



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 13, 2017

Day 6

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

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)

Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)

Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)

Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)

Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)

Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader

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),
Official Opposition House Leader

Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND),
Government Whip

Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W)

Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)

Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)

Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (ND)

Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip

Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)

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)

Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader

Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)

Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)

Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)

Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)

Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (ND)

Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W),
Leader of the Official Opposition

Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)

Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)

Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)

Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)

Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)

Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
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Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

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Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

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Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Anderson, S.	Gotfried
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Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
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Babcock	McKitrick
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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woppard
Kleinsteuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 13, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us bow our heads and reflect or pray, each in our own way. Let us be reminded of the great gift it is to serve the people of Alberta. Allow us to be mindful and understanding of all those who call Alberta home. From our indigenous people to new Canadians we are one. We each share our Commonwealth.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark. I would invite you to sing, each in your own language.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Commonwealth Day Message from the Queen

The Speaker: Before we begin today, I would like to take a moment to recognize that today is Commonwealth Day. I have a message from the Queen, and I'd like to read it to you. Copies of this message have been placed on your desk for your reference: Commonwealth Day message of Her Majesty the Queen, head of the Commonwealth.

This Commonwealth Day, a Baton will set out from Buckingham Palace and begin a long and extraordinary journey. Over the next twelve months, the Baton will visit people living in the nations and territories of our Commonwealth family in every continent and ocean.

Carried on its way by thousands of people of all ages and backgrounds, by the time it reaches its final destination, the Queen's Baton will have brought together through its route and symbolism, almost 2.5 billion people who share the special connection of being Commonwealth citizens.

Contained within the Baton will be a written message that will be opened and read at the Commonwealth Games in Australia next year. However, there is an even more powerful message to be seen and experienced as the Baton passes from hand to hand, from seashore to mountaintop, through cities, towns, and villages. It is the message of a peace-building Commonwealth.

The cornerstones on which peace is founded are, quite simply, respect and understanding for one another. Working together, we build peace by defending the dignity of every individual and community.

By upholding justice and the rule of law, and by striving for societies that are fair and offer opportunities for all, we overcome division and find reconciliation, so that the benefits of progress and prosperity may be multiplied and shared.

As members of the Commonwealth family we can find much to be thankful for in the inheritances we have received from those who came before us. Through consensus and cooperation great things have been achieved.

We can find further reward and fulfilment by continuing to collaborate with others in a spirit of goodwill to build a peaceful and abundant future for all Commonwealth citizens.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to everyone in this Assembly 65 students, who are seated in both the members' gallery and the public gallery, from Stony Plain Central school in my riding of Stony Plain. They're accompanied by a number of teachers and chaperones: Mrs. Niebergall, Mrs. Fleming, Mrs. Wilms, Miss Van Delden, Miss Schaeber, Victoria Warsame, Mr. Dan Kiryluk, Mrs. Kerri Kiryluk, Helen Parent, Paul McCann, and Faye Ledwon. I ask that they all stand to receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome, welcome.

Are there any other school groups, hon. members?

The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seated in your gallery today are four board members of the Royal Commonwealth Society of Edmonton. The Edmonton branch was founded in 2005 during the visit of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to Alberta. The Royal Commonwealth Society has a long history, dating to 1868. It is committed to promoting the values of the Commonwealth. Through youth empowerment, education, and advocacy the Royal Commonwealth Society champions human rights, democracy, and sustainable development across the 52 member states. Our guests are here to recognize Commonwealth Day, which is celebrated annually on the second Monday in March. I'd ask them to rise as I call their names: Ms Nicky Kobly, Dr. John Dugan and his son Dr. John Dugan Jr., Mr. Gordon Smith, and Mr. Joe Zasada. It's my pleasure to introduce them to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, and I'd ask that the House give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise on your behalf and introduce to the Assembly Mr. Richard Brooks, a long-time friend of yours. After residing in Medicine Hat for 35 years, Mr. Brooks now lives in St. Albert. I would ask that he please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, it is my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 19 hard-working civil servants who work at Alberta Agriculture and Forestry. They represent the many women and men who work hard to ensure that farm families and the forestry sector in our province are equipped with information and all the support they need to be successful. They also support my office in providing policies, legislation, regulations, and the services necessary for Alberta's agriculture, food, and forest sectors to grow, prosper, and diversify. I would like to ask them to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the pleasure of introducing to you and through you an Edmonton mother of a very special 10-year-old girl. Cathy Crowell's daughter Hosanna is in grade 5. Her favourite subject is history. She enjoys Mandarin lessons and playing baseball. She also lives with a blood condition that requires her to receive transfusions every two to three weeks. Her parents are very grateful for the generosity of Canadian blood donors, and they are regular donors themselves. Also with her is Pierre Cyr with the Canadian Blood Services, CBS, which operates Canada's blood supply and is a truly vital service to Albertans like the Crowells. We are very proud of our public voluntary blood donation system here in Alberta. I'd ask that the House extend the traditional warm welcome to both of our guests.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your indulgence I have two introductions today. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Jane Lucille McIntyre. Jane was born in 1915 in North Dakota, grew up in Success, Saskatchewan, and has lived in Wisconsin, California, Saskatchewan, and here in Edmonton. She ran her family business until she was 75 years old and has been very active in countless community organizations. Jane's working philosophy was and still remains that when you can't find anyone to do it, you do it yourself. Jane has two children, eight grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild, many of whom live right here in Edmonton. She is joined today by several of her family members. I would ask that the family members please rise and that we give her and her family the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Ellies and Tillie Chudyk. Ellies and Tillie are constituents of mine who have lived in Edmonton-Decore for the last 55 years, but a big congratulations to them as they recently celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. They were married on February 2, 1957. Both retired now, having worked as a trucker and a government employee, they have one son, one granddaughter, and three step-grandchildren. I would ask them now to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you two very special women and friends of mine who are visiting today. These strong women are examples for all women, and they make it their personal responsibility to get involved and make positive change in the world. These women are not only talented and funny and inspiring and hardworking; they're also dedicated to improving Alberta. I would love to introduce Mrs. Leah Wood. Leah is the provincial director for the Wildrose Party and president of the Stony Plain CA. I also take great pleasure in introducing Ms Taylor Wood. Taylor is a university student at Grant MacEwan, studying elementary education, and is also the president of the Edmonton-Calder CA. Taylor has recently started a position in the opposition office as one

of our new receptionists. Taylor and Leah, may I please ask that you rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise on this special day to introduce to you and through you a British citizen, my maternal cousin Sana Sajjad and her husband, Ammar Hussain, who recently got married and are starting their new life in the beautiful city of Calgary. I wish them all the very best and request that they rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of friends who are here today to hear my member's statement on the crisis in South Sudan. They're all leaders in their community and are working to organize relief efforts on the ground in their home country. I would ask them to rise when I say their names, and I apologize in advance for any mispronunciations. They are my good friends Khor Top, Stephen Yang, Tut Phot, Wuor Pal, Simon George, Beijen Wang, Wany Jock, and Thomas Gatleak. I would ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Red Deer

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is no secret that I'm proud to be the member representing Red Deer-North, within the third-largest city in Alberta. I rise today to bring light to the great organizations, attractions, and phenomenal community that Red Deerians embody. It is my privilege to represent the area and the people.

When I am in my constituency, I embrace opportunities to meet with all stakeholders regardless of title, status, or nature of concern. The open-door policy that I extend at times embraces constituents of the opposition, and that's fine by me. The Red Deer River, that winds through the heart of my city, touches nine other House members and 34 municipalities. My interest is that what happens in my constituency impacts others. We are interdependent.

The peculiar nature of Alberta's interdependence, however, is that there is a connectedness to Red Deer. My government hosts town halls in Red Deer to enlist the pulse of my constituents. Opposition parties visit Red Deer, just as they do in Edmonton and Calgary, because we are a central hub that connects the province. However, we are more than a place to gas up and stop at the Donut Mill for what Red Deerians brag are the best in the province.

Red Deer College draws our province's future, and during our beautiful summers Sylvan Lake experiences a strong influx of vacationers and cottagers. Our neighboring guests drive our economy and rely on our resources. We are interdependent.

All of our service-driven amenities lap in the north-south, east-west connectedness that Red Deer provides. Our steady growth in urban population speaks to the little gem that is Red Deer as well as how it draws to our rural partners. They may come to shop, to seek

care at the fourth-busiest hospital in the province, or to take care of business at the courthouse. Whatever they need, Red Deer has it.

My interchange welcomes constituents from every electoral district here and is a vital part of the landscape of the province, so let us dispel the myth that we are just Gasoline Alley.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

RCMP and Public Safety

Mrs. Pitt: This weekend I had the honour and pleasure of attending the RCMP Regimental Ball, an annual event organized for the benefit of the Airdrie and District Victims Assistance Society and hosted by the Airdrie RCMP detachment. The RCMP has hosted these events in communities across this province for as long as they've been a force, dating back to the 1870s, when they were the North West Mounted Police.

Regimental balls allow RCMP officers and community members the opportunity to interact, network, and build relationships in a more positive setting than we're often used to, sharing food and fun, building trust and morale, and raising money for charity. We all know that our police services in Alberta are doing a great job at keeping us safe. It is so important that we take the time to thank these men and women, who often work long hours in high-stress situations and are often forced to deal with the absolute worst aspects of humanity and human behaviour. We place so much responsibility on their shoulders. Their public service is truly admirable, and we cannot ever thank them enough for it.

But despite all this good work, crime is on the rise in our province. When I talk to businesses around Airdrie, they tell me they are extremely concerned about crime in the area. This is no surprise since according to Stats Canada the latest crime severity index for Airdrie rose by 26 per cent. Property crimes in particular are increasing. Break and enters were up by 51 per cent. Robbery is almost up 29 per cent. Thefts over \$5,000 were up 24 per cent in the city while theft under \$5,000 soared to 46 per cent. Increasing crime means increasing strain on police resources and also on our courts.

It's time for action and to ensure that criminals aren't walking free due to the mounting delays in our courts, and we must act now. Albertans can rest assured that the Wildrose will always stand up for the victims and for safe communities.

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

Justice System Delays

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The administration of justice in Alberta is in disrepute due to the actions of this Justice minister. Allow me to make my case. Two weeks ago the minister issued a protocol directing Crown prosecutors to either stay charges or plea bargain to obtain guilty pleas for cases requiring too much court time. Since then hundreds of charges, including many involving violence and weapons, have been dropped.

There's more. Citizens victimized by these alleged criminals had to hear in the media that the offenders got off scot-free. The minister maintains that she had to take this drastic step because Alberta does not have enough prosecutors. Well, that did not come as a surprise because she's the one who cut funding to Crown prosecutors for two years running, and that left 35 positions vacant.

1:50

When the media revealed her court-clearing directive, the public reacted with outrage. The next day the minister found money to hire more prosecutors. Let's put this all in perspective. This NDP government is finally increasing funding for prosecutors, but that

\$14 million amounts to half the amount it is spending to – wait for it – change your light bulbs.

What is especially concerning about this whole escapade is that the minister attempted to conceal her unprecedented protocol. She hid the directive, and when her own prosecutors blew the whistle, she tried to quell the uproar by serving up millions of dollars.

In Alberta the administration of justice is a primary responsibility of the minister. I'm not just making that up; it's on the Justice website. Mr. Speaker, the court of public opinion is clear, and in this case it's the only one that counts. The minister's actions have eroded Alberta's faith in our justice system, and that means the minister has to go.

I rest my case, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Government Policies

Mr. Jean: Oil prices have slid more than 8 per cent since last Monday. We are under \$50 again as the U.S. ramps up its oil production. Today there is more uncertainty with changes coming to the labour code. While the NDP says that it's sunny days again, growth for the private sector in Alberta has been entirely nonexistent. Major players in the oil and gas industry are leaving, man-and-pa shops are feeling hammered by new regulations and tax increases, and life is more expensive for Albertans. When will the Premier admit that her plan is just not working?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by saying that our government is absolutely and completely, entirely focused on making life better for Albertans. You know what? The way that we're going to do that is that we're going to focus on job creation, we're going to focus on protecting core public services, and we're going to focus on making Alberta more affordable. That's the work that we're doing, that's what Albertans have asked for, and that's what we are delivering on.

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP government is out of focus because it's not working, and Albertans are right to be worried about the NDP's gross mismanagement of our economy. Today we heard that there will be consultation on changes to the labour code here in Alberta. We have seen what consultations with the NDP have looked like in the past. Just talk to farmers and ranchers in Alberta. Just talk to small businesses who saw minimum wage consultations quickly become come-and-tell-you sessions. Will the Premier commit to do what's best for Albertans and our economy or only bulldoze through her ideological, risky agenda for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What we are doing, actually, is working very hard on making life more affordable for Alberta families, as the member opposite just referred to. So we're rolling back school fees by 25 per cent, we're freezing tuition, and we're capping electricity rates. All three of those things the member opposite wanted Albertans to pay more for. We are focused on making life better for Albertans.

Mr. Jean: The fact is that Albertans just don't trust this government to get changes to the labour code right. In the midst of the deepest downturn Albertans have seen in over a generation, the NDP

announced income tax hikes, business tax hikes, gas tax hikes, and topped it off with a brand new carbon tax. While small businesses were closing their doors they, the NDP, bulldozed ahead with mandated wage increases, and now expected changes to the labour code have every single Albertan on edge. Times aren't easy right now. Does the Premier understand why folks just don't trust this NDP government to get anything on the economy right?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, what we know is that Albertans trust us to be on their side. Albertans trust us to have their back when times are tough, and that's exactly what we have been doing, and that is exactly what we will continue to do. We will not engage in the billions of dollars of cuts that the members opposite want to take out of our public services and download onto the families of Albertans. That's not the way we will go forward. We will stand up for Alberta families.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Justice System Delays

Mr. Jean: Today is my first opportunity to ask the Premier questions about the crisis in our justice system. Forty-four criminal cases have been stayed in Calgary over the past four months, and 60 more cases have been stayed in Edmonton because of lack of resources. Serious charges are included in that list, like impaired driving, assaulting a police officer, and fraud over \$5,000. When these criminals walk free without having their day in court, it erodes confidence in Alberta's justice system. Why did the Premier wait until significant public pressure mounted to fund additional resources in our court systems?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government believes very clearly that one of the things that does make life better for Albertans is ensuring that they have a secure and safe community. It matters to us. It matters to me as a mother of kids who walk through our communities. That's why our government has been investing in our public safety system since we first got elected. We've been doing it up till now. We will continue to do it. We just announced more funding for prosecutors. We're going to make sure that we get this right.

Mr. Jean: The triage protocol the NDP government has put into place to address the crisis in our courts is, frankly, unacceptable. Fiscal constraints are front and centre in the protocol document and put pressure on Alberta's Crowns to put money ahead of justice. This isn't reasonable. In neighbouring British Columbia the vice-president of the Crown Counsel Association stated, and I quote: the fiscal realities of any particular government are far down the list for us when we consider how to proceed with a case. End quote. Why are the Alberta NDP's priorities so out of whack with the rest of the country?

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, we are very concerned about ensuring that our justice system is well funded and that it works well. That is why we're taking action. We're investing more money into Crown prosecutors. We're investing more money into court workers, and last year we invested more money into legal aid. Our government doesn't just talk about things; we take action, and that's the difference.

Mr. Jean: Canada-wide new statistics are being released about how many charges may be stayed as a result of the Jordan decision. In

Ontario the Crown Attorneys Association estimates that 6,000 criminal cases could be stayed or withdrawn. In Alberta the NDP government, this government, has been silent about it. Can the Premier please disclose to Albertans how many cases in provincial court are currently exceeding 18 months, how many cases in Queen's Bench court are exceeding 30 months, and how many criminal cases as a result of this government will be stayed or withdrawn?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, our government is taking action. Our government is moving forward with investing more into our system of public safety. The member opposite simply wants to study the issue. He wants to raise fears. He wants to raise concerns. He wants to score political points, and then his solution is to study the issue. Say one thing, do another. We're not about studying the issue. We're going to take action. We are taking action, and Albertans will be safer as a result.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Energy Efficiency Programs

Mr. Jean: This government seems to be incredibly proud of the residential no-cost energy savings program. The minister simply can't stop making announcements about it, but unfortunately it's all hat, no cattle, all sizzle, no steak. Albertans aren't being told any details whatsoever: how many light bulbs the government will install per house, whether cabins and cottages are eligible, or if the company chosen will be allowed to upsell Albertans when they're doing it. When will the Premier tell Albertans the details on how her government plans to waste their money on this ill-conceived NDP boondoggle?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I watched with some relish the member opposite making fun of people in Alberta who are concerned about bringing down their electricity costs and bringing down their electricity use. It was quite something. He had a great time making fun of the issue. But you know what? As of today 68,000 Alberta households have signed up for this program because – you know what? – Albertans want to make progress on this issue. I would suggest that if anybody is out of touch on this issue, it is the member opposite. [interjections]

The Speaker: Government House Leader.

First supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Well, let's look at the facts. There are over 1.5 million private dwellings in Alberta. Ecofitt, the Ontario company that got this contract, is only hiring 70 people to manage and install the program. If you were to take an hour per install, including travel time, it'll take these 70 people over a decade to visit every home. Meanwhile Alberta-based energy retrofit companies say that this program from the NDP has killed their business. Why pay for light bulbs when the government is giving away free ones? Why won't this government send this Ontario company packing so that it doesn't unfairly put even more Albertans out of work, as they've done already?

2:00

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this energy efficiency program, the first one in Alberta after this province went for decades being the only jurisdiction in the country without an energy efficiency program, will save the average family over a hundred dollars per year. Now, I appreciate that the members opposite don't care about saving money for the average family, but we do. As a result of that, we are

moving forward with this plan, and because it is so popular, we look forward to making the changes that ensure that they're able to meet the demands of the very excited Albertans who are wanting to reduce their electricity use.

Mr. Jean: Speaking of boondoggles, Mr. Speaker, the Ecofitt deal is a bad deal for Albertans. Albertans know it, we know it, and I'm sure that even the NDP knows it. Other energy retrofit companies tell us this contract tendering was less than straightforward. Curiously, the short list of bidders for the request for proposal awarded to Ecofitt was never published. Will the Premier now, today, assure Albertans that the awarding of this contract was fairly done, that they didn't create a program that only Ontario-based Ecofitt could actually do, and will they release the list of other companies who bid for this contract? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, moving forward on this program was the result of a wide range of consultation done by experts in the area of reducing energy use, something that these folks wouldn't talk about too much because they don't really spend a lot of time thinking about reducing energy use. Nonetheless, the company that won the contract provides this service in Nova Scotia, in Ontario, in Manitoba, in Quebec, and in British Columbia, and the reason that we had to go out was because we didn't have a program here in Alberta before. But you know what? Now we do.

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

Oil Sands Investments

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, while the Premier was in Houston last week, she made such an impression on the energy industry that Shell withdrew 7 and a quarter billion dollars of investment from Alberta. To the Premier: while you were in Texas – I'd just like to know – did the leaders there give you a nice gift and a thank-you card in exchange for all the head office jobs that have been transferred from Calgary to Houston?

Ms Notley: Well, I do understand that while I was in Houston, the member opposite wasn't really watching that much about what was going on but, rather, was filing his suit against the Ethics Commissioner. Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, had he been paying attention, he would have known that we had an opportunity then to talk with many, many leaders in the oil and gas industry about how we are working with them to reposition Alberta as a successful, progressive, long-term sustainable energy producer. The matter that the member opposite talks about is fearmongering. CNRL is taking over that work, and it's going to be good for all Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

The first supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here's another tale from the Premier's accomplishment book. In 2007 Statoil invested \$2.2 billion in the Alberta oil sands. In 2016, on this Premier's watch, they fire-sold that same investment for about \$832 million and left Alberta. Now, they're still in the energy business, just not here. To the Premier: how many more companies and good, mortgage-paying jobs will you and your policies drive out of Alberta before you reverse the carbon tax, the corporate taxes, and all the inconsistencies . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you know, our government is very concerned about promoting economic growth and about promoting job creation, and that is something that we've been very focused on. I'll tell you what. You know what helps bring investment to Alberta? Two pipelines, two pipelines that those guys over there couldn't get after 44 years. That's the kind of thing that is bringing investment to Alberta notwithstanding the drop in oil prices, and that's the kind of thing that will contribute to our ongoing prosperity under our government's leadership.

Mr. McIver: Last week they said that they wouldn't celebrate till there was oil flowing. I guess they've forgotten about that.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier's hand-picked staff member Tzeporah Berman, co-chair of the oil sands advisory group, two weeks ago was telling Canadian universities to remove their investments from the Alberta oil sands. During the Premier's Houston trip she proclaimed her support for the oil sands, but we know that actions speak louder than words. To the Premier: before more investment leaves Alberta, will you fire Ms Berman, or will you continue to send mixed messages about our biggest industry?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what I will be very proud to do is to continue our record of building relationships between people who previously were in opposite corners of the room, never speaking to each other, never making progress, never building pipelines, and never protecting the climate. We brought those people together. We've got those people making progress together. We are setting up a better economic environment and investment climate as a result, and I am very proud of that.

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

Springbank Reservoir Flood Mitigation Project

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Springbank off-stream reservoir, or SR1, is the cheapest, most effective, and fastest way to ensure that flood waters do not once again ravage downtown Calgary. But last week the Tsuut'ina Nation stepped up their opposition to the project, saying that they haven't been adequately consulted. I know the government has been in contact with representatives from Tsuut'ina, but clearly they still have concerns. To the Premier: have you personally met with Tsuut'ina leaders about this issue, and if not, will you?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. I have met with the Tsuut'ina leadership on this issue. While we are very concerned that the Tsuut'ina have issues with the project, I think it's important to remember that we have met with them a number of times. I personally have met with them on this issue. There have been 10 site visits as well, Mr. Speaker, as well as three meetings with department officials and the Tsuut'ina, between the Tsuut'ina and the Transportation department, with respect to this matter, and we have provided over a hundred thousand dollars in funding.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The first supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a critical issue. I'd encourage and urge the Premier herself, please, to get involved.

Mr. Speaker, the Supreme Court of Canada has been clear that indigenous peoples must be included in any projects that impact their traditional territories. Given this well-established fact, I would have thought that engagement with Tsuut'ina would have been a

priority for this government, but it appears not. Again to the Minister of Transportation: what is your plan to address the concerns of Tsuut'ina about their drinking water and the potential impact of SR1 on their lands?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I don't agree with the hon. member that we have not engaged with the Tsuut'ina. I've reached out since its release and hope to have a meeting with the chief very soon. We've engaged in an environmental impact process. That will be complete at the end of this month, and we're expecting that report to be available in early summer. That will shed a great deal of light on the issues that the hon. member has raised, and it will be the jumping-off point for further discussions with Tsuut'ina.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, every year that goes by without significant flood mitigation brings risk, and it's a concern I've raised in this House many times, including almost exactly one year ago to this day. But serious questions remain about when the project will be built, and I want an assurance from this government that they are still committed to SR1. My constituents are also asking me about the process for getting the project approved and construction started. Again to the Minister of Transportation: assuming that federal and provincial environmental approvals are in place that ensure drinking water is safe and lands are protected, is the consent of all parties required before moving ahead?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for the question. Mr. Speaker, well, we've certainly – and I've indicated already that we have – met a number of times with the Tsuut'ina, and we have a detailed log of all of the interactions, which is extensive. So we've been engaging the Tsuut'ina on this issue; we want to continue to do that. We want to find out what their additional concerns may be. We want to await the environmental impact assessment and discuss those issues further with the Tsuut'ina. We're very much committed to the Springbank project, and we certainly are looking hopefully forward to having Tsuut'ina agreement as we move forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Red Deer Courthouse

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since my election one of the most frequent concerns I've heard is how Red Deer needs a new courthouse. The mayor of Red Deer has raised this issue on a number of occasions, as have the local legal community and the judiciary. I have brought these concerns to the minister before. To the Minister of Justice: when will Red Deer receive the courthouse it desperately needs?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Well, we have heard from the community of Red Deer as well and from Mayor Veer that they have considerable concerns regarding the need for a new courthouse. We are recognizing this and listening to all Albertans, and the hon. member will have to wait, like everybody else, to determine how those priorities were prioritized.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Red Deer's courthouse takes in matters from around the region and is a priority for both the city and the county and given that there are significant capacity pressures, to the same minister: what is the government doing to ease these pressures?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question and for her advocacy on this issue. We understand that the court system is under considerable pressure in a number of places. That's why we're investing resources on multiple fronts. We have heard from the community that the Red Deer courthouse is a source of serious concern, and that will be weighed in the balance with government priorities.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the situation in Red Deer is dire and given that the previous government failed to fund a new courthouse for the people of Red Deer, to the Minister of Justice: will the government commit to a new courthouse today? [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Access to justice is a priority for this government. We do know that that courthouse is a considerable concern. We are aware that the previous government over many years and decades failed to take any action on this issue, and we will definitely weigh the needs of Red Deerians, as we do all members of the province.

Thank you.

Oil Sands Investments (continued)

Mr. Barnes: The deal that saw Shell sell most of its Canadian oil sands assets has been in the works for more than a year. That means since shortly after this government unveiled its climate action plan. Instead of stopping investment from fleeing the province, this government was blowing hot air, claiming that Shell was thrilled with the plan. Mr. Speaker, so thrilled, they're leaving. When Shell was lobbying the Premier for a carbon tax, did they explain that they meant the tax to only apply to everyone else while they moved capital to jurisdictions with no carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment and climate change.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find it curious that the member opposite would ask us to interfere in the private dealings between two companies that both stood on the stage with the government in announcing the carbon pricing framework. Both CNRL and Shell supported and continue to support Alberta's climate leadership plan.

As for the details, we are pleased to see an Alberta company and one of Canada's largest energy firms increasing their holdings in the oil sands. This is good news for Albertans, and it's certainly good news for overtime opportunities . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Barnes: Albertans are starting to notice a trend, Mr. Speaker. Companies only support the carbon tax after they've been exempted from paying it. Given that the OSAG panel is tasked with determining who will and who will not be paying a net carbon tax greater than the subsidies funded by our junior oil and gas industry and given that no juniors were welcome on this board, to the Energy minister: will Suncor, the biggest proponent of this government's carbon tax, receive more in subsidies than they pay in carbon tax because of the ruling of a panel that they are on?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I find it curious that the members opposite would talk down one of the largest employers in their own leader's riding. I find it curious that the members opposite are promising to scrap the very plan that resulted in pipeline approvals. They're doubling down on the same dead-end approach that resulted in no pipeline approvals. I find that it is actually beneath us as parliamentarians as well to root for Alberta to fail as we move forward with our climate leadership plan. Albertans deserve better, and they get better from this side of the House.

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, I work for Albertans, not the oil companies.

Albertans are tired of this government's reckless policy initiatives and the long-term instability they create for our number one jobs sector. Given that companies like Shell want to upgrade their portfolio and that under this NDP government's leadership Alberta didn't make the grade and given that this government's rush job on the 100-megatonne emissions cap bill failed to provide investors with certainty, when can Albertans expect to see the long-awaited results of the now overdue OSAG panel?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, all of the companies that the members of the Official Opposition have spent their time talking down today are contributing to the oil sands advisory group so that we can find ways to move forward with innovation and putting Alberta, really, on the world stage as an energy producer. The CEO of Canada's Oil Sands Innovation Alliance praised the emissions cap when he said that "with the technology being developed in Alberta," the 13 oil companies that are part of COSIA "are confident Alberta can continue to grow its industry while reducing emissions." That is our vision for the future of the energy industry in this province. It is not a vision that is shared by the . . .

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

The Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Agricultural Trade with India

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In just the past two years Alberta's producers have increased their production of dried peas by 65 per cent and 400 per cent for lentils to feed India's demand. Furthermore, by 2020 India is expected to surpass China as the world's most populous nation. Guess what? Eighty per cent of Indians are vegetarian. Clearly, there's a great opportunity for Alberta to increase trade with India. To the agriculture minister: did you sign any trade agreements on your recent trip to India? Yes or no, Minister?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for bringing up this important trade issue. We have opportunities in India. As the member has stated, the population is growing. They have a very young population. They're going to continue being an important market area for our producers in pulses, wheat, and canola and other products as well. My mission to India saw opportunities to speak with many different members of industry and government, including state officials. Those talks continue as we continue this process.

Thank you.

Mr. Gill: Sounds like a no.

Given that the former government launched a major trade mission to India in 2014, led by the Premier, and given that three agreements were signed that year to increase market access but just like crops, these agreements need nurturing and given that Saskatchewan recently outstripped Alberta as an exporter of pulse crops, again to the minister: what is your government specifically doing to secure market access in India for Alberta's producers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canada is currently the second-largest producer of pulses in the world. We're the largest exporter of pulses in the world. I'm proud to say that Alberta is the largest exporter of yellow and green peas to India and around the world. That trade continues. We'll continue to do it. I was very proud of my trip to India. We can extend that market even further as the population of India grows.

Thank you.

Mr. Gill: No results by the minister.

Given that last week the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti asked the agriculture minister to provide an update on the status of the historic 2014 trade agreement between Alberta and the state of Punjab but the minister didn't do so and given that I asked the trade minister the same question one year ago and was told that I would receive an update, which has never happened, to the trade minister: what will it take to receive this long-promised update? Would the minister prefer if I sent a formal letter?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very interesting to note that actually my visit to India was the first visit by a minister of agriculture from Alberta, the first one ever. That's important to note, that we obviously take that very seriously. We take that seriously to be able to support. This side of this House has given the support, and we support Alberta farmers and ranchers as we continue our market access.

Thank you.

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

2:20

Carbon Offsetting

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government told Albertans that the carbon tax and their policy changes were about reducing greenhouse gases, but a letter sent to large emitters proves that this isn't the case. Emitters have been told that in the future they will only be able to use GHG offset credits to pay for a maximum of 30 per cent of their carbon compliance charges, that the rest must be paid in cash. If the carbon tax and this government's policies are really about reducing greenhouse gases, then why is the NDP gutting the one and only policy that actually does that in favour of boosting government revenues?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The changes that we are bringing to the offset protocol system and the compliance pieces to that have to do with the regularization of how we do things compared to other jurisdictions. We, of course, have a very robust offset market in this province, and we want to make sure that that aligns with where they also have carbon pricing frameworks in place, where we also find a 30 per cent cap on offsets. So we are aligning our system as the system grows and making sure that we are the leaders in this country in how our offset markets work.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Well, since large greenhouse gas emitters were told that the government won't allow companies to use GHG offset credits to pay for all of their compliance charges and that the NDP wants cash instead and since the use of credits, which result from actual and real reductions in GHGs, is "impacting the ability of government to implement meaningful long-term programming" and since NDP programs are more important than reducing greenhouse gases, will the Premier admit that this government's climate policies were never about climate and that this is just a tax grab and a green slush fund?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, what the opposition calls a green slush fund we on this side of the House call an indigenous solar program. What the opposition calls a slush fund we call an indigenous energy efficiency program. We call it an on-farm solar PV program. We call it an on-farm farm efficiency program. So what they dismiss as real reductions for Albertans and real ways that real communities can save money – they reject those things. They reject supporting communities in that way. They reject those programs because, at the end of the day, they reject the science of climate change.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, I'd like to give some actual information here. Mr. Speaker. Since this means that Alberta companies that actually made a difference in reducing GHGs in the past, actual greenhouse gases, will be punished so that the NDP can flow carbon tax money to their friends who are making NDP-approved investments in the future and given that this is bad for the environment, bad for the economy, bad for future investment, and bad for Albertans, why should any company invest in reducing greenhouse gases in Alberta if the NDP is going to change the rules on them whenever they need more cash?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, what's bad for the environment is an Official Opposition that doesn't believe climate change is real. What's bad for the environment is a group of folks that would rather spread conspiracies than actually tackle climate change. What's even worse is for an Official Opposition to undermine our energy industry and their good ideas for innovation and clean technology to reduce our emissions per barrel, to make our companies more competitive, and to put people to work while we're doing it.

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

Rural Crime Prevention

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hard-working RCMP officers and peace officers in my riding have been working overtime to meet the challenges of rising crime. The facts are clear. Crime is up across rural Alberta, and Bonnyville-Cold Lake is no exception. Motor vehicle thefts have skyrocketed 80 per cent from 2015 to

2016; assault, up 36 per cent; break and enter, up 55 per cent. These numbers and more can be found in a report which I will be tabling today. To the minister: what specific steps are you and your government taking to address rural crime?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for what is really a very important question. All Albertans deserve to live in safe communities. That's why we increased funding to ALERT, funding that was cut by the former federal Conservative government, to ensure that they were able to continue to do their important work, bringing together intelligence and bringing together all different services so that they could work to keep the province safe. That's why we're ensuring that we're making investments in our justice system in terms of legal aid, in terms of Crown prosecution services, in terms of the courts. It's why we've created more judicial positions to keep the system running.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this is a serious issue, by not having a clear strategy to deal with rural crime, this government is flirting with disaster. Given that almost every category of serious crime went up in Bonnyville-Cold Lake from 2015 to 2016, including robbery, assault, and uttering threats, Minister, a constituent of my riding would like an answer to whether or not the minister could shift resources from the safer communities and neighborhoods unit or the sheriffs investigative support unit to secure the safety of my constituents and to help support the hard work . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I know that he and his constituents are very concerned about rural safety, and so are we. Ultimately, the RCMP has jurisdiction because they are the experts over how that deployment works. In terms of the SCAN program and the surveillance program that were formerly housed in ALERT, we've heard a lot from municipal leaders that those programs are absolutely critical to them. Those are programs that are involved in shutting down drug houses, in tracking organized crime, and we think that they're very important.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that crime in most categories has risen steadily since the start of the economic downturn and given that there's a clear connection between Albertans losing work and these troubling rates of rural crime as well as the fentanyl crisis and given that these are not just city problems, that rural Albertans are being the hardest hit due to their living in isolated locations, far away from police services, why has this government been too slow to meaningful action to address the problems in my communities and all rural communities?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. I'm going to have to beg to differ on this government having moved slowly to action. This government has taken a number of steps to ensure that our justice system is functioning appropriately. We've inserted resources to ALERT. That's front-line policing. We've made sure that resources are

available for both defence and Crown prosecutors in the courts to ensure that things are being dealt with in a timely manner. We've passed a bill that ensures that front-line RCMP officers can spend more time on the street and less time doing paperwork. These are all concrete actions that this government is taking. Meanwhile the members opposite propose more study.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Provincial Debt-servicing Costs

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Buried in the government's '16-17 budget, we see the NDP spending almost a billion dollars to service taxpayer debt. That's more than the budgets of Indigenous Relations, Service Alberta, Status of Women, and Environment and Parks combined. To the Minister of Finance: so that we don't bury ourselves in servicing your ever-increasing debt, decimating funding for other valuable programs, when will you present a credible plan to return to a balanced budget?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I stood up in this House before and said that by 2023-2024 we will get to balance if – if – we continue to invest in this province so that people have jobs and construction occurs province-wide, if we continue to support Albertans so that they can go to those jobs with training and education and other postsecondary supports. Those are the things I said, and those are the things we'll stick to in this House.

Mr. Gotfried: Sounds like never, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the same budget predicts that these interest payments will rise to \$1.4 billion in the following year and given that the total budget for Children's Services provided in the recent Q3 update sits at only \$1.1 billion, to the Minister of Children's Services: will you fight to reduce the budget deficit so that money being spent to fund irresponsible borrowing can instead be directed towards increased support of vulnerable children?

2:30

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. Again, Mr. Speaker, I think I've also stood up in this House and said that debt-servicing costs in this province are lower than in B.C. We're at half again below B.C. You know, the kind of thing we won't do is that we won't cut services to Albertans. That side would cut \$9 billion – or \$2 billion. I get them mixed up because they all want to cut billions out of the budget. That would cut seniors' benefits, transportation services, special-needs students' funding, student aid. All that would be gone if they were in charge.

Mr. Gotfried: So I guess we'll find out when debt servicing trumps children.

Mr. Speaker, given that interest payments are projected to rise to \$2 billion in '18-19 and given that this government is expected to take \$1.2 billion out of the pockets of Albertans in carbon tax that same year, to the Finance minister: if you believe that \$1.2 billion in carbon taxes will convince Albertans to make better choices, why won't \$2 billion in debt-servicing costs convince your government to also make better choices?

Mr. Ceci: You know, Mr. Speaker, it's a bit rich hearing this from the other side, a gang who couldn't balance the budget at \$100 a barrel. Now they want average families to pay for their fiscal malpractice with reckless cuts to schools and hospitals. They want to hurt everyday Albertans. On this side of the House we're protecting what people need. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Highway 40

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The beautiful riding of West Yellowhead is a major corridor for both tourism and industry. Highway 40 is a key road for traffic between the Yellowhead highway and Grande Cache. Since I was elected, local towns and counties have repeatedly told me that highway 40 is in desperate need of upgrading. To the Minister of Transportation: when will the residents of West Yellowhead see this road upgraded?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. He's an excellent advocate for his constituency, and I want to thank him for the question. We know that this road is critical for that area for industry, for goods, and for the accessibility to tourism. There's a lot of pressure being placed on highway 40 right now, hon. member, specifically from Grande Cache south to the Wapiti River. I can assure you that we've heard the concerns, and I have the department busy working on solutions.

Thank you.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Speaker, given that the municipality has asked Alberta Transportation to widen narrow points of highway 40, to the same minister: how is the government going to address the safety concerns of my constituents?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the hon. member needs to know that safety is a top priority for me as minister and for the Transportation department. We take those concerns very seriously, so we're currently working with the municipalities in the entire area to address the safety issues that the hon. member has raised today, and we're working towards a solution that will meet the needs of the residents to ensure they get to where they're going and arrive alive.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given how important highway 40 is to the economic development of the West Yellowhead region, when can my constituents expect improvements on the condition of highway 40?

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much for the question. You know, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the former government left us with significant infrastructure issues to address. We're committed to investing not only for safety and for convenience but to promote economic development in this region and other parts of the province, but I can't make any commitments at this time. As the hon. member knows, there are many competing priorities that we have to sort through, but I want him to know that we are looking very closely at the issues he's raised today.

Government Policies

(continued)

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, our province has struggled for almost two years under the NDP reign. In that time the Premier has told Albertans that they are our country's embarrassing cousins. She said that a hundred thousand families who are wrestling with

unemployment and ballooning prices from the NDP's disaster of a carbon tax are simply Chicken Little who need to, quote, make better choices. Premier, your policies are devastating Alberta families. For a government that has shown such gross incompetence, when is the Premier going to ask herself to make better choices?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In a tough economy it's so important to ensure that our government continues to have the backs of ordinary families that are working to make their life better. We're creating jobs. We're cutting school fees. We're freezing tuition. The members opposite just want to keep jacking those things up. We're focused on hard hats. They're spending a lot of time with sewer rats.*

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, people in my riding are worried about the effect NDP policies are having on families and communities. Given that my constituents have had to cut their business hours or shut down completely and since this government's policies are also responsible for driving out billions of dollars of investment from large players like Shell, Albertans want to know: when is the NDP going to stop waging war on Alberta's business community, and when are they going to start accepting common-sense solutions to get Albertans back to work?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I get that the member opposite is concerned about his political future and the political future of his party, but it's time that they got their head in the game. We are working every day to make life better for Alberta families. We're doing that by making sure we're securing two new pipelines, cutting small-business taxes, making sure that Albertans have construction projects to go to work at that will result in good long-term plans for the future and jobs. Instead of proposing that, they'd cut billions of dollars on the opposite side, which would be a threat to schools and hospitals, to the livelihoods that families count on. Our government is focused on doing the right thing for Alberta families.

Mr. Nixon: Insulting Albertans seems to be this NDP government's full-time job. Since they don't seem to understand that they are making a bad situation worse when it comes to the economy and since under their watch we have seen investment flee our province, I'll ask the Premier which one of her inspirational messages she thinks resonates the most with Albertans, calling those who oppose the carbon tax xenophobic or saying that if they can't afford the carbon tax, they should take the bus or walk?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is so out of touch. It is appalling. While he has people that he is being closely aligned with calling the fight for feminism an equivalent to cancer, those who live in glass houses decorated with hate should not be throwing stones. So I have to say: who do you want running this province, making decisions to make your life better? A government that's standing up for Alberta families, a government that's cutting school fees, a government that's capping electricity prices or the members opposite, who just want to jack everything up? I don't think so.

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

Services for Indigenous Peoples

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the child intervention panel continues its invaluable and, hopefully, life-saving work, Albertans continue to hear about the disparity in

outcomes faced by our indigenous children. No one is disputing that this government or previous governments care deeply about all children in care; however, this painfully obvious gap in outcomes must be addressed as quickly as possible. To the Minister of Indigenous Relations: when will the indigenous children of Alberta experience the same level of care and similar outcomes as nonindigenous Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. We are obviously very concerned about the gap that has been created in this province between indigenous children and nonindigenous children by the previous governments over the last literally hundred years in this province. We've been working very hard closely with each of the bands and councils to develop plans to look at economic prosperity, to look at social changes, and to bring all of that together under the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. We're very proud of the fact that we are a party and a government that is committed to these people.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Rodney: Looking forward to hearing timelines.

Now, given that indigenous children are subject to particularly poor outcomes in these and other regards, as the minister knows, and given that much of the funding required to address this issue comes from the federal government, again to the minister, with great respect: what specific commitments have you secured from your federal counterpart in order to assist in rapidly closing this gap in outcomes that is experienced by indigenous youth here in the province of Alberta?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. We, of course, do believe that the federal government has a great responsibility for the indigenous people in this province. As a result, we've had multiple meetings over the last couple of years with the federal minister and all of their departments so that we can ensure that the programs that we are putting together in this province do indeed address not just simply the services required by the indigenous community but the gap between where the services have been provided in the past by other governments and what we are able to provide now.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Rodney: Again, we're very interested in specifics.

Given that a culturally competent workforce clear across government is an integral aspect of an effective public service for all Albertans and given that the children's intervention panel along with the July 2016 Auditor General's report highlight the need for increased cultural understanding within government, again to the minister, as I've asked on a number of other occasions, please tell us: what new initiatives have you implemented to address the low level of First Nations representation amongst employees of all government departments and beyond?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. We, of course, have accepted all of the Auditor General's recommendations. We're committed to working with indigenous

*See page 235, right column, paragraph 8

people. Additionally, we have worked with indigenous communities to help us establish protocol agreements in which all of the ministers in this House are meeting with indigenous communities from across northern Alberta, and soon we will have protocol agreements for the rest of Alberta. In those protocol agreements and at those tables we will have the opportunity to address specific programs required and asked for by the indigenous community. That's consultation.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll go on to the next statement in 30 seconds.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

Edmonton-Decore Constituents' Milestones

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it clearly is no secret just how proud I am of my riding of Edmonton-Decore. Within the past two months there have been some pretty special events that have made me even more proud to be the MLA of this riding. On January 15 Jane McIntyre celebrated her 102nd birthday. My staff helped her celebrate this momentous occasion on February 16 at St. Michael's Long Term Care. From what I heard, it was a wonderful celebration filled with love, laughter, and, from what I hear, some great country music.

On February 2, 2017, two of my constituents, Tillie and Ellies Chudyk, celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. I had the pleasure of meeting this lovely couple for the first time at the Ukrainian Day celebration at the Ukrainian heritage village, where their family name was unveiled as part of the genealogy project there. They are here today in the gallery, and I congratulate them personally on this momentous occasion that they're celebrating.

Finally, on March 17, Carl Huculak will be celebrating his 100th birthday party at St. Michael's millennium centre. I'm extremely honoured to have been invited to his birthday celebration, and I'm truly looking forward to wishing him a very happy birthday in person.

Mr. Speaker, Edmonton-Decore truly has some amazing constituents. These celebrations and many more milestones such as these are just some of the ways that I get to highlight how incredible these people are. Thank you all for allowing me to be your MLA in this riding.

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

South Sudanese Refugees

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary is home to the largest diaspora of South Sudanese in Canada. I celebrated with many of my friends in that community as they recognized the independence of their new country, the youngest in the world, formed in 2011.

Unfortunately, I now see these same friends struggling, worried about their friends and families as their new country is in the midst of a devastating civil war. In a country of 10 million, two million have been displaced from their homes and 450,000 have fled the country altogether. Currently it is the second-worst refugee crisis in the world.

There is widespread sexual violence. In the UN refugee camp in Juba, the capital, 75 per cent of women there have been victims of rape. Ethnic groups are being targeted, and people are being pulled from their homes in the night and killed. There is a possibility of genocide. On top of all of this, the UN has now declared a man-

made famine. With people fleeing their villages and living in the bush, they are unable to farm and grow food, and they are starving.

Two weeks ago I was honoured to be able to meet with a delegation of leaders from South Sudan that included opposition members from the previous government who have been forced to flee the country. They are travelling through Canada, speaking to politicians and community members to raise awareness about the extent of the crisis. Here in Canada all South Sudanese, from both sides of the conflict, are working together to advocate for peace in their country, calling on the federal government to support bringing refugees here to Canada and to support the UN intervention in the crisis.

I urge people to write to their MP or donate to organizations such as the Relief Organization for South Sudan, which is run by South Sudanese and is working on the ground with the UN to bring humanitarian aid such as food, health care, and education to people who need it. Mr. Speaker, most of us cannot imagine living through what is the current reality for those in South Sudan nor the anguish our fellow Albertans are feeling right now, but we can support them and use our voices to draw attention to the dire situation they are now facing.

Thank you.

Conservatism in Alberta

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, unlike the NDP members, I dared to host a town hall meeting in Calgary to consult Albertans. I was very surprised and overwhelmed to see 250 people when it was minus 20. Those Albertans showed up to voice their concerns over the NDP's policies and how we cannot have another NDP government elected in Alberta. Albertans want this accidental government, bent on implementing its risky ideological agenda, tossed out. In a survey of Albertans after the last election 90 per cent of those who voted NDP did so because they wanted a new government and only 10 per cent because they supported the NDP's platform and policies.

When a straw poll was conducted at my town hall on uniting the Wildrose and PCs, over 95 per cent of those people in attendance voted in favour of unity. One key condition for unity was keeping Wildrose principles like fiscal conservatism, liberty, recall, and free votes. One member, one vote was also supported by a clear majority, and people wanted party constitutional changes to require so for majorities. A fair majority in the room supported the conservative party of Alberta or Alberta conservative party as the preferred name for the new entity. I want to thank the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View for attending and thank the Member for Calgary-Greenway for coming in as an observer. I heard from Albertans that unity is essential to get Alberta back on track, grow the economy, and get Albertans back to work.

Mr. Speaker, political realignment is under way, and in short order I'm one hundred per cent certain that conservatives across Alberta will unite into a single provincial party . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Thank you.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the chair of the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship and in accordance with section 5(5) of the Property Rights Advocate Act I'm pleased to table five copies of the committee's report on the 2015 annual

report of the Alberta Property Rights Advocate. Copies of the report are available through the committee office and online.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Bill 3 Voluntary Blood Donations Act

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to request leave to introduce Bill 3, the Voluntary Blood Donations Act.

This new act will create a barrier to the establishment of private pay-for-plasma clinics in Alberta. We must ban paying for blood donations to ensure that Albertans have access to the blood and blood products that they need when they need them. Donating blood should not be looked at as a business venture. It's a valuable public resource that saves lives every day. This legislation is the best way for Alberta to have secure and reliable access to donated blood because, Mr. Speaker, to be frank, blood is just too precious to go to the highest bidder.

I look forward to discussing and hearing feedback from my colleagues on all sides of this House with regard to this important initiative.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two quick tablings, with your permission. First is a *Gauntlet* article from the University of Calgary dated March 7 entitled Wildrose on Campus Faces Heat for "Feminism is Cancer" Email with a quote from their former president saying: "They are anti-women, anti-feminist, anti-LGBTQ."

The Speaker: There's no editorial. Let's go. Keep moving.

Ms Jansen: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for that.

A second tabling, Mr. Speaker. I have provided five copies here, of course. This is from the account of Conservative Maxime Bernier: a photo of the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks choosing the red pill, also known as an antifeminist symbol, in his support of Mr. Bernier.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling five copies of a report done by the local RCMP detachment for Cold Lake. It is of deep concern that we have rising crime that is happening within Cold Lake, and we'd like to see something done within all of rural Alberta by this Minister of Justice.

The Speaker: The minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a letter written by the Alberta Beef Producers. The letter states that they "are pleased that the Alberta Government has recognized the value of cattle grazing for managing and enhancing the health of ecosystems as outlined in the Castle Park Draft Management Plan" and indicates that they are pleased that the

government of Alberta "is committed to working with beef producers to develop a sustainable and long term livestock grazing plan to complement the park's conservation objectives."

The Speaker: Thank you.
Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to briefly table two documents, both articles I wrote on the Springbank dam and flood mitigation. The first is entitled Flood Mitigation an Opportunity for NDP to Show Leadership, in which I urged the government to select the Springbank project, which they did, and I'm pleased that they did so. The second is entitled We Should Build a Dam in Springbank as Quickly as Possible, in which I lay out the case why two different governments selected that project over McLean Creek and other options.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'd like to table five copies of the Children's Guide to the City – Medicine Hat. This unique guide provides a new perspective of the city of Medicine Hat through the original art and words of children who range in age from three to six years old.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there was a point of order, but I've been advised that the Opposition House Leader has withdrawn that point of order.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 201 Justice System Accountability Act

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, thank you so much. It's an absolute honour to rise today and to move my very first bill as a private member in Alberta and to actually have an opportunity to speak on it today, which I will take some time with.

It's no secret, Mr. Speaker, as you've heard from the Wildrose members on this side, that crime is rising across Alberta, and our government simply has not been able to keep up. In 2015 Alberta saw an actual 18 per cent increase. Eighteen per cent. That is just in police-reported crime according to Statistics Canada. As you know, many crimes go unreported, so that would suggest that there has been a tremendous increase in crime. That includes nearly a 12 per cent increase in violent crimes. That's what's so concerning as well.

Every part of Alberta is feeling the impact, including rural Alberta and urban Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I've heard many, many stories over the last 18 months to two years about urban horror stories, in particular in relation to fentanyl abuse and selling drugs, and also about rural crimes, in particular property crimes. Every part of Alberta is feeling the impact, and I think we need to be very cognizant of that. In fact, I've heard in Calgary that they've seen nearly a 30 per cent increase in crime itself. So there's certainly no particular community or part of Alberta that does not see the full impact.

There's no question that there's a growing number of families that are concerned about the state of the justice system, and many already knew that trials were taking too long. But I did want to talk

just a little bit because I did hear in question period one particular minister say that all we could do was come up with reports, that what we wanted to do instead of solving the issue was to report on the issue and to do studies on the issue. Well, Mr. Speaker, this is about keeping track of information that they already keep track of for the most part.

You know, in our court system we have judges, we have clerks, we have Crown prosecutors, and of course we have defence counsel. Well, Mr. Speaker, when you get into the court system itself, you have a clerk that's there, and they keep track of everything. They keep track of how many adjournments they have, how many attendances for trial, how many settings for trial, how many prelim requests there are, and many other things.

In fact, if you open up Bill 201, in particular 2(2)(c), it talks about the total number of adjournments requested, including the number requested

- (i) by the Crown,
- (ii) by the defence,
- (iii) by the court,
- (iv) due to a disclosure issue,
- (v) due to a witness issue,
- (vi) due to a change in counsel, and
- (vii) due to the absence of the accused.

I think it's very important to report things and to be transparent about things. In particular, as I understand it from talking to Crown prosecutors, for the most part we are already keeping track of all these things in court.

What we aren't keeping track of, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that Albertans know what actually is taking place. I believe, based upon my time in the court system in Alberta for 10 years, that most Albertans would be disgusted to find out that often the accused receive adjournment after adjournment and that trials are sometimes set down three or four years from when the case actually happened, when the complaint actually took place.

What we're seeking is not a further study, Mr. Speaker. In fact, it's just the opposite. We're asking for this government to report on what's already given and kept track of by the court clerk and by the Crown prosecutors office. Let's find out when the original complaint was laid. Let's find out when the investigation was done by the RCMP. Did it take a month, or did it take a year? Then let's find out when the first appearance in court was, when the second appearance in court was. Why was an adjournment granted?

Mr. Speaker, much like we did back in the '90s with civil matters, divorce matters, family law, when we found out what was happening, we were able to make changes. We knew in that particular case that judges were not following a guideline set out in the federal guidelines for support payments, so the Parliament in their wisdom came up with a situation where if a judge went off those federal support guidelines, they'd have to write a judgment. They'd have to do a judgment as to why they didn't follow that.

What we're seeking in this case, Mr. Speaker, by this little bill, that's not very long, is that we are simply asking for this government to report on what's happening in our court system. Why is it taking so long for justice to happen? Why are 200 court cases being thrown out? Why are cases where people that have been accused of a crime being thrown out? Why are dozens of impaired charges being thrown out, people that actually get behind a wheel and continue to drive while intoxicated and kill people and cause serious damage to families? Why are they being thrown out? Why are serious sexual assaults or murders being thrown out? Well, I'll tell you why. It's because this government is not putting enough resources in place. I believe that this particular bill, a five-page bill, will track and report to Albertans why this government is not getting the job done.

We know, Mr. Speaker, particularly, that we are expensive here in Alberta for our court system. In fact, we're much more expensive than British Columbia. I think we're about 15 per cent more expensive for our justice system than British Columbia is. Now, they have much better tracking systems than we do. In fact, they actually have a computer system where you can log on and you can look and see where the court system is. Now, not everything is as detailed as I'm asking for but much the same: find out what's happening with court cases and what's happening to particular courts in the system. How long they're taking, how effective they are: that's what we're asking here.

3:00

Now, Mr. Speaker, I said that Alberta's was 15 per cent more expensive than B.C.'s justice system, but when you account and adjust for population, because their population is larger, we're actually 30 per cent more expensive. Our justice system here, which delivers far worse results than B.C.'s, is 30 per cent more expensive. This is an epidemic. It's not just our justice system, but it's also our health system. It's not throwing money that works; it's finding solutions.

This particular bill, Bill 201, is just asking for reporting to the people of Alberta so that we will know whether we need to throw more money at a particular place, or maybe it's a system, Mr. Speaker. I referred earlier to the guidelines and how judges would have to do a written judgment if they would go off the federal guidelines for support payments. Well, that's something that doesn't cost any money. It doesn't mean that you throw money at a system that doesn't work. It means you find a solution.

What I'm suggesting is if it's taking too long to do investigations, which I don't believe is the case except in very complicated matters, or if, in fact, it's taking too long to make sure the accused gets into court the first time or whether it's the adjournment request, which I believe is a large part of the problem, or, Mr. Speaker, if we don't get proper disclosure because we don't have the resources.

People don't understand this in Alberta, but defence lawyers maybe have 20 or 30 cases, Mr. Speaker, that are current. Twenty or 30 criminal cases, for the most part, would be a fairly good law practice, and they, of course, would have new ones come as old ones go.

I remember my time practising in the '90s, Mr. Speaker, here in Alberta, and I saw that the Crown counsel in Fort McMurray, for instance, actually had literally more than a hundred cases. When the Crown prosecutor has more than a hundred cases and defence counsel has significantly fewer than that, they are able to concentrate and put more effort into it and find more loopholes and more situations to represent the accused.

What we need to do is make sure that our Crown prosecutors have every single tool that they can possibly have, including Bill 201, Mr. Speaker, to find out why our court system is taking so long from point to point to point, to remove those barriers so that Albertans can make sure they have confidence in the justice system.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would say to you that we need to also focus on not just Albertans at large to make sure that they feel confident in the justice system, whether somebody breaks into their home or steals their quad off their farm or if there's a violent attack in one of our urban centres. They need to know that when they make the complaint to the police, something is going to be carried through, that the police officer is going to charge that person, that then that person is going to go to court and that person, when they get into the court system, is going to be held to account and receive due process but that if they are found guilty, they are going to do serious time for a serious crime. That's necessary.

But more important, I think, than making sure the accused actually gets justice – and I do think that's very important, especially, Mr. Speaker, because during the time that I practised, I saw that repeat offenders were the biggest problem we had in our court system. Not just people with no prior records that go into the court system and one-offs; it's the people that have one or two or three pages of prosecutor information sheets or records. Those people, sir, need to be focused on, and I do believe that Bill 201 will give us the tool necessary to be able to see that repeat offenders, people with serious records, are clogging up our court system.

But, Mr. Speaker, it's about victims, and for too long the victims in Canada, in particular in Alberta, have been ignored and have been ignored by this government and previous governments. Victims have to wait and wait to get the ordeal done before they can move on, both mentally and physically sometimes. When you're waiting two or three or four years for a trial to come forward, especially a trial that deals with a violent situation, it just revictimizes the victim time and time again.

When they have to come in for a trial and they come in and they're ready to testify, they don't just come to trial and say: oh, another day. They come to trial emotionally upset. They have to challenge themselves to go to trial. Then when the accused comes in and says, "I'm sorry, but I want an adjournment" and the reason is flimsy, all they're doing is revictimizing the victim, and I think we need to stop that. That's why the victims need to have certainty before they testify and to not be drawn back into court time and time again and especially not drawn back into court so they can see the charges dismissed, as this government has allowed to happen in over 200 cases in just the last four months in Alberta.

When victims see their attacker walk away without even getting a day in court, they lose faith in the justice system. They lose faith in their government. They recognize: why would they ever report an incident dealing with a crime that was committed against them if once it gets into the system, once they've gone through all the different processes to get it there, Mr. Speaker, the Crown prosecutor and the judge and the system allow that accused to walk away?

I'm not blaming the Crown prosecutors, Mr. Speaker, because I know they're overworked. I'm blaming the government because they're not giving them the resources necessary, and, yes, I'm blaming the previous government because they didn't set it up properly so that it was efficient. That's how we got to a place where we're 30 per cent more expensive than British Columbia's justice system.

So it's not about throwing money, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the 33 new Crown prosecutors that this government just appointed after they received some pressure from the Wildrose. I appreciate that. I think that's important. Every time we give them pressure, they seem to react, and I think that's a good thing because that's the way this government works.

But what happens when victims hear this and read this in the newspaper? Why would they, then, go and report a crime? Mr. Speaker, after that accused is let go, it's very possible that that victim may see that person on the street, or if that accused is a relative or somebody that that person knows and they're let off scot-free, what happens with that situation? I think it brings disrepute into our justice system. I think it threatens the very foundation, the cornerstone of our society. It's important that when Albertans go to a police officer, they know that something is going to happen, that they're going to be kept safe, that they're not going to be revictimized.

Police do also get frustrated, and I know they do. I had an opportunity to work with many good police officers, many RCMP members throughout the years, great individuals that work extremely hard and are dedicated. But I've also seen these police officers get very discouraged because after they put hours and hours into a

case, they see the accused get off scot-free. Mr. Speaker, these police officers work far beyond their normal hours to make sure that they do the best job possible to have the accused be held to account. When this happens, I think it discourages them. I have heard from many police officers about this particular situation in the past. This is not new, but it has become an epidemic just in the last few months here in Alberta.

There are true visions by criminals on how to slow down the system. When we slow down the system, Mr. Speaker, what happens is that people's memories become fuzzy. They don't recognize and don't remember quite as well in two years as they do today. That's why I believe that the faster we give justice to victims and the faster we give justice to the accused, the better the system will be, and ultimately Albertans will feel that their government has done a better job.

What I'm asking for is not additional studies. I heard that in question period. Additional studies are not what we're asking for, Mr. Speaker. What we're asking for is for this government to be transparent to Albertans about what's going on, about why the accused are walking away and why our justice system is so much more expensive than other justice systems across the country, where those provinces are under the same constitutional obligations that Alberta is.

Now, it is not unusual, Mr. Speaker, for victims to wait years and years for trials, but the only thing more unacceptable than a delay in a trial or an extensive period of time to have a trial – two or three or four years – is not to have that trial at all. I do understand the rights of the criminals, of the accused, but I believe that the victims' rights should far outweigh the rights of the accused in this case.

3:10

The failure of our court system to properly respond to the Supreme Court case in the Jordan situation is, as I said, allowing criminals to walk scot-free on our streets. This includes those accused of violent crimes, and that is the most disturbing thing because often I have found, through my experience, that the people that commit violent crimes have no hindrance to committing another one. The people I saw with big rap sheets and long records are usually repeat offenders, and those repeat offenders continue to get away with crimes. Why would they not if our system, once they get into it, doesn't even hold them accountable?

Now, we have pushed for more judges, Mr. Speaker. We have pushed for more federal appointments for Queen's Bench judges and for more provincial appointments, but it needs to be done more quickly.

Just in summary, I want to say this. I've taken 15 minutes, and I don't want to take any more time. Mr. Speaker, we have actually had the Privacy Commissioner recently state that our freedom of information system, the Justice freedom of information system, is the worst offender in Alberta, that it's one of the worst across the country, and that's not acceptable. That's why I think this justice accountability act would be so important. When we put in a request for freedom of information, we can't even get it from the Justice department, and if we do, it's months and months if not years away.

We need to be accountable to Albertans. They pay us, they hired us, and they deserve a justice system that keeps them safe and gives them confidence in our government. That's why I'm moving Bill 201, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask all members to support me in moving this.

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are here today to discuss what is ultimately an incredibly critical issue. The justice

system balances the fundamental safety of all Albertans and the fundamental rights of Albertans. Nothing could possibly be more important. Our government is committed to ensuring that it works well.

Mr. Speaker, when I took office, I came into a system with incredible backlogs and delays. Much study and much academic writing and much ink has been spilled over this issue and what the appropriate solutions to it are. I began working on this issue immediately upon taking office, trying to figure out where the pressure points are, what needed more funding, what we needed to do to move this issue forward.

We took some initial steps. Almost immediately we launched a bail review to look into our system, to determine how it was working. That system is fundamental to the operation of the entire system of justice, and we've taken steps already to move on that particular bail review, Mr. Speaker. We also took steps to ensure that front-line police officers could spend more time on the streets and less time doing paperwork, to ensure that warrants weren't issued for things like C-Train tickets. That saves work in terms of both police and court officers.

Then the Jordan decision came down, Mr. Speaker. It came from the Supreme Court, and we are constitutionally required to follow it. It imposed time frames with no warning whatsoever. We had to respond incredibly quickly, and we did. In October I went out and I announced our initial response, which was to begin triaging matters, and the reason that that is so incredibly critical is to ensure that the courts aren't picking for us. It's to ensure that we have the opportunity to make sure that the most serious and most violent cases, those that are in the public interest, those for which we have the necessary evidence, are those which are being pursued. It sets direction for our Crown prosecutors to ensure that that is the case, and it is absolutely critical that we lead on this issue, that we take the time to make those decisions in a strategic and intelligent way to defend the rights and safety of all Albertans rather than letting the court pick matters at random.

Mr. Speaker, we took those steps immediately, and the Official Opposition came out and proposed cuts to the justice system. Then they came out with this bill and said that this was not a resource issue. Then the government stepped forward to put more resources in because we knew that, in fact, it was a resource issue. Once we had done that, the Official Opposition turned around and said that we hadn't done it fast enough even though they were calling for the opposite. The member opposite vacillated in his speech so many times between whether it cost too much money for the justice system or not enough that, frankly, I'm a little dizzy.

In terms of the federal justice appointment issue the member opposite actually sat on the federal justice commission ...

Mr. Jean: Committee. Justice committee.

Ms Ganley: Committee.

In that time, when he had the opportunity to advocate for more judges for Alberta, to appoint more judges for Alberta, he said nothing. Nothing, Mr. Speaker.

This government has stepped forward. We've created nine additional positions on the Court of Queen's Bench and one on the Court of Appeal to ensure that we are able to get the necessary resources. We are working with our federal counterparts to achieve things that the former government was never capable of.

Mr. Speaker, our system is obviously facing considerable challenges. There is no question about that. That's why we're investing in so many different front-line things, including policing, including the courts, including legal aid, and including the Crown prosecution service. We, unlike the Official Opposition, have spoken to Crown

prosecutors, to defence lawyers, to the courts, to court clerks. Our largest concern with this bill is that resources which absolutely need to flow to the front lines would instead be focused on collecting statistics, statistics which would require significant additional investment, in terms of those front-line resources that we think belong in courtrooms, in order to collect. We need to avoid turning our front-line Crown prosecutors into statisticians unless it's the case that the information collected would be useful.

We are absolutely in favour of evidence-based solutions. We are absolutely in favour of looking at what statistics the justice system keeps. In fact, we've been looking at this problem for months. I realize that the Official Opposition has only realized recently that we're having a problem with the justice system, but we have been taking steps and making investments since we took office.

The member, when he introduced this bill, noted that it was going to take a period of time to see where we ended up on matrices and what's taking place before we should invest. Fundamentally, we simply disagree. That's why our government stepped up and announced that we're hiring 50 new prosecutors and 30 court administration staff. Mr. Speaker, we've been working with the judiciary, with the Crown prosecution service, and with defence lawyers to ensure that we have the right resources in place.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to vacillating back and forth on whether this is a resource issue or not, the member opposite also cites B.C.'s court system. He seems to love their system and what it is they're doing. In B.C. they have a rather different impaired-driving model than we have here. All across the country, in most parts except in B.C., impaired driving tends to be prosecuted by way of a criminal prosecution. That's true here in Alberta. In B.C. they have instead administrative sanctions. Here in Alberta we have both. We have the criminal prosecution and the administrative sanctions. So while the member is simultaneously saying that we should be more like B.C. and we should be less like B.C., it's a little bit confusing. He's suggesting, I can only imagine, that we should move to B.C.'s model of impaired driving, which doesn't involve a criminal prosecution, while simultaneously complaining that we've only used administrative sanctions. It's just dizzying.

We're well aware, Mr. Speaker, that the system, which has been underresourced for years, requires some changes. That's why we've taken, as I've noted, so many different actions to ensure that we're not wasting time on things that are not within the court's purview, like C-Train tickets, to ensure that front-line police officers are able to spend more time on the front lines and less time back at the office doing paperwork, to ensure that we have the right people running our bail system, and now to ensure that we are providing adequate funding not only to legal aid but to the Crown prosecution service and to all of the courts. We will continue to move forward to ensure that that is the case.

Now, the member opposite certainly cites B.C.'s data portal. It's a little bit different than what he's proposing here today. We will look at it absolutely with interest, Mr. Speaker. We're interested in gathering data. What we aren't interested in gathering is data that our stakeholders, when we canvassed them about this bill, have indicated will just not be very useful in terms of assessing what's going forward. We have had conversations with all system members, and many of them pointed out not only that this would take resources, much-needed resources, from the front lines in order to gather these statistics but that the contents of the bill are not even where we need to focus in terms of moving forward. We're happy to keep statistics; we'd just like them to be meaningful statistics.

3:20

They stressed their significant concerns over the lack of consultation on the bill and the lack of asking them, those front-line system

participants like Crown prosecutors, like court clerks, what it was that was necessary and what it was that was already kept, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite frequently cites that we have some great database somewhere where 100 per cent of these things are kept, but it's simply not true. The estimates on keeping those statistics are quite high.

Mr. Speaker, when a case comes into court, it's the case of an individual victim, the case of an individual accused person. It is one individual case. Certainly, the case file is noted in terms of what's happening with that particular case, but we don't look at those as an overall view. The reason for that is that there are certain dangers in that. There are certainly dangers in conflating incredibly high-complexity cases like murders with low-complexity cases.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, we have a clear plan, and we're moving forward with it.

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I'd like to commend the member for bringing this bill forward. You know, one thing I've learned is that knowledge, of course, is power. When we're talking about making informed decisions and we can bring data, whether it be compiled through police services or through Crown prosecutors, in order to improve the system, I think that is something that we as a society should be doing and, certainly, the justice system as well.

You know, it's important any time we are making decisions, especially as a House, that we consider all of the stakeholders. Certainly, something that has come to light most recently, over the last several weeks, has to do with victims, victims of crime and victims who are being revictimized. I can see that when we bring information as to decisions that were made by the Crown prosecutors or by the police officers that can be compiled, where data can be extrapolated in order to improve the system, to ensure that victims are being taken care of, to ensure, of course, to a certain degree that offenders are assured of their rights, that is something that, of course, is important as well.

You know, I have seen through practice in the police services that sometimes unintentional things happen. Sometimes there are errors in law done by sections of police services, sometimes done by whole police departments. That is why, of course, we have the trials, to ensure that that officer has been compliant with the Charter of Rights, compliant with the Criminal Code. It is the Criminal Code of Canada, not the criminal code of Alberta.

We also have to make sure that those victims, again, are assured that they have rights. It is important that everyone knows that victims do have rights. You know, the hon. member there touched on drunk drivers. There was a time when, I certainly believe, society did not really understand the magnitude of the danger that drunk drivers posed to society. What I mean by that is that at any given time any one of our loved ones could be at risk. We have to really think about that. I have been in those situations where we've arrested or I have specifically arrested somebody who was an impaired driver. I've arrested somebody that blew 400 milligram per cent. I think that was four or five times the legal limit. They were barely able to even function, yet that person was behind the wheel of an automobile. As a former certified breath technician for the province of Alberta I can tell you that drunk drivers pose a significant risk to society.

When we understand why cases may be thrown out, why they may be stayed, why there may have been an error, a judgment call, whatever the case may be, by the Crown or by the police officer, I think it is important as a justice system that we know so that we can

learn, so that we can give the necessary direction and advice to ensure that mistakes do not continue to happen.

I know the hon. member also mentioned in regard to police confidence in officers that he had dealt with personally in the RCMP. I can tell you that maintaining morale, maintaining confidence by front-line services is vitally, vitally important. Nothing is more discouraging for an officer than when they put in time and effort and assist the victim from the initial complaint all the way up until the trial and then, you know, for a reason sometimes unbeknownst to the officer, that file is thrown out or stayed. Then the police officer – the police officer – is the one that has to go and explain why that occurred to that poor victim of crime.

Now, I specifically dealt with a case where a young woman was a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault. We were able to work with her with the domestic conflict unit to give her the courage to testify against that offender. She was willing to do it. She got up there, and she said: I'm going to do it; I'm going to do it because it's the right thing to do. And that case was thrown out. So then the primary investigator went to the Crown and said: "Why? Why? Why? We put in all this effort, all this work. This woman was truly a victim of crime." The prosecutor said: "Well, in the end, it's his word against hers." It was that police officer that had to go back to that victim and say: I'm sorry; you're not going to receive any justice on this file.

So when we take data from a case like that, when we take data from successful cases, similar cases, sometimes we can extrapolate patterns, and in finding those patterns, we can use data, as outlined here in this Bill 201, that can help us in the future. I'm certainly surprised that I'm not seeing a government jumping at wanting to accept a bill like this. It's very simple; it's only a few pages. As I said, knowledge is power. If we can take that information from a bill like this in order to help the prosecutorial process, in order to help the police officers, why would we not do this?

I'm sure, you know, in brief conversations with the hon. member, the Leader of the Opposition, that they did the necessary work to ensure that this wasn't just thrown together, that stakeholders were consulted, that the data is already there. We just need to centralize it. It's like anything. In order to have a successful operation, we must have a central point of command, a central point where the data is taken, disseminated, and then decisions can be made. This is the government. This is the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. If information like this is going to come from anywhere, it's going to come from that department.

You know, I just want to say that I do support the hon. member in his bill that he's bringing forward, and I certainly encourage all members of this House to support this bill. I think it can only help the system, and I think that it could help victims of crime to ensure that victims are not revictimized in the system.

Thank you very much.

3:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do agree that the administration of justice is a matter of provincial jurisdiction. I do agree that those victimized by criminal activity deserve a timely resolution through the justice system. I do agree that statistics are a tool used to gain a snapshot of a moment in time within the justice system. I also agree that in this country the justice system does operate on a principle of presumed innocence.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Having said that, I rise to speak against this bill because I must. My perspective and my arguments come from working for over 30

years in the correctional system. My perspective is based on a correctional model dealing with exactly that, a model which assesses behaviour based on criminal involvement and everything surrounding it.

This perspective was solidified during several conversations I had with a former Conservative cabinet minister. During my tenure as regional executive vice-president of the Public Service Alliance of Canada in the national capital region, between 2008 and '11, I met with a former cabinet minister about several issues concerning public service workers. The former cabinet minister knew I came from the corrections field and always commented about that when we spoke. At the time the federal Conservative government had brought in justice legislation that didn't actually protect the public. I asked the former cabinet minister why this legislation was put forward because it would not make the public safer – I'll speak further about this a little later if I have time – it would cost billions of dollars more, and it would put staff and inmates alike at increased risk during incarceration. He laughed at me. He said that it didn't matter what the risk or the cost was as it was the perception of Conservative supporters that mattered. If they thought the government was doing something to tackle crime, they would continue to vote for them. It didn't matter whether they did it or not.

When I look at this bill, I see a similar perception being presented as was done by the federal Conservatives. They will say that they are doing something to protect the public by doing a study, which seems to be a process to delay action. I believe this bill is about creating busywork, with the illusion of change and protection. Adding the need to keep track of multiple statistics for police, court workers, and the prosecutors office is what one might consider adding busywork to an already overloaded workforce. It will take away from the work all of these people need to do to actually protect you. Justice system officials are already looking at it and keeping statistics for the issues that have an impact within the system. The fact is that if the previous government had hired more staff as they were needed, on an ongoing basis, we would not be in this huge backlog position.

Is the opposition, who is proposing this bill, speaking out to spend money on the public service by hiring many more employees to monitor statistics? Where will that money come from? In this bill they have not proposed how to pay for this increased workload, that will do nothing to protect the public or to move things through the court system in a more efficient manner, nor have they identified the cost of completing the statistics request identified in the bill.

The Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin, who introduced this bill, noted that the system required more of a legislative fix overall than a money fix. I would have to respond by saying that perhaps he is out to lunch within his cognitive thought processes as he does not understand in any way how the justice system works as a total entity. Perhaps he should spend some time within the system to understand the complexities of such a system. Certainly, legislation can and does play a role to direct the system for protection of the public and to do it in a way that actually reduces recidivism and crime. Of course, the beginning of any discourse is about treating people with respect, both victims and those charged with the offences.

Having come from working in the federal correctional system, I know that every cent spent on front-line services provides better protection to the public and reduces the cost to the system in the long run. I also know that providing sufficient resources to families – food, housing, education, health care, and the availability of prosocial activities for all kids – goes hand in hand to reduce the involvement of kids, young adults, and adults in criminal activity.

Another step in the process, which would be thwarted by this bill by tying up police time with a focus on keeping statistics – this

would be taking away from time the police need to do the community relationship building that is essential to knowing what's going on in the community, having conduits within the community which allow the police to be proactive in stopping crime from taking place, having the time to liaise with other groups to monitor volatile situations, having the time to build trust within the community. Once anybody has committed a crime, identifying the reasons why they committed their offences, utilizing complete assessments, addressing those reasons within programming, treatment, and support while transitioning back into a community all reduce the likelihood of an offender returning to criminal activity.

I am disappointed that I cannot support this bill. I am disappointed that the opportunity to put forward a bill that could provide positive and well-thought-out ideas is not in this document.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 201, from my hon. colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition. I think that before I really get into the meat of the matter, I'll just address a few of the comments that have been made here already this afternoon by the government and some wild, wild accusations made by the Member for Lethbridge-East about the intentions of the bill or what the Leader of the Opposition was intending to do. Certainly, she implied that he was efforting to make it look like he was doing something but, really, was doing nothing. You know, I certainly take offence to such comments. I'm not sure that the comments are helpful. They certainly don't add to the debate, and I also don't think that they are true.

3:40

You know, I've spoken in this House on numerous occasions and my colleague from Rimbev-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre has spoken on numerous occasions about some of the challenges that we see inside the Justice department. You'll know, Madam Speaker, that the Justice department has been described by Canadian privacy professionals and experts as a rogue department.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Just last week I rose in the House to speak about the access to information that's required in order to hold this government to account. One of the things that the Official Opposition takes seriously is the information that is made available to Albertans because, as my colleague from Calgary-West mentioned, this knowledge and information can provide power. It can provide the ability to proceed. And this information that my colleague is asking for is available. We've seen at every turn that the current government has a total lack of respect for access to information. What this bill does is that it ensures that Albertans can have the information that is very important to them.

Access to justice is a fundamental of our society, and right now no matter what the reasons are, whether it's the old guys or the new guys, whatever the case may be, we've seen a significant departure from what Albertans expect when it comes to access to justice. Two hundred cases will be stayed, and that's not just cases like not paying a C-Train ticket, as the Minister of Justice would have you believe, but charges like impaired driving, charges like murder. Serious and violent offences are being stayed because the system is broken.

Now, in conversations that I've had with my colleague the Leader of the Opposition, I know that he is very aware that Bill 201 is not going to solve every problem inside the justice system. Bill 201 is

a building block to ensure that we don't wind up in this situation in the future. It's quite possible that information like this, had it been readily available, would have provided the opportunity for governments to make the right decision in advance of having to make a decision. We've seen this government not act when they ought to until members of the public, members of the opposition raise the alarm bells just like James Pickard of the Alberta Crown Attorneys' Association has. It's taking members of the public to raise the alarm about something that the government should have been very aware of. A piece of legislation like Bill 201 will provide that fundamental building block so that we can ensure we have the information to remain ahead of providing access to justice for Albertans.

I know that something I've heard in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills on a very regular basis is that Albertans are frustrated at the rise of crime and that, subsequently, now they are coming to understand that all over the province, whether you're rural, urban, north, south, east, or west, there has been this significant concern because we're seeing these charges stayed.

The information that Bill 201 provides will allow us to act on solutions. This is very much part of the solution because it's not going to require significant amounts of resources. Much of the data is readily available. This is information that would be FOIPable, but we all know the lack of success that this government has had when it comes to running a FOIP system. It seems that they can't run any system. They're having a hard time running the FOIP system. The Premier's office: one of the worst offenders. The Justice department has been described as a rogue department. They're having a hard time running the court system, the health system. And there's one common denominator in this whole process, Madam Speaker, and that's the government.

Now, listen; the government was left a mess by the previous government, but they've been two years at the rudder, and things are getting significantly worse. In every area of the justice system people are frustrated. The police are frustrated. Prosecutors are frustrated. Albertans are frustrated. Yet all the government wants to do is point the finger at the previous government and say: don't worry; we've hired 34 new prosecutors. For the record we're happy about that, but we need to do more. We can't just say that we're cleaning up the court system by minimizing the number of C-Train tickets that are clogging it up and saying that we've got 34 new prosecutors, yet there are hundreds of criminals who have had their cases stayed and hundreds of victims who will never see justice.

Bill 201 provides one small piece in making the system better, and the government is going to posture by saying that the opposition only wants to look like they're doing something. They're going to posture on the three or four items that they have delivered up to this point. This, Madam Speaker, is not helpful for Albertans. What Albertans want is a government that takes responsibility for the situation that we are in, and that's not what they're getting from this government.

Alberta prosecutors are – and I quote – at a breaking point. They're crying out for the government to do more. I know that my colleague has had a good opportunity to speak with a number of prosecutors that have said that this information not only would be helpful, but it would be useful, that it would shine light in areas that are important, that it would provide the information to best be able to move forward. Yet all we get from the government is: don't worry; we're already doing everything we can. Nothing could be further from the truth, and, Madam Speaker, I am more than a little disappointed that this government has chosen to do that.

If Bill 201, the Justice System Accountability Act, is passed, it would track the length of investigations and trials; sources of adjournment; the number of charges withdrawn, reduced, or stayed; and it would require the Justice minister to do that in an annual

report. As such, all of us would be in a much better place to be able to govern, in a much better place to ensure access to justice, and in a much better place to ensure that our justice system remains as open and transparent as possible.

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

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up to speak to this particular private member's bill, put forward by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin. You know, I think we can all agree in this House that every Albertan deserves to feel safe in their home and in their streets and in their community. Protecting Albertans' safety and providing a fair, efficient justice system is one of the first duties of government, and it's one that we take very seriously.

Recently, actually, while coming up here to Edmonton, I had my vehicle broken into, so when the minister talks about people wanting justice, I want justice, too. When we have instances like the one I personally experienced, with a vehicle broken into and some items stolen out of it, we want justice. However, I know that our government is taking the steps as well to help prevent the root causes of crime, which is something I haven't heard come up in the debate so far. I hear things that we're talking about, things like ATVs being stolen or, in my case, vehicles being broken into. There's a lot of research that would suggest that comes from those most vulnerable members of our society not being taken care of, those with addiction, those with mental health issues, those struggling with homelessness. The list goes on. It's important that we take care of those citizens, and our government has been taking action on that.

3:50

Now, when it comes to resources, we've heard a lot of chatter about that, that this particular bill is about finding solutions and that we don't need a legislative fix. Well, one thing I'm proud that our government has been doing is that we are in fact putting resources forward to help solve this problem, that I believe the hon. member's bill is trying to solve, which relates to perhaps that he feels that justice is taking an abnormal amount of time for victims to have their cases go through the court system. That's why our government has taken action. We are hiring 50 Crown prosecutors as well as 30 court clerks and staff. As well, since being elected, we've increased legal aid funding by more than 20 per cent.

Also, there are some legislative fixes that we've done. Those legislative fixes – for instance, the warrant reduction initiative, which the hon. Minister of Justice talked about earlier, ensures that police officers can get back to what they do best, which is being out in our community patrolling and following up on crimes that are reported by citizens and stopping criminals, instead of spending time on jailing people for not paying transit tickets, which does hold up the justice system. And while it's not a legislative fix per se, we have also taken over bail hearings and are hiring new Crowns to do just that. This will free up, again, police officers to go back out on the streets, and this is particularly valuable in the rural areas of our province.

I think we're also open to the idea of exploring the B.C. model of open data, because at the heart of this bill it's about statistics. But I wonder how we would provide that data without fully understanding how much it would cost and how many Crown prosecutors or clerks or other staff members of our justice system it would take to do that and would potentially harm the front-line resources that we need to continue to have our justice system move forward and prosecute and have individuals go through the system with due process.

Now, I heard the hon. member mention in his opening speech for this bill that he wants to make things faster, by his own admission,

and I think he and I can share a common agreement with that. He often spoke of a reason for things being held up, that, you know, lawyers or defence lawyers were perhaps saying “oh, we need an adjournment” for flimsy reasons. I think his opinion on that is perhaps why there’s a big section in his bill in regard to the stats related to that. Now, I’m not a lawyer, Madam Speaker, but it sounds a little bit like, perhaps, with the stats he might want to, you know, meddle in the arm’s lengthness of our court system.

In his bill he talks about the adjournments requested by the Crown. Well, I could perhaps think of a reason where that might be a good idea in order to further serve justice. If we wanted to move faster, well, that would require more resources, Madam Speaker. If it was by the defence, in order for us to have due process, there perhaps could be very legitimate reasons for doing that. Stats where an adjournment was required by the court or due to a disclosure issue: I believe that if there was an adjournment due to a disclosure issue, that’s important to ensure fair justice. But if there was a disclosure issue, that would perhaps be because there’s a lack of resources, which would of course cost money, or due to a witness issue – I could see reasons why that might happen as well as due to the absence of an accused or a change in counsel. I mean, if it’s due to an absence of the accused, I’m not sure how the member would suggest that we solve that, but I would imagine that a solution would be to have more resources out there in order to compel accused individuals to show up in court, which, again, requires more resources.

I find that interesting because our government has spent a lot of time putting more resources into various services all over government that deal with the root causes of crime as well as putting resources into our justice system, which I mentioned at length earlier. Now, the hon. member stands up pretty much every day in this Legislature and talks to our Premier about how he would like fewer resources, Madam Speaker. So whether it’s a spend day or a cut day, I feel like there’s a lack of consistency here where this bill, as well-intentioned – I believe stats are good. I think it’s been mentioned that I believe our government would be interested in perhaps looking at the B.C. model, but we have to make sure that we’re not taking away from those front-line services.

At the end of the day, we are doing that. We are putting the resources in place whereas the opposition only wants to study and say that the solution is cutting, cutting, cutting until it’s not.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to talk about Bill 201, a bill that our leader has brought forward after much consultation with Albertans while travelling the province. You know, the people of my riding and other communities have been witnessing an increasingly steady rise in crime over the last few years, and we know that these crimes have increased partly due to the economic downturn, a question the hon. member on the other side was asking. This bill is just one of the many necessary adjustments we need to implement in order to start to fight crime and begin the work of making our communities safe again.

We’re not just blowing smoke. Not only have the citizens in our riding been confirming this increase and are outraged by it – and, you know, they’re feeling violated by it – but also according to a recent crime severity index from Stats Canada there was an 18 per cent increase in reported crimes in 2015 and a 12 per cent increase in violent crimes. That’s outstanding. Currently Alberta has the third-highest crime severity index rating in all the Canadian provinces. Grande Prairie was recently rated as one of the most dangerous cities in Canada by Stats Canada, with both Red Deer and Edmonton

well above the national average. Crime is increasing right across the province, and the constituents of Battle River-Wainwright are not the only ones demanding solutions; all Albertans are.

Right here in our province accused criminals are walking free, and there’s little or no recourse for Albertans within our justice system. More needs to happen than just pouring money into the system. We need to change the system. We need more accountability.

This is staggering news. How did we get there? It’s not from a lack of overall spending. We spend about 15 per cent more than our neighbours in B.C. on Justice and Solicitor General, 30 per cent when you factor in the population difference. Either the resources are in the wrong place or the system is broken. Or both.

Last Tuesday I stood up in the Legislature to give a member’s statement on the current crime situation in my riding. You know, citizens are outraged. They’re worried about their safety and are beginning to worry that they will have to take matters into their own hands. They are demanding change. Crime is a government matter, not one that citizens need to worry about. The last thing our province needs is for the public to be vigilantes. I mentioned last week that our local ATB was robbed twice, once at gunpoint, last year. These are serious issues that need government intervention. We need better legislation, and we need to look at this from every angle possible.

4:00

There was a mother at home by herself with a one-year-old child that I spoke to. She went out to see what a noise was – she could hear a pickup trying to be started – only to have a gun pointed at her and be told to get back into the home. That was shocking. This is a very serious incident that could have turned very bad and ended up with a fatality, not to mention that I’m sure that this woman is now not feeling safe in her home anymore. Can you imagine that happening to any one of your family members? This is just one of the many cases that are happening in our communities, and this is when people in the rural communities are starting to take matters into their own hands. I’ve already heard from many that they’re arming themselves to protect their property and their loved ones.

Before we can fix these issues, we have to ask ourselves: why is there an increase in crime? What are the common factors? There are many reasons. The economic downturn in the province is one, of course, but the lack of legislative teeth federally and provincially, demands on our court system, and delays give criminals the upper hand. These are all reasons. Local officials in my riding and all over Alberta are saying: enough is enough. We need to work together to fix what is broken and, believe you me, there is a lot broken with our system.

Bill 201 is just one of the many ways through legislation that we need to update in order to make the changes that must happen. The Justice ministry has been deemed the worst for disrespecting public access to information. Bill 201, the Justice System Accountability Act, would help us clearly see the patterns that we know need clearing up in our justice system. If this bill is passed, it allows the ministry to track the length of the time of the investigation to trials, the source of adjournments, the sources of mistrials, and the number of charges withdrawn, reduced, or stayed by having the Justice minister present an annual report to all Albertans on all these metrics. This is vitally important. We need to see where the issues and the bottlenecks are in our justice system.

Too many times criminals are getting away with – well, with murder, literally, and crimes of a serious nature. This is nonsensical. There needs to be accountability. British Columbia is able to provide its systems with an open data portal to track statistics to the courts, prosecutors, offices, and corrections. Alberta’s Solicitor

General, meanwhile, is getting publicly shamed by our Privacy Commissioner for their contempt for the public information.

Not only is this a transparency issue, but it's also one of safety. By creating a system where the investigators in trials are more accountable, we would restore the public's trust. Right now there is no trust that the system is working properly. That needs to be addressed and restored. By failing to make these records public, we are in essence telling the public that there are things to hide in a broken system. Real accountability demonstrates the government's seriousness about changing course as well as the seriousness with government views on all offences. It would help restore the confidence of our citizens and restore the reputation we once had that our families and our properties are going to be protected.

Those who suffer at the hands of our criminals are entitled to see those who are responsible brought to justice as part of the healing process. I would like to see safety restored for the lady in my constituency, Melissa, who in one swift moment in time – the safety of her own home was stolen from her the day the gun was pointed at her and her child at her home. I would like for her and others to feel safe again when they're at home alone. I would like to see justice defuse the angry victims and those who might seek vengeance. I would believe that those who are not guilty of an offence are entitled to have their names cleared and not have to wait years to see that come to fruition. That, too, is very important. Where are the statistics on that?

We need to enter into a new era of accountability. We need to make sure that the courts and the judges make decisions, that there is a trail of evidence and reasoning for each and every verdict, why investigations and trials took the length of time that they did, and what were the source of adjournments, mistrials, number of charges withdrawn, reduced, stayed, and so forth. There is something the public and all of us have to do – and we have a right to know. Not only does the public deserve accountability but transparency in the system, that would also help those who are responsible for those who make decisions to make more educated and wiser decisions moving forward, knowing that those decisions will be held to account by the public.

Having the Justice minister report on these metrics is critical, and I sure hope that the other side of the House sees the importance it has for the security and safety of our citizens. I spoke about the increasing crimes and the use of firearms in my riding. Firearm thefts in Alberta have also jumped 66 per cent in the last three years according to the RCMP. Just eight days ago the *Edmonton Journal* wrote an article entitled Firearm Thefts in Alberta Jump 66 Per Cent in Three Years.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I want less crime in this province. That should be the objective of every government to keep Albertans safe. How do we achieve that?

I'm an entrepreneur, I'm a businessperson, but this principle applies equally to government, that you can't manage something you don't measure. If you don't have the data, how do you know whether something is working properly? Part of the thing that we do in this Assembly: in essence, we're the board of governors or board of directors for the departments that operate in this province. The things that are happening inside those departments: well, they're a fact, whether we measure it or not. It's far better for us and through us the people of Alberta to have access to good, solid data that is reported in a consistent and regular fashion. That allows us to ensure that those in Alberta who are victims of crime have some assurance that the people who have perpetrated those crimes

will be brought to justice and, equally, that the accused is granted their constitutional rights to a swift and fair trial.

Unfortunately, in this province, for a variety of reasons that other members have gone into here over the course of the afternoon, that has not been the case in this province, and it's unclear as to exactly why that is. Not every solution to every problem is simply to add more staff or add more resources. Now, in this case, I do think that we need to address the significant resource shortcoming amongst Crown prosecutors in particular but also amongst judges and amongst the court staff that are required to ensure the swift administration of justice.

But there's one piece that I haven't heard this afternoon mentioned – and apologies to hon. members if others have mentioned this – and that's legal aid as well. All of these are aspects of our court systems. We see an increase in self-representation in our court system, which has contributed significantly to why we are seeing increased backlogs and delays. Why is that? What can we do as a government? What can we do as a province to ensure that either (a) people who choose to self-represent are given the tools and resources they need to do so effectively or that legal aid services are provided so they do not need to make that choice to self-represent?

4:10

All of those factors will be revealed to us if we properly gather data and we require that data to be disclosed on a regular basis, which is what this bill does. Now, I share some of the concern that there's a risk that some of the resources required to gather the data may in fact take away from front-line resources. I actually don't feel that that is a substantial or significant risk in this case. Much of the data is available. We know, for example – again, other members have quoted statistics, and I'll do the same – that we have access to some data. Obviously, that data is being collected in some form or fashion, not just in the ministry of Justice but in other ministries as well. Consolidating that data into meaningful information has been a challenge.

This ministry in particular is challenged with transparency, is challenged with responding to freedom of information requests to the point where as just a citizen of Alberta, certainly as a member of this Assembly I have very little faith in their ability or willingness to share that data with us. We require the Legislative Assembly to ensure that there is oversight of that data.

There are many reasons why we've seen delays in Alberta's court system. One is the just straight increase in the number of charges commenced province-wide. We've seen an 8.3 per cent increase in 2015-16 year over year and those facing multiple charges up nearly 10 per cent but our Crown prosecution services operating at levels that were equivalent to 2007, 10 years ago, so clearly there's a gap. The government has finally recognized that and has actually hired in some new Crown prosecutors or is in the process of doing that, and that's important.

We see also an increase in severity of crime, and other members have mentioned that. I am tremendously sympathetic to those who are victims of crime, who have faced that. It seems to be a particularly acute problem in rural Alberta, but certainly that rise in crime is happening all around the province. Now, there are some bigger discussions that I think we all ought to be having as to why that is. Some of it, of course, is going to be related to the economy, but much of it, I'm sure, is related to the opioid drug crisis, and that's something that is not a problem that we can arrest our way out of. It is a problem that has multiple layers and facets to it. There are many social determinants for why people find themselves in that position. There are many, again, compelling reasons why we need to tackle the root cause of these challenges.

Be that as it may, I can assure you that a victim of crime is not especially interested in the social determinants of why that person has assaulted them or why that person has stolen their property or broken into their home, frightening their family. That's a very scary situation. I think it's incumbent that we have good, transparent, and clear data that can ensure that Albertans have continued faith in their justice system. Not only is it important, of course, that justice is done, but it's important that it is seen to be done, that Albertans have faith.

The best way to ensure that Albertans have faith is that they have the data and the information at their disposal. That data and information may be uncomfortable for the government, but I can assure you that it is a fact, whether it is publicly disclosed or not. I think on balance it would be best if the government says: "You know what? I'd rather we know that information. I'd rather the opposition knows that information. I'd rather Albertans know that information so we can set about tackling the problem and actually addressing the issue." We need to measure what's happening in the system so we know where front-line resources are needed. Are we doing things as efficiently and effectively as we can be? Are there new ways of thinking about how we address some of the challenges in the justice system?

Now, there is obviously going to be some restriction, just based on rights of the accused and just simply the way the process works. Again, there may be an opportunity for us to relook at how we do things in this province, looking at other provinces and seeing if there are things that other provinces are doing differently that we could adopt. But, again, let's look at the data coming out of other provinces. Let's compare that to the information that we have here.

Just in conclusion, Madam Speaker, it is important for victims that justice is swift and justice is transparent. At the same time, it's important that the accused receive swift access to justice and that their constitutional rights are guaranteed and in fact are implemented. But the transparency, the measurement, and the reporting of data are the tools that we need in this province to ensure that victims see justice done and that the accused receive a swift and fair trial. That is why I will be supporting this bill at second reading, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 201. You know, I think back to when the member opposite was in the federal government, and there were calls from communities across our country for an inquiry into the long-standing crisis of murdered and missing aboriginal women. I recall that the government in which he served declared repeatedly that we didn't need another study but that what we needed was to be taking immediate action to address the issues that were driving the problem.

Well, today it would seem that these positions are reversed, with the member proposing legislation focused on studying the long-standing issues that have led to the bottlenecks in our justice system while our government is taking concrete action to address them.

Now, Madam Speaker, I'm very happy that the new government of Canada moved forward with that inquiry into murdered and missing aboriginal women and that our government is actively supporting that work because that is an issue where we have much to learn about the challenges, complications, and issues of systemic discrimination that have led to such tragic consequences.

However, on the issue of the backlog in Alberta's justice and court systems we have a very clear understanding of how we've arrived where we are. Previous federal governments, including the

government in which the member opposite sat, failed to appoint judges, leaving multiple vacancies unfilled on the Court of Queen's Bench in Alberta. Likewise, previous provincial governments failed to appoint enough judges to keep pace with our rapid population growth or to provide adequate funding for Crown prosecutors, and both federal and provincial governments provided inadequate funding for legal aid, further delaying and tying up our system.

As was noted by journalist Paula Simons on a recent podcast, the Press Gallery – I recommend that everyone listen to it; it's very entertaining and insightful – previous Justice ministers in our province attempted to prove their tough-on-crime stance by pushing to prosecute every possible case, without due consideration of likelihood of conviction, and insisting on criminal charges in cases where maybe misdemeanors and fines could have been more appropriate, further adding stress and duress to our justice system. As a result, we have a system that's under great pressure. But as I just described, we are, in fact, quite clear about how we arrived where we are, and I think we're equally clear on what the solution is. We need to invest the resources that have been needed for so long, that previous governments failed to put in place.

Now, I know that the minister has been an active advocate for the federal government to fill vacancies on the Court of Queen's Bench, and she has been successful in getting them to do so, with four new judges appointed last June, and then this past October the Minister of Justice announced the creation of 10 new positions on the Court of Queen's Bench, with an additional seven new judges appointed by the federal government. Just last week the minister announced that our government will be hiring an additional 50 Crown prosecutors, 30 clerks and staff because, again, Madam Speaker, previous governments failed to invest in the resources needed to hire an adequate number of clerks for the courts here in the province of Alberta.

We are committed to continuing to fund legal aid at a level 20 per cent higher than that provided by previous governments. That, Madam Speaker, is concrete action that will yield immediate results in beginning to address the backlog in our system created by previous governments. Now, I'm not denying the value of collecting and studying appropriate data to improve and better target the provision of government services, but if I might reflect back again for a moment, I remember that the Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin served with the government that chose to gut the long-form census across Canada, crippling Statistics Canada's ability to collect precisely that kind of crucial information. Now, I'm very happy to see that he's reconsidered that position and that he's come to recognize the value of collecting appropriate data again. That's good to see. Learning is important. However, in this particular case I'm not convinced that a bill legislating the additional collection and curation of particular data is going to address the problem at hand.

4:20

I was very pleased to hear that the minister did her due diligence upon hearing of this bill. She reached out to stakeholders, including Crown prosecutors, staff in the courts, defence counsel, to discuss the possible benefits or issues with the provisions of this legislation, and as she noted when she spoke today, all stakeholders she spoke with clearly stated that the statistics that this bill proposes to track are likely not ones that would be valuable to track and report.

Again, Madam Speaker, for all stakeholders, the people working on the front lines of our justice system with whom the minister spoke, everyone she spoke with stated that the data this bill proposes to collect would not have value in addressing these issues. I take them at their word, and I fail to see how the solution for an under-resourced system is to add additional burdens, in excess, on the staff

who are working in that system to track the effects of the lack of resources. The way to solve this problem is to address the lack of resources, to provide the resources that are needed to properly serve the people of Alberta, to provide them, again, with faith in their justice system, to see us have the opportunity to give our front-line staff the ability to do their jobs to the best of their abilities without the stress that's been created by years and years of neglect, not to add more burden on them to collect information that they themselves have said is not useful for addressing the problem.

Our overall focus needs to be on ensuring that our courts can focus on serious and violent crime. We need to deal with the repercussions of the Jordan decision. We recognize the challenge of that data to the system, and I've been pleased to see that the minister has responded quickly and is acting to ensure that we are able to better protect Albertans by providing the resources that are needed. I'm proud to serve with a government that will continue to make our decisions based on evidence and input from experts, including front-line employees, the people that do this work every day.

Now, certainly, what I've heard about the open portal from B.C. sounds very interesting. I'd be very open to considering the possibilities that could bring. I don't think we need a piece of legislation to make that happen. I know the city of Edmonton, for example, offers some open data and has been looking into that model, and that's certainly something I've seen many in the community use very well in many different respects. In that respect, I think that's something we should explore, and I note that the minister has expressed that she is interested in that model and exploring that further, so certainly I look for the opportunities to do that.

But, for myself, Madam Speaker, I do not see the value at this time in moving forward with this bill. Thank you.

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is with a great deal of pleasure that I rise today and desire to speak in favour of Bill 201, the Justice System Accountability Act. I want to thank the members for everything that's been said today with regard to this act, even the previous member, who had many good things to say but who, I think, allowed his party politics to intervene when it came to the final conclusion that he needed to make, which was: let's gather appropriate data, and let's be less worried about party politics.

You know, I think all of us understand the serious nature of this. If we haven't been the victim of a crime, we've had friends that have been victims of a crime, Madam Speaker. I can think of the sense of betrayal that a friend of mine had when her house was broken into and just the dramatic change that that brought to the way she sort of viewed the world and to the comfort that she had. We all sort of believe that our house is our castle, that it's a place of safe refuge. When that has been violated, we walk away with a sense of real fear and distrust. It's staggering to think about how, as a victim of a crime, it can just absolutely change the way we look at our world.

You know, if there's one thing that we as a government should have the capacity to do, it's that we should be able to provide a system of justice, a system of law that allows us to realize that we have a modicum of safety and a belief that should that safety be betrayed, there will be a sense of justice, that we can address that crime and that justice will prevail. That's a really important thing. We have to have a system of justice that not only helps victims to receive justice but also to believe that the justice system delivers

justice. We need to take this issue, the whole issue of a backlog in the court system, very seriously.

Crime in Alberta, as we've heard people say today, has been on the rise, and there are many ways that we can address that. You know, we can promote education about personal safety, we can set into place precautions to try to prevent crime, and we can push to increase law enforcement. That is just one other vehicle that we can use, Madam Speaker, to gather the information, to gather the data that we need to make sure that we have an efficient system of law that delivers justice in a timely, consistent fashion.

As Albertans we have to learn to live in a world that sometimes is unsafe. I mean, in Alberta we saw an 18 per cent increase reported in crime in 2015. That includes a 12 per cent increase in violent crime. You've heard the Wildrose speak about the increase in rural crime before in this Chamber and about the devastating impact that that has on farms and rural families.

I can speak to examples from my own place. I live in Drayton Valley, where many of the businesses and the equipment yards where they store their equipment overnight have been vandalized and where equipment has been stolen on a regular basis. When you no longer believe that you can, with a modicum of safety, park your vehicles and your equipment, that you've spent years investing in so that you can make money for your family and for your business, when that's no longer safe, if you don't believe that the justice system can handle it, many want to sometimes take steps that they really shouldn't be taking.

For instance, a friend of mine was in his yard and saw a car stop across the alley and a bunch of jerry cans thrown over the back fence, and then it drove off. He couldn't figure out what was going on, so he and one of his employees stuck around to see. About half an hour later the same car came by, and they scaled the fence and started siphoning the gasoline out of these company vehicles. Now, how are we going to handle that? If you don't believe that that's happening, well, I'm sorry, but it is. For them, they had to explain to these young men that they had a choice: they could either leave, or they were going to be in a lot of trouble. I'm grateful that they didn't take justice into their own hands, but you know, they and the citizens in my constituency have to believe that the justice system has the ability to take care of these kinds of issues and where the victims are not victimized by the system.

You know, we need to make sure that we don't have a serious problem with backlogs in our courts that keep things going for so long through the court system that justice is denied. There has been some concern expressed by this side of the House with regard to the actions of the government as they attempt to deal with criminals. We've had discussions in the last week about the protocol that's come out from the NDP with regard to the triage that they're going to do when it comes to violent crime.

4:30

This government seems to lack the ability to understand that when a file is determined not to be prosecutable because simply, you know, they don't have the resources, that really sends a message to the ordinary Alberta citizen that you're normalizing a lack of prosecution because you don't have the resources and because you haven't done the job of making sure that our system of justice is capable of handling these issues. Fiscal constraints and increased demands on the justice system should not make it possible for criminals to walk free and for victims to be left without justice.

You know, I once, when I was much younger and, maybe in the minds of some of the kids that I taught, was maybe a little more cool . . .

An Hon. Member: You're still cool.

Mr. Smith: I'm still cool. Thank you very much.

... was taking a bunch of kids out to have a barbecue and a wiener roast on a Friday night with our church and saw a car blitz through on highway 16 just out by CFRN – at the time there was a set of lights there – and just about wipe out two cars going through the intersection and then, about 300 or 400 yards down the road, saw the same car upside down in the ditch, a couple of lampposts sheared off, and the individual that had been driving the car in distress. You know, the first time I saw that car coming was when I looked in my rear-view mirror, and I saw it going about 60 miles an hour. It was about 30 yards behind me and at the last second jerked over, went through the intersection, and missed my car. I was that close to having five or six people that were in our vehicle wiped out.

Now, we have to have a justice system that doesn't give people the idea that a person that was as drunk as this individual was can get off scot-free because our system is so backlogged that we can't deal with it. That is not acceptable. We better start asking ourselves: why are our courts so backlogged, and what are the problems that are developing that are keeping us from dispensing justice? What happened to us that we have a justice system where criminals walk free while the victims are left to struggle? Why does our Alberta system have an underperforming system of justice?

Yes, we've admitted on both sides of this House that there was a problem with not having enough prosecutors and that the prosecutors we had were overburdened. We're glad that the government is taking steps to deal with that, but that sometimes is a symptom of a broken system. We have to start asking ourselves: where is our justice system failing Albertans, and what do we need to do in order to find out exactly where that's happening?

Bill 201 is a step in the right direction. It may not be the be-all and the end-all, but it's a positive step in the right direction by allowing us to gather information that will tell us why and where specifically our justice system is failing the people of Alberta. Bill 201 is about gathering data.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak in favour of Bill 201. I think it's important for us to recognize the problems in our system so we can act and make appropriate decisions moving forward. You know, in a recovery program the first step is admitting that you have a problem. We know we have a problem, and now we're putting part of the solution on the table. A constituent just the other day told me: please promise me that in 2019, when you're government and the opposition puts forward a good idea, you'll listen to them because it's better for all of Alberta.

Now, when it comes to the court system, there are many problems that it's facing right now, one of which is, you know, that potentially we're not going to be prosecuting criminals, especially if the case is difficult or unlikely to bring forward a conviction, which, Madam Speaker, is of serious concern for anyone who's ever been sexually assaulted. Those are most definitely difficult cases and could most definitely in the beginning be seen as unlikely to receive a conviction, but it doesn't matter anymore because this government has instructed our Crown prosecutors to not proceed with these cases. That's disgusting.

Now, my hope is that the government will see the error of their ways and will reverse this because there's a good piece of legislation on our Order Paper which will remove the statute of limitations on civil proceedings for survivors, which I think is a great move. It's a great step forward. That's a good initiative. That's

a great thing, and we'll talk about that more when that comes back on the paper. But it's a bit confusing that we see a new triage protocol that actually sends the opposite message to survivors. It's deplorable, and it needs to be reversed, and I hope – I hope – that that will be, and I will applaud that government on that day.

Now, Bill 201 would go to address some of the problems that are in our court systems because we're going to see where those problems are and what the holdups are. Instead of just not prosecuting cases and letting alleged criminals go, we're going to be able to fix some of the problems. This is part of the solution, Madam Speaker.

You know, we may see where defence lawyers are using adjournments as a strategy to wear down victims – traumatized victims – to wear down the will to continue to show up at court and try and testify. We may see that. Likely we will.

This will make the system more accountable by accumulating data between the Department of Justice and the courts. This isn't an overburden of work. This is something that's already being recorded. Maybe the system is outdated. I mean, we use a reel-to-reel system for data collection in Service Alberta. That's insane. I sure hope that's not the case in our courts, but we'd certainly find that out should Bill 201 be passed. A bottleneck in the system: that would be addressed. Bill 201 will track how many charges get dropped or lessened, and it's not necessarily a reflection of a soft-on-crime attitude but an overburdened system. We will see these problems.

Madam Speaker, I won't say much more in support of Bill 201 except that we need to look at the hypocrisy of what is happening right now between the triage protocol system and the cases, charges of sexual assault not even seeing their day in court because you're afraid of the Jordan ruling and its data. This is insane. This is absolutely insane. Someone, please tell me. Like, you don't see the hypocrisy of Bill 2 and the triage protocol? It doesn't work. One does not support the other. I urge this government to take a look at that, please. Those who have a voice and an ear of those who make decisions in this government, I urge you to use them. In the opposition we will support you in that one hundred per cent.

Now, please, I urge all members in this House to support Bill 201, to take a step forward in addressing some of the problems in our court system together as a House because this is a good idea. This is what the constituents of Airdrie would want us to do. I will be voting for 201, and, please, I urge all of you to do the same.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to Bill 201?

Seeing none, I'll call on the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition to close debate.

4:40

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Can you imagine going to school every day, going for 12 years, or going for four years of university or getting a master's degree and having nobody grade what you do during that entire time? Can you imagine going from grade 1 to grade 12, and every day you come home with a report card that's empty, and nobody knows what you did all day in those classes? They don't know what class you went to. They don't know whether you showed up on time for those classes or whether you turned in your homework. Well, that's what they're suggesting, what the NDP government is suggesting, is the right thing to do with our justice system.

Now, Madam Speaker, I've been clear on this. I've been a lawyer for 25 years. For 25 years I've been a lawyer. I worked in the courts in Alberta for 10 years. When I drafted this bill, when I came about

the idea and started to talk to people, I talked to Crown prosecutors, talked to defence lawyers, talked to as many people as I could. I actually talked to one Crown prosecutor, one person that I'd actually practised with in Fort McMurray, and she's actually been a lawyer now for – wow – I bet you it's 40, 45 years. During that period of time she was a Crown prosecutor for at least 20 years, she was a defence attorney for at least 30 of those years, because she did both, and she did federal Crown work and provincial Crown work. Now, Madam Speaker, I can't think of anybody more experienced in the entire province than her. She's been at this full-time for over 40 years. She actually helped me in large part to draft this bill or to at least come to the point where I thought it was workable and made a lot of sense.

It does make a lot of sense. If you have an opportunity to do it – in fact, I heard from the other side that many of the people on the other side thought that keeping track of what we were actually doing, having us grade what people are doing, and finding out why they're doing certain things or why they're not getting certain things done would be a good thing. I think it would be a good thing.

Madam Speaker, I do want to clarify a couple of things. First of all, the NDP needs to know that the Criminal Code is a federal statute. It's not provincial; it's a federal statute. Therefore, across Canada all of those federal statutes are the same. Now, there are some administrative changes that are different in each province, but the federal statute is the same. Crown prosecutors are to make sure that that federal statute is kept up and that they're prosecuting people properly. It's not a provincial statute; it's a federal statute. The Criminal Code, as a whole, should be – and I implore all members here to think about this very specifically because the people of Alberta have lost faith in the justice system simply because of these 200 cases, and they see this government doing very little to react to it.

I can also assure the member that most crimes are committed – I mean, she was talking about what the basis of the crime committed is, and I know that a lot of studies have been done on this. For the most part, it's lust or greed, sometimes desperation. In Canada, hopefully, that's never the case because people shouldn't fall through the cracks in Canada.

But the simplest thing – and I implore the members on the other side to think about this because it appears to me that it's only the NDP that is voting against this bill, that is voting against keeping track of what we do in the justice system. I would implore them, Madam Speaker, with this: don't worry about it. You won't be here in two years to put this into action. You won't be here. You won't. I would suggest that what you should do is to put it in place. It's going to take you at least two years to get around to putting it in place or bringing up the rules and the regulations, like Bill 6. Why don't you just put it in place? We're more than happy to administer it because we think it's good government, and we'll be making sure that Albertans know, through transparency in the judicial system, exactly what this government is hiding from them.

I can't imagine anything more important than making sure that criminals are kept off our streets and the people of Alberta are kept safe. This government, by ignoring that and the principles of fundamental justice and the need for transparency and accountability in this bill and in our justice system, is ignoring the best interests of Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has moved second reading of Bill 201, Justice System Accountability Act.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:44 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Jean	Strankman
Clark	Loewen	Swann
Cooper	Pitt	Taylor
Cyr	Rodney	van Dijken
Gotfried	Schneider	Yao
Hanson	Smith	

5:00

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hoffman	Miranda
Babcock	Horne	Phillips
Bilous	Jansen	Piquette
Carlier	Kazim	Renaud
Carson	Kleinsteuber	Rosendahl
Connolly	Littlewood	Schmidt
Coolahan	Loyola	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McKitrick	Turner
Goehring	McPherson	Westhead
Gray	Miller	Woppard
Hinkley		

Totals: For – 17 Against – 37

[Motion for second reading of Bill 201 lost]

Motions Other than Government Motions

Surgical and Diagnostic Wait Times

501. Mr. Jean moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to complete and make public within 120 days of the passage of this motion a report relating to surgical and diagnostic wait times that identifies the following: barriers causing excessive wait times; estimated costs of wait times in terms of factors including but not limited to lost productivity, health deterioration, and opioid addiction; and cost-effective solutions including those used in other provinces to reduce wait times within the limits of the Canada Health Act.

Mr. Jean: Well, Madam Speaker, one up, one down. Let's hope that we have a little bit more good fortune with the second one. Maybe this government will listen because I do think statistics are extremely important. They're important in our justice system. They're also very important in our health care system.

It's my pleasure to rise today to speak on my first private member's motion here in the House and to talk about an issue that's very near and dear to me. I think it's near and dear to every Albertan. You see, Madam Speaker, I do believe in universal health care. I believe that health care should be there when we need it. Access to health care is important, but actually getting the health care is even more important because access to a waiting line is not access to health care, just like access to a waiting line in the justice system is not access to the justice system. Unfortunately, we saw the members on the other side vote against the opportunity for additional access to the justice system and additional resources. I

would be ashamed if I were them. Fortunately, I don't have to worry about that because I'm standing up for everyday Albertans every single day I'm here, and I'm proud to do that.

My motion today calls on the NDP government to complete and make public within 120 days of the motion passing a report relating to surgical and diagnostic wait times. Madam Speaker, we live in the greatest country in the world, in the greatest province in that country. We have tremendous wealth, but it's not giving Albertans a proper return on investment. We know that because when we compare Alberta's medical system, our health care system, to anywhere else on the planet, we find that the amount we pay is not getting a proper return in outcomes. The amount we pay is one of the highest in the world. In fact, in a recent OECD country comparison to Alberta it was determined that we were the second most expensive out of these OECD countries and that we had the 28th worst outcomes – worst outcomes – not best outcomes but worst outcomes. That is shameful.

[The Speaker in the chair]

That's why I'm suggesting that a report be put forward relating to the surgical and diagnostic wait times that identifies barriers that cause these excessive wait times, that estimates as well the cost of wait times in terms of factors that maybe this government doesn't understand. These factors are important, factors including but not limited to lost productivity, health deterioration, and opioid addiction. These are important things to Albertans. Today we're almost losing one person per day from opioid abuse – one person a day – yet what is this government's response? You've heard it, Mr. Speaker, and you're going to hear it a lot: new light bulbs.

While Albertans are dying, our health care system doesn't respond properly. That's why this motion also asks for the government to prepare and submit a report that evaluates the cost-effective solutions, including those in other provinces, that are used to reduce wait times within, of course, the limits of the Canada Health Act.

Now, I was very happy to announce in 2014 my retirement from politics after 10 years, Mr. Speaker. I know the NDP would like me to retire even earlier than what I expect to do, and I'm hoping that they keep saying that because that's going to make me stay here longer. I can't think of anything better than to fight the ideological purpose of the NDP government in this place for the benefit of Albertans. When I left Ottawa and left the politics there – and I was very proud of my time. I was. We passed a lot of things. We built a lot of pipelines. We brought in some great laws, great criminal justice laws. [interjections] These people laugh about it because they don't know about it. I heard clearly from what they were talking about in the justice system that they don't know about the justice system either.

I'm hoping we get a better response on the health care system. Maybe they'll understand that the only reason I came back to politics here in Alberta was to make sure that what happened to my son doesn't happen to theirs or anybody here or anybody that's listening or any Albertan because it was negligence, nothing but negligence. It wasn't the people that were negligent; it was the system. That's why I'm here, to fix the system, and I'm going to fix more than those systems. With the help of my Wildrose caucus we're going to fix the justice system. We're going to make sure houses don't burn down anymore when a government doesn't respond. Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of work to do.

I wanted to spend more time with my family when I came back here. I wanted to come back to Alberta because I love Alberta. It is the greatest place in the world. But after watching four months, five months of delays, seven or eight misdiagnoses, and seven biopsies, my son died. I held his hand during most of those, Mr. Speaker.

Politics matter, Mr. Speaker. Politics matter because we bring in policies. This government brings in policies on justice, or not. They bring in decisions on health care, or not. They can make our system better right now, just like they could have done with the justice system by passing Bill 201, but they didn't. They voted against justice. We have an opportunity, a tremendous opportunity; 55 people, 56 people on the other side could make the decision to save additional children's lives in this province just by getting the system right, by making sure health care responds not just by way of treatment but by outcomes. People can be healed if they focus on outcomes.

I believe that today we can start making a positive change in the lives of Albertans by signalling our intent as a province to finally tackle wait times. I'm going to flip through this speech because I can't believe some of these stats. If you want an MRI in Alberta: 172 days, Mr. Speaker. For an MRI – I can tell you that I've seen the MRI machines in this province. They sit empty. They are not being utilized. They're sitting in rooms where nobody is operating them, millions and millions and millions of dollars of equipment. And what is the response from this government? Hmm; business as usual; let's spend more money. It's not a solution. We need to look at what we've got, the assets that we have. The MRI machines, the X-ray machines: let's use them 24 hours a day until we get rid of the backlog.

If you have a problem with your sight, a degenerative problem or you need cataract surgery, 224 days you have to wait. That's 90 per cent of the time, Mr. Speaker. Two hundred and twenty-four days. January to August for cataract surgery when you can't see very well. And there's a backlog. But you can go to Calgary and decrease that backlog, apparently. You can't do it in Edmonton. That just shows that the system is failing. When you can go from one town to another town in the same province and have totally different outcomes, have totally different response times, something is wrong.

What's the response? Free light bulbs. Yeah. Let's get an Ontario company in and get Ontarians to work in Alberta, and we'll hit – what? We talked about it today.

5:10

An Hon. Member: They think it's funny over there.

Mr. Jean: They do think it's funny. They keep talking about how these things are funny. But they're not funny, Mr. Speaker. They're not funny when you have been a victim of a sexual assault and the judge throws out the case and you're a victim being revictimized. That's not funny. It's not funny when your son dies in a hospital because the system broke.

And it breaks every day. There are people dying in our health care system. There are people not getting the response that they should get. People pay their taxes here and they deserve to have a proper response from their government. They deserve to be able to go into a health care system that actually cures them and doesn't just shift them around. My son was refused by two hospitals before he was actually accepted by one, and he died less than eight months later. Refused, Mr. Speaker. Kicked out. Disgusting.

We need a health care system that reacts, that is better than the alternative that we have right now. I believe in universal health care. I believe that every Albertan deserves health care but health care that actually solves the problem, that doesn't just put them in a hospital bed. Mr. Speaker, hospital beds in this province cost up to \$15,000 a day to keep people in them. Fifteen thousand. That's what I said, Mr. Speaker: \$15,000 a day to keep them in.

My son waited two months for a test that cost five grand. What in the world is going on? I paid for two tests for my son. Finally, I

dragged out what tests he needed after two and a half months. I sent money for those tests. One cost \$10,000; another, \$2,500. Mr. Speaker, I was ready the first day he went into the hospital to pay that amount, but nobody told me. I had to beg. I literally went into that hospital just about every day to find out.

That's why we need to do something different, Mr. Speaker, because what we're doing is not working. I don't care what the Health minister says. Our system is broken, and throwing money at it is not going to solve the problem. If you need a knee replacement in Alberta: 237 days. That's how long you have to wait. For a hip replacement: 209 days.

There is a better way, where we put the needs of patients first, before any ideology. We protect taxpayers while respecting the Canada Health Act. I want to see the greatest health system in the world right here in Alberta. It can be done, and it will be done with a Wildrose government. We will get back to action where outcomes matter more than treatment because it is about outcomes. It's about making people better.

The productivity costs, the loss of the quality of life while we take care of our seniors when they might have a hip they have to wait for – it doesn't cost any more money today to get that hip replaced than it does in 209 days. It doesn't cost any more money to get that cataract surgery today than it does in 224 days. We need to get rid of the backlog.

Now, let's look at Saskatchewan because they're right next door. Their primary product is oil, much like ours. And congratulations to Saskatchewan. They're the number one place in the world right now to invest in the oil and gas sector. We're 48th in Alberta. We do get the same price, Mr. Speaker, and use the same pipelines, but we don't have quite the same government. In Saskatchewan they do have something that is called great wait times. In fact, they are considered clinically reasonable wait times by physicians.

In Saskatchewan they've hit or blown through many of their wait time targets for key surgeries like cataracts and hip and knee replacements. In Saskatchewan, 92 days, three months. In Alberta: 224 days, more than double. Something's wrong. For knee replacements patients in Saskatchewan are waiting 130 days; 237 days here in Alberta. And for hip replacements patients in Saskatchewan are waiting 128 days versus 209 days here in Alberta. It doesn't take a genius to see that something's wrong here in Alberta. If you want an MRI and then want to see a specialist and then want to get referred, well add that 200 to 200 and another 200, and a year and a half later you might see somebody to help you. That's not access to health care. That's access to a waiting list. It's different, and the Supreme Court of Canada said that it was different.

So let's have some difference. Let's have Alberta lead the country in wait time guarantee. Let's move forward, Mr. Speaker, on something that actually gets rid of the same, tired methods of health care that we've seen in this province for years.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to give you a couple of examples of what I've seen the money go to. If you're moving from Lethbridge to Calgary and you work for Alberta Health Services, it's going to cost – well, I've seen it cost – \$138,000. It's \$138,000 if you work for AHS and you move from Lethbridge to Calgary. I'd say that the market rate is a little different.

Or we could talk about the AHS senior manager that had his assistant go and save a parking spot for his wife during Christmas shopping. Or better yet, why don't we talk about the AHS personnel that was sent down to the Mayo Clinic because he wanted a second opinion on his cancer. Guess who paid for that, Mr. Speaker? The taxpayers of Alberta did. It's disgusting that my son waited here, thinking he had health care, and Alberta Health Services sends some bureaucrat down to the Mayo Clinic for a second opinion.

While they banter and laugh on the other side, Mr. Speaker, people in this province are not getting access to health care. This government should take it seriously. This government needs to take it seriously because people's lives are on the line. It's not an issue of money. It's an issue of quality of life. It's an issue of productivity. It is an issue of life. There are innovations that people can make. There are things that people are doing in other jurisdictions.

I have to commend the minister. She has responded, from my understanding, to many of my caucus members that have issues in their particular ridings. I appreciate that, and I would suggest that she's one of the more competent ministers on that side. But that means, Mr. Speaker, that she cannot use any excuses. I've heard a lot of excuses today. She needs to take control of the bureaucracy and find some systems that work, and this particular motion provides one little help, one little helping hand for her.

I would ask that before turning it down, they take it into consideration because there's no reason Alberta shouldn't have the best health care system in the world, certainly in Canada. No reason. I think she's got the capability to make it the best health care system in Canada, and I assure you that the Wildrose members on this side of the House will work to make it that system while we're in opposition. We will work with the government in any way we can to improve our system in justice, our system in health care, our system in education. That's our commitment to the government. I don't want any family to have the same experience that I had. None.

I did not realize how important policy and politics were, not when I was in the federal government for 10 years passing laws, and I did pass a lot of laws. I was very proud of those laws. I was proud of the pipelines we built. I was proud of my private member's bill that was tough on organized crime, Mr. Speaker. I was proud that I asked for many more judges, both at the Queen's Bench level and at the Provincial Court level, because I was in the system for years and I understand how important it is for Crown prosecutors to have the resources, just like it's so important for our health care system to reflect the best practices from across the country and across the world. Right next door in Saskatchewan and in B.C. – you can go east or west – both have better systems than we do, and they do it for a lot less money. I don't care how much money it costs; just get it right because people's lives are at risk.

Let's not waste the money. I've talked to people that can buy a wheelchair for \$9,000 that AHS sells for \$15,000. These are not funny things, Mr. Speaker. People work hard for their money. Alberta Health Services has an obligation to the people of Alberta to get it right, to get a return on investment not just because of the money but because the return on investment is the person's life, their quality of life, their family's quality of life, the productivity of that person getting back to work.

Can you imagine if the whole backlog was gone tomorrow or even if this government moved forward with this motion and solved it so that we got rid of the backlog in a year, Mr. Speaker? Can you imagine? No more having to go and help family members buy groceries, go shopping, go for a haircut, go see the doctor. They would be back living a high-quality lifestyle. Their quality of life would be back to the point that they deserve, where they have a health care system that is the best in the world.

5:20

We all want the same things here. We just believe on this side of the House, the Wildrose, in transparency, accountability. That's why we need to publish these things. That's why we need to move forward, Mr. Speaker, so Albertans know what we're doing. Look around the rest of the country for best practices and implement those best practices. It's important. Until you see a loved one die,

until you go through the justice system and it fails you, you don't realize how important it is.

So on this issue today, on my Motion 501, I'm hoping that the NDP, on the other side, and all parties in this place will set aside partisan differences and will say: yes; we are here for Albertans, for Albertans first. That means we have to look at best practices around the world and around Canada and implement those best practices in our health care system.

We don't have to go far, Mr. Speaker. If the Health minister picked up her phone and called the Health minister in Saskatchewan, I bet you any money that they would be able to sit down and the Health minister from Saskatchewan would say: here's what we did; here's what we did to reduce our wait times to three months for just about every normal surgery, for every common surgery. While we here in Alberta have to wait 200-plus days. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that if we emulate systems and copy other jurisdictions that are successful, we will have success here.

Right now it's not an issue of money. We spend almost 50 per cent of our budget on health care, and I know that foundations across this great province raise millions and millions of dollars more. I myself was on the children's health foundation. I was the chair here in northern Alberta, raising money for the Stollery for many years, Mr. Speaker, back in the '90s.

I know how important it is. That's why I'm hoping they're going to support this bill.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to rise and respond to Motion 501. I want to say that I know everyone in this House wants to ensure that we have the very best health care system to serve every single Albertan. We know that wait times are important and that we need to be finding ways to continue to reduce them.

Mr. Speaker, I'm so proud of the fact that we have public reporting on these wait times through a wide range of sources, and the member has mentioned some of them. Alberta Health Services monitors and releases quarterly reports for wait times on coronary artery bypass grafts, scheduled contract cataract surgeries, hip replacement surgeries, knee replacement surgeries, hip fracture repair, and much more. Further, Alberta Health Services' website includes information on the EMS dashboard, which reports response times to life-threatening episodes as a quarterly metric as well. It also tracks real-time monitoring for emergency rooms in Edmonton, Calgary, and Red Deer so far.

The Alberta wait time reporting system publicly tracks wait times for a number of those surgeries, as we mentioned, as well as diagnostic imaging and wait times for oncologists as well as radiation therapy. I'm proud that this information is publicly available through waittimes.alberta.ca. Additionally, the Canadian Institute for Health Information, CIHI, reports comparative wait times for key procedures such as hip and knee surgeries, cataract surgery, and radiation therapy across Canada. We use this information, Mr. Speaker, to target our resources and to help plan for a system that Albertans can depend on when they need it.

I want to also extend my condolences. The system doesn't always get a chance to help everyone in a way that is saving their lives.

Mr. Speaker, we're not afraid of evidence. We know that there is progress to be made on wait times, and we are committed to making progress. But I also want to be clear that if you are an urgent patient, you will be seen urgently. People triage patients through the system. This government will continue to protect public health care for all Albertans, which is one of the reasons why I'm so proud that we

restored the \$800 million in funding that was planned to be cut just prior to the last election. That represents a lot of patients who would have been waiting longer for care.

I know that it's tough to come up with solutions. I know that there have been proposals for massive cuts to the system and off-loading costs to everyday Albertans with health fees. Tell me, Mr. Speaker, how slashing resources can do anything but increase wait times and off-load costs onto Alberta patients and their families. Rather than continuing to describe our problem – we are thoroughly aware of it – this government is taking action on wait times. We are taking action for all Albertans, not just those who can afford to pay.

With this motion the member opposite is asking us to divert even more resources in providing information that's already publicly available to everyone. I want to say that I welcome feedback for concrete solutions from the member opposite and from all members of this Assembly. I know that we all have great ideas. We want them to continue coming forward, but I do not believe that this motion is a way to make that the reality, Mr. Speaker.

With that in mind, I'm urging my colleagues to vote against this motion as it stands today and to keep bringing recommendations forward as we work in a way that's collaborative to build a better system for all, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am humbled and honoured today to rise to speak to this motion, Motion 501, that's brought forward by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin, the hon. opposition leader. I really want to thank him not just for his passion on this topic, which is personal, professional, and political, but also for how he's weighed it with a lot of research. It's a matter of the gut and the head and the heart, and I salute him for that.

Now, it's on record in *Hansard*, so I don't need to read it, sir. There are just so many ideas in here that are completely reasonable. Making it public within 120 days: it's simply asking that the government would complete a report related to surgical and diagnostic wait times, issues that are concerning Albertans in a big way, and they have for a long time. Barriers causing excessive wait times – excessive wait times – estimated costs of wait times, health deterioration, opioid addiction are immediate and urgent issues. This information is quite accessible; it's a matter of collating.

I'm sensing a serious trend here. That information is piecemeal right now in many issues that this government is dealing with. Let's put it together. Let's do the right thing, come up with the best options, implement them, and re-evaluate it for the benefit of Albertans, for their quality of life and the quality of their pocketbook. It's just common sense. It talks about "cost-effective solutions including those used in other provinces to reduce wait times within the limits of the Canada Health Act."

I really need to know – and I think Albertans have every right to know – why anyone on the other side of this Chamber could possibly vote against this. Please be specific. This is not binding in terms of a bill that was just voted down. This is a recommendation. It's a request. You wouldn't do anything wrong by voting for this, private members. Nothing. You would be helping your constituents. They'll be asking why you voted against this if you do. There's no threat, Mr. Speaker. It's just a reminder that this is an opportunity for people to work together for Albertans.

Now, I've heard for a long time about surgical and diagnostic wait times being extremely frustrating for people to work within, not just in this province, though, Mr. Speaker, and not just in this country. I remember from quite some time ago being the chair of the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, and the Health minister

at the time and myself, over a decade ago, put on a health summit, and it actually focused on best practices from around Planet Earth. I can tell you that no one from any country there would ever – would ever – suggest that they had a monopoly on the great ideas for health care. Speaking at this moment, I don't know if the hon. member happened to be there at that time or not. I wish he had been.

In an ideal situation everyone would receive the very time-sensitive diagnostic tests or surgical procedures that they require, but the reality of the situation is that we have a finite system. It's a finite world. There's only a certain number of doctors and hospitals and time in which to serve an ever-expanding population. Now, I know from my time in cabinet, in wellness, that great gains were made in this respect, and I think it is extremely unfortunate that this government has dropped them. How can you drop the positive, proactive, preventive, happy, healthy, out-of-the-hospital healthy eating and active living? Without a budget. I don't get it.

5:30

Now, because of that and because of the fact that we have limited resources, obviously it's incumbent upon any government to be effective and efficient with the utilization of resources that we do have so that we can serve the greatest number of people. We've heard it said in this Chamber many, many times that dumping endless amounts of money into the system is clearly not the answer.

We all know that Alberta has one of the most expensive health care systems per capita, yet wait time statistics leave us near average. We can do better, don't you think? Don't you think we deserve better? When I say "we," I mean Albertans. When the government or any major institution sets out to make a significant change, the best thing that they can be armed with is good data.

By taking the time to study the complete picture, with input and advice from relevant stakeholders, the government would be best equipped to fulfill their own priority, their initiative 2.7 from their own Ministry of Health business plan 2015-2018. The initiative states: "Implement a Wait Time Measurement and Waitlist Management Policy to address long wait times in the health care system." You said that you're going to do this. Here's an opportunity to do exactly what you suggested. Wouldn't it be nice for you to say, "Promise made, promise kept"? Then we could all walk out of here at 6 o'clock, have a nutritious meal, get back to work, and all Albertans would know that you've fulfilled your own promise.

I know that this initiative is a work-in-progress. But, honestly, the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. You know that from Lao-tzu, don't you? I see no reason why this government would not want to seek out and analyze any and all data that's related to this ongoing issue. It will empower.

As I said, the motion is simply asking the government to within four months complete a report which dives into a number of issues that may be exacerbating wait times. It's finding solutions. I heard the minister a minute ago asking for solutions. That's what this is about.

By making the report public, there's nothing to hide here. The motion would increase the transparency in the health system, and has that not been a hallmark, at least a proclaimed hallmark, of this government? Here's another great opportunity to prove that you're doing what you were saying you are doing, by being open and transparent, this time in the health care system.

Albertans would love to have those insights into factors which impact wait times. By the way, if it made the previous government look a little worse, we're not afraid of that at all. Bring it on. When I say, "Bring it on," Mr. Speaker, that's not aggressive. What that means is: let's continue to solve these problems that continue to evolve and, in this case, get bigger and bigger. We need to reverse that process. This is a perfect opportunity to do exactly that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we're only allotted a certain amount of time to speak on these. I won't be able to go into other details as to why I'm going to be voting on this motion in a very positive way and why others on this side of the House, I suspect, will as well. Everything about this motion is reasonable, including the timeline, so I'll vote for it. I'd encourage members from all sides of this House to rise in the time that we have and state why they will or will not vote for this. I know that we have esteemed members of a number of realms, including health care, who have incredible experience and expertise, and you know who you are.

Well, let's face it, everyone in this Chamber who has friends and family who have been through the system will have personal experience as well, so let's bring forward the personal, the professional, the political. Let's do the smart thing. Let's work together for Albertans in a cost-effective, quality-of-life sort of way that will make this province even better than it is today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to respond to Motion 501. I'd like to thank the Leader of the Official Opposition for bringing this important discussion on surgical wait times to the attention of the Legislature.

As a former operating room nurse at the Foothills hospital for nearly 10 years I think I can offer an important perspective to this debate. Mr. Speaker, the operating room is like no other place in our health care system, where patients put their complete trust in the team taking care of them while they're anaesthetized and unable to speak for themselves and where family members are not permitted to enter. Imagine how some people get nervous about visiting the dentist. Well, consider how nervous people are going in for brain surgery.

Thankfully, Mr. Speaker, the people who care for our patients undergoing surgery are some of the most dedicated and caring individuals I've ever met. I was honoured to work amongst them, people like Dr. Garnette Sutherland, whose team developed neuroArm, the first MRI-compatible neurosurgical robot, that was recently inducted into the Space Technology Hall of Fame. I know of many operating room nurses, anaesthetists, and surgeons who volunteer their time and skills to travel to places like Africa and Haiti at their own expense to help those less fortunate.

That's why, Mr. Speaker, I was shocked when in this very Chamber on December 7 last year the Leader of the Official Opposition characterized me and my former colleagues as "people who don't know how hard it is to work a real job" and people "who don't understand the fears of working families across this province." I know it's the job of the Leader of the Opposition to oppose, but I think he's taking his job a bit too literally when he describes people on this side of the aisle, who worked as nurses, teachers, social workers, and doctors before being elected, as not working a real job. The arrogance and disrespect shown by the Leader of the Opposition to these hard-working public servants is stunning. Perhaps instead of talking down about hard-working Albertans and focusing on . . .

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been raised, hon. member.

Stop the clock.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to a point of order with respect to the Member for Banff-Cochrane clearly

making allegations against another member in the House, imputing false motives or unavowed motives to another member, using abusive language or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder. While I appreciate the fact that the member may be reading from a quote inside the Chamber, the language that he's using on the opposite side of that quote is certainly language that's likely to create disorder.

He's also imputing false motives to the Leader of the Opposition in what he was or was not saying on that day in this House. I think the Leader of the Official Opposition has a very, very lengthy track record of defending front-line workers, a very, very lengthy track record of speaking highly of those who provide service. Even today, in what I would consider to be very, very, very passionate remarks about a very, very personal situation that he underwent inside this province, at no point did he speak specifically about front-line workers and nurses in an emergency room but merely about a system. Perhaps it would be advantageous to this House if that member would speak more along those lines and less about imputing motives to the Leader of the Official Opposition.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the Member for Banff-Cochrane was talking about incidents that had happened in the past. I think the Leader of the Official Opposition had said those remarks. He didn't say anything that hadn't already been said. Understanding the passion that the Leader of the Official Opposition had – and we all recognize that – you know, that passion shouldn't give him or anyone else, for that matter, immunity to be able to say or do anything they want. I believe the Member for Banff-Cochrane has not said anything that would disrupt the duties of this House but things that had been on the record and had been said. He wasn't talking about front-line workers as the Opposition House Leader is talking about. He actually talked about members who in their previous occupation had been members of health services.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:40

The Speaker: The House leader of the third party.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you. Standing Order 23(h) reads: "makes allegations against another Member." That indeed occurred. Standing Order 23(i): "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." It's not a matter of interpretation here. That's clearly what indeed has happened. I think it's extremely unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, because I'm expecting that you and all Albertans really want to be debating this motion and not this sort of situation, which is completely, unnecessarily, and extremely deleteriously personal.

Standing Order 23(j) reads: "uses abusive or insulting language." I know that many people would feel that that is exactly what this is.

Now, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we could go on, but out of respect for this House and this debate and for this motion and for the people of Alberta I'm not going to go on. I'm simply going to suggest that a very quick, easy, efficient, and fair way to deal with this situation is simply for the member to rise, to apologize, to retract the statements. I'd love to hear the rest of the speech as it relates to this motion on this table at this time.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm of the view that you continue to find reasons that you can antagonize each other across the hall. In this particular instance I don't have the Blues in front of me. I don't recall the exact words that you said. Nonetheless, there was a reference, which I believe the Opposition House Leader made, with respect to comments that were made in the House earlier. I would,

however, caution the member. I'm not sure that there is actually a point of order in this instance. However, please stick to the subject matter, avoid those statements that may be perceived as personal, and be respectful.

Please proceed.

Debate Continued

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, perhaps instead of talking down about hard-working Albertans and focusing on his own internal party conflicts and bozo eruptions, he should go out and actually talk to some front-line workers. The Wildrose leader's contempt for public servants is only compounded by his demands to unilaterally impose wage freezes and toss collective bargaining out the window, something Wildrose previously opposed during the Bill 46 debate . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Westhead: . . . demonstrating just how far to the right they've shifted.

Mr. Yao: Easy, commie. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, if it wasn't bad enough for the opposition leader to publicly . . .

Mr. Carlier: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been raised.

The Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Parliamentary Language

Mr. Carlier: Thank you. You know, heckling most certainly is part of the customs of this House. What we just heard went over and above that: "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member," "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." If you haven't heard the word that was said by the member, Mr. Speaker, it was actually the word "commie," which I would say most certainly fits into that definition.

Mr. Yao: I withdraw and apologize for those comments.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Banff-Cochrane, keep in mind the earlier comments, and be careful.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

Debate Continued

Mr. Westhead: First of all, on April 20 of last year in this Chamber the Official Opposition leader said with a straight face in *Hansard* the following quote with respect to Alberta's health care system: "When people quit or when people move out of the province, let's just not rehire them . . ." [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon member, particularly at this late hour, could you address your comments to the subject matter and try and avoid those clauses that you believe might be taken as causing disorder in the House.

Please continue.

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, I know I've touched a nerve on the other side telling the truth about the opposition, but I think I've got 10 minutes . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

Mr. Westhead: Each member is afforded 10 minutes to make their case, and I'd appreciate the opportunity to do that, Mr. Speaker.

He said: "Let's just not rehire them for now . . . It would help morale . . . It would."

Mr. Cooper: Point of order, Mr. Speaker, on relevance, please.

The Speaker: Did I hear a point of order on relevance?

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. That's correct.

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, I'm talking about what the Official Opposition leader said with respect to surgical wait times and staffing in hospitals. I'm trying to make my point on why I'm not going to support the motion.

The Speaker: Hon. member, please proceed but keeping mindful for this third time that I've asked you to – you've seen what's happening on the other side, so please be conscious of that. Please proceed.

Mr. Westhead: Sure. Mr. Speaker, I can't be responsible . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Please proceed.

Debate Continued

Mr. Westhead: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, you heard me correctly. The Wildrose's solution to the unemployment situation and wait times is to leave front-line positions unfilled. Not only that, they actually think this would improve morale. I've heard some far-out things from the Wildrose brain trust, but this one ranks right up there with calling feminism a cancer.

Take it from me; these hare-brained Wildrose schemes would simply not work and would most definitely not help morale. Picture this, Mr. Speaker. Health care being a female-dominated workplace, with a relatively young workforce thanks to the cuts imposed in the '90s by the PCs, that eliminated a generation of nurses and blew up hospitals, there are hundreds if not thousands of front-line workers on maternity leave at any given time. Not only that, the short-term staffing situation was to such an extent when I worked at AHS that staff couldn't even get time off to attend their own wedding. Here we have the leader of the Wildrose saying that it would improve morale not to fill these positions. It's unbelievable. You can't make this stuff up.

I'm beginning to think that the Leader of the Opposition is concentrating more on keeping his job or dreaming up a name for the new party. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to suggest: the wild conservatives.

Wait, Mr. Speaker. Here's another Wildrose plan to make you facepalm. During the 2015 election campaign the Wildrose proposed a catchy-sounding wait time guarantee. The guarantee went like this: if a Wildrose government fails to meet its own wait time targets, which they most certainly would considering their plan to not fill vacant positions and cut billions from health care, Albertans could go to a private clinic or out of province for procedures and be reimbursed by the public system. In a press conference the Wildrose

leader said, and I quote: we expect people to go to other provinces; we expect people to go possibly to the United States. End quote. I wish I was making this up, but it's true.

Boil this down, Mr. Speaker, and what you get is the Wildrose plan to funnel public dollars to their friends at private clinics and export public health care dollars to the U.S. or other provinces and bring in a de facto two-tiered system, where the wealthy jump the queue. This is just . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Please continue.

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, this is just another back-of-the-napkin Wildrose plan, that was clearly not thought through, just like the others, a plan that belongs with their shadow budgets, never to see the light of day. It's a shame, really. Albertans deserve better from their opposition.

Let's walk through an example of their plan, Mr. Speaker. The Wildrose sends Mr. Jones to the U.S. for hip surgery. Mr. Jones pays out of his pocket for airfare for him and a companion and pays out of his pocket for a hotel room. Then Mr. Jones suffers a medical complication during surgery and has a stroke. As a result, Mr. Jones requires 24-hour care for the rest of his life and must be repatriated back to Alberta at significant expense. Who pays for all this, you might ask? Mr. Jones. "Sorry," the Wildrose says, "We only offered to pay for your hip surgery; you're on your own for the stroke."

On the other hand, here in Alberta . . .

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: What's the point of order?

Point of Order Allegations against Members

Mr. Cooper: The point of order is that the member continues to use language and make allegations about the Wildrose, make allegations against members of this House . . .

The Speaker: Opposition House Leader, you've said that before. In this instance, I think the member is offering an opinion, which is the freedom . . . [interjections] Order, please. Are you finished with the point you wanted to make? I heard that before.

Mr. Cooper: No, I'm not finished with the point that I'd like to make because the hon. member is making assertions about things that aren't true. He is making assertions about a policy of the Wildrose Party that are false. He's not telling the truth, and that should be a problem for all members of this Chamber . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

5:50

Mr. Carlier: I think you said it best, Mr. Speaker. The member was just giving his opinions on things that have already happened in this House. In my wildest imaginings I do not see a point of order here. I think that right now they might agree with me that emotions are quite high at the moment, and that's probably what's giving rise to a lot of these points of order, not necessarily the facts of what's been said.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The House leader for the third party.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, sir. Sections 23(h), referring to allegations, and 23(i), to false and unavowed motives. It's not a matter of

opinion, sir, when someone comes forward and says – and we don't need the Blues; we don't need smirking. If the member had read the motion, the last clause includes: "to reduce wait times within the limits of the Canada Health Act." He was going off on a huge tangent about private health care, et cetera. I've got to tell you that it's embarrassing when we can't have a level of decency and respect in this place to concentrate, sir, on the motion . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: On the motion. Let's keep the personalities out of it, please and thanks.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you have two minutes left. It was a matter of opinion – I caution you again, for the fourth time – agreeing with your own deputy House leader. Be cautious of the time of day that you're at and the comments you make.

Debate Continued

Mr. Westhead: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let's see. Instead of investing in Alberta's health care system, like we are on this side of the House, Wildrose would rather cut billions and export public health care dollars to private providers outside of Alberta and support queue-jumping for those who can afford it.

Mr. Speaker, I can't support this motion or the Wildrose's preposterous and ill-considered solutions to shorten wait times. We already publicly report a significant amount of wait time information. More reports and studies that the Wildrose is calling for would divert resources away from the front lines.

I'm getting a bit tired of the Wildrose leader talking down about Albertans and hoping that the government fails for his own short-term political gain. This motion from the opposition leader was a chance for him to demonstrate leadership and propose some solutions, to show Albertans what he would do differently. If he bothered to look, he would have seen that wait time information is already publicly reported. He'd rather admire the problem and scapegoat and blame front-line workers.

Instead, what we need to do is take action, and that is exactly what this government is doing. We restored \$800 million in funding to health care and will continue finding efficiencies to offer more timely care and make improvements in wait times.

Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting this motion and urge members to do likewise. Thank you. [interjections]

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

Quiet, please.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand in this Assembly and address Motion 501. I'll try to raise the level of debate from some of the members that have spoken earlier.

You know, every hour in Alberta we spend about \$2.4 million on health care. That's about \$58 million a day. I think that we have made it very clear and the Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition has made it very clear that we support the public universal system of health care. We just desire, unlike, I guess, the NDP across the way, to make sure that it is efficient, that it is effective, and that it actually delivers health care rather than wait times. Unlike the musings of the individual that spoke prior to myself, we actually care what happens to Albertans when they enter the health care system.

Now, we are arguing in Motion 501, Mr. Speaker, that we simply produce a report and that that report look at the barriers that cause the excessive wait times. We can't argue, nobody in this Assembly can argue against the fact that we have horrendous wait times. It's obvious. The facts are there. Alberta, by one report, spends an

average of 22.9 weeks in wait time; Saskatchewan, 16.6; Quebec, 18.9; Ontario, 15.6. Surely to goodness, as legislators in this House we can have a conversation that looks at: what are the reasons, what are the barriers that create those wait times? Let's look at: what are the estimates that those wait times cost?

Let's take a look at the proposals so that we can evaluate cost-effective solutions for those wait times. This is something that is not particularly partisan. It's not left-wing; it's not right-wing. We've all agreed on universal health care in this Assembly. Surely to goodness, we don't have to look at the personal; rather, we can look at the system. Access to wait times is not access to health care. It is not access to healing. Let's take a look at the motion. Albertans wait nearly three weeks longer than the national average for treatment.

Wait times mean that patients continue in their suffering. I have a father, who had a knee replacement. It was done very well by the health care system in this province. The fact that he had to wait a significant amount of time, about, by the way, what I see the average is, about 224 days – if I remember correctly, my father had to wait maybe a little bit longer than that but approximately that wait time. Mr. Speaker, I know the pain that my father went through, and I know the kind of drugs that he was on, and I know that at 77, 78 years of age, when this was happening, he could hardly walk across the kitchen to be able to deal with making breakfast.

Wait times are important. Access to health care is important. We all have loved ones that have this same issue, so we in this Legislature should be dealing with this issue, and we should be dealing with it in a rational fashion. This motion simply asks us to go and create the ability to have a report that within 120 days will report on the wait times, on surgical and diagnostic wait times. That is a completely reasonable thing. I would suspect that all Albertans that listen to what we're doing here today would agree with that statement. I don't understand why the government would not be willing to support this motion.

You know, the Fraser report reports that the estimated cost of wait times can be as high as \$3,951 per person, for a total cost of \$3.5 billion to the Alberta taxpayer, Mr. Speaker. Those are significant costs. Now, you can argue the numbers, and that's fair enough. You can argue whether you like the Fraser Institute or you don't like the Fraser Institute or whether you believe their numbers or whether you don't. But this report would allow us to take a look and to come up with numbers that we want and reasons that we want. Estimated barriers and estimated costs: that's what this report is about, not some flights of fancy.

Alberta is presently facing an opioid crisis. One of the reasons – not the only reason but one of the reasons – that we have a problem with an opioid crisis is the fact that physicians have been prescribing opioids and people have become hooked. The longer we keep people on wait times, the longer they're on pain medication. The longer they're on pain medication, the more likelihood they have of becoming hooked.

Mr. Speaker, when I take a look at the wait times, I believe that it's important that we start to study this with Motion 501. Albertans demand this. Albertans will benefit from this. The social cost for families, the social cost for individuals suffering from mental health, the social costs and physical costs for people that are suffering from pain and from wait times and that need surgical and diagnostic data: this would help us progress those issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I want to adjourn the Assembly pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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