we also had to make sure that our house was affordable. So, as many experience, our house and the area that we lived in was a little bit further from our school than what was ideal.

As I was building my career and developing as a young person who's trying to build a profession as a young parent, there was something I experienced in the '08 recession. I actually had to deal with a 25 per cent income decrease because of many variables that existed within my employment, like many families are dealing with today here in Alberta. So as I'm continuing to pay these bills that aren't going to go down, like mortgages and insurance, I start getting closer and closer to the date that my son is going to be going to school. And I was blessed to find out in 2008 that I was going to have another child. Eventually what ended up happening was we started learning what the school fees were going to be, and I reflected back to when I was in school, which wasn't too, too long ago. The busing fees weren't as high as they are today, especially in Calgary, especially in the public board.

Right then I was dealing with this area where I was on the cusp of what would be defined as low income. I refer to it as sort of the no-man's-land, where you're not eligible for any benefits, but you're really pinching every penny to get by. I remember hearing on the news a year out of my first son going to school about a hike in busing fees because there was a shortfall in the CB's budget, and that got a bit scary because, you know, I was reflecting back to what it was going to be.

Right now in Calgary our busing fees in the public system sit at \$335. Now, I reflect on the fact that I had a third child. That would be over \$1,000 to take my kids through school, and to reflect back to where my income was sitting when my first son was going to school, I was going to be paying 4 per cent of all the money in my pocket to bus my kids to school, just to bus my kids to school. That didn't include any of the other fees that were coming in there, including instructional fees.

When you're a young parent, you have a lot of pride. You know, you don't want to seek that help. Sometimes people look at you, and you feel like you're being stigmatized, so you don't necessarily seek the help that you need. I'm going to tell you that, especially when it came to that September fee for my first son, that was around a time where it was paycheque by paycheque. That was around a time where, yep, you're going to have holes in your knees for a little bit longer. It was really tough, and this is a basic necessity. This is a basic necessity that as a taxpayer I'm already paying into and the generation before didn't have to pay as much for, so you're really questioning the equity around this. Fortunately, I had a little bit of a shift in career and was able to move up, and it became a bit more affordable for us to maintain that.

But I reflect back to many other variables. I reflect back to where it's a single parent, how when you're a single parent and you have a situation where you're raising a family by yourself, it's a lot harder for you to progress through any structural system and move up the ranks. The reality here in Alberta is that a lot of our single parents, not all of them, are women, and the reality here in Alberta is that there is a huge pay inequity that exists between men and women. I can only envision the burden that we see on many of these single, stay-at-home moms who are in that no-man's-land that I

speak of, where they're not eligible for the supplements and the subsidies for busing, or they carry that pride because they want to show that they can do it on their own and they don't seek them out.

Growing up in northeast Calgary I saw a lot of challenges. I would say that with our new Canadians there are a lot of language barriers that exist. So a lot of people are not aware that these subsidies do exist, or they're worried about trying to seek them out, or there's a lot of pride that exists with it, as I just spoke about.

5:40

When we reflect back to how much is collected by school boards, it's a significant amount of money. It's over \$200 million. Now we're helping assist with backstopping the school boards, which is something similar to what we saw with the tuition freeze. It's our government making sure that not only are we going to implement a policy, but we're going to make sure that we support our stakeholders when we do it.

In the past we used to see mandates – and I use the tuition freeze as an example – where we would say: we're going to freeze tuition; figure it out. One thing that our government acknowledged is that there are many variables that cause increases in overall costs for many of these institutions, so when we implemented a tuition freeze, we made sure that we backstopped our postsecondaries so that they weren't going to take an unnecessary burden, so that we didn't see unnecessary cuts that were going to the classroom, so that we could allow them to continue to accept as many students as possible. That's one thing that we're supporting with this policy. Not only are we implementing the policy; we're helping our stakeholders get there.

It's important to recognize, too, that for many of the people who are in their designated areas and who are busing their students, when we speak about, on average, that a lot of parents are going to see a 25 per cent decrease, to be candid, especially in a lot of the newer communities in Alberta, some of them are going to see potentially more than a 50 per cent increase because they're paying a significant amount of money for their busing fees.

Recently we had the opportunity to have the minister down in Calgary to speak to many stakeholders, including the Calgary school board, about this policy and about moving forward with it. Unfortunately, I didn't have a chance to attend that because I was down in Auburn Bay with the Member for Calgary-South East to open a new school there.

I chatted with a lot of the administrators and a lot of the principals there. We've seen a significant amount of growth in south Calgary, and unfortunately we weren't catching up to the school builds that we needed to with the growth that we're facing in that area. I spoke with some of the administrators about the student population that we're seeing there. They had over 600 kids from day one in that school – 600 – so the reality is that even though the new developed community of Auburn Bay down in the south end has that new school, there is a huge possibility that not all of the kids are going to go there, that some of the parents who live in that community may end up having to bus their kids anyway.

The reality is – and you hear this all the time in Calgary; you hear it in the radio ads and you see it in any of the advertisements they do for any new development – that there's a perception, a misleadingness that happens because they talk about: oh, a new school is coming in this area. Well, the reality is that there is designated school land, and the reality is that we might be breaking ground or that the community is very new and there might only be 50 kids living in that area. But the reality is that there isn't a school right now, there isn't a school for that kid in that area, and the child has to be bused.

Subsequently, these families who've moved into this area because it's going to be a new, well-developed area for a family are going to face this heavy burden. In Calgary specifically, a lot of young families go into our suburban areas. A lot of them, building their careers and sometimes dealing with financial hardships, live in those areas because they're affordable and we've seen inflation in more centralized houses. Just as I spoke about, most families, when they're holding their newborn child, aren't thinking about the school fees that they're going to have to pay. So they ultimately face the heavy burden that parents who have to pay for these busing fees face.

Now, the one challenge that I've always acknowledged that we face with this is that there's been a gradual increase in costs, and the previous government was not looking at ways that we could ultimately support this long-term growth. So we saw gradually a lot of things that were eroding within how much people are paying for bus fees. One thing that we specifically saw in Calgary as well is the subsidy for transit passes. Most high school students take public transit to school because their high school is maybe far away, especially because we have a lot of centralized high schools in Calgary, so a lot of students end up going, you know, dozens of kilometres in some cases. Myself, even, when I was in high school, I went from literally the end of Calgary to downtown to go to high school on a city bus.

An Hon. Member: Was this four years ago?

Mr. Sucha: Unfortunately, no. It was not four years ago. I don't show the grey yet.

With that being said, the fact of the matter is that in the past there was a significant subsidy that parents received for having to pay for public transit passes, and that subsidy has eroded. One thing that our government is looking at is supporting that subsidy as well as we move forward with this program.

The one thing that we have really shown as we implement policies like the tuition freeze, as we implement policies, as we saw, similar to the TEBA board, looking at collective bargaining negotiations with our school boards, is that we've always had a collaborative approach with our stakeholders. We're going to continue collaborating with organizations like the ASBA and all 61 school boards here in Alberta to ensure that we can implement this in a very fair and transparent way, that we can continue having these conversations as well.

You know, when you look back at some of the instructional fees that many people are paying – I mostly spoke about busing fees – the fact of the matter with our instructional fees is that as you go up the grade levels, surprisingly, as I've learned, the older your kid gets, the more expensive they become, especially when you're looking at activities like sporting activities. The instructional fees also start to increase. We've gradually seen an increase in our instructional fees that has not really matched the level of inflation, so it's been that heavy burden that a lot of our students are realistically facing.

Reflectively, I'm very excited to move forward with this because I know it's going to impact over 600,000 students, and realistically it's something that we've always committed to. It's a way that we can help many parents during these hard economic times, and it's a way that we're continuing to make life more affordable for Albertans. It's a way that we reflect on and look at people who are marginalized, people who don't need handouts, those who are lower income, similar to myself a few years back, but who are working hard, are pulling those 50-hour workweeks.

You know, it wasn't like I was looking for a handout when I was a parent. I was coming home at 2 a.m., waking up at 7 to bundle up

three kids, sometimes holding two of them in my arms because they get tired and don't want to walk, to drop my first son off at school. I always reflect on the anxiety that used to come as September was coming closer, trying to figure out how we were going to pay for this, having to maybe delay that credit card bill or maybe having to think twice if I'm going to actually make that cable bill or that telephone bill.

You know, many of these commitments, similar to what we've seen with the investments that our government has made for low-income transit passes and the supports that we're doing with some of our municipalities to really encourage supports for lower income and marginalized people, are really trying to widen that gap because we do recognize, especially in a province like ours, that for many individuals it can be really tough to try to have these essentials, and ultimately school is something that's essential for all kids.

We need to do what we can to remove the barriers for parents, to make sure that ultimately our schools have all the tools they need to succeed and that we follow through with the commitments that we've made. This is the first step as we move forward in our mandate. It's something that I'm proud of, and I know that the constituents of Calgary-Shaw and all Calgarians are going to be happy that we moved forward with this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: A question under 29(2)(a)?

Ms Fitzpatrick: Yes.

The Speaker: The Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for quite an enlightening, I guess, discussion about the bill.

Now, I was certainly a single parent for quite some time, and I remember actually walking and dropping my daughter off and carrying her to take her to school. If you'd just tell me a little bit more about kind of where you think we need to go in terms of giving support in this area.

Mr. Sucha: You know what? I think that we're making some great strides, and this is the first step as we move forward. I really reflect back to the biggest burden as a young parent who dealt with some challenges in relation to a little bit of financial hardship. That was the biggest anxiety, to be completely honest and to be completely candid. That's why, you know, when I was sitting here for the throne speech and we were moving forward with first reading of Bill 1, it got really exciting for me.

5:50

You know, I had an individual here, whom I invited, who's with the Aboriginal Friendship Centre in Calgary. We reflected on how this would possibly impact a lot of people. It was very funny because we actually sort of grew up in the same area of Calgary. It was sort of these parallels in life.

You know, it's very easy, when we sit here, if we've had good jobs for a long period of time or if we've had our career for 25 years or if we're in a situation where we're becoming a grandparent, to kind of forget what it was like to be raising those kids and the challenges that we had with the finances.

It's also important to reflect back – you know, it wasn't that long ago; it was only 25 years ago – to when a house in Calgary was a five-digit number and when you didn't have to deal with as many technologies to make sure that we keep our school systems modern. It's important to reflect back that I was going to school at a very interesting time because it was when we faced a lot of heavy, heavy

cuts. We started to really see that in the implications in the classroom, even when I reflect to myself on the troubles that I had learning how to read and write as a young child and the lack of supports that I had in the classroom, because it gradually went up from 20 students to 30 students, where the teachers were overwhelmed.

So we have a choice to make here, ultimately, and it's either (a) heavy cuts and letting our students pay for it and ultimately impacting our economy in the long term or (b) supporting our essential services and our education system and making sure that we move forward in supporting those families who need it most and reflecting on how we can support them through reductions in things like school fees. Ultimately, we're looking at it as – you know, I'm going to call it the way I reflect on it, that it's almost like a flat tax in many respects.

One thing that we asked Albertans when we were standing up during the election – and this is one of the key things that we said over and over again, and people looked at it as our mandate – was that we asked for those who reaped the benefits of our province, who are earning a little bit more, to pay just a little bit more. Realistically, we still sit here with one of the lowest tax jurisdictions in the country. We're reflecting on how we can move forward with this, and it's asking those who might earn \$200,000 to pay a little bit more so that we can support those families earning under \$40,000, who are struggling to get by day after day, have that support and not see the soaring costs that come from these fees and ensure that we continue to fund for enrolment, ensure that we can give their kids the best-quality education.

At the end of the day, these kids are going to be the ones taking care of all of us in this province when we get old, and they're going to be the ones sitting in these chairs. Maybe it reflects our government sooner than expected. Nonetheless, it's important that we make sure that we do everything we can to support these students moving forward.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It looks like we'll have a few minutes left to wax eloquent on Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, a welcome addition to the Legislature. I think you'll find unanimous consent for this and maybe not unanimous consent for how you're going to finance it. That may be the challenge that you're up against. Borrowing is not a solution if we don't have a long-term plan to address this important contribution to young families particularly.

Of course, it was under the PCs that these fees got out of control. Under the Klein cuts in the '90s the schools had to make up the reduced income they were getting to function, and Ralph Klein's government allowed schools to levy whatever fees they wanted, so they went from about \$80 a child in 2008 up to \$240 a child in 2012 and even higher since. The only question, I guess, that all of us need to look at is: how can we continue to spend more and not get into trouble for those very children and their future and the level of debt they're going to incur?

One suggestion we have on the Liberal side – and it's been in our platform for some time – is to phase out the private school fees as they're able to and find the resources to sustain some of their needs, not suddenly but over the course of five to 10 years. That would amount to something like, I believe, over \$200 million. That could help to sustain the kind of reduced school fees in the public system that I think we're all looking for. According to my research \$248 million is now being paid for private schools in Alberta. That would go a long way in moving us towards a sustainable source of funding and satisfy us that we're honouring our commitment to public

education while not compromising some of the special schools that are in the province that have to be subsidized because of disabilities – learning disabilities, physical disabilities, autism, and significant learning disabilities – and that at this point are under the private purview, perhaps.

I guess that in the short time that I have, I just wanted to make the point that we certainly support this. It's another important step that this government is taking to make living more affordable for lower income people and education accessible for more people at the lower income levels and allow people to keep their own money and use it in other ways. We often hear from this side of the House: leave money in people's pockets. Well, that's exactly what you're doing in this case. You're leaving more money in people's pockets to spend in other ways that they consider valuable and preferable for their own families.

However, borrowing is not an answer in terms of the longer term. We have to be careful that this is also a slow transition away from private school funding and ensure that we deal with the special populations that they are dealing with. We believe that there should be more support for wraparound services, including affordable lunch programs and transportation, as is indicated in this bill.

Subject to hearing more about just how we're going to fund this, we will certainly be providing provisional support from this side of the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any questions under 29(2)(a) to the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View? The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can either adjourn the House, or I can ask the hon. member under 29(2)(a) to

enlighten us further for a couple of minutes about the Liberal plan to make education more affordable.

The Speaker: There's a question under 29(2)(a).

Dr. Swann: Well, I would be very pleased to add more to what I've said. The Liberal plan has been outlined in our platform for a number of years along with the message about shifting more of the private school funding to the public school system. I think that is well recorded. I'm pleased that the government is borrowing our policy and looking at that still although the minister has been a bit ambiguous about exactly what he's going to do with the private schools. I hope he will become more clear with time and ensure that we do provide the more fair response to a public system that is struggling. I encourage the government to look more seriously at that private funding source.

The Speaker: Hon. member, under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Hanson: Yes. I'd just like to clarify: is it your party's position to defund private schools and charter schools?

Dr. Swann: It's our position that over time we should bring all the school systems under one public school system. That will not be quick or easy because, as I indicated, there are some special schools that are only funded by private funds right now. But the goal is the same, to ensure that public funds go to public schools over a period of five to 10 years.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I will adjourn the session until tomorrow morning at 9.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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