



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, March 8, 2017

Day 4

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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

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Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
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Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
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Government Whip
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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
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Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)
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Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)
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Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)
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Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
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McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
McLean, Hon. Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND)
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
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Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
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Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

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

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, March 8, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect and pray together, each in our own way. Hon. members, today is International Women's Day, a day to celebrate and thank the Creator for the people in our world who are mothers, partners, daughters, sisters, grandmothers, friends, and women who lead in families and in communities every day. Amen.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

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.

[Adjourned debate March 7: Mr. Loewen]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Yes, Mr. Speaker, on 29(2)(a) for the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky. I was listening intently yesterday as he took the members of this House down a little bit of a Willy Wonka's wondrous boat ride.

The Speaker: Hon. member, we're not able to be under 29(2)(a) at this point. It ends. So to the main question: is that what you wish to speak to?

Cortes-Vargas: Because he adjourned debate?

The Speaker: Debate was adjourned.

Cortes-Vargas: Yes? Okay. Excellent.

The Speaker: Your main speech? Is that what you're . . .

Cortes-Vargas: That's okay.

The Speaker: Okay.

The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, good morning, everybody. I would like to say that I'm very grateful for the opportunity to have a response to the Speech from the Throne. Thank you to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta for her beautiful expression of this document.

Last year we saw many, many Albertans standing up against a government that wants to alter the very fabric of our community. They stood up against actions of a government that insult the people who built this province. We've seen so many Albertans actually gather at the steps of the Legislature asking, demanding, crying to

the government, trying to be heard. Albertans have tried to help bring some common sense to this government. We have seen a government that is bent not only on altering the very province that they are privileged to govern but also the people who live here.

What this government does not seem to understand is that you can only blame low oil prices for a very, very short period of time and that solid economic policy and fiscal policy are the keys to surviving and thriving in these terrible economic times. This, however, would only become clear to this government had they the wisdom to actually reach out to Albertans and converse with them about their needs and provide real solutions for living through this downturn. I've heard from many of the members opposite that they've had many conversations with people, and I'm curious as to why those conversations did not turn into consultations and then impact the policies that they brought forward. Many times we're able to see outside of our own ideology when we have legitimate conversations with those who challenge or oppose our own ideas, and we have yet to see the government have these conversations authentically with Albertans. Instead, they've simply pushed through legislation that supports their own agenda and that sidesteps Albertans.

This government has blamed the opposition for public concern over unpopular and unwanted legislation and regulations and has accused us of fearmongering and has sidestepped accountability to Albertans. They claim that the concerns that we bring on behalf of Albertans to this Legislature are exaggerations. It's time for the government to get off their talking points, I think. The language that is being used is flying in the face of the open statement of this throne speech, where it states, "We are an open and inclusive society built on enduring values: compassion, hard work, and justice."

This government not only talks down to the opposition, but it also has belittled the very people that they are put here to represent. Perhaps most disrespectful is that this government has said to Albertans who are saying that, for example, they can't afford the cost of the carbon tax to take the bus. Very thoughtful indeed. The government will never – never – win the hearts and minds of these great people in this province in this way. The desire to build a better province lies in the hearts of every member of this Legislature. I mean, I've said this many, many times in the past, that the broad and ideological objectives that guide this government have left us all wondering what it is about the spirit of Albertans that is overwhelmingly offensive to this government.

I'm surprised to hear in the Speech from the Throne that the government claims that they've brought down the rate of spending thoughtfully and prudently. Well, we only need to look at the billions of dollars in debt repayment, the lowering of our triple-A, which I know doesn't seem to be a very big deal to them, and the bureaucracy to see that this claim in no way reflects the reality of their actions and it certainly does not meet the needs of this province.

We have seen an increase in the price of oil and, thankfully – thankfully – we have seen a change in this government's stance on pipelines and our precious natural resources. The people of Alberta deserve a huge pat on the back for that. That came from Albertans and their strength of lobbying this government and past governments to do the right thing and to allow, actually, the folks at the National Energy Board to do their job to help provide information necessary to the federal government so that they can do their job and approve pipelines.

Now this government needs to fully support and move forward – and I see some changes there – toward Energy East as well and Keystone XL. The proof is in the pudding. Right, folks? The eco-activists involved in this government have had their say. Their needs as well as those of every other Canadian will be balanced in

the outcomes of the NEB, and this process must be and needs to be respected and followed so the interest groups on all sides of this discussion have their say. To date this government has fallen short of its claims, especially the claim of making life better for all Albertans. I personally receive thousands of e-mails weekly asking, begging for answers. No government truly, truly invested in making life better in an oil-rich jurisdiction would cap the oil sands, which translate to prosperity for Albertans and Canadians. I just can't imagine how that makes life better for all of us.

What government truly invested, Mr. Speaker, in making life better would bring back a capacity market and then sell it to Albertans as that somehow they're trying to help families when we all know that that cost of electricity will be hidden in every other tax you pay? What government interested in making things better would spend \$9 million on a campaign for a carbon tax when we have massive levels of child poverty in this province? Nine million dollars in the pockets of those families through tax breaks and education: that could have changed lives.

The Premier is on record as stating that the previous government's commitment to environmental protection was anemic and that our air, land, and water would continue to be threatened by government neglect. What exactly has this government done differently?

The debacle over the PPAs is a perfect example. I would certainly appreciate understanding how this makes life better for Albertans. In the government's own words, "Alberta's energy industry creates good jobs, and good jobs are the bedrock of a strong province." Well, everyday Albertans expect, then, from this government that when we are thrown under the bus by people in other nations who call our oil sands dirty that this government will be the first to stand up and educate and alter the untrue perceptions of our environmental stewardship in this province. Some of these perceptions are courtesy of this government. It is now time to fix that. Now, in my opinion, that is how you make life better for Alberta families.

9:10

I would like to give another much, much needed shout-out to Albertans for their work in pressuring this government and others into fulfilling, at least partially, their commitment of reducing school fees and to the government for taking this very first and necessary step. I believe we can go further, as I stated before. Because the numbers in this reduction did not include the carbon tax, we'll see how the numbers shake out. But again to the government: thank you. What I would also like to say, though, is that, unfortunately, what should have been helpful for Albertans is only going to have minimum impact because of increased taxes, carbon taxes, out-of-control spending, expanded size of government, and new spending commitments.

We're thrilled to see, though – and this is awesome – that parents will be consulted outside the structure of predetermined surveys in modernizing the curriculum. Again, to the people of this magnificent province: this is your victory lap. We will be watching to make sure that this government follows through with its promise of parental involvement in the curriculum rewrite, choice in education, and local decision-making at the board levels. We saw this government tear apart a home-schooling community, and we will be watching closely this government's commitments to funding independent schools.

We, unfortunately, see very confusing commitments to literacy, numeracy, and testing for our kids. If we expect to give our kids the best education possible, we need to look at some proven teaching strategies as well as those strategies that link classroom education to life outside the classroom. Our children are not guinea pigs, and

Albertans will not sit back and watch this government experiment with our children any longer.

I look forward to seeing how this government will provide accessibility to services for our very able special-needs people, Mr. Speaker. This is imperative, and I'm grateful to see it in the Speech from the Throne. This government has the opportunity to lead by example through collaboration with all Albertans, but so far what we've seen from this government is labelling and dividing groups of Albertans and using this divisiveness to pit groups of Albertans against each other in its race for scarce resources. The government has created anger and distrust where there was once open discussion and thoughtful discourse.

So, Mr. Speaker, here is my love letter to the government. If you truly want to make life better, you must create a strong economic environment and communities that have resources to celebrate, love, accept, and enjoy each other's uniqueness. Good governance will get to the heart of the problem without politicizing or polarizing society for its own gain. This does not make life better. While we see glimmers of hope in this Speech from the Throne, this session will be very telling. I know that I and the rest of us will be watching and waiting for the actions from this government that demonstrate that they're truly interested in enhancing and strengthening our open and inclusive society that is built on enduring values: compassion, hard work, and justice.

Thank you.

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

Ms McKittrick: I'd like to thank the member for the interesting discussion on the throne speech. I was wondering about those letters that she had received. She mentioned that she had received thousands of letters, and I was wondering if it would be possible for them to be tabled or to have access to them because I'm very interested. I haven't received those letters, so I'm not quite sure what those thousands of letters mean.

Thank you.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, I'd said thousands of e-mails. I will, certainly, if you would like. I haven't read specifically from any e-mails, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure if I need to table, but I would happily provide this House with the thousands of e-mails, without the names, if that's what's required of me. I'm not sure. I did not speak specifically of any e-mail, but I would be happy to send this member – in fact, I will forward you the thousands. I would happily share those with you any day. You just let me know. We'll talk about it, and we'll make sure that the e-mails that are coming to me – I'm not sure what the privacy situations are with that. Let me look into that. But I will happily – happily – forward the thousands of e-mails that I get and happily share them with you.

Thank you for the opportunity, actually.

The Speaker: Are there any other questions or comments to the hon. member under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we come to the halfway point of our first mandate, it is an incredible honour and privilege for me to respond to Her Honour's Speech from the Throne. This provides an opportunity to not only look forward in anticipation of what is to come but also to look back at what has been accomplished and what we had set out to do in our platform.

Alberta has a long and proud history. Despite recent economic challenges beyond our control Alberta also finds itself in an enviable position in the present. Thanks to the visionary leadership laid out in the Speech from the Throne, Alberta has a bright future,

set to lead the country in economic growth. Albertans elected us on a platform of change, of doing things differently. The trust placed in me by the voters of Banff-Cochrane to be their representative is something I always keep top of mind.

On International Women's Day I'd like to pay tribute to the women in my life: my wife, mom, sister, niece, my 101-year-old grandma, and my constituency staff.

I'm honoured to represent such a diverse and vibrant constituency, full of community-minded Albertans, who look out for one another. I'm inspired by them every day. Indeed, the determination and resiliency they displayed during the 2013 floods influenced my decision to run for election.

Alberta is going through difficult economic times due to the low international price of oil. At times like these Albertans expect a steady hand on the tiller to navigate challenging situations, and this commitment was reaffirmed in the Speech from the Throne. Like all Albertans, the people of Banff-Cochrane are pragmatic and sensible, but they also don't shy away from challenges or let hard work deter them from striving to reach new heights, literally and figuratively. It's quite the opposite really.

Take the recent reintroduction of bison into Banff national park, for example. In early February bison were successfully translocated to the Panther valley after many years of planning. This historic return of bison, a keystone species and North America's largest land mammal, coincides with the 150th anniversary of Canada's Confederation. After being absent from the wild for over a century, the bison's homecoming is a historic and cultural triumph.

This was made possible by people like Banff national park superintendent, Dave McDonough; bison reintroduction project manager and wildlife biologist, Karsten Heuer; Bison Belong co-ordinator, Marie-Eve Marchand; and Eleanor Luxton Historical Foundation trustee Harvey Locke, just to name a few. This was a significant team effort, and I'd like to thank all of those involved in this historical undertaking. There are too many to name them all.

Preceding the physical reintroduction of the bison, another example of determined co-operation took place during the signing of the Buffalo treaty during the summer of 2015 in Banff. At that time First Nations from both sides of the Canada-U.S. border gathered in Banff to welcome the Stoney Nakoda and the Samson Cree as signatories to this treaty of renewal, co-operation, and restoration.

It is truly inspiring to see the recognition of our past creating a path toward a vibrant future. This is especially so with respect to the reconciliation process with Canada's indigenous peoples. The traditional territory of the Stoney Nakoda First Nation, or *Īyāhé* Nakoda, includes Banff national park. A letter signed by 20 First Nations leaders is calling for the name of Tunnel Mountain to be changed to its traditional name, Sacred Buffalo Guardian Mountain.

Alberta's wild spaces are world renowned and form an important part of Albertans' personal and collective identity. From our rugged mountain landscapes, rolling grasslands and foothills, boreal forests, and badlands, tourists from across Canada and around the world have a visit to Alberta on their bucket list.

Banff-Cochrane is fortunate to be home of the global water futures research station led by Dr. John Pomeroy. Over the next seven years the program will involve 18 universities and over 700 scientists studying ways to improve disaster warnings, water quality, and finding innovative ways for local and regional governments to adapt to and manage risks related to climate change.

During the Speech from the Throne, Her Honour told us that the government will continue to improve parks across our province and build on the historic protections that have already been brought into place such as the recently announced protections for the Castle region. The constituents of Banff-Cochrane are especially delighted

to hear about improvements to Alberta's provincial parks, many of which are located in this constituency.

Camping and recreating in Alberta's outdoors is a family pastime, where many fond memories are formed. Albertans and visitors love to hike, fish, hunt, and enjoy our natural places. Greeting those visitors are our world-class tourism partners. Whether you're looking for the thrill of a dogsled tour across the Continental Divide in Lake Louise, snowboarding on Olympic terrain at Nakiska, being pampered in the spa in Banff, attempting some of the world's most difficult rock climbing routes in Canmore, watching the Lions Club rodeo in Cochrane, or cross-country skiing in Bragg Creek, there are family-friendly activities for all ages and all ability levels throughout Banff-Cochrane.

9:20

Supporting the businesses who cater to visitors and locals alike are several active and engaged chambers of commerce and business associations throughout the constituency. Launching just this past January, the newest addition to these hard-working groups is the Bow Valley Chamber of Commerce. I had the honour of attending several of their conversation cafés while they were in the formative stages of creating a chamber.

I'd like to congratulate for their efforts the founding members of the Bow Valley Chamber of Commerce: Chair Brian McClure, Vice-chair Stephanie O'Brien, Treasurer Stefan Armstrong, Secretary Elaine McPherson, and members at large Isabelle Daigneault and Darin Fauth. I look forward to working with them and all other businesses as we diversify and strengthen Alberta's economy together.

Banff-Cochrane is fortunate to be home to no fewer than five craft breweries and two craft distilleries. The newest additions – Wild Life Distillery, Canmore Brewing, Half Hitch Brewing, and Bragg Creek Brewing – join their more established counterparts Grizzly Paw brewing, Banff Ave. Brewing, and Park Distillery. The Minister of Finance is known for declaring that beer is good, and I'd like to add that craft spirits are good.

The tourism sector in Banff-Cochrane is thriving. Canadians are looking forward to celebrating 150 years of confederacy, and many are planning a visit to Banff, home of Canada's first national park. To help ensure that these visitors have the best possible experience, our government recently committed \$14 million for public transit projects in the Canmore to Lake Louise corridor.

There are many tourist attractions to choose from for those visiting Banff-Cochrane. The Whyte Museum, located in Banff and founded by Peter and Catharine Whyte, inspires visitors by providing a glimpse into the area's rich history. Museum Director Vince Varga, Board Chair Marino DiManno, and CEO Brett Oland work incredibly hard to collect, preserve, and tell these important stories.

Another unique attraction for visitors near and far is the Cochrane Lions Club Labour Day rodeo. I'd like to thank Lions Club President Darren Begg for inviting me to celebrate the rodeo's 50th year this past September. The rodeo is considered one of the toughest amateur events in Canada.

The Cochrane & District Agricultural Society is yet another organization serving Cochrane and the surrounding areas. President Justin Burwash and the board of the ag society are working hard to preserve and promote Alberta's traditional roots.

While we work hard to celebrate and preserve Alberta's proud heritage, we must also work to ensure a bright future. Her Honour's Speech from the Throne indicated that our government plans to do exactly that by supporting energy efficiency programs. The programs will help families, businesses, nonprofits, farmers, municipalities, and indigenous communities to save money by

supporting more energy efficient appliances, heating, lighting, and more. In addition, the government will make it more affordable to install solar panels on homes, supporting jobs and growth in Alberta's residential solar industry, and helping families power their homes with more green energy.

KCP Energy, located in Canmore, is one such company that helps homeowners to use less energy and save more. With young children and a strong belief that climate change is real, KCP Energy founder, president and CEO Geoff Domenico decided to create a business that would help his family and others to move towards living more sustainably.

Consideration of what the future holds in store for generations to come is a strong motivator for action. When a child's home isn't safe, we have a responsibility to step in and do whatever it takes to make sure that kids are protected. As Her Honour said in the Speech from the Throne: "Child protection is one of the most important services any government can provide, and we owe it to our children to get it right." It is for this reason that I'm honoured and humbled to be a member of the all-party Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention. Building on the work of this panel, the government plans to introduce new legislation focused on ensuring that child death reviews receive the utmost care and attention. This is difficult yet important work, and I'm committed to working hard alongside fellow panel members to ensure that children are protected.

I was also pleased to hear in the Speech from the Throne that the government will work to better help and protect victims of sexual and domestic violence with the introduction of legislation that eliminates barriers to pursuing justice. This work will complement that being done by the Banff YWCA, which offers a safe place for those leaving domestic violence situations in the Bow Valley. The Banff YWCA's women's emergency shelter project is led by CEO Connie MacDonald, with a strong team and talented board supporting her. A person of courage and determination, Connie and the YWCA team are working to create a made-in-the-Bow Valley solution.

Affordable housing in Banff-Cochrane is a long-standing issue. I was pleased to hear Her Honour refer to our government's commitment to continue to address long-overdue repairs of the affordable housing units we already have and to build more units for families and seniors in need. Affordable housing helps make our communities whole, and these are essential in communities like Cochrane, Canmore, and Banff, where housing costs are high.

I'd like to express my gratitude on behalf of the constituents of Banff-Cochrane for Her Honour's comments in the Speech from the Throne regarding our government's commitment to building infrastructure, supporting public education, and health care. This will especially benefit residents of Cochrane, which was the second-fastest growing municipality in Canada according to the most recent census. Residents of Cochrane will benefit from the construction of a new school, the Calgary cancer centre, and the Calgary ring road. I'm looking forward to attending the grand opening of RancheView school in Cochrane later this month.

Our government's legislative and policy agenda is bold and ambitious and exactly what Alberta needs in this time of economic recovery. As Her Honour concluded in the Speech from the Throne:

Though the world around us may be growing more uncertain, your government will remain calm and focused. Now is not the time to let our steady hand waver. As we have from the start, we will continue to create jobs, diversify our economy, and protect the health and education services on which families rely. In that work we will make life better for Alberta families.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I took particular interest in the Member for Banff-Cochrane's comments regarding the reintroduction of bison into the national park area. It sounds like he is well versed in that and took great interest in that. He also made significant comment in regard to the people that were involved in the reintroduction and going forward, so I was wondering if he could provide to the Chamber the wildlife management plan for the reintroduction of that.

I noticed also that the minister of environment is here today. I don't want to offend any sensitive ears, but the introduction of elk onto the Suffield base, that was also federal property, did not have a wildlife management plan and to this day still does not. We've since only recently learned that those animals have had chronic wasting disease discovered in the facility there. I'm wondering if the Member for Banff-Cochrane could tell us if there is indeed a wildlife management plan that's available for the introduction of those species in a national park.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much for the opportunity to expand on the reintroduction of bison. As I mentioned during my speech, the bison are a keystone species in the Rocky Mountain area. The activity of the bison, the way they eat and graze, stimulates the biodiversity of the region. Then, you know, their dung supports insect species, which also feeds the birds, and the birds also use the bison fur that they rub on the trees to line their nests. So it's an incredible opportunity to increase biodiversity in the region.

I'm not an expert, but I was fortunate to attend a ceremony in Banff national park just last week at the cave and basin site, where the folks involved in the reintroduction told us the background story of how they were introduced. The way I understand it, the plan for reintroduction for the next two years or so is to keep the bison in, as they call it, a soft release pen. There are 16 animals. Most of them are pregnant females, about two or three years old, so the plan is to have them calve about twice in this enclosed area so that they have a better understanding of the geography and they create sort of a home base, a home territory in that region.

9:30

Once those calvings have been successful – and there's a team supporting the bison through that process – then they're going to open up the pen and have them wander in a larger area. The area that they were reintroduced to in the Panther valley is ideal for buffalo grazing, bison grazing because it's a very grassy area and there are also lots of natural barriers for the bison. They have a large space for a home range to roam, but even without a pen they're somewhat contained in a certain valley.

It's quite an exciting project. This is something that our indigenous and First Nations people are very excited about. It's something that required an incredible amount of collaboration and planning. They had to bring in a heavy-lift helicopter from the west coast to carry the bison to the soft-release enclosure. The buffalo came from Elk Island national park. This is a place where they keep bison, and it was part of the plan all along to select healthy young animals that were pregnant and bring them to the enclosure.

I'm really excited to see how this goes. I know that people are watching this closely and interested to see what other effects this reintroduction might have. You know, it's a really great way to celebrate Canada's 150th birthday as well.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under 29(2)(a) to reflect upon the response to the Speech from the Throne from the Member for Banff-Cochrane. I want to ask him to tell us a little bit more about the balance that's always been sought in the Banff-Cochrane area with respect to keeping a balance between environmental protection and economic development. It's something that's been going on for decades and decades. I remember one family's story, that's been told often... [The time limit for questions and comments expired]

The Speaker: Respectfully, hon. member, you don't get to ask the question.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege to respond to the forward-looking Speech from the Throne we heard last week, especially on International Women's Day. Throughout the world today people are commemorating the struggle for women's rights. This is feminism, and feminism is simply equality, something we're all entitled to and something that is not a cancer.

Before I get started though, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a minute to thank my constituency assistants, Stephanie and Marie, who are in the constituency office today making sure that the people of Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill can connect with their government.

Governments are elected to do many things, Mr. Speaker. To give hope, to lead in good and tough times, and to make life better for Albertans. Sometimes that includes making difficult decisions, and I'm proud of my colleagues in the cabinet and all the hon. members in the government caucus who do just those things. Since being elected in 2015, I've seen how dedicated all members of this House are to serving the people of Alberta, and I want to acknowledge you all.

I'd also like to recognize the staff of the Legislature. I've seen how hard they work. The long hours they put in and their commitment to doing excellent work are obvious every day we are in the House. Thank you.

On May 5, 2015, the people of Alberta chose a new government because they wanted change, change from feeling disconnected from their government, change from obscure election financing rules that allowed those with the deepest pockets to have the most influence over elections, change from seeing our provincial savings stagnate, change from uncertainty about the health care and education that their families depend on, and change from relying heavily on resource revenue that is at the mercy of markets we do not control. I was proud to run for election and support a platform that promised Albertans what they have always needed and should expect from their government: funding for health care and education that they can rely on, respect for the environment, and a commitment to ensure that people in the province will get the maximum benefit possible from natural resources that belong to all of us.

Our government under the leadership of our Premier is committed to serving Albertans. With the clear agenda detailed in the throne speech and with an eye to the future, we're showing Albertans that we have a plan for today and tomorrow.

Alberta is the land of milk and honey, and Albertans want strong leadership. They want stability, and they want to know that the government has their back when times are tough. This is exactly what this government has promised and has been delivering since the last election. Our busy legislative agenda shows Albertans we are committed to their future. Through thoughtfully cutting the growth of government spending, we can ensure that vital services remain accessible and innovation and prudence are valued.

In the last throne speech our government committed to a strong, diversified economy in concert with strong environmental policies. Protecting both our below and above ground resources is imperative to Albertans today and into the future.

Last year the federal government approved both the Trans Mountain pipeline and line 3 as a result of the climate leadership plan, and we will continue to nail our colours to the mast and foster the co-operation that led to these approvals to ensure that the pipelines are built and Alberta oil is exported through them because what is right for Alberta is right for Canada, too.

Alberta is seeing the benefits of the new royalty structure. Already this year there has been more than a 50 per cent increase in drilling activity over last year. While the oil patch hasn't rebounded to where it was before the price of oil fell so dramatically, some of the workers affected by layoffs over the last two-plus years are heading back to work, and the outlook for our province is to lead the country in economic growth this year.

Our government knows how hard the downturn in the economy has been on Alberta families and how important jobs, both in the energy sector and in other industries, are to them. By investing in infrastructure that is essential to ensuring our economy is in a good position to rebound and continue to gain strength, our government is providing the elements that both industry and individuals need to get around, grow, and be productive.

Even with the downturn, Mr. Speaker, Evanston in Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill continues to be one of the three fastest growing neighbourhoods in Calgary, and the people of Evanston need good neighbourhood schools for their kids to attend. I was very pleased to attend the opening of two schools in the area. Kenneth D. Taylor school is named after the former Canadian ambassador to Iran, and each one of the students has been appointed an ambassador to the school. I also went to the opening of Our Lady of Grace school. Investing in this type of infrastructure not only provides good jobs so people can support their families and plan for the future; it builds community.

Other industries are vital to the economic success of Alberta, and our government is supporting small businesses. We reduced the small-business tax by a third, cutting it from 3 per cent to 2 per cent. Stimulating investment and growth in start-ups is an integral part of supporting a healthy economy. By introducing the Alberta investor tax credit, we are encouraging the flow of venture capital dollars within the province. I was very excited to be one of the co-sponsors of this bill.

I worked in information technology for a number of years, helping companies in manufacturing, health care, and oil and gas meet their strategic business goals, and I know that the scope of technology is wide. Technology pervades almost every aspect of our work and personal lives. While Alberta has some incredible tech leaders and innovators, especially in the oil and gas industry, the top three tech companies world-wide represent market capitalization of almost \$1 trillion. Our province is full of smart, well-educated people who are positioned to take advantage of the tax credit, grow the technology sector, and create very good, well-paying jobs for Albertans.

Through this program and the capital investment tax credit, coupled with the establishment of business incubators like the one recently opened in Medicine Hat, we are making the province a desirable home for start-ups.

AgriFood will continue to be a shining light in terms of economic growth. In addition to investments made in expanding the Agrivalue Processing Business Incubator in Leduc, this year our government will further support Alberta's entrepreneurs in this sector. Agriculture is what helped to make Alberta the strong province it is today. I grew up in what was a small farming town

outside of Grande Prairie called Sexsmith, and I know first-hand how the pioneers of our province helped create our culture. This is critical to our future.

Many of my colleagues and I had the chance to meet with the Alberta Beef Producers at the Canadian Beef Centre of Excellence in the fabulous riding of Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, and sampling the beef there reinforced something I've known my whole life and was able to brag about at PechaKucha events in London last year. Alberta has the best beef in the world.

Our government knows that Alberta doesn't exist in a vacuum. We need to nurture the relationships we have with current and potential trade partners so our shared economic interests are protected and can grow. Our government will keep supporting and growing Alberta's trade relationships, with missions to Japan, India, and China this year, because the world has an appetite for what our energy, agriculture, and forest industries have to offer.

9:40

What all these actions have in common, Mr. Speaker, is the same commitment, a commitment to creating good-paying jobs that support hard-working Alberta families.

Good jobs mean good paycheques, and those go further when families aren't paying out of pocket to cover rising school fees. Every year it's been getting harder and harder for many families with kids in school to make ends meet. Our government promised to do something about rising school fees during the last election campaign, and we announced in the throne speech that we're reducing school fees by 25 per cent, keeping our promise to families to make life more affordable for them. We'll continue to look for ways to reduce school fees even more. Money should not be a barrier to attending school.

In addition to these strategies to support the growth of the economy, create jobs, and keep costs down for families, our government knows that some people in our province haven't always had a fair shake. We signed the new relationship agreements with Treaty 8 and the Métis Nation of Alberta, and we'll work with indigenous communities and the federal government to make sure that First Nation communities have access to clean drinking water.

Our government has taken steps to make sure that every child is protected because it is one of the most important services our government and any government can provide. We've established an all-party Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, and we will introduce new legislation focused on making sure that child death reviews get the attention and consideration they deserve.

Our government is continuing to address long overdue repairs on affordable housing units we already have, and we're building more units for low-income families and for seniors because everyone deserves a safe, affordable home.

We're continuing to act on our commitment to affordable, \$25-a-day child care, which is a huge help for parents, and families will continue to receive the enhanced Alberta family employment tax credit. We will continue the path to \$15-an-hour minimum wage because no one should have to work three or more jobs just to pay their living expenses.

Mr. Speaker, as a survivor of sexual assault I am especially heartened that our government has tabled a bill that, if passed, will empower survivors of both sexual assault and domestic violence to bring forward civil cases when they're ready by removing the time limitation. It takes time to be strong enough to share our stories. Lifting this limitation respects the time it takes to heal. If we hope to eradicate domestic violence and sexual assault, we must provide the support that survivors need to overcome what has happened to them.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans can be proud of their government. We've stayed by their side during one of the tougher times our province has faced, and we will continue to stand by Albertans while our economy recovers and more people re-enter the workforce. We'll continue to stand by our industries, both the established ones like agriculture, oil and gas, and forestry and markets that are emerging in our province like value-added agribusiness and agrifood and advanced technology.

I'm proud to have run for and been elected to a government that keeps its word, a government that has followed through on what we promised Albertans we would do in spite of the mock outrage we often hear, and I'm looking forward to the many good things we will do this session.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any questions to the member under 29(2)(a)? Please proceed, Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see that in the throne speech we've got the announcement that there's been a 50 per cent increase in drilling, and I welcome that as well. But my riding hasn't seen the people going to work quite yet. I noticed that you had mentioned in your Speech to the Throne that people are going back to work. What kind of, I guess, justification do you have to show that, like, Bonnyville-Cold Lake is going to see the spike of people going back to work? I guess, right now I can tell you that people are still concerned in my riding with how to feed their families, and food bank use is at an all-time high.

Thank you to the member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the question brings up a valid point. It is going to take some time for as many people who have lost their jobs to get back to work. I have seen, however, a lot of advertisements for people to go and work, especially up in northern Alberta, and I often post those kinds of job postings on my Facebook page so that people who are in my riding are able to connect with the employers that are looking for well-qualified people. There are definitely more opportunities opening up than we've seen over the last couple of years, and I'm happy to help the member connect with those companies and share that information with him if he thinks that'll be helpful for him.

Thanks.

The Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne. What Albertans heard in the Speech from the Throne was a continued commitment from this government to value and be inclusive and intelligent when considering legislation. Now, one might say that that's how all governments approach legislation, and that may be so, or at least that's what they think. If that is the case, then it must be that different governments have different definitions of what it means to value and be inclusive and intelligent. The throne speech highlighted what these words mean to this government, and it's very different from what Albertans have experienced for far too many years, and it's very different from what's being proposed by opposition parties or being proposed by other loud factions who are set on turning back time.

Mr. Speaker, the policies that this government has passed and proposed demonstrate what value means to this government. It's a value system that says that at all times and especially during tough

economic times everyday Albertans deserve a government that considers them and that they deserve a government that tries to make their life better for them.

Mr. Speaker, it didn't take long for this government to reiterate its values with its first bill of the spring session, that commits to reducing school fees across our province. The decision to eliminate fees for the instructional supplies and materials and busing students to their designated schools will see parents of nearly 600,000 students save \$50 million a year. These are the actions of a government that thinks about making life better for the majority of Albertans, a government that understands that these fees are a burden to many families and the importance of putting money into the pockets of these families. Not even in good economic times did previous governments see reducing school fees as valuable. They didn't see or understand that school fees can put some children at a disadvantage, that it staggers the starting line.

In addition to reducing school fees, we have introduced the school nutrition pilot to help get our students future ready. Building on our successes, our government has appointed a panel to review the curriculum and has been seeking input from Albertans. Mr. Speaker, it's our job as legislators to ensure that all of Alberta's children are given an equal opportunity to succeed. The bottom line is that not only do we stand behind Alberta's families by trying to make life more affordable, but we simply value education.

This government treats education as an investment, an investment that we cannot afford to not be part of and that we refuse not to make a budget priority. The dangers to our education system with the previous government's plan to remove \$500 million from the budget were immediately evident to our government and the public. I've been speaking to grade 6 students all over Calgary's greatest riding, Calgary-Klein, over the last couple of months, and rest assured, Mr. Speaker, that these kids are aware of those proposed cuts, and, believe it or not, they did not hear it from me although I do get to tell them that we restored the \$500 million to the budget.

They ask me: how many kids would be in my class? Would Ms Smith be my teacher? Would they have had to have gone to another school? Well, Mr. Speaker, this government values education and understands that quality education is a right and not a privilege. I'm proud of this government's stance and record on education.

I'm also proud of our government's position to protect people from predatory payday lenders. We've all borrowed money, Mr. Speaker, mainly to make large purchases that we can't pay in full. But when you're borrowing money to pay bills and having to borrow from predatory payday loan operations, it can be difficult to dig out. We also recognize the need that some may have for these types of services. This is why we introduced new laws covering payday loans. Alberta now has the lowest fee for payday loan borrowing in Canada.

9:50

As well, Mr. Speaker, the government will put more money in the pockets of families as it continues with its plan to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. And let's not forget about the Alberta child benefit. For years we had one of the lowest minimum wage rates in Canada. We need to recognize fair value for work, and we need to recognize the cost of living in all parts of the province.

Another way of ensuring that more money stays in the pockets of everyday Albertans is to reduce the chances of losing money to people and companies using disingenuous sales tactics. That's why this government has eliminated high-pressure door-to-door sales of items such as utility rates and energy products, and as was noted in the throne speech, a consumer bill of rights will be introduced, protecting Albertans' hard-earned money.

What's more, Mr. Speaker, this government has capped electricity rates to ensure that there are no surprises on electricity bills. Electricity bills will always be reasonable and predictable. Instead of a government that builds escape clauses for corporations, we now have a government that takes the needs of Albertans across the province into account, and it understands that there needs to be a balance between what allows the economy to work and what allows families to make ends meet.

Mr. Speaker, in difficult economic times a good measure of a government's values is how it deals with necessary cutbacks and where these cutbacks occur. I'm pleased to say that this government takes a very different approach to trying to control spending than previous governments did. This government refuses to make things worse for Alberta's families by making deep cuts to front-line staff, by reducing services, or by reducing the quality of education and health care.

This government is trying to steady the rate of spending by reducing the salaries, bonuses, and perks such as golf and country club memberships to executives in the province's agencies, boards, and commissions, and it has now legislated that the executive compensation of the heads of the ABCs will be transparent to both the government and the public. Not only were these salaries out of line with comparable positions in other jurisdictions; they were insulting to Albertans struggling to pay the bills.

This government is also freezing the salaries of government employees and dissolving or consolidating 26 ABCs. These moves taken together represent annual savings of \$16 million a year. While this is a small step in controlling the province's finances, it's clear that this government has its priorities aligned with making life better for Alberta's families and is not just here to reward those who've helped us get elected.

Mr. Speaker, this government is built on inclusion – just look at our caucus – and we never forget that with our policies. Our commitment to the LGBTQ community has been a pillar of this government's mandate, and we are working with the PDD community to ensure that improvements are made to have access to services that are required by every individual.

I'm immensely proud that this government had the courage, Mr. Speaker, to protect paid farm workers in this province. This was an act of inclusion, an act that sent a message to the province's paid farm workers, who work our land and grow our food, that they matter, that they will be protected in the case of injury, and that they no longer fall outside of the government's purview. There is little explanation as to why this never happened before other than that it was merely a tradition not to include them. This is wrong.

Mr. Speaker, I am elated that this government developed a Ministry of Status of Women, especially on International Women's Day. This is 50 per cent of our population not given the inclusion that it not only deserves but is necessary for a better society and province.

Another example of inclusivity that may not be as obvious is the bill An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta. What this bill did, Mr. Speaker, was remove big money from our elections. It removed corporate, union, and executive influence from politics, and it levelled the playing field for our democratic parties in this province. I've also been told by constituents that this bill has restored their faith in Alberta elections. They believe that ideas and policies will again be the determining factor in voting and that elections will not be won simply with a chequebook. We will continue to work on electoral finance reform.

Mr. Speaker, it's not a secret that the price of oil has had an impact on Alberta's economy. It's also not a secret that this is not the first time that the price of oil has had an impact on our economy. So why has no previous government made decisions to move

Alberta's economy into a position in which it can weather downturns in the oil price with diversification strategies and make it equipped to deal with the realities of the 21st century?

Well, Mr. Speaker, I just don't know the answer to this, but my intuition says to me that at the core of this is that change is difficult for some. Thinking beyond what you've always known in terms of relationships and the economy and recognizing that there are new ways and alternative economic opportunities is crucial to building a better province and a better world. We need to make intelligent decisions in regard to our economy. Every time there's a downturn in the price of oil, slashing public services and cuts to health care and education and layoffs are not the answer. These types of austerity measures look good on paper, and they work for a short time, but they actually do more damage in the long run by putting more people out of work and creating massive infrastructure deficits that impact generations to come.

Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, we now have a government that gets it. We have a government that is working to ensure that we will be able to weather further economic shocks from low oil prices while at the same time strengthening our oil and gas sector in a way that accepts the ecological realities of the 21st century.

This government has opened up investment in this province with the investor tax credit. We are putting shovels in the ground and putting people back to work with several infrastructure projects.

The climate leadership plan is as much about protecting our environment as it is about growing our economy in renewable energy. It's about demonstrating to the world and the rest of the country that we can have a strong oil and gas sector and still be stewards of our environment. We can use our oil and gas wealth to fund our increasing need to transition to renewable energy. To be sure, we would not have federal approval of two pipelines to tidewater without the climate leadership plan.

The carbon levy will enable us to grow the renewables sector, creating more renewable energy on the grid and 21st-century jobs in this growing sector.

The new royalty structure is paying off, Mr. Speaker. There has been steady growth in drilling and extraction over the last several months, and industry and economists are applauding this incentivized plan. But we didn't do it alone. We worked with industry experts to ensure that we would arrive at a place that was good for industry and the province.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be part of this government, and I am certain that our definition of values, inclusion, and intelligence resonates with more Albertans than the definitions held by the opposition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that in the previous session of the Legislature the Member for Calgary-Klein introduced a private member's bill regarding bullying in the workplace. He never had a chance to discuss that. I know that we've made some commitments in the throne speech to make life better for working people. I know that bullying in the workplace is one of those elements that the member is very passionate about, and he's been working collaboratively with the ministry, so I wonder if he might want to tell us a little bit about that.

Mr. Coolahan: Sure. Thank you for the question. Well, yeah, I was disappointed that that bill did not pass, but that's okay. I'm pretty sure that we as a caucus and the government are very committed to

making sure that psychological harassment finds its way into our legislation.

You know, it is a shame. I think that that legislation is a lot like the farm workers legislation. It just baffles my mind that we don't have that type of legislation in this province. Many other jurisdictions have it, and we wouldn't be reinventing the wheel on this because we can take from other jurisdictions what has worked and what hasn't. The numbers are astounding of how many people have actually suffered bullying in the workplace. If I can remember correctly, just over 60 per cent have been victims of bullying in the workplace.

You know, I do admit that there are a lot of companies that have harassment policies, but it's not mandated, and I think that was the first step in legislation, to mandate that we have this type of legislation in the workplace. I know companies try very hard to make sure that their employees are safe, but without the legislation, workplace harassment policies really don't have the teeth to back up their policies. [A cellphone rang]

What's more, Mr. Speaker, the policies that we do see in workplaces throughout Alberta are kind of piecemeal. There's no consistency to how these policies are written and how they're enforced.

10:00

Yeah, I do look forward to more debate on this, and I do look forward to support from opposition parties on this matter. I think this is a very important topic for everyone in this province. Nobody deserves to be bullied at work in our province. We do a very good job of staying off bullying with children and online. We've worked very hard on that, but we've kind of forgotten our adults in the workplace. We've always focused, unfortunately, just on the physical aspect of bullying or harm reduction, I guess, at work. You know, it's just not enough. I mean, people that have been bullied at work: they suffer symptoms that are similar to PTSD. It's really quite disturbing, and this can go on for years and years without somebody coming and making a complaint, a formal complaint. Even if they do make a complaint, there may not be a harassment policy in place, or the HR department is not equipped to deal with these types of situations because they haven't been trained on it, or they simply just don't understand what their recourse is.

I think what we are trying to do with that type of legislation is to give people recourse when they can't get satisfaction, I guess, or a resolve at work. I would hope that they would be able to go to a third party and file a formal complaint that will be investigated by a third party. Quite frankly, I think the notion of having a third party investigate is really an incentive for employers to ensure that their workers are safe at work and that harassment is dealt with immediately and satisfactorily.

Anyway, I'll end it there. Thank you for the question, and I do appreciate thinking about this topic.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, I would have recognized you earlier, but I was distracted by a sound in the gallery. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for overlooking my . . .

An Hon. Member: Indiscretion.

Dr. Swann: My indiscretion. That would be a good term, yes.

Thank you. My honour and privilege to speak to the throne speech, a very fine speech, to be sure, as all throne speeches are. I haven't heard a bad one in 11 years. The question is: what follows, and what's the action on the ground?

I acknowledge we're here on Treaty 6 land. Our First Nation brothers and sisters clearly need to be heard and seen and be part of the activities of this Legislature more than they have been. I acknowledge a government that, perhaps for the first time since I've been here, recognizes First Nations and the importance that they have and the relationship with them as critical to our success, all of our success, going forward.

This is probably my last Speech from the Throne as leader. Who knows? It's possible. I won't be the interim leader for a third time.

An Hon. Member: We've heard that before.

Mr. Cooper: It's the swan song.

Dr. Swann: I hope to have many farewells over the next few years.

I want to acknowledge International Women's Day and in that context the Calgary Police Service's troubles over harassment. I've been working or trying to work with the Calgary Police Service to establish two things: one, independent hearing officers in our police forces so that the hearing officers for complaints are not past police people but independent, legally trained people. The chief has said that he's interested in this and is going to look at the possibility and feels that it's an important area. Other police forces should be looking at this, as far as I'm concerned.

The second is amendments to our Human Rights Act. Under the Human Rights Act the Human Rights Commission can only hear complaints within a year of them occurring. For many of these women who have been harassed, it's been years, and they haven't felt that they could come forward. We need to extend that period. Just as the minister is doing with respect to sexual assault, sexual harassment should also be included in extending the timelines, and I'll be coming forward with a suggested amendment there.

But the other part of the Human Rights Act that needs to be amended is for the Human Rights Commission to be able to independently investigate systemic concerns like what is going on in the police force today. It's something like 28 women who've now come forward in Calgary in addition to the others that have come forward. It's clear that none of them felt free to make a complaint to the Human Rights Commission, and therefore the Human Rights Commission can't act. It can't investigate without a complaint. Well, if we amend the Human Rights Act – and in special circumstances only. We don't want them going willy-nilly into organizations and pulling down people. But I think it's important that the Human Rights Commission be empowered. In situations like this, where there's clear evidence of wrongdoing and it's being hidden, they need to have the power to go in and launch investigations.

Yes, the speech was excellent, and I acknowledge that many of the issues that were raised were important. We all, I think, could agree on most of the statements that were made. I was disappointed with only one sentence which related to the ongoing crisis with opiates in this province ravaging our families and increasing by the month, even in our remand and jails. Last year there were eight deaths in remand and our provincial jails and 27 near deaths in our remand and jails. The near deaths were reversed by naloxone – great – but if the naloxone or the guard wasn't there, that could have been a potential 35 deaths due to overdose, raising a lot of questions about what is happening, how the drugs are getting in, how well they're being managed by the staff, whether there is access to professional health care workers in there, how they deal with people who are coming off drugs as they come into jails. We need a public inquiry there, as far as I'm concerned, and I'll be again raising that with the minister, which I raised in the fall as well.

I want to acknowledge the bold new direction this government has taken. It's the first serious commitment I've seen since I got into the Legislature to reduce inequity and poverty – the first serious commitment to reducing inequity and poverty – and the first serious commitment I've seen to climate change. You know, I got into politics because of climate change and the lack of action, and I want to acknowledge this government for being bold and moving the yardstick down the field, if you will. Most Canadians believe that climate change is real, and they want to protect future generations from the scourges of extreme weather events, new infectious diseases, droughts and floods, and the increased impact on the global community with refugees and the massive immigration that we're going to be facing. Someone has said that what we've seen from Syria so far is a small indication of what we're really going to be seeing in the next two decades if we don't get some degree of control over all three: conflict, poverty, and climate change.

The Stern report – some of you may remember it, from 2006, 11 years ago – said that we can spend 2 per cent of our GDP on climate change now, or we can spend 20 per cent of our global GDP in 30 to 40 years. That's what we're faced with, and this government has taken that on actively if not aggressively.

Infrastructure: surely worth investing and borrowing for at this stage and protecting our employment here, with interest rates being favourable. These echo the Liberal platform, which I'm very pleased to have influenced this government on over many years of advocating.

10:10

Parks. By the way, I meant to mention parks in the environment portfolio. Happy to see the commitment to protecting our wildlands, our eastern slopes. It needs to go much further, and there need to be, as with everything, authentic consultations. I'm glad to see the off-highway vehicle people being listened to. They're a strong lobby. They're going to be very, very active, very challenging to the protection that is needed in the eastern slopes. Science is the basis for evaluating linear disturbance. We need to make sure we're protecting our waterways, primarily, and our habitat. We can co-exist in some areas with off-highway vehicles, but there are certain areas where we cannot. Our eastern slopes have to be very carefully examined, which I applaud.

The electricity agenda moved ahead without sufficient research, in my view, and with a lack of awareness of unwanted side effects, negative effects, from some of the changes. I will be tabling a motion next week, with the help of the former Utilities Consumer Advocate, offering a regulated rate option that we believe would save Albertans up to a hundred dollars a year, and that amounts to, you know, significant dollars over the course of the next 10 years. We calculated that close to a billion dollars could have been saved in the last 10 years if we had used this form of calculating the regulated rate option over the current one.

There needs to be – and I'm pleased to see it – a stronger emphasis on mental health and addictions in this province. I was pleased that the Premier included me in the review last year. I still haven't seen an update on where that is. There were 32 recommendations. Six were acted on within a week, but we haven't heard any follow-up on the other important recommendations, that relate not only to the lack of integrated mental health services in this province but also now to the opiate crisis, that appears to be out of control. That is all I can say. Whether we call it an emergency or not doesn't matter, but we need to mobilize resources. We need to co-ordinate the departments of Justice and Solicitor General, Education, homelessness, First Nations, and Health. If we don't get all those departments working together, we are not going to get ahead of this terrible and costly tragedy that's going on.

Bill 6 was a wonderful, welcome initiative, again, by this government. They've been part of recognizing basic human rights for the people that feed us every day: the right to a safe working place, the right to compensation, not being booted down the road because they can't perform their functions after an injury. I'm not saying that all farms and ranchers were not ethical and good employers, but some were not, and all workers deserve a standard of safe conditions and compensation when they get injured.

I'm pleased to see a couple of reports come out this week from the working groups. I'm waiting now for the other three. I hope they will not be delayed too long, and I hope they will not be watered down by the very strong push-back from the ag coalition, who only came on the scene since Bill 6 came in. Formerly it was the Alberta Federation of Agriculture that spoke for the agriculture community and agriculture and the ranching and farming industries. Somehow the ag coalition jumped on the bandwagon against a lot of the positive elements of Bill 6 and undermined any belief in the rural community that this is actually going to be good for both owners and farm workers.

It's going to improve both the image of the agricultural and farming sector, and it's going to obviously improve, hopefully, long-overdue child labour standards, which we still don't have in this province for farm workers. There are no child labour standards. Especially in the context of the Mexican Mennonites, I've seen and heard lots of stories about some of the ways that they have been misused and abused, not only by working in situations that are not safe, but because their families needed the income, they allowed them to skip school to go and work in some of these somewhat dangerous areas.

So that is an ongoing satisfaction to me, and I'll be watching for progress reports and holding the government to making strong decisions there.

Health innovation is happening, but it's much too slow and much too piecemeal. We need to address the waste and inefficiency in our major public service health care, consuming more dollars per capita than any other provincial budget and getting poorer results in spite of it. It's not about money. It's about better management, and I hope that the minister is going to be bolder in looking at the ways that the systems are top heavy. They're focused on treatment and high tech, and they're not addressing early intervention/prevention programs in the community that would make such a difference.

Primary care family physician teams are not working well together. They're not working consistently on some of the most important issues plaguing our population, including mental health, addictions issues, child poverty, child behaviour and learning problems. If we don't get primary care networks to work more effectively and efficiently and clearly fit into the rest of the system with the other players in social services, in education, and with the other departments that are important to health, including the poverty work that needs to be done, we're going to see a continued escalation in costs that we're not going to be able to afford without sacrificing many other things that are needed.

I'm happy to see the commitment to high-quality, affordable child care and, obviously, given the financial situation recognize that we can't do everything we would want to do at this time. I'm pleased to be part of the panel reviewing child deaths in care, and I hope that we'll soon focus on the early determinants of child health and family health. This is clearly an area where we are missing the boat.

Since 1994, when Ralph Klein cut social services, we now have 20 per cent fewer social services supports than the national average. It has never caught up. As a result, we have families in distress, families unable to meet their basic needs, families that are in a cycle of poverty and violence and unable to succeed in school. The

vicious cycle continues. I think we have Ralph Klein to thank for that, but successive Conservative governments have not addressed the issues of basic social supports for people.

I'm pleased to see First Nations and Métis appearing to be more of a priority. Clean drinking water clearly needs to be addressed. Both provincial and federal governments have to step up and make sure that we can guarantee every person in this population clean drinking water. We need regular progress reports on that. I hear a smattering from time to time: oh, this reservation, this organization now has clean drinking water, and another one is going on a boil water order. Well, let's make it a systematic and consistent progress report that we get with, again, joint federal and provincial response.

Change is difficult. I think we recognize that. It disrupts people and organizations in their lives, in their work. Essential as it is, the pace of change I think has to be examined by this government. The pace of change in some areas has been beyond what many people can tolerate. Particularly the business community has been giving me an earful. I think that if you want to be successful in the next election, you need to listen to the legitimate concerns of the business community and understand that all the wealth that we are distributing here comes from business.

Oh dear. Is it possible I've run out of time?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you very much for your thoughtful response. I do want to go back to your comment about the opioid crisis. I want to go back there because you and I have had many conversations over this and my over 30 years of experience in corrections. Certainly, I would have to say that staff in every institution in the country, in the remand centres are vigilant in terms of stopping drugs coming into that institution. They do everything that they can to stop it. Unfortunately, it doesn't stop. My question to you – well, I need to back up. Those drugs come into the country, come into the city, come into the province. In fact, Lethbridge police had a huge drug bust of over a million dollars just a couple of weeks ago. Somebody is fronting that money for those drugs to come in. Can you give me a suggestion of an achievable objective to stop it there? Certainly, from my experience that's where it needs to stop.

10:20

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much for the question. I would leave that to the federal and provincial authorities, who know much more about screening packages and substances and finding these.

I would flip that to recognition that maybe we don't have enough discussion at this time about the revenue as well as the spending. We've been very focused on the spending in this government, and I think we need to have an adult conversation about the revenue side as well, recognizing that, again, all the revenue that we distribute comes from business and, yes, some federal transfers, some fines, some land sales, and taxes. I see a real need to examine what is happening on the spending side, though, as I mentioned, in public services through independent reviews, I would hope, of all the public sectors. Independent reviews. I haven't seen or heard any of the ministries doing independent reviews and examining with real action following the failure of certain aspects of our delivery services.

We cannot expect carbon taxes, royalties, fines, and federal transfers to meet the burgeoning debt load, which ultimately will fall to our children. We have to examine other options. We have to look at other sources of revenue. That includes a PST; I'm sorry. We used to have a 7 per cent national GST. Now it's at 5 per cent.

A 2 per cent PST would simply take us back to where we were before. We need to have an adult conversation about a PST in conjunction with a very rigorous examination of what we're spending in the public sector and how we can bring that under control.

I know of all kinds of examples of waste in the health system. That's the system I know best, but I'm sure that there are areas in every branch of government that, because they haven't had an independent review, are not able to make serious and strategic, maybe surgical, decisions about where we can find efficiencies. I would be willing to entertain a discussion about a PST if we're seriously exploring and publicizing the changes that we're making in our public sector through independent analysis of where we could make significant improvements and efficiencies, better management styles, strategies, people who are not doing effective work within their job portfolio. Those kinds of changes have to be much more rigorously done.

I think that if we don't address the growing and burgeoning tax level, we are going to be passing on to future generations a tremendous boondoggle. We've heard already about the \$2 billion that we can anticipate in interest payments coming up. So I would welcome and I think this Legislature should welcome an adult conversation about where we're going to get the revenue to continue as well as finding the efficiencies in our spending.

Getting back to the original question that the Member for Lethbridge-East asked, I think that if we're not screening appropriately for drugs going into the correction centres, if we're not equipping the staff appropriately to do thoughtful engagement with people who may be coming off drugs or who may be addicted or who may be at risk and are desperate to do anything to get a fix because of the pain they're in, then we need to do something else.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to stand on behalf of the Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville constituency to reply to the Speech from the Throne. I would again like to express my gratefulness for the opportunity that my constituents have given me to do this. I would like to thank the Lieutenant Governor, Her Honour the Honourable Lois Mitchell, for sharing this government's direction for Alberta for the next year. The beginning of the speech honours the fact that this Legislature, our Legislature, is built on Treaty 6 territory, something that we should think about every time that we create and debate policy.

All the decisions that we make have lasting consequences and affect all relationships that we have with the people of Alberta. This has never been more important to me than after listening to stakeholders that came to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, where we're reviewing the Child and Youth Advocate Act. This is why I finally seized the opportunity from my friend Doug Heckbert to go out to his acreage to take part in my first sweat. On the walk there we saw a moose bed, a large spot that was made in the snow by a moose that was lying down on the side of the path. It reminded me of the interconnectedness that we have with the land. The elder that was there asked me why I was there, and I told him that it was to experience the lives of others.

Mr. Speaker, 70 per cent of the children that are in care are indigenous, and it's up to each one of us to engage and learn why that is. It was quite powerful. I shed a lot of tears in the dark. I heard a lot of stories, and the elder told me something that resonated with me and that I carry with me, that words are powerful. Words can

build us and each other up, and they can also tear us and each other apart. We must be careful with each word that we say.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Madam Speaker, in the Speech from the Throne we were reminded that Alberta is "an open and inclusive society built on enduring values: compassion, hard work, and justice." It's those inclusive values that are the underpinnings of our government's work, like bringing in the Alberta child benefit and the enhanced Alberta family and employment tax credit that are helping hundreds of thousands of families make ends meet as we work towards economic recovery. That's just one way that our government is helping our communities.

Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, sets the framework for helping take part of the burden of school fees off families. A publicly funded education is supposed to be a right and a cornerstone to helping kids get the best start. Sadly, it's not the reality for many families. I've visited with many teachers that pay for supplies for families out of their own pockets because they see these students come into their classrooms every single day without the tools and basic necessities to learn.

Visiting St. John XXIII elementary in Fort Saskatchewan, I read to a group of grade 4 students who asked me questions afterward. One student stood up and asked me how his mom is going to be able to pay the rent. It wasn't because of the carbon levy. It wasn't because his mom lost her job. It is because this young man's family is part of the working poor in this province. Sadly, they are just one of many families who weren't planned for when government was making policy for the last 25 years.

My own mother, who relied on the welfare program, had her benefits cut, when I was about 11 years old, from \$800 a month, just enough to pay for rent, food, utilities, and maybe to take the bus every now and then – she had that cut in half to \$400. That meant that at the time she was forced to move in with her boyfriend, who was abusive, and it meant that at 11 years old I couldn't visit my mother anymore. I know that our case isn't special.

Growing up with my sister and my dad, socially funded programs like the Alberta child benefit stood between us and homelessness. This is why every time in this House and every time in my community I will stand and defend a \$15 minimum wage in this province. It's a steady increase, and it's an initiative that is supported by the Alberta Council for Women's Shelters. People like my mom, women that are stuck in minimum wage jobs, when they leave abusive situations – we know that it's the right thing to do.

Alberta's government kept the minimum wage depressed while the cost of everything else skyrocketed for almost a decade. So while we know, Madam Speaker, that families are being careful with their own hard-earned dollars, our government is making strategic, well-intentioned decisions when it comes to the money that belongs to the public. Spending almost \$35 billion on critical and long-neglected infrastructure and transportation projects will keep roughly 10,000 workers a year employed.

Two schools that are under way in the city of Fort Saskatchewan are a necessity to the current and future needs of a very young, expanding population of Fort Saskatchewan. SouthPointe elementary will have kindergarten to grade 9, and St. André Bessette, that broke ground last year and at which the Minister of Infrastructure was able to join us, will be home to students from grades 9 to 12. These schools were promised over and over and over again by multiple governments and never got a shovel in the ground. Finally, our government was elected. We understand and the government understands the value of investment in education in

our community. Music rooms, libraries, and school gyms will no longer need to be made into classrooms.

We have a situation in Fort Saskatchewan that remains a key infrastructure issue: the highway 15 bridge. Madam Speaker, let me draw a picture for you. You are driving out of Edmonton. It's the Manning freeway, and you're headed east. It's easy; it's twinned. Traffic moves along as people drive out from Edmonton from work or to visit Fort Saskatchewan or back to the farm or you're one of thousands that are employed in Alberta's Industrial Heartland: Dow, Sherritt, Shell, Plainsman, Stream, Kiara.

It's a beautiful drive as it turns into highway 15. It's still twinned. Traffic is moving, and then for no apparent reason four lanes of divided highway narrow down to a two-lane highway. Heavy traffic, tanker trucks, and large transport vehicles are speeding by you in the opposite direction at 110 or 120 kilometres an hour. You're feeling a little bit more anxious because all that divides you is a line on the road. Then the speed limit for some reason drops to 80.

10:30

Then you hit a light where there are two major highways that come out of major transportation corridors in our province, that create billions of dollars of GDP, that intersect with yours. There are traffic lights, and you grind to a halt, and you patiently take your turn for an hour. You get through the lights, and then for no apparent reason the speed goes up to 100 kilometres an hour around a hairpin turn in the highway down a steep hill. Then, finally, the speed goes down to 70 to cross a two-lane bridge, a bridge built in 1957 that didn't anticipate the size of the trucks that we have now and didn't expect the booming heavy industry. So you cross this bridge, and finally after getting out of that traffic jam that happens every morning, every evening, every day through a short valley between two banks, for no reason other than trying to deal with our province's planning shortfalls, it opens up to eight lanes in the city of Fort Saskatchewan. They tried to solve a problem, but they couldn't because they didn't have the partnership of a province.

The traffic situation is serious. On the evening that I was elected, the mayor of Fort Saskatchewan, Gale Katchur, came to visit me. She said, as she shook my hand for a photo: we need to talk about the bridge. Being part of Alberta's Industrial Heartland Association, Gale knows the economic growth that can happen if we invest in healthy trade corridors, and as mayor she knows that we have lost people on these roads and on that bridge. You don't have to imagine what happens when you go through a hairpin turn on highway 15 after being frustrated, stuck in traffic for an hour. You don't have to imagine what happens on that turn in the winter when the roads have ice and you have headlights in your eyes and you try to move your vehicle a little bit to the right and you hit the rumble strip and it jars your senses. That's what's happened. People have died on that turn and on that bridge. That is why I am continuing to ask our Minister of Transportation to help us find a solution because our core responsibility, Madam Speaker, is to make life better for every Albertan.

Madam Speaker, making life better also means looking forward to the future, creating the opportunity for our resource owners and resource developers to get a better return on those resources. It was incredible news to hear that our climate leadership plan, with a cap on oil sands development and a price on carbon, had secured us federal approval on a pipeline that gets us to Canadian tidewater. For too long we have been dependent on one customer at one price, and this will finally open up markets in a way that gets us a better price, more customers, and a better tax revenue to build the things that we need. This commitment to growing our economy also applies to my core principles, adding value to our

resources before shipping them away. This was perfectly aligned with our government's petrochemical diversification program, a program that has seen the announcement of two projects, one in the constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville with Inter Pipeline. This will create thousands of jobs and diversify our economy.

It's this innovation that created our new royalty framework, that has led to the approval of 158 new wells that wouldn't have been otherwise drilled last year, a framework that rewards those that can reduce their costs and improve efficiency, a situation where Albertans and industry both win. It's for this reason that my constituents wait with intense anticipation for recommendations from the Energy Diversification Advisory Committee's discussions with industry, economists, academics, and labour to find ways to get better value and more jobs for our energy resources and to diversify our economy.

Madam Speaker, my constituency very much wants to be part of the conversation about orphan wells. This continues to be an issue with farm and land owners that have wells abandoned by bankrupt companies that have little to no recourse when trying to recoup payments or trying to get a well capped.

This year work continues to support small businesses, entrepreneurs, and job creators, job creators like Alberta's Two Sergeants pub and microbrewery, located in my home of Fort Saskatchewan. They continue to add new brews like the oatmeal stout and Bear Beer and to partner with other small businesses to create products like IPA beard oil, some of which I hope to buy for my new neighbour, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, or the buns that they serve with their elk smokies that use their own spelt grain that has been used for brewing.

Madam Speaker, our government is also working to help and protect victims of sexual and domestic violence with the introduction of legislation that eliminates barriers to pursuing justice. Bill 2 will eliminate limitation periods that are bound by time so that when a victim of sexual violence is ready, time has not gotten in the way of justice.

Madam Speaker, this government is making life better, and it's never too late to make progress so that we can protect families; so that we can include women in the future; so that indigenous people are not just partners but teachers; so that I can be an active part of our government building bridges to help heavy industry, our farming sector, our youth, our Muslim brothers and sisters who I prayed with in Vegreville after the attack in Quebec, our temporary foreign workers, that need a voice. I am here for them to make their lives better and ensure that they are included with the future that Alberta offers. On this International Women's Day and every day I am here to be part of a feminist agenda.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was pleased to hear the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville talk about the increased drilling that's gone on in the province and that this government's policies have increased that. I was wondering if the member could also give us her opinion on how those increased drilled wells would be protected by the orphan well policy that the government has and if this government is going to give more funding and more stabilization to those wells that are being abandoned. If the policy is going to be increasing well drilling, then how are the landowners, you know, many of whom are her constituents – how would that be protected by this new government?

Mrs. Littlewood: If I understood the question from the member properly, I think that there is a lot of discussion around how we address those issues. There are a lot of wells across the province that need to be remediated, and there could potentially be work there. The government will be talking with our federal counterparts and industry to see how we can address those issues because it is something that needs to be addressed.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Under 29(2)(a), the hon. member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. With much respect to the member who just shared her throne speech with us, I know that she has also talked openly and candidly about her experience with sexual assault. On this International Women's Day I think it's absolutely essential that we as men be in solidarity with women, all women. So I'd like to ask my hon. colleague and member how I as a man, from her perspective, can be a better ally to women who have experienced sexual and domestic violence.

Mrs. Littlewood: I want to thank the member for the question and recognize all the effort that you have made on this issue with your family and with your community and with your friends. You know, standing in the Legislature and talking about experiences like that is not easy because you put it on the record for everyone. It's important, though, to do that because we have the opportunity here to be that voice for those that aren't ready yet to speak about it themselves.

10:40

In the thought of what we can do, anyone, whether it's men or women, it's even just to listen and to be there if they're asking for support, to believe them. You know, the campaign I Believe You was such a remarkable message because the message was that you don't have to know what to say. You can just say, "I believe you," and that's enough until the person asks you for further support. It's a campaign that I believe in because even in my own family or friend circles it's actually still really common to talk about those things and experience that sort of slut shaming and victim blaming that happens with those conversations. Just having that initial step of empathy and believing someone is an incredible thing that you can give that person in that moment.

It was interesting when I had people coming to me, texting me, or e-mailing me and calling me after I shared my own story here. It was interesting how many people felt guilty about not sharing their own stories, and we have to ensure that we don't make those people feel like they have to yet. They can do it when they're ready.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to respond to the Speech from the Throne? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: All right. Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my great privilege and honour to rise in the House to respond to the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne. It's hard to believe that almost two years have passed since that wonderful orange wave brought our government into power. I mean, it's been an incredible learning experience for all of us. I guess one of the great things I've learned is just what amazing people we have the privilege to represent.

[The Speaker in the chair]

As many members are aware, my riding has a big stretch of highway 63 and highway 28, which were the main evacuation

routes during the Fort McMurray wildfire. Just the level of assistance and support without thought to personal cost or personal advantage that my constituents, of course, along with the rest of the province showed to people as they fled I think speaks to the incredible sort of bedrock morality that our society and our province is founded on. It's been this – I think the Lieutenant Governor referred to it as grit – grit that I think has allowed us to weather what have been very trying circumstances for many people. I mean, we've had, of course, the collapse in oil prices. We've had, you know, poor weather in many parts of the province. It's made agriculture quite challenging. Of course, in my own hometown we had our sawmill close, which had a huge local impact. With all these things happening, there could be a possibility that people would have maybe a bit of despair.

That's not something that I've seen. I've seen people being, you know, resilient and hopeful through that, and that extends to our business community as well. There are signs that things are picking up. I mean, one huge thing: Athabasca now has a Tim Hortons, which is a milestone in that community. Much more than that, though, two years ago the future of Athabasca University had clouds over it. I have to say that now it is absolutely clear that Athabasca University will continue to remain a world-class university and continue to remain in Athabasca. Things could have been much, much worse.

I grew up in Alberta, you know, as many of you have. I graduated in the late '80s. When I got out of high school, there was no work. What's more, there was no support. That was the beginning of the age of austerity. It went into Klein's time. I'm just so grateful and happy that we don't have to deal with the types of issues that afflicted us then. At a time when people need support and assistance the most, unlike in the past, that's been there for them. I mean, just think how much worse this could have been. We could have had to deal with laid-off teachers. We could have had to deal with laid-off social workers. We could have had to deal with laid-off nurses. We could have had to deal with closing hospitals. We could have had to deal with our infrastructure continuing to fall apart. We could have had to deal with the very necessary improvements to roads and transportation being frozen.

Just to sort of pause and think about that, just imagine what would have happened during the Fort McMurray wildfire if we hadn't proceeded to finish twinning highway 63 up to the Atmore corner.

Mrs. Pitt: Or budgeted properly.

Mr. Piquette: Yeah. We won't get sidetracked there.

What would have happened if we'd frozen the work on the highway instead of taking out those suicide corners? I'm looking at Mr. Cyr, who I know is quite aware of some of those issues.

Mr. Cyr: Name. Name.

Mr. Piquette: I'm sorry. I was so proud of myself because I remembered to call the Lieutenant Governor the Lieutenant Governor. The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

But, you know, how many lives have been saved and will be saved as a consequence?

I reflect on the additional money that our government gave to FCSS, which I know helped them deal with the spike in domestic violence and other issues that have come with some of the economic troubles with the collapse of oil. So I'll just say that I'm very proud and happy to be part of a government that, at the very least, has not made things worse and, in fact, has made things a lot better. In particular, in our riding has been the great success of the resource diversification program, with the renewed hope that those massive investments in petrochemical diversification will be coming

forward, and our continued support for the North West refinery phase 1, which has kept thousands of workers still working in a situation where there weren't really many other alternatives.

That kind of leads me to a wonderful line from the Speech from the Throne, which I think speaks, like I said, to Albertans' bedrock values and especially to the values that I see in my colleagues, that we understand that "we are an open and inclusive society built on enduring values: compassion, hard work, and justice." These are values that I know Albertans still believe in. Albertans believe in justice; however, it is not always straightforward to know what the right thing to do is even when you know that's what you want to do. Not only does the scope of our values change over time; how we interpret those values in the real world is always changing in light of new information, and that's always changing in the light of our own increasing maturity as individuals and as a society.

I think you can really see that in some of, you know, the important moves that our government has made recently; for example, the recognition of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. First Nations for far, far too long were regarded and treated by too many of us as second-class citizens. We have a lot of damage to undo, but at least I think we're on the right track, and I think that speaks to a growing moral awareness of what it means to treat other people with respect.

10:50

I think this is most definitely true with International Women's Day. Now, I should say, of course, that Alberta historically was among the very first, I think, in the dominion to recognize the rights of women to vote. That wasn't, I guess, because of the goodwill of the men of the province. I think we were kind of led to that and continue to be, but at least you could say for us that we have the good grace to know when to shut up and listen and to change our behaviour when it's needed.

I think this also speaks to, you know, in this past year the recognition of the contribution of Ukrainian immigrants to Albertan society. That's a big change. I remember reading memos that our predecessors, the Social Credit government, back in the late '50s wrote about asking the RCMP to spy on Ukrainians in northern Alberta because they thought they were untrustworthy foreign elements and they suspected them of maybe coming up with an insurrection. I hope you won't ask me to table that document. I can find it somewhere in the records.

Now, they also said that the other kind of really disreputable group that you needed to keep an eye on were those damn Frenchmen up there as well. I have to say that I'm very proud, and I know that my father – unfortunately, he's not here today. I know he'd be happy to see that. He missed that. It's, of course, due to the wonderful work of our Minister of Culture and Tourism that we're recognizing francophone – I'm trying to remember exactly what it's called. But we raised the flag. I think that the recognition of French Canadians as a central and equal element of Alberta society is something that I'm very proud our government has embraced, something that I think is long overdue.

It also just speaks to that real change in our maturity as a society. When my father spoke in the Legislature back in the '80s, for those people who are a little bit younger, I don't think you can really imagine just what an uproar it caused. Now, these were, of course, the days long before Facebook. However, that was also the day long before call display, so if you wanted to give death threats or threats to people, you could just leave a message on the telephone answering machine. We used to get these messages at home. They'd be things like, "Oh, you frogs should be taken up against the wall and shot," or, you know, "Get your ass back to Quebec," and things like that. It was a big deal.

Dr. Turner: Is that parliamentary?

Mr. Piquette: Don't do that. This is going to be in *Hansard*, you know, Dr. Turner.

Now it's noncontroversial. So I guess what this speaks to is that, I think, as a society we are maturing.

This brings me to, I think, my second-favourite job of all time. From 2006 to 2011 I had the privilege of teaching ethics in law and education at the University of Alberta. I had the opportunity to teach education students from around the province, everywhere from down in Hanna up to Peace River, High Level, and, of course, Edmonton and Calgary, all points in between. These students, to a person, shared one overwhelming characteristic, and that is that they all really wanted to do the right thing. Like I said, though, it's not always kind of clear what that right thing to do is. One thing I used to do to kind of shake them up, to get them thinking about moral reasoning was that I used to use a little exercise called Heinz's dilemma. Now, I'm not sure if members have heard of Heinz's dilemma, but it's just a very simple little story. It's a druggist named Heinz, and he had a drug, a very special drug, a very expensive drug, that could cure a very particular illness. Another gentleman's wife in that same community contracted that very illness. Unfortunately, he did not have the money to pay for the drug. So then the question you pose to the students is: what should this individual do?

Now, the answer is irrelevant. What's important is how you reason out your answer. Basically, a moral theorist called Lawrence Kohlberg used this as a way of kind of showing that the way you approach moral questions, the kinds of ways you relate to them, speaks to your maturity as a moral person. So at the very bottom stage, basically, you consider: "What's right to me? What's in it for me?" You know, what works for me is what's right, which basically corresponds to the toddler stage. Everything a toddler sees is "mine," right? But as we mature and if we work at it, we progress. From there, you go into basically looking for: what will make me popular? What's going to help me fit in? What do people see from me, right? That will be the stage of – it's a kind of advanced stage of: what's in it for me? But that's to avoid punishment and to be popular.

However, the goal as an adult is to reach the final stage, which is to think of the primary consideration of what's right and what's right in the sense of even if the role was reversed, if I'm making a decision about that person and even if I was in that person's position, I would still find the decision acceptable. So a universal ethic. It's treating all people as equal and worthy of moral consideration. That's what it means to be a mature person ethically, and that's what it means in the end to do the right thing.

Now, of course, this is nothing new. I mean, that final stage of moral development is something that, I think, expressed – of course, there's a famous little poem on it. Very quickly – actually, I don't think I'll have time to quote that poem. But let's just say that there was a very famous teacher that lived long ago that made that same point but a lot more succinctly: love your neighbour as you love yourself. It's this type of approach that I think we as elected officials need to take in all the decisions we make.

This is what, for me, makes it all the more disappointing to see the . . . [Mr. Piquette's speaking time expired] Oh, no. How could 10 minutes have shot by already?

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Shaw under 29(2)(a). Is that correct?

Mr. Piquette: Could I say something before I sit down?

The Speaker: You need to sit down.

Mr. Sucha: I was enthralled by the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater's comments. I was wondering if he would care to elaborate some more.

Mr. Piquette: I was just going to point out that that's why I find the opposition's resistance to the climate leadership plan to be so disappointing, because as far as I can understand, the position that they have come to now is that they no longer – okay; well, I won't say no longer because that might be loaded. They do not deny the science of climate change. They do not deny that it is being influenced by human factors, by factors, you know, caused by us as a global community. What they deny is that it's our responsibility to do anything about it, right? What they deny is that we have a responsibility, and they use tactics that are, frankly, unethical. I mean, in ethics you'd call it special pleading.

The Speaker: I caution you, hon. member, in the use of the word "unethical."
Continue.

Mr. Piquette: Okay. I guess I think that along with our province it's time for our opposition to grow up. Thank you.
With that, I would like to move to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: You can't do that.

Mr. Piquette: I can't do that either?

The Speaker: I'm not able to accept the motion to adjourn. We're at 29(2)(a).
The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was listening to the member's comments, and I would like to take some time to thank the Transportation minister for reviewing highway 28 and making some alterations and taking the time to sit with me and my colleagues. I also acknowledge that this impacted a fellow constituency as well, and it's great to see that we can work together to fix some of Alberta's problems.

I would like to say this to your 29(2)(a) response. With jobs and unemployment being so high in our ridings right now, how do you feel about an Ontario company getting jobs to install light bulbs within Alberta, when you have constituents out of work just like me, under this new climate change plan that you've got going forward?

11:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Piquette: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question. This is the type of thing that I think I was kind of referring to in the sense that I think that – well, I don't want to cast aspersions, so I'll just maybe quickly explain to the hon. member that we do have interprovincial trade agreements that restrict what types of jobs, you know, or contracts we can have only provincial bidders for. Our businesspeople depend on interprovincial trade, and interprovincial trade is a give-and-take, so we cannot expect other provinces to honour that agreement if we don't honour that agreement. What's more, though, is that this company has established an office in Calgary, and they are hiring all Alberta people to do the actual work, so we will be getting employment from this.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)?
Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As much as I would love to hear about bright ideas and light bulbs from the other side, I'll move to adjourn debate at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 1 An Act to Reduce School Fees

[Debate adjourned March 7]

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to be able to rise as a cosponsor and supporter of Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees. This was a campaign promise. It was something that resonated deeply with parents across Alberta and parents in my riding of Calgary-East. When I was door-knocking during the election and when I've been door-knocking recently and when I talk to people in my community, I often hear from them: "Hey. What's up with the school fees? Are you doing something about the school fees?" So I am so happy that we are doing something about the school fees.

The very nature of public education is that it's free. This is something that we've agreed on as a collective here in Alberta, that every child in our province has the right to a good, free public education. The issue of school fees and rising school fees has in recent years become a bit of a barrier to this promise that we have to children in Alberta.

Education is why I ran. It's why I ran in 2012; it's why I ran again in 2015, because as a teacher in schools in Alberta I felt that the government was not fulfilling its promise to students and to teachers and to public education in Alberta.

I remember in 2010, after I spent my first full year as a teacher in the public education system, that the government made some decisions about funding for education that were going to result in cuts to teachers in classrooms. Many of my friends who had been out of school, who had been teaching for a year, were told that their contracts weren't going to be renewed for the following year. There were going to be fewer teachers in classrooms. In my own school I saw the effects of that. My principal was an amazing woman who worked very hard to be able to keep all of us, and I thank her so much for the opportunity to have been able to keep my job through that situation. But our school did see a reduction in educational assistants, our school saw a reduction in technology that was available, and our school saw reductions in supports for ESL students' technology in the classroom.

It was these collective actions of the government of the day that led me to run for elected office. It led me to be here in this House today because that message, when I talked to parents in my constituency, resonated. People value education in this province. People know that education is the key to making the province better long term, into the future. If we educate all of our students well, to be critical thinkers, to be forward lookers, to be co-operative people, to solve problems, to be entrepreneurial, if we do that well, we are going to continue to have an amazing province well into the future. If we do education right, Mr. Speaker, it solves so many other problems. That is one thing I'm so proud of our government for, our enduring commitment to quality education for every student in this province.

Now, while I am very proud of our public education system in the province, the issue of school fees and their increase has been an

ongoing issue for families and can sometimes be a barrier to accessing public education. As a teacher in the Calgary board of education one of the things that I was responsible for at the beginning of the school year was collecting school fees, which is a downer for a lot of reasons. One, it takes time away from me being a teacher in the classroom. I have to spend time at the beginning of the year making sure that all of my students have collected fees, filing them appropriately, making sure that they get to the office. As those of you who know me know, organization and paperwork is not one of my strengths. This was something that, you know, was not a good use of my time, this collection of school fees.

But it was also a downer because I would have to send continuous letters. I would get letters from the office to tell me: "So-and-so hasn't paid their school fees. So-and-so hasn't paid their schools fees. Could you remind them, please, that they have to pay their school fees?" You know, there are reasons why families aren't paying school fees, and I think those reasons were outlined very well by the Member for Calgary-Shaw in his speech yesterday. Parents don't always want to admit that they don't have the extra money to pay these fees. There are systems in place where parents can apply for waivers so that they don't have to pay the school fees. However, that often involves filling in forms with very personal information, taking those forms to the school, and functionally telling all of the staff at the school that your family is too poor to pay for school fees. That can be embarrassing, and that's something that people don't necessarily want to do.

Sometimes parents would, you know, have to make hard decisions in order to pay these school fees. They might be making decisions about whether to buy their kids extra toys or whether to enrol their kids in lessons because they have to pay these school fees. So in a public education system this is a barrier, and this is a problem.

I do, though, want to say that I am very excited that we are finally moving forward on addressing this issue that affects so many families across the province. I do want to say that I am impressed by the considered and thoughtful approach that the ministry has taken on this issue. When I was at the doors, people would say, you know, "What are you doing about school fees?" And I would say: "The ministry is looking into it. They've been looking into it from the moment they got elected." Part of the issue is that we didn't know. We didn't have the data. We didn't know what school boards were collecting, what school fees. We didn't know how much were the school fees that were being charged. We didn't know what those school fees were being used for. So rather than charging ahead and just saying, "We're cutting school fees," we engaged in some very thoughtful consultation with school boards across the province to be able to see where school fees were being charged, what they were being charged for, and where we might be able to make a difference. This took some time, and we took some heat for taking time. But because of the nature of what we've done and because we've taken time, we're able to zone in on the particular fees that we're able to eliminate right away.

Some of the places that we've started: we've started with the elimination of materials fees and the elimination of busing fees to designated schools. Now, this is going to save parents a significant amount of money. If you look at Calgary, if you consider that you have two students in high school in Calgary and they both take the bus, this could be saving you nearly a thousand dollars a year if your child goes to a Calgary board of education school. You know, that's a significant amount of money. That's money that parents are going to have in their pockets at the end of the month to pay for other things.

I also just want to mention that we have had, if I can locate it, several people who have been onboard with this decision to reduce

school fees. Allison Pike, who's the president of the Alberta School Councils' Association, said:

We commend the Education Ministry for working to reduce school fees paid by Alberta parents. School councils look forward to consultations supporting this legislation as an important step in ensuring the success of all students.

Michelle Draper, who's the board chair of Edmonton public schools, said:

Edmonton Public Schools is supportive of the government continuing to invest in education and in Alberta families. We share a commitment to equity and accessibility of public education.

11:10

When I spoke to board trustees, I spoke to the chair of the Calgary board of education and my trustee on the Calgary board of education the day after the announcement came out, and they said that they were so happy for their families. They have kids in school, too, and they know that these fees can be burdensome, and they're happy for families. They are, of course, waiting to see what comes through in terms of funding to replace the school fees, but we have assured them that the Department of Education has found \$15 million worth of efficiencies in the budget, which we will be finding later, to be able to address the gap that will exist because of the elimination of these school fees.

Now, the other thing is transportation fees. We've managed to look at busing to designated schools. In my ideal world every student would have a school in their community that they could ride or walk to and busing wouldn't be necessary. Unfortunately, due to the growth of many of our communities, this isn't something that's happening, and we are working to address that shortfall with school builds. I, like many of my colleagues, am proud of the schools that we've been building around Alberta so that kids don't have to pay for bus fees, so that they can bike and walk to school every day. I do just want to note that it does absolutely take time to design a school, to find land for a school. It takes a long time, but the reality is that this government right now, today, is building those schools.

I sit on the Public Accounts Committee, and I did see the Auditor General's report that noted that the previous government didn't allocate the appropriate resources or have the planning in place to build all the schools that they had promised. I will quote from that report right now. It says:

The departments' systems and capacity to support the school-building program did not keep pace with the very large growth and complexity of the program. Our audit found that neither department has adequate systems to plan, deliver and report on the program. Both departments were individually responsible for certain aspects of the program, but no one was responsible for overall results, so information on project schedules, including completion dates, was not known. Internal reporting on project progress was lacking, and public reporting was consequently weak.

So while, certainly, the previous government was very good at announcing schools, they were not particularly good at actually building the schools.

I would like to thank our Transportation and Infrastructure ministries. I would like to thank all of the school boards who have collaborated with our Transportation and Infrastructure ministries to get those schools built, to get them designed. And I'd like to thank all of the students and staff. My neighbour across the street has just moved, and she's had to spend the first half of this year in a different school before she can move into her new school. That's a lot of work for teachers, to have to move schools in the middle of the year. But they're so happy to finally have new schools and to have new schools in their communities so that kids

don't have to bus to school. These are huge improvements that have been made.

While this bill reduces two types of fees immediately, the materials and instruction fees and the busing to designated school fees, in my mind the real benefit of this bill is that it allows the ministry to have more oversight into school fees: what's being charged, why these charges are being made, where we can make decisions to cut or reduce fees.

I think everyone agrees that kids need to be supervised at lunch, and I think everyone agrees that students need to have access to technology at school. However, I don't think that parents, certainly, agree that we need to pay for those things. The idea that a student has to go to school and then you have to pay for your student to remain at school over lunch is a little ridiculous to me. Clearly, people, you know, work and aren't necessarily sitting at home waiting for their children to come home at lunch, especially if you have to bus your child to school in the first place. So the idea that you would have to pay for your student to be supervised at lunch is a little ridiculous.

I do want to mention something that I hear a lot. I hear a lot that people say: "Well, why can't teachers just do the lunchtime supervision? Why can't teachers just sit in the classroom while the students eat lunch? Why isn't that a thing?" Well, because they're doing other things, Mr. Speaker. They're supervising extracurriculars. They're tutoring kids that need help. They're doing marking. They're working. They're often working over lunch hour, you know, and sometimes they're maybe not working. Sometimes they're eating. An amazing thing that you might be doing: you might be eating lunch as a teacher.

I would challenge anyone who makes the claim that teachers should be doing the lunch hour supervision to come to a school, stand in front of students for three to four hours, help them to learn, make sure they're not hurting each other, you know, create a warm, welcoming learning environment that all teachers do every day in school, and then I'd challenge them to feel that they don't deserve to have lunch like every other worker in Alberta. Every other worker in Alberta gets lunch. Teachers are allowed to have lunch, too.

You know, through this bill we will continue to look for solutions. We will continue to look for solutions for lunch fees, for technology fees, for all of the other fees that school boards charge. We will work with school boards and parents to make sure that school fee structures are more fair. Again, the public nature of education in this province means to me, anyway, that whether you're going to school in Cardston or Medicine Hat or Grande Prairie or Calgary, your school fees should be relatively the same. I mean, in an ideal world there wouldn't be any school fees at all, but regardless of that there should certainly be some equity and fairness among the school boards so that there's not this vast inequity that we see right now.

One of the things that we are doing is working on the definition of what constitutes a basic education because in order to determine what school fees can be charged and which can't be charged, we have to have a common understanding of what a basic education is, and that is something that we will be working on through consultation. Now, I would argue, again from my personal opinion, that a basic education includes things like technology. I had a smart board. It was helpful. I think . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Opposition House Leader on 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Cooper: Yes, please. Thank you. It sounds like the member ran out of time, so I'd be riveted to hear the rest of her remarks, and

perhaps in those remarks she could also answer the question that I have. I was recently speaking to a school board trustee in the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and they had expressed some concerns, particularly around busing fees. They have some parameters where kids inside 2.4 kilometres of the school pay a fee and those outside don't. I know that there is a wide range of busing fees that are applied and administered at the local level at the school board's discretion.

In a situation like that, where some people were already paying and others weren't, how exactly is the process going to work for them to make the necessary adjustments? Were all of those things calculated when they arrived at their total number? Can they receive any assurances that even though they have local policies around who is paying school fees and who isn't, those are going to be taken into consideration and not wind up in a situation where the government has created the illusion that there's not going to be school fees – and by school fees I mean busing fees in this case – and then next September the school board is going to feel some pressure when the government didn't consider how the local policy had been applied?

Ms Luff: I do want to finish my statement about what I would argue is a basic education. What I would argue is a basic education is access to technology. I would argue that it includes experiential learning outside of a school. I would argue that it includes things like music and art and programs that enrich, you know, every child's educational experience. Not every child loves math, unfortunately, but every child loves something, and I think it's important for students in school to have an opportunity to do what they love.

In terms of busing fees we recognize certainly that it is complicated and that different school boards have different standards when it comes to school fees. The ministry has done extensive work looking into different systems for different school boards and will continue to consult widely with school boards to make sure that, you know, everyone understands the standards that are laid out in this legislation.

11:20

The Speaker: Any other questions under 29(2)(a)? Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently myself and the Member for Calgary-Currie had an opportunity to go to the Member for Calgary-East's constituency to announce a pilot project that the government was launching in collaboration with a lot of our school boards in relation to nutrition programs. I was really excited to go there because it was where I grew up, and I know that that's going to pay dividends. I know that the Member for Calgary-East represents a lot of working-class constituents, so I would love to hear how this is going to have a very positive effect on her constituents in Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you to the Member for Calgary-Shaw for that. I was going to speak a little bit about this, and then you'll catch a little bit more in my response to the Speech from the Throne if I get a chance to do that tomorrow. Certainly, I was thrilled when the school nutrition pilot program was announced. I was thrilled that the announcement was in my riding, and I was thrilled that all of the three schools that were chosen were schools in my riding. The reason that that was is because the need is greatest in my riding.

There are lots of kids, and there are lots of schools who are working with local nonprofits to be able to provide school meals already. Many of my schools in Calgary-East provide school nutrition programs, and they do that because they know that kids can't learn when they're hungry. They're seeing over and over

again that kids would come to school hungry. I have heard very sad stories about teachers who would see kids grabbing granola bars, you know, and filling their pockets on Fridays because when they would go home over the weekend, they knew that they weren't going to have anything to eat. So to be able to provide a program like this to families in my riding means a lot. It means a lot. It saves time. You don't have to pack lunch. You know your kids are going to be fed nutritious meals at school. They're going to be able to learn, and they're going to be able to succeed.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round, round and round, but how are we going to pay for them to go round and round? In the 30 years that I taught school, transportation and school fees were always a discussion that we had every year. As an educator I would sit down with our administration, and we would review the school budgets. We would attempt to find that magical point somewhere between balancing our school budget and trying to meet the classroom needs of our students.

As educators we understood that one of the foundational cornerstones of a public education system was that all of our students, no matter what their financial circumstances, should have the opportunity to have a high-quality education. I think we've heard that shared on both sides of the House as we've talked about this. One of those amazing things that we have as Albertans is a commitment to ensuring that all of our students will have a high quality of education.

Now, that didn't mean that that educational experience wouldn't have some inequities, but as far as the core curriculum was concerned and as far as the educational outcomes were concerned, we believed and we continue to believe that they have to be accessible to all of our students free of charge. But in the diversity of the courses that we provide in our schools and in our school boards, of all of the educational offerings that we have for our students, there is great diversity, and there's often a huge amount of inconsistency from school to school, from school board to school board.

Often financial realities meant that some families in my school would struggle to make ends meet. Outside of school they would have to make tough choices about their kids and where they would find the money to be able to meet the financial needs of their family. Those questions and those concerns didn't end at just their lives outside of the school. They also had to encompass how they were going to find the money for some of those school fees. It was never easy as a schoolteacher, as an educator when a family was identified that was truly a hardship case, for the administration to try to step in and either make arrangements for some small monthly payments, putting them on a schedule, or whether we would have to try to find some form of discretionary funding in our school budget that would allow for the coverage of those school fees.

There was no doubt that there were some years that the school fees could add up very quickly in the lives of our families and of our children. Instructional fees such as photocopying, field trip fees, school books, resource book rentals, band instruments, phys ed fees, cosmetology fees, welding fees, art fees, drama fees: there are a lot of places to spend money in education and in the lives of our students. The list went on and on, and it still didn't include the fees that could accompany extracurricular sporting activities or performance fees. I know that as a parent who chose to live as a single-income family, trying to live on a schoolteacher's wage, the

month, especially in September, often lasted a lot longer than our money in the bank.

Now, this system of handling school fees, while at times burdensome to our school administration, did have at least one advantage. The decisions were often made locally, often at the school level, and at the most at the school board level. The advantage of that is that these decisions about what to charge and how much to charge and how to pay were done at the local level. These were done within a community of people that knew each other. The decisions were always made knowing that the impact that they would have would be on our friends and on our neighbours and on kids, who we cared a great deal for. Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, while a well-intentioned piece of legislation, seems to come at this problem indirectly, and it is putting much of the consultation, much of the decision-making with regard to these school fees under the consultation that will occur after the bill is passed.

The Wildrose Party will be supporting this bill, but we do have some concerns. The first concern revolves around local decision-making. It is the Ministry of Education that will define instructional fees. It may appear easy for those not having taught in the front lines to try to decide what an instructional fee is, but it's not easy. You can't just simply define that fee. Because of the great diversity, it's a very difficult thing to do.

The government has said that an instructional fee will be textbooks, workbooks, photocopying, printing paper, and any common fees charged to an entire student body or grade cohort. This definition and, for that matter, any definition of instructional fees is going to be hard because every school and every school division offer in many cases very unique courses and educational opportunities that may not fit easily into this definition of instructional fees. Even the government understands this and understands the difficulty of this as they have reserved the right to further define what an instructional fee is through regulation.

11:30

Now, there are so many different types of courses and mandatory experiences within our education system that trying to figure out what should be an allowable instructional fee and trying to define and put a price on that instructional fee is going to be difficult. What about safety goggles for welding? What about gym clothes for phys ed? What about supplies for a sports medicine class? What about school fees for noon-hour supervision or mandatory field trips? This could become as convoluted and as confusing as is the case presently in home education when trying to decide what a home education parent can claim as a reasonable expense when educating their child.

Home education expense reimbursements have become a fiasco. Great expense is being created within the bureaucracy of this government as they try to identify and list and catalogue and reimburse in an equitable fashion legitimate home education expenses. It is quite possible that the issue of school fees will go down this same path of confusion and mismanagement as schools, in an attempt to balance their budgets, look for creative school fees.

This is particularly of concern as we look at the government's future ready initiative. In an attempt to broaden our framework and thinking around what it means to go to school and how to relate what we learn in school to what we do outside of school, indeed as we consider that school no longer even has to be conducted within the four walls of a classroom, we wonder where the discussion on school fees begins and ends. We understand that many of these details will be discussed in the future, and I can only say that I hope that the consultation process will be robust and transparent as we attempt to try to understand how we can take what appears to be a

very narrow definition of instructional fees in Bill 1 and help it to serve the students that we educate and the parents that have to pay the fees.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 has set aside \$54 million to partially cover the costs of school fees and transportation, starting in the fall of 2017. Approximately \$39 million is set aside for school fees and another \$15 million for transportation fees. Now, our next concern focuses on where the government is going to find the money for this initiative. The government says that the money will be found through efficiencies. As the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills would say, hooray, but forgive us for not getting too excited until we can actually see a ledger that outlines exactly how this government is going to actually pay for this program. Is this coming from efficiencies found in the Education budget, is it going to come from some other portfolio like Health or Seniors and Housing, or is the government going to download once again onto the backs of school boards and expect the efficiencies to come from that level of government?

The Wildrose Party can and does support the elimination of mandatory instructional fees. We campaigned on that promise. Bill 1 does not come close to the Wildrose proposal, but it is, finally, a step in the right direction, assuming that they don't once again confuse the idea of government efficiencies with the concepts of borrowing and debt. Based on this government's track record with budgets, I do wonder if this government is simply going to find the money by posting another record-level deficit and contributing to an even greater debt burden on Albertans while trying to convince them that the instructional fees will come from efficiencies.

Lastly, this government's bill does not live up to the NDP promise to reduce school fees by 50 per cent and to eliminate the noon-hour supervision charges, so while we will give this conditional support, this move in the right direction, let us remember that it is still a broken NDP promise.

Bill 1 does not simply address instructional school fees; it also tries to hide the effects of the carbon tax on transportation costs in a bill that is titled as all about school fees. Having said that, trying to finally address the cost of the carbon tax will have our general support. The carbon tax is estimated to cost school boards somewhere between \$8 million and \$12 million. How the \$15 million is set aside for transportation costs and how this money will be allocated is, like with so many government bills, left up to regulation. Will a student whose designated school is full or where a parent chooses to register their student in a nondesignated school still be forced to pay a transportation fee?

Wildrose will support this bill, but we have many concerns and questions about this bill that the government would be wise to consider at Committee of the Whole. Will the wheels of the bus go round and round? For Albertans' sakes, we hope so, but it is quite probable that Bill 1 could find itself on the side of the road with several flat tires if the concerns of the Wildrose Party are not effectively addressed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any comments under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Imagine that it's September. You've picked out new clothes, shoes, a shirt, and, if your child is like me, maybe you've bought them a new tie as well. School supply shopping is done. You walk your child to school, or maybe you bring them to the bus stop. They get on the bus, they go off, and you wish them a great first day. That's what a lot of my constituents and the families in my riding are going to be doing this September.

Now, your child is going to come home, and they're going to have a note from their teacher. It's going to say that you owe the school hundreds of dollars in fees, and this is in a publicly funded school, Mr. Speaker. You're being charged for textbooks, workbooks, instructional materials, and whatever they want to call these fees. That's sticker shock. There's going to be sticker shock there. A lot of parents will go: I thought education was free in this province. This is the reality that my constituents would face, will face this September if the government was not moving along with Bill 1.

Every single school, every single teacher, every single principal will say: "Well, we have an opt-out program. We have something for the parents that don't want to or cannot afford to pay these fees." Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, that not a single parent and not a single family wants to be the person walking in saying: "Please, I need help. I can't afford these fees, and my child needs to go to school." Not a single parent wants to be put in that situation with that social stigmatization or any of those embarrassing circumstances.

In this year and last, Mr. Speaker, I'll have opened eight new schools that were, yes, announced by a former government but were not funded by a former government. If you want a school built, it takes more than just an announcement. You must actually put the money where your mouth is. Now, many of my constituents and families know that this government is committed to education, and opening those schools was step 1. It was just one of those many important steps.

I just met with a school group just outside this Chamber, took a photo with them. It was a group of bright grade 4s, and one of the first things that I heard from the parents accompanying them was: hey, we were talking about Bill 1 at our parent council meeting yesterday. These are the things that matter to families. These are the bills that help Albertans. These are the bills that make a difference in their pocketbooks at the end of the month.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Madam Speaker, that's why I'm so proud to be able to cosponsor this bill. That's why I'm so proud to be able to support this bill, a bill that will save Albertans \$50 million and each of my families up to a thousand dollars per year. I've heard from families, from parents, from school board trustees and teachers and so many more people that know the difference that this bill will make in the lives of an average family.

11:40

It was a platform commitment of this government, Madam Speaker. It was something that I was very proud to bring to the doorsteps of Edmonton-South West, and it was something that this government is taking action on to support families. Our government is making good on that promise. We know families are happy to see the relief, especially in these times of economic downturn, of economic hardship. We know families are happy to see that this government is standing up for them, is making the right choices, and is moving in a direction that helps Albertans. We're helping Albertans save money that they can spend on their mortgage, maybe their groceries, hockey for their child, or any number of other things that their kids may want to partake in, that they may want to partake in. It's something where families will be able to say: we can now do what we couldn't do before.

It's important to note, Madam Speaker, that we're able to do all of this without compromising education for our students. We're able to do all of this while making sure that school boards and schools and teachers and students and class sizes are funded exactly the same way they were before, that we are guaranteeing a high

standard of education in this province. Education is the core of our future. Education will improve the lives of all of the children in this province. This is one more step, one more small step, admittedly, that makes their education more accessible and makes students more successful. It's progressive, it's the right thing to do, and it will make families' lives better.

Madam Speaker, the opposition would have us let these fees grow. The opposition would have us tell families: "We can't help you with fees. We can't help you with that little bit of difference in September, with that little bit of an extra step. We can't do that." That's what the opposition would have us do. This government will not stand for that because we're committed to helping Albertans. This legislation gives the government the authority to make lives better. It gives the government the ability to save money for families. That's why I'm so glad that this government is our government, a government that cares about Albertans, a government that's thoughtful, a government that's looking out for my constituents and looking out for families.

The Alberta School Councils' Association reports that some families spend more on school fees than on presents for Christmas, Madam Speaker. That's something that we shouldn't stand for. Instructional and material fees are an equitable way that we are able to make a difference for those families. These benefits will be seen across almost every single school board in this province. The amendments that are being made to the School Act give the minister and the government that power to regulate these fees and help Albertan families. It will also introduce a brand new fee review process that will allow parents to have their concerns heard by the school board of their choosing and to address any issues that they may have around fees.

Madam Speaker, the Edmonton public school board and the Edmonton Catholic school district, the two largest boards that service my constituents right here in Edmonton-South West, have both stated that this legislation will allow their schools and their school board to act in a way that is more equitable and accessible for their students. It will ensure that all of their students and, by extension, my constituents can succeed at school.

Madam Speaker, this bill has my full support. It is simply the right thing to do for Albertan families. If we do not move on this, we are letting families down, we are letting my constituents down, and we are letting Albertans down. I urge all members to support this bill so that we can take action on making life more affordable for families right here right now.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to move to adjourn debate on Bill 1 as well.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 2
An Act to Remove Barriers for
Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and move second 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 help survivors of sexual and domestic violence by allowing them the time they need to come forward and file a civil claim. If passed, this bill will eliminate limitations periods for civil claims related to sexual and domestic violence. Right now in Alberta if a person wants to sue for these types of assault, the action must be started

within two years of when the person knew about the incident. There are provisions in the current legislation that suspend the limitations period in certain circumstances. The provisions of Bill 2 would remove limitations periods for making the following types of claims: sexual assault or other sexual misconduct or nonsexual assault which involve a minor, intimate relationship, or dependant.

Madam Speaker, we recognize that for survivors of sexual and domestic violence the decision to come forward is extremely personal and often difficult. Removing limitations periods empowers survivors to come forward on their own terms, when they are ready. With respect to sexual assault the proposed amendments would put Alberta in line with the majority of the country. However, Alberta will be leading the way in addressing other sexual misconduct in intimate relationships as no other jurisdiction in Canada expressly states this in their legislation. Removing the limitations period for claims stemming from sexual misconduct in intimate relationships would increase recourse for people who have endured a broad range of unwelcome behaviours such as sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, stalking, indecent exposure, voyeurism, or the distribution of sexually explicit photographs without the individual's consent.

The provisions of the bill would apply retroactively, meaning that claims that stem from incidents that predate its coming into force would be allowed. It's impossible to know how many historical claims would have been subject to the limitations period and will be brought forth as a result of removing these. Each survivor will have a unique journey, but this will open one more door for those seeking to hold their attacker accountable in the court system. Applying these changes retroactively is consistent with other jurisdictions and aligns with the purpose of the bill, the recognition that survivors of sexual and domestic violence may need to come forward.

This is a change Albertans have asked for, Madam Speaker, and it's the right thing to do. This government is listening to Albertans, and we're taking action to address their concerns. Every Albertan deserves to feel safe and respected in their communities, their homes, and their workplaces.

When we introduced this bill, we heard from a survivor and from organizations who work with survivors. They told us that this opens one more door for survivors to come forward and provides one more option for a survivor's journey.

Madam Speaker, 1 in 3 women and 1 in 6 men will experience sexual violence in their lifetime. We hope this bill will help to make their lives a little bit better. I urge my colleagues in the House to support this bill.

Thank you very much.

11:50

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence. I know that in this House we have heard and have all the statistics about how prevalent sexual assault and battery is. We've heard harrowing and heartfelt accounts from members in this House about their own experiences with this crime – and I'm extremely proud to serve alongside you for your bravery in stating that – and we've welcomed guests that have bravely come to share their stories about dealing with the trauma that accompanies crimes of this nature.

I'm very happy to speak to the bill before us today, recognizing that this is a step forward in how we as a province treat those who

have been victimized. The bill removes the limitations period for sexual assault or battery as well as for sexual misconduct or sexual assault or battery in certain circumstances, like being a minor, being in an intimate relationship with the accused, or being in some way dependent on the accused. These changes will help protect the rights of survivors and allow them more flexibility when they can bring forward civil cases against the accused.

This flexibility is important because in many cases there are very real traumas that prevent victims from coming forward immediately after these crimes. The intimate nature of the crimes being addressed by this bill makes victims that much more vulnerable to manipulation and intimidation from their abusers. Sometimes it takes many years for these people to escape the influence of those committing these crimes or many years before they feel comfortable sitting across from them in court.

Those considerations could be serious obstacles to achieving justice for survivors of sexual assault and battery, and the government has done excellent work with this bill by removing some of those obstacles. I'm pleased to lend my support to this bill, and I will be voting to see it passed.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence. Today is the perfect day to be discussing this piece of legislation, on International Women's Day, as we all know that most of these acts are committed against women and girls. Every person should have the right to be free from sexual violence and assault, and we all have a role to play in ensuring that right is upheld.

Sexual assault is a legal term used in Canada to refer to any form of sexual contact without voluntary consent. For many people experiencing a sexual assault can be very difficult to understand, and sometimes the true trauma does not set in until very late in life, many, many years later. Many people often have no idea what to do or where to turn for help, support, or even understanding. Since every person's experience and recovery process is unique, each person must decide for themselves what is needed for healing, but it is important that these decisions be made by the victims and that we respect their own unique healing process. This means giving them time.

Sexual assault is a violent and heinous act. It can take years to overcome. Legislation meant to compensate victims and allow them to seek justice needs to reflect this, and this is why I am pleased to support Bill 2. Removing the statute of limitations brings us in line with the majority of other provinces. This is important. I look forward to seeing this bill move forward, offering to the debate, listening to the debate, and I encourage all members in this Legislature to support this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Is there anybody wishing to speak on 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any wishing to speak to the bill?

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The House will be adjourned till 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 11:55 a.m.]

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