



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 14, 2017

Day 7

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

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

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 14, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I would like to welcome the students and staff of l'école Richard Secord school for stopping by and visiting and looking first-hand at democracy in Alberta. L'école Richard Secord is one of the French immersion schools in my riding of Edmonton-Rutherford, and I couldn't be more happy that they're here today. They are accompanied today by their teachers, Ms Biette, Mr. Girard, and Mrs. Cooper, as well as parenting chaperones Ms Milne-Epp, Ms Musial, and Ms Amirsayafi. If I could ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House, please.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, M. le Président, I would like to introduce to you and through you Wes Hosford elementary school. The students are with their teachers, Richard Henderson and Tanya Landiak, and with chaperones Claire Pearson, Deb Giguere, Colleen Helwig, Cori Willis, Kim Goodwin, Leslie Elliott, and Janet Steeves. The students asked me some really great questions as I was talking with them, and they decided that the age of voting should be age 12. I would like them to rise and to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups?
Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Carol Bigam. Carol Bigam is the president of the SouthWest Edmonton Seniors Association. There are over 20,000 people over the age of 55 in southwest Edmonton that her organization works to support. I'll be referring to SWESA in my member's statement. I would invite Carol to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mr. Silvio Adamo who is the fire chief and director of protective services in the beautiful town of Banff. Chief Adamo has 30 years of experience keeping Albertans safe, and he was the incident commander during the Mount Royal Hotel fire last December in Banff, that successfully evacuated all guests without incident in the middle of the night. He is a brave and courageous leader and is supported by an equally talented and dedicated team of first responders. I'd like to thank Chief Adamo and his team for the work they do day in and day out to look out for our communities, and I will ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much. It's a real honour for me today to welcome to the Legislature and to you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Ruben Nelson, who is a long-time advocate for real leadership, adaptive leadership, foresight. I think he may have coined the term "wicked problems," and I think all of us have some sense that those are part and parcel of our daily bread. I would welcome Ruben to stand and be recognized by the Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

Justice System

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, lately we've heard it all from members of the opposition when it comes to the justice system. Last week the Leader of the Official Opposition said that we shouldn't be investing in our courts because we need to place things on matrices to find out where the problems are first. This government fundamentally disagrees, which is why we are investing in more Crown prosecutors and court clerks as well as pushing the federal government for more judges. This government understands that we need clear evidence and we need innovation. We also need to fix decades of PC government underfunding. We can't cut our way out of these problems.

Then we heard the opposition attack the triage protocol, which prioritizes serious and violent crimes like sexual assaults in our courts. A criminal law professor at the University of Alberta said that the Alberta government should be "applauded . . . for attempting to tackle the problem in such a direct and principled manner."

Mr. Speaker, government is about leadership, and leadership means having to make decisions. The opposition's do-nothing approach would mean that more violent cases would be thrown out without a trial. Somehow the opposition believes that by focusing on nothing, we get further ahead. That would hurt Alberta families. Survivors and victims deserve better. Albertans deserve leadership.

Mr. Speaker, this government is also making changes to Alberta's bail system to ensure that the right information is in front of the right person during bail hearings. This will ensure that the safety of Albertans is top of mind when these decisions are made.

This minister is working to address the entire justice system, not just one part of it. She has made tackling serious and violent crimes a clear priority, and she should be applauded for that. This minister will not back down when Albertans need her.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Government Policies

Mr. Nixon: Here's the reality for most Albertans outside the dome here in Alberta. They're hurting. They're hurting a lot. They've seen friends and neighbours lose their jobs and ma-and-pa shops close their doors, their parks shut down with no consultation, their farms and businesses attacked with misguided legislation, their children's and grandchildren's futures leveraged with unprecedented deficit and debt. They're worried for their future, for their children's future, and they feel like the very best of Alberta is slipping away. Imagine their frustration when they consistently see the arrogance and condescension from this government almost every single day.

The list is growing long, Mr. Speaker. We are embarrassing cousins if we don't like the carbon tax. We're xenophobic. And here's some free advice from the Premier. Can't afford the carbon tax? Take a bus and, quote, make better choices. People in my riding don't like this kind of talk. They're proud people, they're common-

sense people, and they expect the government to have their backs. But old habits die hard with this NDP government. I asked simple questions about the devastating impacts of this government's policies on Albertans, and how did the Deputy Premier respond? She implied that opposition supporters and my constituents are "sewer rats."

It's shameful. Albertans can expect two more years of being talked down to, being treated like sewer rats instead of the great women and men who built this province. If the senior at A&W in Sundre is a sewer rat, if the rig worker from Peace River is a sewer rat, if the moms and dads in our cities who are worried about our province's future are sewer rats, if the over two-thirds of Albertans who hate the carbon tax are sewer rats, then I'm proud to stand with them.

We won't divide this province in half. We will unite our province behind common-sense values based on neighbourliness, compassion, and unbridled belief in the greatness of Albertans and the greatness of Alberta. And if that makes us sewer rats, Mr. Speaker, according to the NDP, then so be it.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I would note that the Minister of Health earlier in the session today apologized for the comment that she made earlier.

Blood Plasma Supply

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Health minister introduced the Voluntary Blood Donations Act. Many Canadians believe that we obtain our supply of blood and blood products solely from voluntary donations. We've been led to believe that that makes our blood supply safer and more secure, but it's not true.

1:40

Times change, Mr. Speaker, and so do medical treatments. Today Alberta spends some \$200 million annually purchasing blood and plasma products from U.S. suppliers who rely on donors who are paid for their donations. Some ask: why don't we produce these products here in Canada? Well, Canadian Blood Services simply can't provide the necessary plasma to meet the demand. After 20 years of trying, CBS obtains only 17 per cent of the plasma needed for Canadian purposes from volunteer donors, which then has to be exported to the U.S. for processing. The rest comes from paid U.S. donors.

Now a private company wants to establish 10 plasma collection centres across Canada as well as a Canadian plasma processing facility. They want to invest over \$400 million and employ 2,000 people in high-paying biomedical jobs, and they want to come to Alberta. They want to invest in our province, put Albertans to work, and diversify our economy. And the NDP's response: "Go away. We don't want you. We don't want your money, and we don't want your jobs." The NDP would rather send 200 million Alberta taxpayer dollars every year to highly profitable U.S. pharmaceutical corporations to buy plasma products obtained from paid American donors and then sink \$100 million more into preserving union jobs at Canadian Blood Services.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP says that they're all about helping Alberta families, but what they're really all about is looking after their friends in the unions and using taxpayer resources to do it. Now, the NDP calls that a better way. Albertans call it something else, and they want a better government.

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

Seniors' Town Hall Meeting in Edmonton-Whitemud

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have many seniors as constituents in Edmonton-Whitemud. These seniors want a healthy and

active life that is not burdened with difficulties maintaining their lifestyle, including family and community connections.

The SouthWest Edmonton Seniors Association, SWESA, operates in the burgeoning southwest quadrant of Edmonton. Besides providing opportunities to socialize, SWESA has educational sessions covering a wide variety of topics and several activity programs, including yoga and walking, to keep our seniors healthy and aging well in place. Mr. Speaker, I've heard from SWESA and many seniors in my riding that health care, particularly policies affecting the provision of pharmaceuticals, is a major concern for them.

On March 9 my constituency office organized a town hall at the Terwillegar rec centre. Presentations were made by pharmacists, professors from the University of Alberta, and the co-ordinator of Alberta comprehensive integrated services for seniors. Nearly 100 seniors were in attendance, and there was excellent community engagement throughout five presentations.

Five major recommendations emerged. First, Alberta needs a comprehensive, integrated care system to ensure that seniors have access to the services that they require. This would use community-based preventative and basic care and use both administrative and electronic supervision to treat the patient from initial assessment to palliative care. Second, programs like med-wise Alberta can teach seniors how to inquire about new medication, monitor its effectiveness and possible side effects, and follow up on their conditions. Third, pharmacists and nurses can reduce patient care costs by playing a larger role in providing health services. Fourth, the Alberta drug benefit list should prioritize clinical guidelines over cost efficiency when listing drugs. Fifth, Alberta needs a patient-based model where funding follows the patient through every stage of treatment.

These presentations were tied together by a common thread: our health system needs to improve collaboration among professionals, increase accountability at every stage of treatment, and commit to following best practices.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Farm Safety

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about how farm safety is important to me and to our government.

March 12 to 18 is Canadian Agricultural Safety Week. "Agriculture is a way of life, but one with inherent risks. When it comes to physical safety, [farming] is considered the third most hazardous in Canada, and in terms of absolute numbers of fatalities it is deemed to be the most dangerous occupation," according to the rural and farm safety Ag for Life site. Your family is your pride and joy. Whether you are raising children, watching out for your partner, or checking in on dad after a long day in the field, you would do anything to keep them safe while preserving the farm experience for future generations.

Last year the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association introduced a national three-year campaign, Be an AgSafe Family. The focus in 2016 was children's safety, and this year AgSafe's theme is Appealing to Adults, which I believe is a fitting shift since adults have the responsibility to educate our children and others.

Mr. Speaker, my constituency, the beautiful riding of Stony Plain, has a rich agricultural heritage and is considered an agricultural services community. For more than a century hard-working farmers and ranchers have lived in the area. They flourished through the good seasons and persevered through the challenging seasons to continue to be a lifeline of our society. Some evenings I stop at the side of the road and I watch the combines and farmers

hard at work. I know that although my day has been long, theirs has been much longer as I remember taking meals out to my stepdad in the field.

I believe safety is of paramount importance in our community. Mr. Speaker, our government provides a number of resources and tools available for farm owners, workers, and families to encourage the adoption of safe farm practices. FarmSafe Alberta is one tool that is available to help farmers to have safety management systems or a safety plan for their operations.

To all of our farmers province-wide: make every week farm safety week.

Thank you, sir.

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

Education Ministry Online Student Resources

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Serious concerns were raised by a parents' group about content on a site that can be accessed through Alberta Education's website. The government-funded site says: "a collective of resources specific to Alberta K-12 students, teachers, and school staff." According to the site itself it is funded by the Ministry of Education. The goal of this site is to provide a positive place where students can go to find resources, information and to find connections with local community supports.

We need to know that students are being listened to and supported, that teachers have the resources and the information and support that they need and that parents are consulted and informed and made aware of the materials that are presented to their children. Yesterday a parent group noticed that a link from the site went to a Facebook page with content that was not appropriate for children. Articles about sex positions, adult toys, sado-masochism and acts are not community resources for young students.

Can objectionable material be found on the Internet? Yes. And, obviously, children can access pretty much anything they want on the Internet through their phones and devices. But should we not have links to age-inappropriate government-approved websites? We should not. We need to respect students, parents, and teachers, who reasonably expect materials provided by and connected with our education system to be age appropriate and to promote a safe environment for all students.

I understand at this point that the Minister of Education has looked into this. We must respect the concerns of parents and make sure that the materials on and connected to our education resources contribute in a positive and healthy way to our education community.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund it is my pleasure to table five copies of the report covering the committee's activities during the 29th Legislature from December 2015 to December 2016. This report fulfills the requirements of Standing Order 55 and section 6(4)(c) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act. This report will be posted on the Assembly's website, and copies are also available at the committee office.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 202 Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 202, the Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act.

The intent of this bill is about ensuring Alberta has sufficient laws in place for victims of the sharing of nonconsensual intimate images, which is a crime. These changes will create a provincial tort law necessary to compensate victims of these devastating and humiliating acts. This bill will ensure that those who choose to use nonconsensual private images for financial gain will not be able to turn a profit at the expense of others.

This bill will also legislate protection for students under the School Act and the Education Act, to ensure student victims will not suffer further harm, by compelling principals to suspend the offender involved and possibly send the offender before a school board. Our hope is that there will also be an education component to this as well.

I hope that all members of this Assembly will work together with me, whether that will be through support or amendments, to ensure victims of the distribution of nonconsensual intimate images are protected.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a first time]

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Government Policies

Mr. Jean: Wildrose priorities are to cut taxes, shrink the deficit, support Alberta families, and grow the economy so that Albertans can get back to work. No surprise here. Cutting taxes, shrinking the deficit, and supporting families are the top priorities for the majority of this province. The only name that I will call these people is concerned Albertans, worried about the future of our province. The Premier brought in a carbon tax with no mandate, that is raising costs for Alberta families by up to \$2,500 a year. Does the Premier believe that this step is making life more affordable for Albertans?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, what I do believe is that when you talk about affordability, it's probably helpful to begin with the right numbers.

But more important, Mr. Speaker, is that we absolutely believe that it is our job to make life more affordable for Albertans. That is why, as you've probably heard before, our government is introducing a bill to cut back school fees by 25 per cent. That is why our government is capping electricity rates so that regular families don't have to have anxiety attacks around the kitchen table every month when the heating bill comes in. These are the kinds of things that make a difference for Alberta families. We are proud to be moving forward with them, and we won't stop.

Mr. Jean: That fear around the kitchen table is caused by this government.

The majority of Albertans say that the NDP is moving too slowly to balance budgets, and they're right. In fact, I'd suggest that the majority of Albertans also don't appreciate being talked down to. They don't like being called the embarrassing cousin of our country. They don't like being referred to as sewer rats. All of these insults because they don't agree with this NDP government's agenda.

Will the Premier commit today to end this divisive and hurtful rhetoric and begin to respect all Albertans regardless of where they come from or who they vote for?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, what I think actually would be hurtful to Albertans would be the agenda of the members opposite. For instance, they want to take \$2 billion out of our operating expenses. Do you know where that would leave us? Let's just walk through it a little bit: seniors' benefit program, the whole program, over \$350 million; all transportation for students, including rural students, \$350 million. But more: eliminating funding for all special-needs students. And there's more: ending all student aid. You know what? That doesn't get you to \$2 billion. There's more to come. The members opposite need to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, that was not the question. I'm going to repeat it again. Albertans clearly don't like being called the embarrassing cousin. They don't like being referred to as sewer rats. All of these insults because they don't agree. I'm asking today: will the Premier commit to end this divisive and hurtful rhetoric and begin to respect all Albertans regardless of where they come from or who they vote for? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what we are going to do is continue our focus on making life better for Alberta families, and we are going to do that by not telling them that it is their job to accept less and to cut back in their schools, to cut back in their hospitals, to throw people out of work just to balance the budget tomorrow, to me, an ideological agenda. That's not what Albertans voted for, and that is not what they will get.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Carbon Policies

Mr. Jean: The NDP's obsession with taxing carbon hurts our economy, and now it will hurt the environment, too. The environment minister has told large emitters that they can no longer pay their emission taxes with carbon offsets. Under the old system they could use offsets that came from projects like renewables that had actually reduced greenhouse gases. Now 70 per cent of the tax must be paid in cash so the NDP can then spend it on light bulbs, shower heads, and power bars. How exciting. This means less investment in reducing carbon and fewer jobs for Albertans. Why does the Premier possibly think this is a good idea?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to full compliance flexibility with respect to the specified gas emitters regulation. What we have done with the 30 per cent cap is that we have ensured that we have predictability for business. Historically the use of these credits has been just over 40 per cent, but it's dropped to as low as 3 per cent last year. The changes we made will help companies reduce emissions on-site, which is also a compliance option for companies. It's one companies take seriously. It's not one that the opposition takes seriously because they don't believe in climate change.

Mr. Jean: If our major emitters are discouraged from investing in renewables here in Alberta just to hand cash over to the government, how does that possibly help our province reduce emissions? This new regulation, put through, by the way, without consultation, has now sent another chill throughout our economy and our industry. It's created further uncertainty, it's hurting our competitiveness,

and it will only mean fewer jobs for Albertans over the long term. This isn't about actually reducing emissions; it's just about new NDP slush funds. Why won't the Premier simply admit it to Albertans?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that when companies reduce their emissions, they also reduce their costs, and that allows them to free up capital in order to hire new people. It allows them to move the economy forward. Now, I know that the opposition has spent their time slinging mud at oil companies. Just yesterday he called out Suncor by name, dragging their reputation through the mud. On this side of the House we are committed to working with those companies to fund innovation, to reduce the carbon in the barrel, to repair our reputation, that that member sat in the federal House and did nothing about for a decade. [Disturbance in the gallery]

The Speaker: Excuse me.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! You're not part of these proceedings.

An Hon. Member: That's a Dipper.

The Speaker: Pardon me? Hon. member, the management of strangers is my responsibility.

The second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: The fact is that this carbon tax has been extremely bad news for Albertans since the very beginning. For businesses big and small it's hurt their ability to compete. For families it's made life less affordable, with higher gas and fuel bills. It's raising the price of everything for Albertans, and it will just keep getting more expensive under the NDP for years and years to come, and all the NDP can show for it is new light bulbs and shower heads to be installed by a company from Ontario. The carbon tax isn't working and is just making things worse. When will anyone in this government actually see it, admit it, and change course?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I believe that 68,000 Albertans who have signed up already for the first phase of the efficiency programs will find it fairly shocking that they're being mocked and belittled by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

As to Cenovus, CNRL, Suncor, and a number of other companies, they believe they can reduce the carbon in the barrel, Mr. Speaker, but the Wildrose and the Leader of the Official Opposition talk them down, drag their reputation through the mud. These are some of the biggest employers in the province let alone the leader's own riding. These are companies that helped us out during the fire. They drive the Canadian economy, and all the Wildrose can do is insult them in this House.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Third main question.

Health Care Wait Times

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the only reason I came back to politics was to make sure that what happened to my son in our health care system doesn't happen to any other family in Alberta. That's why I'm here, to fix the system. The motion that I introduced yesterday was one piece of that puzzle: studying wait times in our health care system, the barriers and costs associated, and looking at other provinces for solutions. Eminently reasonable. Why, then, did the Premier instruct her caucus to vote against this motion?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, let me begin by saying that I think all members of this House do want to see better outcomes in our health care system. We care about the families who need our health care system, and we care about the people who are in our health care system. That's why we want to run it the best way we can. One of the things that we believe fundamentally on this side of the House is that the way to do that is to run a publicly delivered, publicly funded system that everybody has access to no matter how much money they have, and that is the fundamental point that our members on this side of the House are attempting to protect. We were concerned that that was not reflected in what the member opposite was proposing in his motion.

2:00

Mr. Jean: The exact opposite, Mr. Speaker. That's exactly what this side of the House is protecting as well, and my story in the medical system isn't unique. I hear heartbreaking stories of families who have lost someone far too often. I apologize, but we all should be doing everything we possibly can to reduce barriers, to reduce wait times because there are very real results when we don't pay attention to the system. People die. If the Premier was in opposition, she would support this. She would support this motion. Does the Premier not believe in reducing wait times in our health care system, and if she doesn't believe in that, why not? Just say yes; pass the motion.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I think we can all agree that we do need to reduce wait times and that we do need to focus on doing better within our health care system, and that is absolutely what our government is committed to. I've met with and talked with people who've had the same kind of experiences that the member opposite talks about and has experienced himself, and we all know we need to do better. It is just not always the case that we agree on the best way to get there. The disagreement that we saw yesterday was that we just didn't agree on the best way to get there, but we all agree that we need to get there. We will continue to focus our efforts on doing that in the best way possible.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, part of the motion was to look next door at Saskatchewan and B.C. Both of them have better systems. For instance, their outcomes outperform ours. For cataracts they wait 92 days; in Alberta we wait 200 days. For knee replacements they wait 130 days; we wait over 200. For hips it's 128 days; for us it's, again, over 200. We want to help fix this, and we just simply ask the NDP to look next door, but the NDP showed yesterday that they have no interest in improving wait times, not even one little bit. Is it just ideology that prevents the Premier from acknowledging what works in other provinces, or does she just not care?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, as I've said repeatedly, we do very much care, but we have a genuine disagreement on the best way to get to these outcomes that we're looking for. In fact, the Minister of Health can report extensively on the number of wait times that have been reduced under our watch. What we will say, though, is that we are not going to expand private-sector delivery of health care so that only wealthy people can get health care in a timely way. That system doesn't work. You just have to look at the millions upon millions upon millions of people south of the border who have no access to health care to know that that is not the path that we want to go down, nor do Albertans.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Government Policies

(continued)

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This government's out-of-control spending is a concern to all members on this side of the House, and now we know it's a concern to all Albertans. A Mainstreet poll says that 58 per cent of Albertans believe the NDP is doing a poor job of handling the economy. Twenty-three per cent of Albertans say that reducing spending to lower the deficit is their number one priority. To the Premier. You've ignored Albertans on Bill 6; you've ignored Albertans on the carbon tax. Premier, will you ignore Albertans again when it comes to this ballooning provincial deficit, or will you just chalk it up to angry "sewer rats"?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, our government is committed to having the backs of Albertans during this difficult time. What we are doing is focusing on making life better for Albertans by making life more affordable, by investing in job creation, and by supporting those incredibly important public services that we were just talking about in the last set of questions. These are the priorities of Albertans. We will not back down from them because that's what we promised them when we were elected, and that is what we will deliver.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, our PC caucus today launched our balanced budget plan. It outlines a plan that listens to Albertans because they don't want their kids and grandkids to have to pay for NDP incompetence. It will balance our budget by 2020. It includes a no front-line cuts guarantee. To the Finance minister. Toss out your key messages and your fearmongering. Now that we have shown you don't need to rack up \$10 billion in debt every year, will you commit today to not create more billions when you introduce the next budget?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did have a quick chance to look at the proposal put forward by the member opposite, and I have to say that this group couldn't balance the budget when oil was at a hundred dollars a barrel. Now they are proposing that they can cut \$4 billion, slash taxes, protect health care, balance the budget in two and a half years. When exactly do they also plan to propose pigs and unicorns flying? They've got that amount of reality in their proposals.

Mr. McIver: No unicorns and lollipops, like the NDP, Mr. Speaker, but we are going to repeal the carbon tax. We would use the federal carbon tax. Instead of a green slush fund, we would actually use it to pay down the debt or make it revenue neutral and reduce other taxes to pay down the debt.

To the Finance minister: will you listen to what millions of Albertans are loudly telling you and repeal the carbon tax to pay off the debt faster? Or when you say that you have the backs of Albertans, do you really mean that you're on the backs of Albertans, making it heavier and heavier with the burden of future payments?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker. You know, that gang over there: seven of the last eight years they couldn't balance the budget, as our Premier said, when oil was \$100 a barrel. We'll not take any lessons from that side. The kinds of things we're going to do are to prudently and cautiously bring down the deficit by keeping programs and services strong, by diversifying

the economy, and by investing across this province so that more and more Albertans are put back to work.

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

Gay-straight Alliances in Schools

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2014 the Alberta Liberals led the province into the modern era by introducing legislation to make gay-straight alliances mandatory in any school where students request them. I'm proud to say that this is now the law. In recognition of this fact the Education minister wrote an open letter to Alberta students telling them: "You have rights that your schools will respect" and "I'm with you one hundred per cent." Now it appears that not all schools are respecting these rights. Is the Minister of Education still with these students one hundred per cent?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks very much for the question. Every student in Alberta deserves a caring and respectful and safe school in which to learn. We know that experiencing bullying can stress students, and then people don't do well in school and otherwise. We've been working with each of the school boards across the province to build policy to ensure that they are compliant with the law. The right to create a club, a GSA or a QSA, is the law here in the province of Alberta, and we work with individual schools and school boards to ensure compliance.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister cited, quote, big cultural changes and certain religious beliefs as reasons why establishing GSAs in certain schools was complicated. Just yesterday he called some of the schools' attempts at creating GSA policies, quote, a bit clunky. End quote. I'm not sure what is complicated about these GSAs. It should be recognized that they also save lives, and the minister should be doing everything in his power to support them. So why isn't he? Why can't you declunkify this system?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you again for the question. Mr. Speaker, certainly, we are working diligently with all of our 61 school boards and all schools in the province of Alberta to build policy that's in compliance with the law. You know, we have seen the evolution of change in the province here over the last couple of years and before with the work on Bill 10 to create a safe and caring environment for students. We have seen progress, but I won't say that we have solved the issue thus far.

As per declunkifying, I'm certainly looking for more than just that. We're looking for a way by which . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, last year the Minister of Education ordered an investigation into schools refusing to comply with the GSA law. Apparently, the report revealed something so troubling that the minister now appears to be backtracking on his commitment and refusing to tell us why. Alberta students, parents, and school boards need clarity from the minister on this issue, not excuses. Do Albertans and Alberta students still have the legal right to form GSAs in all schools, or don't they?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The law is very clear that students do have the right to create clubs in their schools and

that if they choose to name it a GSA or a QSA, they are certainly within the law to do so.

In regard to a particular school that I did use an inquiry process on, the report will be out very soon. Yes, it is complicated, but, you know, it's worth it every step of the way to ensure that we do have safe and caring environments for every single student. It's not just students that are in jeopardy that benefit, but all Albertans benefit from the equality and social justice that this implies.

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

2:10 Misericordia and Royal Alexandra Hospitals

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many families in Edmonton-Meadowlark are concerned about the future of the Misericordia hospital. In Budget 2016 we allocated \$20 million to consult on the future of the Royal Alexandra and the Misericordia. My question is for the Minister of Health. Can the minister please give us any updates on this file?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. I know that his constituents rely on both of these two acute-care hospitals, that for far too long were neglected under the former government. Certainly, he has been a very strong advocate for them. We are looking at finding ways that we can address the deferred maintenance that we've seen throughout our province. It is significant. The member is absolutely right that we spent \$20 million in last year's budget to make sure that we have the right plans moving forward to support these hospitals and Edmontonians requiring their care.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can you give us any details on the next steps in this process and what this means for funding moving forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the capital planning process is under way. The submissions from AHS as well as other stakeholders and feedback from the community are important pieces as we continue to move forward in planning. I want to say that I, too, along with the hon. member am outraged that the previous government left our major hospital facilities in such disrepair while handing out bonuses and perks to many of their friends and insiders and appointed positions. These certainly don't reflect the values of this government. We've taken concrete action to make sure that we repeal those bad practices that the last government had and that we're putting Albertans' money to support Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can you give us any details on how the government plans to address concerns about emergency wait times at the Misericordia?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The emergency room at the Mis was one of the very first ERs that I had an opportunity to visit in this capacity. Like many Edmontonians, I know that it

can be better and that it should be better. In the past the opposition's only answer was to propose massive cuts and to continue to bring in health care premiums. Our government repealed those premiums and is working and moving forward in a prudent and fiscally responsible way. I look forward to keep working with the member who asked the question and with all Edmontonians to make sure that we're addressing this important, critical infrastructure in the city of Edmonton.

Municipal Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, municipalities around the province are scratching their heads, wondering where \$300 million from the nearly \$700 million in the building Canada fund/PTIF disappeared to? At the Resource Stewardship Committee on May 11, 2016, the Minister of Infrastructure indicated that federal Minister Sohi wanted \$300 million to go to municipal projects. Will the Minister of Infrastructure apologize for misleading the municipalities and getting their hopes up about the money?

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry to disappoint the hon. member opposite, but over \$280 million of that \$300 million has been allocated already to municipal projects, with more to come. You know, he should check his facts.

Mr. Taylor: I'd like to see where that money is going to.

Given that Dave Breakwell, the ADM of corporate strategies and services at Alberta Infrastructure, indicated at Public Accounts on February 28, 2017, that "those projects have all gone forward since March 2016 for the federal government to approve the specific projects," to the Minister of Infrastructure: before we lose another construction season, why is the federal government vetoing the projects and holding up economic stimulus?

Mr. Mason: Well, I would say, Mr. Speaker, that I'm confused, but I really think it's the hon. member opposite that is confused. The federal government is not holding up projects. We've allocated over \$280 million of federal infrastructure money towards municipal projects, and there's more to come. We've applied to the federal government for funding for the Springbank flood mitigation project. We've applied for money for a number of important initiatives. I don't know if the hon. member is against those things, but we need to fund LRT transit projects, flood mitigation, all of that.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Springbank still has a lot of hiccups and environmental things that have to happen both provincially and federally.

Given that the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation has decided to allow Ottawa to dictate to him how it's going to be, will the minister commit to tabling in this House the list of the BCF PTIF projects across Alberta that are being held up by behind-the-scenes business so municipalities across the province will know which provincial projects are coming?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't know where that hon. member gets his information. We're working very well with the federal government. We're working very well with Alberta municipalities. Our government stands to make life better for Albertans and for Alberta families, and we're doing that by working with our federal counterparts, with our municipal counterparts to deliver the infrastructure that Albertans need to improve the quality of life and to create jobs for Alberta families.

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

Serenity

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In December, when every member of this House was expressing horror about Serenity's death, I suggested a small legislative change to immediately save the lives of children. It would simply amend the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act to compel any adult to call police if they know that a child is in need of intervention. But the government said that it didn't have the time to draft the bill before the Christmas recess. To the Premier. Children are still at risk. Why did you not make Serenity's law Bill 1 for this session?

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

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can say without a doubt that I know that every single member of this Legislature is committed to getting it right for the children who are vulnerable in this province. That is why our government has ensured that the Department of Children's Services has the resources, the support that it needs to move forward with changes, and that is why we are working with all the members of this Legislature to figure out what the best possible actions are to go forward on this. As soon as those recommendations come from the panel, I look forward to acting on them within the near future.

Mr. Ellis: Why is she waiting for a panel? This law could be saving children's lives now.

Given that in the House last week the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre asked the new Children's Services minister twice if her ministry was investigating Serenity's death and twice she said nothing, so we'll take this as a definitive no and given that the RCMP are also critical to ensuring that Serenity gets justice, Minister, you must have been in contact with the RCMP. Are they investigating Serenity's death?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we were all deeply moved by the case involving Serenity, and that's why the Minister of Children's Services has been working so hard with all members of this House to ensure that moving forward, we have better processes in place. In terms of what the RCMP is or isn't investigating, the hon. member is well aware that I don't direct the RCMP's investigations. That would be highly inappropriate.

Mr. Ellis: Minister, this was a simple yes or no question.

Given that a little girl died in Alberta – she was starved, she was beaten, she was sexually assaulted, and her killer is still at large – and given that the ministerial panel is reviewing the death review process, but that will not provide justice for little Serenity, it seems that you want to forget about her. But we will not let you. To the same minister: what about Serenity? What are you doing about her? And use her name in the answer.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Without a doubt, every single member of this Legislature was very much touched by her story. Now, obviously, my answer saying that every single death triggers a review didn't, you know, lead to an answer and understanding. Absolutely we are reviewing Serenity's death. Absolutely. We want to ensure that we learn everything we can to make the system better. So, yes, we're investigating Serenity's

death, and yes, we are investigating the death of every child in care because we want only the best for the children . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

2:20 Workplace Legislation Review

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Labour minister announced a review of our province's workplace laws. These laws are not high on the radar of everyday Albertans I talk to. Thousands of Albertans are currently without work, and even those with a job are worried about losing it. This government's priorities are not helping a difficult situation. This government appears to be more focused on ideology and appeasing their labour activist friends than listening to the fears of everyday Albertans. Minister, will you please explain how you think this labour review will help create the jobs Albertans need now?

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. All Albertans deserve fair and family-friendly workplaces that support good jobs in a growing economy. Making life better for Albertans means helping them take care of their families and themselves. It means making sure that they have good jobs that will not fire them if they take time off to take care of a loved one who is ill or injured. Alberta businesses deserve the best laws that allow them to attract and retain the best in the business. We are going to review this workplace legislation, which has not been reviewed since the Calgary Winter Olympics.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that Albertans want to go to work to care for themselves and their families and given that this government has shaken investor confidence by breaking contracts, increasing the minimum wage, shutting down coal, and ramming through other legislation and given that this government is delaying our economy's recovery by again signalling to investors to stay away for now, will the minister please explain how it's family friendly to kill jobs by introducing more uncertainty into the labour market when thousands of Albertans are without a job?

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, what I hear when the member opposite talks about us not doing this review is that he does not value the hard-working Albertans that we have in our province. It's very puzzling why the opposition would not want us talking to Albertans. Then, again, they do want to roll back the minimum wage. They're against cutting small-business taxes. They've opposed every action we've taken to make life better for families. So maybe it's not that surprising.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the labour review sends a signal that this government is going to continue to experiment with our economy by moving forward with their NDP ideology and given that entrepreneurs are sitting on the sidelines waiting for this government to provide a stable climate for investment and growth and given that this minister's priorities are not in line with the priorities of everyday Albertans, why is the minister sending negative signals to the market to wait and see what this government will do while we need jobs now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Making sure that we have workplace legislation that works for businesses and Albertans is a priority. It's something that every Albertan deserves. Right now Alberta has the shortest amount of time that someone can go on compassionate care leave in Canada. Other Canadians have access to rules that mirror the federal system, and Alberta does not because we haven't reviewed the system in that long. Making sure that we are talking to Albertans and looking at critical issues like that is part of our responsibility as government. Just saying, "No; don't touch things," or "No; we're going to repeal it," is not reasonable.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mental Health Services in Central Alberta

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The lack of mental health beds in central Alberta hospitals is a growing issue. A Ponoka doctor told me that by a once temporary, now permanent system Calgary is sending eight mental health patients to take over beds created for local patients. I agree that Albertans should work together, but Calgary receives 1,300 per cent more capital health funding than all of central Alberta combined. How much more money do you need to give the Calgary health region before they can take care of their own mental health patients rather than sending them to underfunded central Alberta?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very important question. Our government knows that we inherited a very fragmented and disjointed mental health system, which is why one of the first acts of our government was to appoint the mental health review panel to bring forward recommendations to our government on ways that we can improve system access across the province for Albertans in their home communities regardless of where they live.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans would rather hear what the minister will actually really do rather than spout talking points, we need to focus on outcomes, not rhetoric. This issue is really affecting the lives of my friends, my family, and my constituents. We already spend over \$2,000 more per capita than B.C. on health care. Other than raising taxes and throwing more money at the problem, by what real strategies will the minister fix AHS to ensure that central Albertans can actually receive mental health care in my region?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the opportunity to elaborate further. Our government has committed \$5.6 million in new operating funds toward implementing the recommendations of the mental health review. An important piece of that is bringing together stakeholders from across our province, from rural Alberta, from urban Alberta, and from remote areas of Alberta, to make sure that we're all working together – government, nonprofit community agencies, and indeed the corporate sector – to build a system that works for all Albertans regardless of where they live. We'll have more to say about that in the coming days.

Mr. Orr: And how much of that money will end up in central Alberta?

Mr. Speaker, given that today is not a cut day, that it is a save day, saving the lives of Albertans, I want the minister to know that mental health patients in central Alberta are unable to access health care in the community due to underfunded and overcrowded hospitals being taken up by patients from outside the region. Given that central Alberta makes up roughly one-tenth of the population yet only receives one-twentieth of the capital funding, what will the minister do to equalize the amount spent in central Alberta with other parts of the province? Or is this deliberate health care rationing?

The Speaker: Thank you.
The associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Again, our government is really committed to working to ensure that we have equitable health care access across the province, so that means expanding access where we can and with the limited resources we have because we're also committed to slowing down the growth in the health care system. You know what we're not committed to? We're not going to be cutting those capital projects that the member opposite is asking for us to invest in. We're not going to cut operating dollars for health care systems, unlike the members opposite keep asking us to. Mr. Speaker, we're investing in health care for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

AAMDC Spring Convention Ministerial Forum

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Municipal leaders from across rural Alberta will gather next week in Edmonton for the annual spring AAMD and C conference. The highlight of that convention will be the ministerial forum next Wednesday morning. Now, out of respect to those leaders, all of cabinet used to attend these forums. Last fall less than half of the NDP cabinet made it out to attend. Now, two sets of departmental estimates have been scheduled for next Wednesday morning. To the chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future: why have you scheduled estimates for Culture and Tourism at the same time as the AAMD and C ministerial forum? [interjections]

The Speaker: Just a moment. [interjections] Quiet, please. [interjections] Please be seated.

Hon. member, the question was directed to whom?

Dr. Starke: The chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future.

The Speaker: Just seeing the notes, as the member well knows, as per page 506 from the second edition, "Questions to the Ministry or to a committee Chair concerning the proceedings or work of a committee, including its order of reference, may not be raised," only schedule-related items.

Mr. Chair.

2:30

Mr. Sucha: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is actually the first I've heard of it because it's a discussion between House leaders on when this happens. I believe that that date is still embargoed, so I don't even know if we're supposed to be talking about it in the House at this time.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, that wasn't that hard.

Given that rural leaders are vitally concerned about the many emerging issues in the Department of Education and given that I'm

sure the Education minister is also well aware of these issues and would be eager to answer questions at the AAMD and C ministerial forum, to the chair of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities: why have you scheduled estimates for the Department of Education at the same time as the AAMD and C ministerial forum?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, as a House leader the hon. member ought to realize that we do consult with the opposition with respect to the scheduling of budget estimates, and that has been the case in this instance. These dates have not been finalized. I take the hon. member's point, and we will consider carefully, in conjunction with opposition House leaders as we always do, the scheduling of these estimates.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that we've told them now three times about the conflict and they haven't changed the schedule yet, we're hoping the fourth time is the charm.

I'm going to ask a question of the new Municipal Affairs minister. Given that I'm sure you're wanting to cultivate a strong working relationship with rural municipal leaders, what are you doing, sir, to encourage all of your cabinet colleagues to attend next week's ministerial forum?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjection] Well, somebody over there said, "Whac-A-Mole," and it feels like *Groundhog Day* because the same thing keeps being said over and over.

I'm discussing with my caucus mates every day how important AAMD and C is to me. I can't wait to be there. Actually, in fact, the 21st is my birthday, and I'm going to be there from about 7 till who knows when because I'm committed to the members of the AAMD and C and to our municipal leaders. I'm very much looking forward to all of the conversations that I'm going to have and to working on municipal issues.

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

Capital Infrastructure Funding for Red Deer

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the MLA for Red Deer-North I am proud to represent a diverse and growing region. I have heard from my constituents that our infrastructure is out of date and not keeping pace with our growing population and of our role as a regional hub on the QE II. To the Minister of Transportation: what have you done to improve road infrastructure in Red Deer?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for that question. I appreciate her strong advocacy on behalf of the people of Red Deer and central Alberta. Red Deer is fast becoming a major economic centre and a cultural engine in our province. Last year our government moved forward on the Gaetz Avenue interchange project, an \$80 million project that will significantly improve critical transportation infrastructure. We stand up for the families of Alberta, including central Alberta. We're going to continue to do that through prudent investments in infrastructure.

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

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Red Deer is an important centre for travellers and industry and that this growth has caused transportation infrastructure issues in areas such as the Taylor Drive intersection, highway 2A, and the Waskasoo Creek culvert, what future transportation projects can the residents of Red Deer count on in the upcoming year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. Obviously, infrastructure throughout the province, including central Alberta, is a priority for this government as we strive to make life better for Alberta families. We're committed to supporting the infrastructure in the areas that the member has identified. I can't say more than that, but she needs to stay tuned.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Red Deer, the beautiful gem that it is, will continue to grow and given the significant infrastructure gap that was inherited from the previous government, what can the residents of Red Deer expect to see for infrastructure investment in their vibrant and diverse city?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member knows that I cannot talk about things that will be revealed in the budget on Thursday. But I can tell her that we put \$20 million in the current capital plan for the Red Deer multiplex project and \$9.7 million for the expansion of the obstetrics unit at Red Deer regional hospital.

Mr. Speaker, every time I drive down that highway, I see the work that's going on at Red Deer College, I see the interchange at Gaetz Avenue, I see Albertans' money at work to improve the quality of life for central Albertans' lives and families.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Research and Innovation Initiatives

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I came to know that the federal government has an \$800 million fund for innovation networks and clusters and that they are expected to decide in April or May how the funds will be doled out. Based on our population, if Alberta gets 10 to 12 per cent, that would be \$80 million to \$96 million. Can the minister confirm or deny that Alberta Innovates is in line to receive funding from this federal government program?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. As the member should know, the federal government has not tabled their budget yet, and until they do, you know, provinces will be watching eagerly to see how the innovation dollars will be spent.

But what I can assure the member is that recently, within the last two months, I led a trade mission with the Minister of Advanced Education and the three university presidents to meet with five different federal cabinet ministers to talk about Alberta's innovation priorities, and I look forward to telling the member all about them in the next question.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given there are clusters and innovation networks popping up all over Alberta in new fields like geomatics in Lethbridge and unmanned vehicle systems in Medicine Hat and given that the fintech sector in Calgary and the computer gaming sector in Edmonton are showing signs of growth, what is the minister doing to ensure that Alberta's innovation networks and clusters like those in the master warehouse are able to access this funding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for the question. Just to fast-forward through the previous answer, there are three areas of priorities that we've collaborated on with the private sector, with entrepreneurs, with venture capitalists, with our post-secondaries, and researchers, and that's that we're focusing on health innovation, on smart agriculture, and on clean energy. These are Alberta's strengths. We're going to continue to leverage them and to work on them.

I'll tell you this much, Mr. Speaker. In the past year we consolidated the four Alberta Innovates corporations into one. We hired an incredible CEO to lead our Alberta Innovates. We are providing funding to ensure that we are supporting these industries. That party over there would cut . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that President Trump aims to reform H-1B visas such that computer programmers and entrepreneurs from India will no longer be indentured servants of Silicon Valley and given India's status as the number one country sending out migrants to the world, to the same minister: what are you doing to ensure that those economic immigrants leaving the U.S.A. choose Alberta as their home to create software and start-ups despite the NDP calling Albertans sewer rats?

Mr. Mason: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, you know, there are a number of initiatives that our government is undertaking, and I want to remind the member and members opposite who continually try to run down our province that our government is standing up for Alberta. Last year we had the largest private-sector capital investment in Canada. We are leading and will lead the country in economic growth in 2017 and in 2018. We have the highest weekly earnings, the highest employment rate. We have the youngest population in Canada, one of the most educated. Our government is investing and working with organizations like Edmonton Economic Development and Calgary Economic Development to attract talent and companies here to Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Provincial Fiscal Deficit

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Progressive Conservative caucus released our balanced budget plan. In this plan we lay out how it would be possible to eliminate the deficit by 2020 and lay out a plan to pay off the debt. This was done by eliminating funding increases to the rate of population growth and without cutting funding to front-line services. To the Minister of Finance: will you admit to Albertans that we can return our provincial finances to balance without drastic cuts to services?

2:40

Mr. Ceci: Unlike the Premier, I haven't seen the plan that they talk about, two and a half years to balance, but it sounds like it's too good to be true. It sounds like a bit of a scam. If they were going door to door, they'd be illegal, I can tell you, in this province. What I can say is that we are prudently and thoughtfully bringing down the deficit, and then we'll attack the debt. Those are the things that Albertans will rely on in terms of programs and services and other things we're doing.

Mr. Rodney: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.
First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government likes to keep accusing us of always wanting to cut the budget and given that the PC balanced budget plan actually restores over a billion dollars in municipal infrastructure grants and almost a billion more to transportation funding, to the Minister of Finance: if our caucus can find a way to balance the budget four years earlier than your government while increasing funding for key priorities, why can't you?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the question. You know, someone in the back has done the math, and they say that the revenue math is wrong by \$933 million, so you might want to look at that first.

Dr. Starke: Your numbers.

Mr. Ceci: No. This is your stuff.

Mr. Speaker, earlier today I met with a young man named Yusef. Yusef and his father, Mohamed, are very concerned about the costs going forward in this province. That's why we brought in Bill 1, which will reduce the cost of school fees by 25 per cent. That will give them more money in their pockets. Those are the things we're going to continue to do for Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our caucus's balanced budget plan uses your numbers for revenue projections, includes modest increases to funding to meet growth populations and enrolment, funds critical infrastructure, balances the budget four years earlier, and has a plan to pay off the NDP borrowing, to the Finance minister: do you just want to use our plan on Thursday?

Mr. Ceci: Well, you know, I think I'll stick with the government plan, Mr. Speaker, the one that thousands of hours have been put into, the one that hundreds and dozens of people have been assisting with. That's the one that I talked about when I went around the province in terms of trying to find out what Albertans think. All of that is in the budget. You'll have to check on Thursday to see if any of your plan makes it. Here's a little note in advance: no, it doesn't.

Introduction of Bills

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Bill 203 Alberta Standard Time Act

Mr. Dang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 203, the Alberta Standard Time Act.

Mr. Speaker, our government was elected on a mandate of change, and I am going to change time for Albertans. Alberta is one of the sunniest provinces in this country, and Albertans have overwhelmingly told us that they want the sunshine at the end of their day. Albertans work hard, they play hard, and they just want to let the sun shine in.

This week Albertans had to change their clocks in their homes, their cars, their offices, and their phone booths. On my watch, Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 will repeal the Daylight Saving Time Act and give hard-working Albertans consistent time year-round to save money, improve efficiencies, and make life better for Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-North West, just before the returns and reports, I may have yesterday given you not enough time to explain, but again I ask that members, when introducing reports like this, are brief and are not including editorial comments.

Ms Jansen: Absolutely, and I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your patience.

I have three items to table, Mr. Speaker. The first is a *Gauntlet* article on the membership in Wildrose on Campus held by Wildrose MLAs and executives.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a copy of the poster for the antifeminist movie *The Red Pill*, sponsored by Wildrose on Campus and promoted by Rebel media.

Finally, a copy of the Wildrose on Campus constitution, with a special section detailing the aim to promote the Wildrose Party.

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

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I rise to table a document written on March 9 by Steve Penney, a professor in the Faculty of Law at the University of Alberta, supporting the actions our Minister of Justice is taking.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise to table five copies of an article in the *Calgary Sun* called Anti-bully Minister Sandra Jansen MIA from the Alberta Legislature Since "Electrician" Blast against Len Webber, with a quote from the MLA for Calgary-North West that says that he "should go back to being an electrician."

The Clerk: Tablings to the Clerk.

Mr. Cyr: I have two tablings, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: To the Clerk?

Mr. Cyr: The first tabling is an article: Manitoba Revenge Porn Law Aims to Empower Victims.

The second tabling is Cyberbullying Has "Hugely Disproportionate Impact on Women and Girls."

Thank you.

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

Mr. Nixon: Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

The Speaker: Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. You seem so much alike.

Mr. Nixon: The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and I spend a lot of time together, but there is a slight height difference.

I just rise to table the appropriate number of copies of a column written by Rick Bell this morning called Mainstreet Poll Shows More Hurtin' Numbers for Notley NDP as They Attack Opposition "Sewer Rats." The column just goes on to show that it's not a good idea to try to shore up your polling numbers by calling Albertans sewer rats.

The Speaker: Could I use this opportunity to remind all members that there are differences between Tabling Returns and Reports and Tablings to the Clerk, so please pay more attention to that in the future.

I believe we are at points of order. Is that correct? It seemed for a moment that we may not have any today, but it appears that we have, from my count, four of them.

The first one was by the Government House Leader.

Point of Order Imputing Falsehoods against a Member

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills in his question made the statement that the government was calling Albertans sewer rats. This is a dreadful misrepresentation. The hon. Deputy Premier spoke in the House this morning and apologized for that comment.

2:50

I was present at the time that it was made, and in no way did she intend or, actually, could any reasonable person infer that she was calling Albertans sewer rats, Mr. Speaker. It was intemperate language that the minister has apologized for in this House. Now, obviously, the opposition wants to make as much hay out of that as possible, but they are clearly misrepresenting the words and the intent of the Deputy Premier with respect to that and completely ignoring the fact that she has apologized and withdrawn those comments.

Mr. Speaker, 23(h) is making "allegations against another Member," in this case against all members on this side; 23(i) is imputing "false or unavowed motives to another Member"; and 23(j) is using "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder."

Nothing could be further from the truth than what the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills said. I understand his political motivation in trying to distort and to convince Albertans that the Deputy Premier meant something other than she did, but it ought not be accepted in this House. I'm quite concerned that in the various conservative parties across the way there seems to be a real looseness with the facts, and I'm compelled to stand up and point it out, Mr. Speaker, and ask that you bring the opposition to order with respect to this matter.

The Speaker: The deputy House leader.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to point out that the member that made the comment wasn't in the House when the minister made her sort of apology this morning. I'm going to say that this is a matter of debate. You know, we've called points of order to stop members of the government, including

senior ministers, from using derogatory statements about the opposition over and over and over again. We've continued to call points of order. They seem to ignore it even when it has been ruled as a point of order, so it doesn't seem to stop them. The Minister of Health used the reference to sewer rats, not us. She called down Albertans, not us. The term "sewer rats" will continue to be a matter of debate, as will embarrassing cousins, long into the future, so you might as well get used to it.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I couldn't help but pop up and react to the Government House Leader's remarks. In one statement he said that nothing offensive was said, and in the next statement he said that an apology was made. It can't be both, probably, so based on that alone, I would say that there's no point of order here. We all heard what was said in the House yesterday about sewer rats. It really points to a pattern on behalf of the government – calling Albertans sewer rats, embarrassing cousins, lots of other names, telling them that they make bad decisions, really being disrespectful to Albertans – and it's something that ought to stop.

The Speaker: On this particular matter I'd like to deliberate in consultation with checking precedent on this issue.

Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, I have a note that it was withdrawn. I'm assuming that's the case. Yes?

Member for Calgary-Lougheed, I believe you had a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Rodney: Yes. I trust this might be dispensed with quickly and efficiently. I'm calling the order at 2:40 p.m. The Minister of Finance used unparliamentary language, including words like "scam" and "illegal." There's a quick and easy answer, and that's simply that he apologize and withdraw the remarks.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, this hon. House leader always thinks that it's just a simple matter of agreeing with him that he's always right and that we should just do the right thing and say, "Sure," but it's not that easy. The hon. Minister of Finance in answer to the question indicated that what the Progressive Conservative opposition was doing really was to be misleading. I think that it was clearly a matter of debate. I'm not talking about any particular member being misleading but about statements that I think were not going to lead the public to the correct conclusion. He used the allusion to the act where we as a government have made it clear that door-to-door sales in which products are not properly represented are not allowed in this province anymore, a good piece of legislation.

Quite frankly, I don't think that the language was unparliamentary at all. I think it's simply a matter of debate. It was a disagreement between members, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The deputy House leader for the Official Opposition.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find it interesting that words like "misleading" and "scams" and "illegal" can be found as matters of debate, but terms like "sewer rats" are unparliamentary. I don't quite get the argument there. Either one is one or one is the other. You can't have both.

Now, I find it interesting that the Government House Leader used the situation of door-to-door sales. Now we have people, a company

from Ontario, coming into people's houses and trying to upgrade . . . [interjections] Well, what's the difference? It's the same thing.

The Speaker: Hon. member . . .

Mr. Hanson: It's a matter of debate as well, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, please don't engage me when I'm speaking to you. Please. Are there any other points you'd like to make?

Mr. Hanson: That's fine. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to cite Standing Order 23(j): "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." Calling a document that another party puts in the Legislature a scam and misleading and illegal is certainly designed to create disorder in the House and, as such, ought to be ruled out of order.

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, since apparently everyone is going twice. I just rise to dispute what the member has to say. The comment was made in reference to a document. There's a difference between talking about people and talking about ideas. It was made about an idea, and that idea is that we can have all the front-line services we want, we can have no taxes at all, and it will just all be free. I think that that idea is a little bit silly.

On this side of the House we believe that we have to invest in things in order to get the services we need. Mr. Speaker, ultimately, this is the fundamental conversation of democracy, right? You know, are you willing to invest in things? Are things important enough to you that you're willing to invest in them? That is the fundamental difference that we have with the members on the opposite side of the House. We need to be able to have those conversations. We need to be able to talk about those ideas. If this is a point of order, I'd suggest that we really can't debate anything at all.

Thank you.

The Speaker: When I first heard the comments – and I don't recall; I don't have the Blues in front of me with respect to the scam – I do remember hearing the word "illegal." On first blush on hearing that, I thought it was in jest that the minister was making the comment. But it's clear that words like that continue to be said in this House and seem to have escalated, particularly in the last two days. I have cautioned several times, and not many people seem to be listening because it's coming up on all sides of the House that words are being used.

3:00

I think that in the future it would be wise for all members of this House to not use words like "rats" and "illegal" and "scam." In this particular instance I would caution the minister to be cautious about using the words even though they may be in jest because, as you see, it does cause upheaval in this House, and I hope that in the future both sides of the House will do it.

I don't particularly see a point of order at this particular time.

Orders of the Day Committee of Supply

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

Interim Supply Estimates 2017-18 General Revenue Fund and Lottery Fund

The Chair: Before we commence this afternoon's consideration of interim supply, I would like to review briefly the standing orders governing the speaking rotation. As provided for in Standing Order 59.02, the rotation in Standing Order 59.01(6) is deemed to apply, which is as follows:

- (a) the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes,
- (b) for the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Member's behalf, may speak,
- (c) for the next 20 minutes, the members of the third party, if any, and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak . . .
- (d.1) for the next 20 minutes, the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent Members and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (e) for the next 20 minutes, private members of the Government caucus and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak, and
- (f) for the time remaining, to the extent possible, the rotation outlined in clauses (b) to (e) shall apply with the speaking times set at 5 minutes as provided in Standing Order 59.02(1)(c).

During the first rotation speaking times are limited to 10 minutes. Once the first rotation is complete, speaking times are reduced to five minutes.

Provided that the Chair has been notified, a Minister and a private Member may combine their respective speaking times, with both taking and yielding the floor over the combined period.

Finally, as provided for in Government Motion 7, approved by the Assembly on March 7, 2017, the time allotted for consideration is three hours.

I will now recognize the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to move the estimates.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would like to move the 2017-18 interim supply estimates for the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government.

When passed, these interim supply estimates will authorize approximate spending of \$30 million for the Legislative Assembly and \$7.8 billion in expense funding, \$936 million in capital investment funding, and \$149 million in financial transactions and funding for the government, and \$241 million for the transfers from the lottery fund to the general revenue fund. These interim supply estimates provide funding authorization that will allow the normal business of the province to continue while the Assembly takes the necessary time to review, debate, and approve the government's budget plans for the 2017-18 fiscal year. I should also add that these estimates will be fully debated as part of that process.

Madam Chair, the amounts in these interim supply estimates will provide the government and the Legislative Assembly with two months of funding. I believe that providing two months of funding is a prudent approach. It provides sufficient time to fully debate the

budget, that I will table on Thursday, and therefore allows the Assembly the necessary time to do its work.

Madam Chair, for the benefit of the Assembly, let me say a few additional words about interim supply and how government arrived at the requested amounts that we have here for debate.

Treasury Board and Finance works with officials from across government to forecast the requirements for each department based on their expected costs, commitments, and the timing of payments that need to be made during the months of April and May 2017. Oftentimes as part of the regular course of business payments to certain partners are required at the beginning of the fiscal year. For example, in the case of Advanced Education certain payments are made to postsecondary institutions up front at the beginning of the fiscal year. Likewise, in the case of Agriculture and Forestry certain payments are made up front to the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation. Therefore – and let me emphasize this point – one cannot assume that the amounts before the Assembly today will simply be one-sixth of each ministry's final budgetary figure.

I'd like to remind all members of the Chamber that the government's budget will be tabled on Thursday at 3:15, at which point the detailed estimates for the full fiscal year will be made clear. Once full-year estimates are made public, I'm sure that we'll have a good and robust debate in this Chamber.

Madam Chair, before we debate these estimates, let me emphasize that this government is squarely focused on making lives better for Albertans. This interim supply will make life better for Albertans. Without the funding, many of the services Albertans depend on, like hospitals, schools, and housing for seniors, would be in jeopardy. Simply put, this interim supply is required to ensure that the basic services that Albertans rely on from their government are available when they need it.

On that note, Madam Chair, my colleagues and I will be happy to answer any questions as we continue our work to make life better for all Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. Do you wish to combine your time?

Mr. Hunter: Yes, I do, Madam Chair. Thank you.

Minister, spring is right around the corner, and with spring comes pothole season. Last year Alberta Transportation needed over \$372 million for the maintenance and preservation of provincial highways. Of the requested expense of over \$301 million, how much of this interim supply request is going to fund highway maintenance and preservation?

Mr. Mason: I would prefer it if the hon. member would take his time and ask his questions, and I'll try and answer them when he's completed.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Hunter: All right, Madam Chair. Minister, municipalities are also looking for grants for water, waste water, public transit, airports, local road bridges, and special cost-shared paving projects. Does the minister have a dollar amount for how much of the \$301 million in expense is going to the municipal grants?

Am I just reading this into the record, then, Madam Chair?

The Chair: It's my understanding that the minister would prefer to have all the questions. You get 10 minutes, and then he'll take 10 minutes to respond to it.

Am I understanding that correctly, Minister?

Mr. Mason: Yes.

3:10

Mr. Hunter: Okay. Last fall you signed agreements with the federal government for public transit and water and waste water. It is my understanding that there is still money left over from the federal grants that remains to be allocated to projects. Are there any federal dollars in this \$301 million expected to be voted on, and is there any provincial cost sharing with the federal grants that can be found in this interim expense for transportation?

The next question, Madam Chair: are any dollars of this expense being directed to traffic safety services to run advertising campaigns for highway safety?

Next, Minister, you also have \$218,640,000 in capital investment to spend in this interim supply, being capital projects like ring roads; highway twinning, widening, and expansion; interchanges, intersections, and safety upgrades; bridge construction rehabilitation; and water management infrastructure. Can the minister advise how many tenders are sitting on the shelf just waiting to be unleashed on the construction market once this money is voted on?

Next, can the minister indicate what is the dollar amount of the tenders on the shelf? If the minister does not have the tenders ready to go for all the capital investment, then I would like to understand why he needs this money now. I guess we'll stay tuned for the answers on that.

We know, Minister, that last year in your annual report you lapsed over \$125 million in capital investment. In 2014-15 the lapse for capital investment was \$343,696,000. My point is that if the minister cannot spend the money fast enough, why ask for it to be voted on now? Can the minister guarantee that the capital investment to be voted here in interim supply will be expended by June 1, 2017?

Madam Chair, can the minister advise how much of the \$218,640,000 that the minister wishes to spend is derived from federal dollars? How much of this over \$218 million is being directed to the Calgary ring road? Will there be any highway twinning; i.e., highway 3 in my area emerged from the \$218 million. Where and what projects will you be doing?

Will there be any spending on the Springbank dry dam out of this \$218 million? Can the minister advise how much of the \$218 million is for land buyouts from freehold landowners for the Springbank dry dam? Is there any compensation for the Tsuut'ina Nation in the \$218 million for the Springbank dry dam? Does the minister's legal opinion indicate consultation with Tsuut'ina is sufficient, or does the Tsuut'ina Nation have a veto over this project due to the impact on the reserve?

Does the minister agree that the McLean Creek option on our river to protect Calgary and other communities is starting to look a little bit more cost effective? What about the rehabilitation of other water control structures, like the Carseland-Bow headworks? Is there any funding here for that project?

Can the minister advise if there will be any interchanges, like highway 791 and highway 1, funded out of this \$218 million?

Minister, you have \$6,291,000 in financial transactions. Can you detail any land that will be bought, sold, or swapped with this amount? Consumables like gravel, sand, salt for highway maintenance also get recorded as financial transactions. Did you buy any for the provincial highways?

Finally, Minister, did the highways need more winter maintenance in winter 2016-17 than usual?

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The member has asked a great many questions in his time, and I thank him very much for that. The questions that I can't answer right now: we'll endeavour to provide written answers to the member and to other members of the Assembly.

Madam Chair, just in general the spending for 2017 estimates – and this is based, of course, on last year's budget, about 17 per cent of last year's budget. So all of the issues that the member has raised have to fall within the previous budget. He's asked, for example, a number of questions that will be best answered in the actual budget that is coming down on Thursday. In other words, he's cleverly encouraging me to tell him what's in the budget on Thursday because he knows that I would get fired if I did that. I'm not saying that he's trying to get me fired, but, you know, in politics these kinds of things happen.

I can't really discuss what's going to be in the capital budget, but I can tell him that we are requesting – and the expenses: 2017-18 the estimated cash is \$1,771,356,000. Seventeen per cent of that, as the member has indicated, is \$301,131,000. Capital investment is based on \$1,276,319,000, of which 17.1 per cent on the capital side is \$218,640,000. Financial transactions is \$16,291,000 for a total for the interim supply, Madam Chair, of \$536,062,000.

It includes a number of things. The \$301 million which he's asked about includes funding for programs, services, and support; to provide leadership and guidance in investment and capital planning strategies; standards for transportation infrastructure procurement policies and processes; contract implementation; new strategic procurement initiatives. It includes traffic safety services, which provide leadership and direction for transportation safety programs.

Ministry support services, Madam Chair, is funding for my office, the deputy's office, communications, human resources, and other corporate services. We fund also the ongoing operations of the Alberta Transportation Safety Board, which conducts driver review hearings and independent appeals of driver, vehicle, and safety decisions.

We do, as the member asked, a considerable amount of maintenance, which supports the structural and operational maintenance of all provincial highways and bridges; for example, snow removal, grass cutting, pavement line paving, crack sealing, pothole patching, and maintenance on roadway signs and gravel roads.

The previous government, of course, had engaged in a number of long-term P3 contracts, and those have to be supported financially. It includes structural and operational maintenance of all the provincial ring roads.

Preservation is an important piece of the budget, Madam Chair, to support preventative and corrective bridge maintenance, geotechnical erosion and landslide remediation program, and preventative and corrective pavement maintenance program.

Finally, it also supports assessment and support systems, which includes maintenance of items such as rest areas, vehicle inspection stations, ferries, provincial park roads, and public roads and bridges on First Nations land.

I'll get into the capital grant funding because the member asked about that. The green transit incentives program, or GreenTRIP, provides support for local, regional, and intermunicipal public transit throughout Alberta.

There's the community transit fund, the strategic transportation infrastructure program, which I know the hon. member is interested in because it provides financial assistance to rural and smaller municipalities for developing and maintaining key local transportation for structures such as local bridges, community airports, and resource roads. This was a very popular program in rural Alberta which was defunded by the previous government, and we have restored funding. It's a limited amount of funding, but it is

significant to rural Alberta. It includes – let me just get the numbers here – \$100 million in the capital plan for the STIP program over two years. Those are all important.

3:20

Now, with respect to – and I'll just pick a few of the questions because there are so many of them – the question he's asked about twinning, there's a substantial amount set aside in this budget for twinning. Of course, it's based on a proportion of last year's budget, but that includes providing sections of highway twinning, widening, and expansion to provide a safe and efficient provincial highway system. It includes final paving on newly resurfaced roadways, widening of existing paved surfaces, bypasses, and new construction. There are also items in here for interchanges, intersections, and safety upgrades, bridge construction, provincial highway rehabilitation, water management infrastructure, and flooding.

Now, he's asked a number of questions about Springbank. I can tell the hon. member that the Springbank project is proceeding as planned. We are in the process of arranging site visits in order to do appraisals on the land. We've purchased a number of parcels already.

With respect to issues that have come up recently with respect to the Tsuut'ina Nation, there has been considerable consultation with the Tsuut'ina until now. I was a little surprised to hear them say that it hadn't taken place. I've met personally with the chief and a number of members of the council, and there have been a number of other face-to-face meetings and quite a bit of correspondence, which we can provide a summary of, but that doesn't mean that we don't need to do more and to do it better. I've reached out to the new chief – there's a new chief – with respect to this matter.

Many of the issues that they've raised in connection with environmental impacts on their land, for example, should be addressed in the report on the environmental impact assessment. That's been a yearly process. We've been out conducting the study over a full year so that we get all four seasons, and that will be completed at the end of this month. That work will be completed, and we're expecting that report sometime in the early summer. It should address a number of the issues that have been raised. If there are flags there, you know, then that is a good point of departure for further discussions and consultation and mitigation if that's actually required.

As far as we are concerned, we did look at this carefully and tried to balance the benefits of Springbank versus McLean Creek, and we haven't changed our opinion with respect to that matter. Particularly, the McLean Creek project would be significantly more threatening to a number of protected species, and the environmental impact, I think, would be much more severe than at Springbank. Ultimately, though, hon. member, our job and our intention is to protect people downstream, in Calgary and other communities, from a repeat of the 2013 flooding impacts.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills. Did you wish to combine your time?

Mr. Panda: I'm going to direct my questions to the Finance minister in whichever way he feels comfortable.

The Chair: Is that acceptable?

Mr. Ceci: I'll try the same thing he tried, 10 and 10.

The Chair: Based on that he may have a long list of questions?

Mr. Ceci: Yeah.

Mr. Panda: Then how do I get answers? Will you make note of each question? [interjection] Oh, he is being assisted by all of the backbenchers.

The Chair: Hon. member, you'll have 10 minutes, then, that you can speak and ask your questions.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Chair. Have you seen this document, Madam Chair? Do you have a copy of this on hand?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Panda: I'm going to refer to that. To me, Madam Chair, if the government was organized and if they had done their job, there would be no need for this interim supply. This interim supply is to keep the government running until the NDP do their job. I get that. They need to pass the budget. We understand that. But what are the reasons why your budget was not passed before interim supply was needed? We haven't heard that from the minister or any of the ministers. They haven't told us why they couldn't pass the budget before they asked for approval of this interim supply. I would like to hear that.

Mr. Yao: Why, Minister? Why?

Mr. Panda: Yeah. Is this the only government to pass an interim supply? Absolutely not. We understand that. Are there governments that can pass a budget without the need for interim supply? Yes. Absolutely yes. Then why is this government not choosing the best practices for passing budgets? How many other things in this supply bill will go against best practices? We don't have any details. We have zero details. If you look at this document, there are line items – they list all the departments, and they ask for millions and millions of dollars but zero details on that. We don't know.

I mean, we called it last year a blank cheque. That's what we called this supply bill last year when a similar document came through the House. We asked for more details and were refused last year. That's why we're trying hard this year to see if we can get any details. We were told to wait for the budget, to vote on this with confidence in the NDP government, that they knew best. This year is no different. There are still no details to be found anywhere in these documents. If any of the backbenchers there are wise enough to find details, please pass that on to me.

How can the government ask elected officials to vote on spending when all we have is the final number? We do not know where the money is going and what it is allocated for, how much this budget number is compared to years previous. We don't have all those details. How much debt this adds: we have no details.

I know the Finance minister says that beer is good, but I can't get details of the beer tax on this either. That's why I'm confused.

This supply bill is for two months, yet many of these numbers are much higher than one-sixth of the total budget. Now, I know that spending is not equal every month and that more money needs to be spent at certain times of the year, but how can we tell that from these numbers? We can't. [interjection] I'm coming to that. How do we know that the money allocated in this bill will be for necessary spending and cannot be multiplied by six? You're asking for two months. Do we try to then multiply it by six to get to the annual budget? I don't know. If we had any details, we could eliminate that as an option, but again we have no details.

We are here to represent our ridings, the people that elected us. Mayor Nenshi, my city's mayor, announced today that he hopes there is a large amount of funding for him in the budget. Yeah. Like the central Alberta folks here: they were looking for, you know, big money. Same thing with my mayor. My job is to defend my mayor here. When he is saying that he has to increase property taxes because of your uncampaigned-on carbon tax, I have to believe him. I have to believe him.

3:30

Looking at the Infrastructure budget, for example, we have no idea if Mayor Nenshi's wishes were granted. Looking at the Municipal Affairs budget, we have no idea if Mayor Nenshi's asks were fulfilled. In fact, we have no idea if anyone will get any money. There are many MLAs who meet regularly with their local municipalities, same as I meet with my councillors. I know you don't like to do town halls, but I'm sure you may be meeting with municipal officials.

When they ask us why we voted for any particular line item of this interim supply without having details, I can't say that I have blind trust in the Finance minister because he's a fellow Calgarian. No. I can't say that because he's not doing anything to create jobs in Calgary, so it is tough for me to defend that. That's why when we are being asked to vote on this like a blind man judging an art competition – it looks like that – I'm not comfortable to do it. That's why I need more details.

Madam Chair, I'm sitting in today for my colleague the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks, but I also want to ask the minister of economic development, who is not here . . . [interjections] Sorry. I meant to say – the Deputy Premier is here. She represents all the ministries, so if I can direct my questions to her through you.

For example, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade requested \$400 million last year. I guess that was the money that they expensed last year. Now he is looking for \$59 million more, almost 15 per cent of his annual budget, for two months, which is less than the money needed for two months of operations of economic development. Looking at the reduction, I'm hoping that it's a signal to cut his overall budget. I'm hoping that you are hearing the concerns of Albertans to restrain spending. I'm hoping that you're trying to rein in the spending based on that indication.

Also, of that \$59 million that the economic development ministry is asking for, we don't know how much is going to AITC and CITC. Those are the two featured programs of this ministry, but we don't know which amounts are directed to those two programs. We don't know how much has been expended in 2016 on AITC and CITC. I've asked this minister and sometimes I've also asked other ministers: how many jobs have been created through these programs, AITC and CITC, during the 2016-17 fiscal year? Without knowing that, I don't know how to vote in favour of this money for 2017-18 because they haven't told us how many jobs they created in 2016-17.

I also note that \$390,000 is being expended in capital, but is this ministry spending it on new computers or photocopiers? Whatever they're doing, they haven't told us. The minister also listed \$8.335 million for financial transactions, implying that they had some consumables they might have used up. We don't know that. Those are the kinds of questions that we have, Madam Chair.

Of this approximately \$59 million – that's what the economic development minister is asking for – he needs to advise us how much is going to fund line 1, which is ministry support services. In the same way, how much of that \$59 million is going to line 2, which is economic development and small/medium enterprises? And of that \$59 million, how much is going to fund line 3, which is trade and investment attraction? Can the minister tell us how much is going to fund science and innovation, which is line 4? Is there any funding going to jobs, investment, and diversification?

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the series of questions. I hope to be able to answer all of them. First of all, I just want to look at the preface for the interim supply and just read what it says. The hon. member was saying, you know: why isn't there more detail?

On the detail in the interim supply estimates, the preface says that it

reports the requirements for public monies from the General Revenue Fund to fund the operations of the Offices of the Legislative Assembly and the Government from April 1, 2017 to May 31, 2017, inclusive... The amounts in these estimates address only those funding requirements for which the Government will need to obtain authority under an appropriation act.

So this is not the full budget. This is just a portion of the budget, and we're bringing that forward. It's addressing two months of expenditures, and that will give us the time we need to put forward a thoughtful and prudent budget, that we will table on March 16 and start to debate shortly thereafter.

The hon. member also wondered why we were taking that time, and I can say clearly that our government is taking the time to consult with Albertans, hear their thoughts and ideas on the fiscal and economic challenges we face as a province. We will have a full debate on all aspects of the budget in this House.

Why does it come in the middle of March? Why doesn't it come earlier, he suggested, so that we could get it passed before the end of March? I can tell you that of the previous 10 budgets that were tabled in this House, four were presented in April, three were presented in March, and three were presented in February, so there really is no one way of doing things, Madam Chair. A number of different tablings of the budget have taken place over the years across those three months that I talked about. Obviously, if you're going to be presenting in April or late March, then you would need to come up with interim supply, so this is really not anything that's unusual.

The two months of spending that we are talking about, the appropriations that we're talking about, is to ensure, as I mentioned before, that the normal course of government business can be carried out as we take the necessary time, again, to discuss and debate the budget. The opposition and all of the members of this House will have that opportunity through the Committee of Supply process.

We have had to work across government, the officials in my area, to forecast the requirements for each of the departments. Based on their expected costs and commitments and other things that they are required to do, payments for the period between April 1 and May 31, we've arrived at the amount of about \$9.1 billion.

Madam Chair, if it's appropriate, I'll cede the rest of the answers to my colleague, who will address the specifics with regard to some of the ministries that the hon. member questioned.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just to elaborate with regard to the line items that the member asked about in Economic Development and Trade, as was mentioned by my colleague the Minister of Finance, this is standard process for all government departments. In essence, interim supply guarantees that passage of a portion of the year's monetary requirements to ensure that operations can continue.

3:40

Some of the operations, of course, in the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade include our international trade offices, which are making really good progress and expanding opportunities in Asia in particular. We want to make sure that they can continue to operate for the up to two months that we want to allow for good, fulsome, and thoughtful debate in this House on the overall budget. We want to ensure that the community and regional economic supports intake happens on April 1 rather than having to wait for two months and leave families in the lurch. We want to continue

providing the supports that have been available through grant programs to Alberta small businesses and have the general operations of the ministry continue to move forward.

There are some items that I believe in past years have required more than one-sixth of the payment to be made during that same portion of time. For example, Alberta Innovates has a number of grant programs. Some of those are required to be paid out more than one-sixth of the annual cost during this upfront period. Another one could be, again, for those international offices that we have. We do transfers to the federal government, so again the timing doesn't always line up that it could just be one-sixth. There's some variance with regard to those line items for sure.

In general I want to assure all members of this Assembly that we look forward to a thoughtful, engaging discussion on the entire budget, beginning on Thursday when we all get a chance to review the final documents and move forward through comprehensive debate. The passage of this interim supply will in no way impede our ability to go through each of the line items at that point in much more detail. I want to assure all members that, certainly, the amount that we're asking for in interim supply for Economic Development and Trade will not be the entire budget for that ministry. We will certainly have room for feedback from all members of this Assembly in that regard. It is important to us that we continue to have the operations of government continue while we allow for good, thoughtful, democratic debate.

We actually have in the Chamber right now the president of one of the largest unions that we have in Alberta, who represents many workers in the public service. We want to make sure that we continue to provide stability for those workers and for the union. So thank you very much to Guy Smith from AUPE for being here to observe some of the proceedings this afternoon, to make sure that we provide that stability to the public service, to the citizens who make sure that the direction set in this Assembly is implemented in a way that moves us forward as a province, supporting Alberta families and making their lives better.

Certainly, Economic Development and Trade is a key area of interest. You've heard us say that we are focused on making sure that we work to diversify the economy, making sure that we are continuing to grow the number of mortgage-paying jobs in this province, and making life more affordable. Economic Development and Trade certainly plays a key function in those first two in particular.

We certainly look forward to ongoing discussions and deliberations. I'd be happy to comment on other areas, as would my colleagues. Certainly, any ministry is on the table. We look forward to hearing your feedback, comments, and questions.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Hon. minister, do you wish to add? You still have a few minutes.

Mr. Ceci: Yes. Just to kind of close off that comment and my own previous comment to say that, you know, the budget is going to be tabled on March 16, in a couple of days. The member has many questions about what's in, what's out, how much are things reduced, or what's getting increases. I would just say to that member and all of the members in this House that all of those questions will be answered on Thursday when the budget is released. They can go through all the line items at that point, and many of their questions will be addressed by what's in the budget.

Lastly, Madam Chair, there are a number of ministers here who are pleased to address different ministries that will be questioned. You know, questions from the other side can be directed to people here, and we'll figure out who is to stand up and address them.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Did you want to continue the . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. If I could go back and forth with the ministers, if that's all right.

This is Education, so whoever would like to take that opportunity with me, I'd be very honoured.

Mr. Ceci: That's me. If you could just direct your questions, I'll take them down and answer.

Mrs. Aheer: Certainly. Thank you very much. With Education, we have a couple of questions, of course, regarding the numbers, and hopefully we'll be able to get some answers about this. I was wondering about the \$721.5 million. What is this representing? What percentage of the upcoming budget does that represent? I'm assuming that we'll find out a little bit more about this coming up, but it would be very, very nice, I think, for Albertans to know at this point in time, in interim, what that percentage is and where that's going to be allocated.

Obviously, there are programs that need to be supplemented, so I think some of the questions we would have are around: what percentage of those dollars and what programs will be supplemented through those funds? There's not, obviously, a lot of clarity in these reports, so I think that that would be a very important piece of information to understand.

When we're going through these numbers and once we understand the percentage of that – the portion that I'd like to ask about is: is there an aspect within the ministry that is accountable for the expenditure of those funds, and who would that be? Again, the minister has talked many times about monitoring and evaluating the programs.

These are some questions that not only lie within interim supply but also other questions that we've been asking around the programs. Obviously, we're wondering about: what programs will be supplemented? How much is that going to cost? Who's going to be accountable for the expenditure? How is this monitored? How are the programs monitored, exactly? For example, outside of teachers' costs, how much of that \$721.5 million will go directly into the classrooms? This is definitely an aspect that Albertans are very interested in understanding given the fact that so much is going on that is lacking in clarity these days with Albertans. These are a lot of the questions that we're getting.

Another important aspect is that within the throne speech the Premier had mentioned some important aspects about special needs. How will the children with special learning needs be supported by these dollars? Are there dedicated dollars that are coming from this allotment that will be going towards special-needs programs?

Will this amount be used to pay the school fees, transportation reductions, as were just delivered in Bill 1? Is that where these dollars are coming from for September 2017, or will the efficiencies that the government spoke of in Bill 1 come from that operations line? Again, we're looking at \$15 million that has been promised by the government for transportation in Bill 1, so we're just wanting to know how that's being allocated and if that's coming from this particular budget.

In capital spending, in the supplementary supply bill you transferred almost \$107 million – correct? – from capital to operating expenses, and that's the major chunk that's there. Does the \$302-plus million in this interim supply reflect the reduced amount of capital funding, and how much would that be from that? If the previous transfer had not been made, would you then have required

this amount plus the transfer amount? That would then total almost \$409 million.

How many schools do you anticipate completing with this \$302 million? There's been a lot of talk about school completions, building schools. We're just curious about how much of that fits into this dollar amount in the capital expense in supplementary supply. Are these projects on time and on budget? Is this \$302 million what we can expect for expenses across the year, or is this amount weighted more heavily in the spring?

3:50

I just have a few more questions, Madam Chair. This is more about operations and maintenance and how they fall in the interim supply. Does the amount that's reflected in the transfer from capital reflect the transfer from capital in the supplementary supply? What operations and maintenance projects are being undertaken with this infusion of funds? Also, was the transfer in supplementary supply a direct attempt to offset the carbon levy? Again, this is something that's very important, I think, for Albertans to have clarity and to understand where the dollars are going. Will the increase to operations and maintenance be continued next year?

Could this funding for operations and maintenance include green or alternative energy initiatives? And if those initiatives are there, how are we going to make sure that Albertans understand that, the dollar figures, and how dollars are being directed from those projects into green initiative projects? Is there a priority list of these operations and maintenance projects? The list, again, would include the funding for the O and M, for the alternative energy request, transfers, all of that. Also, with regard to the priorities, what was the consultation process, and who participated?

Finally, Madam Chair, I just have a couple of questions on the financial transfers. What is this transaction? I would love some clarity on that. Where did the money come from, and where did it go to? What's it for? And how will that impact the upcoming budget?

Thank you so much.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. Thank you for the questions, hon. member. First of all, let me just say by way of background that Treasury Board and Finance has requested that ministries allow for interim supply for the period of April 1 to May 31, 2017, at which time it's anticipated that our Budget 2017 will be passed in the Legislative Assembly. That's why we've come forward with these requests for interim for Education and every other ministry. Based on the interim supply period of approximately two months in the new fiscal year, Education's spending targets are estimated to be just over \$1 billion.

It's broken down, as the hon. member has gone through – and I'll just for the basis of everyone here be clear – as \$721.5 million for operating of schools. So let's just spend a moment talking about the operating of schools and how that's undertaken. The school boards across the province are the delivery mechanisms for the operations of schools. They have identified budgets, and they bring those forward to the Education minister. That ministry works with those school boards to ensure that the needs identified in the request for funding meet the Education Act.

The Education Act is clear in terms of what needs to be done to address the primary education of Albertans and what those monies can be spent on. So there's an accountability or a compliance, if you will, with the request for funds and the kinds of things they could be spent on, and then that gets reported during the course of the year from the various school boards to the Ministry of Education. Those

operating dollars that are identified in the first line, \$721.5 million, have been allocated through agreements with the school boards. That's what they will go to do, to address the needs of two months' of funding for schools.

I would just maybe jump from that to something to do with Bill 1 that was asked about in terms of: you know, are these monies going to address the 25 per cent reduction in school fees, that this government has said we will institute as of September 2017? The quick answer is: no, none of these funds that are identified here will go to offset any reduction in fees starting in September 2017. That will be the subject of further work after the budget is passed. I would just clarify that point, I guess.

The next line number is \$302.6 million for capital investment in school facilities, and those monies will be used to deliver to school boards, who will be using some of those monies, not all of them – of course, some of those monies will be the subject of expenditures for new school buildings and modernizations of schools, and the cash flow there will continue to make those things possible. Off the top of my head I don't know the exact number of completions that will occur with this \$302.6 million or the exact number of modernizations that will conclude with these monies, but to be sure, some of those monies will be for those purposes.

Some of the monies will be going to school boards across this province, and they will use them for the improvement of their facilities as they have identified through budget plans, that are, as I said earlier, made available to the Ministry of Education and ultimately reconciled with: you know, does it meet the act, and if it does meet the act, are they funds that can then be disbursed for those purposes?

One other question on capital investment was asked, and that was in relation to, you know, the movement from capital to operational funding on improvements to schools that improve the facility less than five years. There's an effort to try and put monies in the operational budget that are appropriate for improvements to schools that aren't capital in nature and to take that money out of capital so that during the year there's not an additional hit to, I guess, the deficit or a request for funds to be moved from capital to operations and reported on an operational basis and that then increases the deficit during the year. So this is a positive thing that's being done.

With regard to that \$302.6 million I'm not able to confirm how much of that is changed as a result of this transfer of accounting difference so that we treat the expenditure of funds the proper way and account for them the proper way as opposed to putting them in capital and then, partway through the year, transferring them.

You know, the education of children in this province, I think we would all agree, is a top priority for everyone. The interim supply here means that stable funding for school boards can occur and that students currently enrolled in Alberta schools won't see any disruption in their attendance.

This is a continuation of business that we presented in Budget 2016 and covers the 2016-17 fiscal year, which ends on March 31. Stakeholders won't notice the difference in anything that's taking place as a result of coming forward with this interim supply as their current funding will be maintained. There will be no impact on them or their ability to provide services, nor will there be an impact on the ability of any young Albertan to go to school. The funding covers all regular operations, including school capital commitments, and it is a matter of regular course of business to present it here.

4:00

With regard to specific questions about special needs – you know, do they have to be concerned, perhaps, that something will change as a result of the numbers in this interim supply? – I would

just want to reiterate that no school business will change for anyone as a result of bringing forward this interim supply, debating it, and passing it later. It is business as usual for Alberta schoolchildren.

I'll just see if there are additional questions here that I can address. I think I answered the way the expenditure of funds is monitored, how much classrooms will or won't get, and the percentage of operating here.

As I said earlier in reference to my introductions, this is not to be construed as one-sixth of the total amount necessary for the Education ministry and the school boards around the province. It's a billion dollars, and it's broken up this way because in many cases school boards need some upfront funding to make sure that they have everything they require. We are making sure that in doing that, Madam Chair, we are taking care of the important youth who are in our schools. It's not to be construed as one-sixth; it is to be construed as necessary funds. It's necessary at this time for the work of school boards to continue. The budget that we will table on March 16, in two days, will have all of the line items identified in it, both increases, decreases and other kinds of things that people are looking for.

The Chair: That concludes the time for the Official Opposition, the first hour. Oh, I guess we've got six more minutes. Is there anyone else in the Official Opposition who would wish to ask any questions? No? Okay.

Then we'll move on to the next segment for the third party. Any hon. member from the third party wishing to ask questions? No? All right.

Then we would move on to any other party represented. No questions?

We will move, then, to private members of the government caucus. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Did you want to go back and forth?

Connolly: I would prefer to go back and forth, but it's up to the ministers. I'll mostly be talking to the Minister of Health and the Associate Minister of Health if that's all right with you both, to go back and forth? Perfect. I assume that the head nod was a yes.

First of all, I'd like to thank you both, the Associate Minister of Health and the Minister of Health, for all the work you've been doing over the past year to make sure that we've constrained our spending in health care while maintaining front-line services. It's truly appreciated. I know I have a lot of nurses and doctors in my riding of Calgary-Hawkwood who truly appreciate that we are trying our best to support the front-line services while at the same time cutting spending where it is possible.

Actually, one of the main things that I've heard from my constituents is about the compensation for physicians. I understand that we need interim supply to fund operations, including the compensation for physicians, until the budget is passed, and I know that both the Associate Minister of Health and the Minister of Health worked tirelessly to talk to the Alberta Medical Association to try to curb doctors' compensation. I would just like to ask the ministers if either minister can give us an update on where we are at with implementation the new amending agreement we have with the Alberta Medical Association.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair and to the member for the important question. Actually, this weekend was with the Alberta Medical Association at their spring representative

forum here in Edmonton, and I can tell you that the physician community and the surgeon community of Alberta shares their commitment to make life better for Alberta families and all Albertans.

We've already had some really great outcomes with regard to the amending agreement that are going to help us move to a more sustainable health care system. Obviously, one of the big drivers was to make sure that we were able to get the cost escalators that were about 10 per cent per year to a more reasonable rate of increase.

Another one of the drivers was to make sure that we had new models of compensation so that patients who regularly would say that they spent more time in the waiting room than they did talking to their physician about their complex cases, that that wouldn't be the case. It isn't the case today in all clinics, but it certainly is not as much of an exception as we would like it to be, Madam Chair. We want patients to spend more time with the right providers, not on the highway travelling to and from long waits.

The amending agreement in terms of the savings has already enabled us to save about \$100 million last year, and that's because the doctors did come to the table and worked with us on a schedule of medical benefits, which are the kinds of codes that are used when billing happens. This is certainly a very good first step. We anticipate up to about \$400 million in this next fiscal year through increased efforts in that regard.

There have already been two rounds of amendments to the schedule of medical benefits. Some were implemented in January – that's why we have about \$100 million in savings from the current fiscal year – and more are coming forward April 1. Again, that was done in partnership – actually, a lot of the recommendations that came to the table: you'd think that as this is about cost savings, they would only be from the employer side of the table, but a lot of the cost-saving initiatives that were proposed around the schedule for medical benefits came from the membership themselves.

I have to say that this is something that I think is a win-win. You don't have to look very far either in our past or across Canada to see what happens when the relationship isn't grounded on respect, on collaboration, and wanting to make sure that both sides are working for the betterment of all patients.

Another key area of focus in this agreement is the different types of specialities we're going to require. This is something critical to ensuring that patients have the right care in the right place at the right time. We have a real opportunity to get this right here in Alberta by looking at how we ensure that our students in our major medical schools here have opportunities to specialize in the areas where they are most needed, whether that be a type of practice or whether it be in excitement for preparing to go to one of the communities, for example, in the rural north. Madam Chair, I know that your constituents want to make sure that they have access to both physicians and other health care providers in their communities, and they absolutely deserve that.

The AMA deserves a seat at the table when we're doing that work to make sure that we develop the right plan. To the medical students and to the residents of the province of Alberta: we value their expertise and their skills, and there are many places for them to ensure that they can continue to work in the province of Alberta in those areas of specialization and in those communities that require their expertise.

Certainly, this is very good news, Madam Chair, and I am proud of the fact that I've been invited to every representative forum since becoming minister, and I have taken up that opportunity. I think this was the fourth one, I believe, this last weekend, and I really enjoyed the fact that we had the opportunity for me to deliver remarks, for many of the representatives to ask questions, and then for a lengthy

lunch with the students and the residents that extended beyond my time even, in that the CEO of Alberta Health Services and my deputy minister were both in attendance and both spent additional time with those students and residents.

They have excellent ideas. As future resources, as physicians wanting to make sure that they serve the province, that they themselves are in areas where their skills are going to be used to their fullest, they are very excited to be partners with us in addressing how we move forward. I believe some of the residents will be in the Chamber next week, and we'll have an opportunity to hear about some of their additional areas of focus as we move forward.

Certainly, it's been a very good partnership with the Alberta Medical Association. We've made significant amendments that resulted in up to half a billion dollars in savings over just two years, Madam Chair, as well as improving access and quality of care.

4:10

I really have to say that this is a win-win-win-win for the budget of Alberta, a win for the physicians and for their demonstration as being strong stewards of the system, and a win for patients and members of the Alberta public. I'm really proud of the work we've made there, and I'm happy to highlight some of it this afternoon in the Chamber.

Thank you.

The Chair: Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Minister. I appreciate the answer. Thank you very much, Chair.

Just very quickly, you were mentioning that last week you were in Calgary talking about the health transfer deal the government has made with Ottawa. Just quickly, can you tell us what this means for our budget and if it has affected the total that you're asking for in the interim supply?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair and to the member for the question. Our discussions with the federal government have been lengthy, and at all times at the table our number one goal was to make sure that we got the best possible deal for Alberta families. We certainly believe, after lengthy conversations, that that is the result. We did not leave one dollar on the table that could have come to this province, so I'm proud of that.

We've done that in partnership with the federal government, and as a result we're going to see \$703 million in federal funding directed specifically to home care. We will also see \$580 million in additional support for mental health initiatives. These are two core pillars of what we promised Albertans we would do, and it's great to be able to dedicate additional funds in these specific areas.

We also preserved the per capita funding arrangement with the federal health transfers. This was a fundamental piece of what we sat down at the table hoping to achieve. We know that some jurisdictions have lobbied for a change in formula that would have seen our portion of the federal transfers go down even if the amount went up if they changed the way that that funding was distributed. So I'm very proud of the federal government and of the province of Alberta that we were able to maintain that arrangement. This funding will figure into the 2017-18 budget, and we are very happy to discuss that in greater detail beginning on Thursday.

Thank you for the question, and I look forward to helping these increased dollars be put to immediate use right here in the province.

Connolly: Thank you once again, Minister. You actually touched a little bit on mental health and mental health funding. I know that for myself, I've gone through quite a lot in regard to mental health. Luckily for me, I'm in a position where I have the resources to

access mental health funding and mental health resources that already exist. However, the great many Albertans and myself before I was elected weren't able to access these programs. For a short time, while I was under my parent's program, I was able to access it because, luckily, as she was a teacher, she was able to access that funding. For myself, however, in university, it was very difficult for myself as well as my peers in university to access mental health funding.

When it comes to these kinds of conversations, it can be easy to forget that the number one factor behind them is Alberta families and the patients who need care. Can you, really, give us an example of a specific service that comes to mind that interim supply will support, and how much of that is going to help with mental health funding?

Ms Payne: Yes. Thank you to the member for the question. Certainly, we know that access to mental health and mental health supports is a challenging issue here in our province, and our government has been diligently at work around the implementation of the recommendations from the evaluating mental health report. We will have more details to get into about that as we move through the budget process and in the coming days.

But just to, you know, comment on one important piece that I know is of real importance and of interest to this House, and that is the continued funding for addressing the opioid crisis. As the member is likely aware, as part of the negotiations around the Canada health transfer, we were also able to secure an additional \$6 million from the federal government in new funding to address the ongoing opioid crisis, which will be bundled with the existing dollars within the interim supply around continuing to move forward with our opioid action plan to address the ongoing opioid crisis in areas such as harm reduction, access to treatment, working with partners in Justice around enforcement as well as increasing and expanding education and awareness campaigns at various levels, not just generally in the public but also specifically with partners in Education and the school system.

With respect to mental health supports we know that the supports that families are able to access in different parts of the province can really vary. Without giving away too much of what we're going to be talking about more later on this week, just to flag that our government is continuing to invest in mental health supports and in ensuring that we have a co-ordinated and comprehensive system.

As we've been doing our work, we've heard from so many families and so many Albertans about the challenges that they've had in terms of accessing the system, navigating through it, and being able to find the right supports in their community. We've also heard so much about the differences in levels of support that are available for an Albertan from one of our large urban centres versus some of our smaller communities. Certainly, we are working very carefully to ensure that we are able to get as close to equitable access as we can because we know that issues like mental health and issues like substance use don't discriminate based on geography. They're issues that are felt all the way across our province.

Connolly: How much time do I have left?

The Chair: About six minutes.

Connolly: I'd like to cede my time. Thank you.

The Chair: Is there any other private government member who wishes to speak? No further questions?

Then under the rotation it will now take us back to the beginning. If there are any further members of the Official Opposition who had any questions?

Mr. Hunter: Madam Chair, I just have one question, actually, for the Minister of Transportation. I had asked 19 questions, and of those 19 questions, I think that you probably answered a quarter of those questions. Now, I appreciate that you do have the opportunity of being able to state how you're going to be able to answer those questions, but you made a comment in your answer that you would be willing to get the answers to my questions in writing. I would like to know, Minister: would you be willing to get those answers to the questions prior to us voting on this interim supply? That's the question I have.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much for the question, hon. member. That, unfortunately, is going to be difficult as the hon. member, Madam Chair, asked a number of detailed questions that require some looking up on the part of officials in the department in order to provide him with a clear and accurate answer. That's the problem in a supply situation like this when you fire off a bunch of very detailed questions like: what's the value of all the outstanding – what is the word? – tenders, you know, how many are there, and what are they worth? I'm sorry. I hate to disappoint you, hon. member. I don't carry that stuff around in my brain. But the department will get that information, and we will get back to the hon. member.

We need to keep in mind that this is a slice of last year's budget and all of the questions relating to the interim supply are questions that would have been asked about the budget that is just coming to an end. This is just a continuation of that for a brief period of time until the Assembly is able to go through the process of evaluating the new budget. We go through Committee of Supply, and we do the estimates on a department-by-department basis, and then we vote on the new budget. So in the meantime we're just carrying on for a brief period of time with the old budget.

4:20

There's no significant variation in the Transportation department in the interim supply from this budget year that's just coming to an end. It's the same budget, just extended a little bit till we can get the new budget passed. There are no surprises there, hon. member. A lot of your questions I think are very valid and interesting and I would love to answer them, but they have to do with next year's budget. They have to do with, you know: is there money in different capital projects? Well, that's a question that can't be answered until the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board tables his budget on Thursday, and then I would be happy to answer the questions, now that I know what . . .

The Chair: The time for that segment has ended, hon. minister.

Going to the third party, this is your last chance.

Any further government members, private members who wish to ask questions?

All right. If there are no more members who wish to speak, I will put the following questions.

Vote on Interim Supply Estimates 2017-18 General Revenue Fund and Lottery Fund

Agreed to:

Support to the Legislative Assembly \$20,597,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Auditor General \$4,100,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Ombudsman \$555,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Chief Electoral Officer \$1,264,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Ethics Commissioner \$161,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner \$1,146,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Child and Youth Advocate \$2,207,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Public Interest Commissioner \$214,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Advanced Education
Expense \$618,564,000
Capital Investment \$244,440,000
Financial Transactions \$66,000,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Agriculture and Forestry
Expense \$314,300,000
Capital Investment \$2,600,000
Financial Transactions \$223,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Children's Services
Expense \$241,000,000
Capital Investment \$770,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Community and Social Services
Expense \$665,000,000
Capital Investment \$1,812,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Culture and Tourism
Expense \$87,004,000
Capital Investment \$340,000
Financial Transactions \$836,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Economic Development and Trade
Expense \$59,042,000
Capital Investment \$390,000
Financial Transactions \$8,335,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Education
Expense \$721,500,000
Capital Investment \$302,600,000
Financial Transactions \$3,200,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Energy	
Expense	\$34,909,000
Capital Investment	\$902,000
Financial Transactions	\$10,867,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Environment and Parks	
Expense	\$189,283,000
Capital Investment	\$53,345,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Executive Council	
Expense	\$5,400,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Health	
Expense	\$3,684,014,000
Capital Investment	\$8,490,000
Financial Transactions	\$7,000,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:

Indigenous Relations	
Expense	\$32,000,000
Capital Investment	\$4,000
Financial Transactions	\$4,000,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Infrastructure	
Expense	\$118,000,000
Capital Investment	\$77,000,000
Financial Transactions	\$4,000,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Justice and Solicitor General	
Expense	\$253,689,000
Capital Investment	\$742,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Labour	
Expense	\$32,662,000
Capital Investment	144,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Municipal Affairs	
Expense	\$272,599,000
Capital Investment	\$1,409,000
Financial Transactions	\$23,093,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Seniors and Housing	
Expense	\$70,230,000
Financial Transactions	\$2,200,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

4:30

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Service Alberta	
Expense	\$55,532,000
Capital Investment	\$21,900,000
Financial Transactions	\$1,690,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Status of Women	
Expense	\$1,222,000
Capital Investment	\$8,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Transportation	
Expense	\$301,131,000
Capital Investment	\$218,640,000
Financial Transactions	\$16,291,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Treasury Board and Finance	
Expense	\$27,509,000
Capital Investment	\$555,000
Financial Transactions	\$1,031,000
Transfer from the Lottery Fund	\$240,924,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The Committee of Supply shall now rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again. The following resolution relating to the 2017-18 interim supply estimates for the general revenue fund and the lottery fund for the fiscal period from April 1, 2017, to May 31, 2017, have been approved.

Support to the Legislative Assembly, \$20,597,000; office of the Auditor General, \$4,100,000; office of the Ombudsman, \$555,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, \$1,264,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, \$161,000; office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, \$1,146,000; office of the Child and Youth Advocate, \$2,207,000; office of the Public Interest Commissioner, \$214,000.

Advanced Education: expense, \$618,564,000; capital investment, \$244,440,000; financial transactions, \$66,000,000.

Agriculture and Forestry: expense, \$314,300,000; capital investment, \$2,600,000; financial transactions, \$223,000.

Children's Services: expense, \$241,000,000; capital investment, \$770,000.

Community and Social Services: expense, \$665,000,000; capital investment, \$1,812,000.

Culture and Tourism: expense, \$87,004,000; capital investment, \$340,000; financial transactions, \$836,000.

Economic Development and Trade: expense, \$59,042,000; capital investment, \$390,000; financial transactions, \$8,335,000.

Education: expense, \$721,500,000; capital investment, \$302,600,000; financial transactions, \$3,200,000.

Energy: expense, \$34,909,000; capital investment, \$902,000; financial transactions, \$10,867,000.

Environment and Parks: expense, \$189,283,000; capital investment, \$53,345,000.

Executive Council: expense, \$5,400,000.

Health: expense, \$3,684,014,000; capital investment, \$8,490,000; financial transactions, \$7,000,000.

Indigenous Relations: expense, \$32,000,000; capital investment, \$4,000; financial transactions, \$4,000,000.

Infrastructure: expense, \$118,000,000; capital investment, \$77,000,000; financial transactions, \$4,000,000.

Justice and Solicitor General: expense, \$253,689,000; capital investment, \$742,000.

Labour: expense, \$32,662,000; capital investment, \$144,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense, \$272,599,000; capital investment, \$1,409,000; financial transactions, \$23,093,000.

Seniors and Housing: expense, \$70,230,000; financial transactions, \$2,200,000.

Service Alberta: expense, \$55,532,000; capital investment, \$21,900,000; financial transactions, \$1,690,000.

Status of Women: expense, \$1,222,000; capital investment, \$8,000.

Transportation: expense, \$301,131,000; capital investment, \$218,640,000; financial transactions, \$16,291,000.

Treasury Board and Finance: expense, \$27,509,000; capital investment, \$555,000; financial transactions, \$1,031,000; transfers from the lottery fund, \$240,924,000.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? Say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

I would like to alert hon. members that Standing Order 61(3) provides that upon the Assembly concurring in the report by the Committee of Supply, the Assembly immediately reverts to Introduction of Bills for introduction of the appropriation bill.

Introduction of Bills

(reversion)

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

Bill 5

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 5, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to this Assembly.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate March 14: Ms Hoffman]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to this item?

Mr. Nixon: What are we on?

The Deputy Speaker: We're at the Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I could not hear you, but I thank you for clarifying that for me.

The Deputy Speaker: My apologies. You've already spoken.

Mr. Nixon: I've never spoken to the throne speech. Not to this one.

The Deputy Speaker: All right. My notes must be in error. Go ahead.

4:40

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thought for a minute I might have missed the whole speech. On my life, I don't know how one could miss my speeches because they're just so spectacular. I know that my side of the House, I hope, agrees with me.

I rise today, of course, to respond to Her Honour's throne speech. You know, it was interesting for me. I, like many members of the Assembly, had some guests that came to watch the throne speech being read. Of course, for them, it was their first experience watching a throne speech, and they were quite interested in the process and the history of it. But as they began to listen to the speech, they expressed to me, they were quite shocked with many things that were in the speech, both some things that seemed quite contradictory to the government's actions as well as some positions that the government was taking in the throne speech that seemed out of touch with the majority of Albertans.

Now, to be quite honest, Madam Speaker, I don't think that one could address all of the concerns that I have as a result of the throne speech, that I've seen in the throne speech, but I will attempt with the short time that I have to try to talk about a couple, particularly areas that I think are impacting my constituents the most. One of the areas I would like to start to talk about is where the comments in the throne speech talk about protecting natural areas, protecting natural recreation activities like hunting and fishing, that Albertans enjoy. I certainly do agree that we have some of the nicest natural areas in the world right here in Alberta. I know that in my constituency of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre we have a tremendous amount of what we affectionately call the west country, but that's really the eastern slopes of Alberta. Of course, west of Rocky Mountain House and west of Sundre are some of the most beautiful places, without a doubt, in the world.

My community has enjoyed recreation activities inside our backyard for many generations. In fact, our neighbours from the large urban areas come to our backyard to enjoy their recreation time on the weekends. The area outside of Rocky Mountain House, which is a town of about 7,000 people, and the county that surrounds it, with about 12,000 people, can go up to well over 100,000 people on the May long weekend, just for those three days. It's a beautiful place, and they enjoy it. So I don't take issue with the government saying that they want to protect that. I want to make sure that my children can enjoy the recreation activities that I've enjoyed in the west country and their children can enjoy those activities as well, but the action that this government has taken recently in regard to protecting recreation areas is directly in contradiction to what they are saying in the throne speech.

They say that they want to protect the ability of people to recreate in those areas and to make sure that they're preserved for a long time to come, but the reality is that what we've seen in the Castle is just the opposite. In fact, that's what the people down in the Castle were told during that process, that they would still be able to utilize the recreation trails that they have built. They put millions of dollars of their money or their club's money into the infrastructure. They were told that they would still be allowed to hunt and fish in those areas. Now we're hearing that cattle will probably be removed from those areas. Cattle, of course, have been grazed in those areas for over a hundred years in this province. That's directly the opposite of what groups were told at the beginning of the consultation process. That's not protecting the historic use of those areas.

Now, I want to preserve our west country. The west country is something very important to me. As you know, Madam Speaker, I lived in the forest reserve for seven years, running a lodge right on the Red Deer River, an hour from pavement. It was one of the greatest experiences of my life. I loved raising my young family in that area. It's important that we preserve it, but I want to preserve those areas and utilize them. I believe that we can preserve those areas and still be able to recreate in them.

I'll give you an example, Madam Speaker, which I think proves my point. The Ya Ha Tinda Ranch, which is on the Alberta side of the line of the national park, a place that I hold near and dear to my soul, one of my favourite places on Earth, was shut to the public back in the 1980s or the late '70s. There were some situations going on similar to what we've seen in the Castle or the west country around Sundre or Rocky Mountain House, where off-highway vehicles and trucks were being used in inappropriate ways. Camping was not working appropriately. There was a mess. Things were wrong. So they shut it, similar to what this government has just done with the Castle, just shut it to all the people that have used it since the beginning of Alberta, and it sat there. You know what? Nothing actually improved on the ranch during that time.

Then a decision was made about 23 years ago this year, I believe, to form an organization called the eastern slopes foundation, which was made up of volunteers who quad, are active in horseback riding, and who like to camp in the area. They took over all of the recreation side of the ranch in partnership with the national park. It is Alberta land because it's not in the park, but it's actually owned by the national park. It butts right up to it. It's where they train all the national park horses. It's where the Brewster brothers founded their ranch. Of course, most of us would be familiar with Brewster buses and Brewster tours inside Banff. That's where that whole history started, at that ranch.

Now, if you go there now, you will see some of the cleanest campgrounds, well-maintained trails, a very active place where people from all over Alberta, not just in my constituency, get to come and enjoy the weekend, ride their horses in some portions, drive their quads in some portions. So by utilizing the stakeholders, partnering with them, we were able to create something that was great, preserve a beautiful place for many generations to come and still be able to utilize it.

The problem now with what's going on in the Castle is that not only have they kicked all the people out of the area that they get to enjoy; they've now completely lost the trust of the people that are involved in there. So if we want to go to other areas of the province and we want to encourage those groups to build ATV trails, to maintain horse trails, to do those types of things, why would you? If you've put a million and a half to 2 million dollars' worth of infrastructure already into a place like the Castle just to have, you know, your deal basically broken – and there are letters from the minister saying that they would still be able to participate in there, from this minister, not from the minister of the last government, and

they already reversed that – why would clubs or people participate in that? That’s just one of the things in the throne speech that I find in contradiction of what they’re saying.

I’ll give you another one. Two weekends ago, when I was back in my constituency, I was at a bull sale in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, in Ponoka county. I like going to bull sales. I don’t know how many members on the other side of the House have had the opportunity to go to bull sales, but they’re great. They’re a lot of fun. They’re a really good time for the community to get together, not only, of course, to buy bulls for their ranches but to be able to interact.

Every person that I spoke to at that bull sale wanted to talk about light bulbs. Now, I’ve got to say that it’s the first time that I’ve ever been to a bull sale where people wanted to talk about light bulbs. They wanted to talk about the government’s program for light bulbs, how they’re spending the money that they’re taking from the citizens of Alberta through the carbon tax and putting it into light bulbs. Most people, Madam Speaker, thought it was a joke. They actually, literally thought it was a joke. They thought that it was just something that somebody had put up on Facebook, like an urban legend. Nobody could believe that this government wanted to take the money out of hard-working Albertans’ pockets and then spend it on an Ontario company going around Alberta and installing light bulbs. Nobody could believe that. They literally thought it was a joke. I had to convince them: “No, it isn’t a joke. It’s actually true. This is what the government is doing.” Again, totally out of touch with the people of Alberta.

Another area in the throne speech talks about getting spending in control. In fact, I think what it says is: “Through [different] action and targeted reductions we are bringing the rate of spending growth down thoughtfully and prudently.” Madam Speaker, we are seeing the largest deficits in the history of this province. We are seeing unprecedented debt, that is being borrowed against my children’s future and the members opposite’s children’s future. My grandchildren’s future and the members opposite’s grandchildren’s future. There is not one piece of evidence in the throne speech of any action that this government has done to date or has shown they will do in the future that shows that they are interested in getting our spending under control. Not one action. The complete opposite of what that throne speech is saying.

Now, if we were really going to do what the throne speech is saying, I would be all for it. I find appalling how much money we are borrowing against our children’s future. I find appalling the consequences that we will see for Albertans as a result of the decisions of this government. I just don’t think that that is realistic, what has been written in the throne speech, compared to what the hon. members’ and the government’s actions are.

Another one is, to me, actually, I think probably the most shocking. In the beginning of the throne speech it says:

We are an open and inclusive society built on enduring values: compassion, hard work, and justice. In an uncertain world these values are more important than ever, our North Star to guide us through our deliberations as we seek to build a better province for every Albertan, no matter their background, birthplace, or creed. We are one province, one people on a common journey towards a common future.

Those are great words, Madam Speaker.

When you take those in comparison to the government’s words in other ways . . .

An Hon. Member: Actions.

Mr. Nixon: And actions.

But their words are what I want to talk about briefly. The government’s words do not show this at all. They do not show this at all. While it is a great goal to go to, they do not show it at all.

We have, as you know, a Premier who has called Albertans embarrassing cousins. When you compare that to these sentences, I’ve got to tell you that the people of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre or the people that I talk to across Alberta do not see those words when being called embarrassing cousins.

Mr. Yao: Or sewer rats.

4:50

Mr. Nixon: We’ll get there in a minute, for sure.

There is no way that calling Albertans embarrassing cousins lives up to what has been written in this throne speech.

Albertans across the province, over three-quarters of them, roughly, are fundamentally against the government’s carbon tax. They’re fundamentally against it. That’s a big part of what’s in the throne speech, the program that will come from that or the money that they want to spend on that. They’re very much against that, and as they speak about it, they are called angry, or – here’s the best – the Premier tells them to make better choices or to drive and take the bus.

Well, I know the Minister of Transportation will acknowledge that there is no bus or C-Train in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. People need to drive. The option of taking a Smart car does not even work on our roads. In fact, the hon. Minister of Transportation would not be able to get down the driveway to my home inside a Smart car. It just would not be able to do the climb, particularly if there was snow.

I can tell you that people in Sundre or Rocky Mountain House or Rimbey are still very deeply insulted by those comments from the Premier. They do not reflect what is in this throne speech. It shows a fundamental lack of understanding of a huge portion of our province and the way of life there and the realities of the situation that takes place inside our communities to tell them to just take the bus, a bus that does not exist. It’s insulting, and it does not fit within it.

Now, I know we have lots to do, so I will bring this to a close shortly, but I will close with one other example that does not fit with the vision or the language in this throne speech: sewer rats, as the hon. member pointed out. To call constituents, to call Albertans, to call anybody sewer rats – and whatever version of that or whoever is being referred to as sewer rats, I’ll let the government explain who those people are – is absolutely insulting to the people of Alberta. It is particularly insulting to my constituents. Now, I do understand that it was referred to people that I associate with. Well, I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that the people I associate with are my constituents, my family, my neighbours, my friends, my community. Those are ranchers, farmers, small-business owners, nurses, doctors, teachers, rig workers, SRD workers, forestry workers, fish and wildlife officers. Those are the people that I associate with, and they are not sewer rats. That does not live up to what is in this throne speech.

I think it’s fair for Albertans to expect better from this government going forward. I challenge them to try to live up to what is in this throne speech because I think they’re good words on where to go, but to continue to call our constituents embarrassing cousins, to continue to call the people that I represent sewer rats is appalling and does not fit with what is in this throne speech.

With that said, I will adjourn debate, Madam Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 1
An Act to Reduce School Fees

[Debate adjourned March 14: Mr. Malkinson speaking]

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise here once again and continue to speak on the importance of Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees. You know, the opposition talks lots. They tend to heckle, and one of their favourite terms is to say: Albertans are watching. Yes, indeed, Madam Speaker, they are. When I go out and door-knock in Calgary-Currie, I hear over and over again about the importance of quality education and the fact that having to pay those school fees can be a burden even on families that you perhaps would think would not traditionally be burdened by school fees. I hear that over and over again. That's why I'm so glad our government brought this forward. Because of school fees, parents are worried, and we are helping to alleviate that.

Now, from the opposition throughout the debate today and yesterday we have heard many heckles, many points of order, and, of course, many tweets on this matter. The Wildrose record is clear. It seems to be that no matter what we're debating in this House, whether it's important things like reducing school fees, the only answer is: cut, cut, cut. Unless it's not. We heard just today about ripping up contracts, which is something the opposition has mentioned previously, when it comes to our public service. We have heard them disparage our oil and gas companies, that the same families they claim to support rely on, that the families in Calgary-Currie rely on. Disparage them.

An Hon. Member: Shame.

Mr. Malkinson: I hear some heckling of "shame," and I agree there, Madam Speaker.

I find it a little disingenuous. You can't be pro jobs if you're pro cuts to education and teachers. You know, I have heard that the Wildrose opposition wants no school fees. That's great, and we are moving there, Madam Speaker. But you can't say, "You have no school fees," when there are no schools, no teachers. It seems to me that if you were going out to the doorstep and you were saying to Albertans: we're going to have no school fees; we're going to have lower taxes; we are going to have nothing but, in fact, larger classes with fewer teachers – and for the opposition, which I've heard say that over and over again, to say that somehow that won't be the case, I would say that if they're telling Albertans that at the door, which they are because they say it in this House, that perhaps that is an extremely enthusiastic interpretation of the truth. Shame indeed.

In our platform we said that we were going to reduce school fees, and we are there. I've gone to doors in Calgary-Currie over and over again on issues like this, issues that matter to Albertans, and every time I go out, I'm so proud because when I talk to them, I have a new box that I can tick off on our platform of what we are doing to help Albertans. I mean, I realize that it might be strange for the former party to, you know, have politicians going to a doorstep and saying: yup, this is what we promised during the election, and we're getting there each step of the way, slowly, methodically working through our platform, that I proudly ran on in Calgary-Currie. [interjections] Indeed.

Now, of course, as I mentioned earlier, you know, many heckles, many tweets. I'm hearing heckles from the other side on our carbon levy. That's the same carbon levy that got us two pipelines in this

province, two pipelines that are getting our product to market, that are employing Albertans all throughout Alberta and in particular in Calgary-Currie, which is in the shadows of all the office towers in downtown Calgary, where there are professionals who are working in all corners of the oil and gas industry.

Even as I tour Calgary-Currie on a regular basis, I also tour my old workplace, where, again, there are many hard-working Albertans who are right on the shop floor working on heavy equipment, working on engines. I hear from them that the tide is turning. There is more work. More new units are going out the door, Madam Speaker. There are more repairs happening. Companies are spending again. There are green shoots in the economy. We've got to take care of Albertans.

Another thing I heard earlier in the debate was that when it comes to priorities for the Wildrose, one of their solutions in this mismatch between what they say that they can magically do while somehow lowering taxes is that it's just a matter of how the money is spent. Now, I wonder how they reconcile that when in debate today we heard that the amount of money that they want to cut is more than the total budget of our education system. So I wonder how they reconcile that. I go back to what I said earlier. To say that they're just going to cut all that . . .

Mrs. Littlewood: That's \$2 billion out of operations.

Mr. Malkinson: Two billion dollars out of operations.

. . . to say that they're going to do that and that somehow that will make Albertans better and that somehow that will put teachers in the classroom: well, again I would say that that is perhaps an extremely enthusiastic interpretation of the truth.

5:00

Now, of course, we hear – I say it again – many heckles, many tweets, and again I'm hearing: well, what about the debt? Well, it's a downturn. We had great advice from David Dodge, a former governor of the Bank of Canada. He said that this is exactly the thing you are supposed to do in a downturn: put Albertans to work, act as a shock absorber, make sure that Albertan families are taken care of. We will continue to do that.

They say: cut back. Again, it's cut, cut, cut. When they're going to families and saying, "When we cut back, somehow it's going to make life better for you," what they're saying to that person at the doorstep is: "We're going to make life better for you by cutting services and laying off your neighbours just because you're concerned your other neighbour was laid off." How does that help? It doesn't make sense.

That is why, Madam Speaker, I am so proud that Bill 1, where we're reducing school fees, is just one part of our continuing platform and our commitment to Albertans to make life better for Albertans. I want to say that again: to make life better for Albertans, to make it more affordable without having to resort to games and budgets that are as deep as a tweet even if they do happen to exist.

Our children are our future, Madam Speaker. Children should have a level playing field no matter what their economic background is, and that's leadership. That's leadership our government is taking. That is leadership that I will happily tell all of my constituents in Calgary-Currie about because we are making life better for Albertans everywhere.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), any questions or comments?

I'll recognize the hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm grateful for the opportunity to talk about the government's Bill 1. Well, the government is consistent in one way. The last Bill 1 they had was an embarrassment, and this one is, too. The last Bill 1 that they had was to create a ministry that was already created.

Now, Madam Speaker, to be clear, I intend to vote for this bill because it's actually better for us than it is for the government. You know, reducing school fees is a good idea, but only this government, only the gang that couldn't shoot straight ever, would make it Bill 1. They are actually setting in legislation breaking an election promise – and they call it Bill 1 – because, of course, they promised to eliminate school fees, and this says that they're only going to do a quarter of eliminating school fees. They are calling that Bill 1.

They are actually setting in legislation breaking an election promise, so no one can miss it. I want to congratulate the government for being so up front with Albertans about how much they're going to disappoint them, leaving no room for doubt or misinterpretation in Albertans' minds that this government has broken this promise. They are so proud of breaking the promise that they've called it Bill 1. Wow. Nice work by this government, Madam Speaker, I have to tell you. I'm sure they're quite proud of that little piece of handiwork.

You know what, Madam Speaker? It gets better. When you look at this whole thing, if you read the bill, Alberta parents aren't fooled. They know that there are still risks here. They know that the schools that have collected those fees are going to have to collect that money from somewhere else, and the government has not yet made it clear that they are going straight to those schools and those school boards and replacing that money. And they may. We may find that out in the budget on Thursday, but they haven't made that clear yet.

You know what? The parents of Alberta are smarter than this government is because they know that if there are millions of dollars taken out of their schools and it's not replaced, then something is going to have to give. There are going to have to be fewer teachers, fewer field trips, fewer music lessons. Something is going to have to give. They're not fooled by that. Further, the other thing that I think they're going to be concerned about is the fact that if there are no transportation fees, how do they know that the fees in another area aren't going to go up to compensate for that?

You know what? Parents are smart enough to ask these questions – they've certainly asked me these questions – and the government hasn't answered them for Albertans. This government hasn't answered them for Albertans. So what you have here is the potential – you know, you can't blame the schools. I mean, bless their hearts, they're putting up with this government, too, like the rest of us. They get this thing announced to them, and they find out that this is happening, and they say: well, how are we going to replace that money that we've collected from parents for transportation and other things? If they're going to be short that money, I don't know what the school is going to do to pay their transportation bill, whether it's going to have to come, again, from textbooks or the classroom. The government hasn't answered these important questions. All they've really done is set in legislation that they're breaking a campaign promise, and they've seen fit to call that Bill 1.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to vote for it because reducing school fees is a good idea, but somebody ought to have a plan to go with it, a lot more detailed and a lot better than this government has been able to muster. As a result of that, I will be proud to tell everybody in Calgary-Hays about Bill 1 and how this government was so determined to break a campaign promise that they made a piece of legislation out of breaking that promise. I'm sure that Albertans will notice that. You know what? It's in a long line, unfortunately, of

bad decisions by the government, and it's one that Albertans have come to expect. It's certainly not a surprise to me that they have botched this job amongst so many other ones.

With that, I will sit down declaring my support for the bill where the government sets in legislation their breaking of a campaign promise.

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

Seeing none, are there any further speakers to Bill 1? [interjections] Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I apologize. Between myself and my colleague for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville we have a great deal of enthusiasm for this bill.

I appreciate the opportunity to rise today and speak to Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees in Alberta, another example of concrete action that our government is taking to make life more affordable, to make life better for Alberta families.

Now, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat the other day had a few comments regarding our failure with this bill, and certainly the Member for Calgary-Hays just had some comments along those lines as well. Certainly, we did make a bigger commitment in our platform that we had in the last election than we are currently putting forward with this bill. You know, my colleague the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park I think offered some very trenchant comments explaining many of the thoughts along these lines, but it appears that there's been a lack of understanding, so perhaps we need to review some of those concerns and questions again.

Now, in the past, you know, when we've had governments that have come in and have made the kinds of cuts that are being proposed again by members across the aisle, those cuts have not been implemented with thought or with care. Those cuts have generally been implemented recklessly, I think without much responsibility taken by those who were implementing those cuts. Indeed, Madam Speaker, they seem to have some understanding of the principle that the buck stops here, but certainly while the buck stopped there, no responsibility for the effects of cutting that buck seemed to rest with the people that were making those cuts. Instead, the theory seemed to be that you make the cut, and then you simply leave it to everybody else to figure out how they are going to deal with that.

5:10

That's left, then, to trickle down. Of course, we know that many of those across the aisle are big fans of trickle-down economics. They seem to be big fans of the trickle-down cut, where the cut is implemented without thought, without consideration, without taking the time to look at the impacts that it would have, and indeed without trying to ensure that when that cut was made, it did not impact the front-line services.

Now, I appreciate that the document that was put forward by some of the members of the third party today is offering a no-front-line-impact guarantee, so it seems that perhaps they've learned and may be looking to do better than they did in the past with some of these cuts. Of course, there are some other issues with that document, but that's not the topic of discussion here today. The real thing, Madam Speaker, is that the reason that we are not proceeding with a full repeal of school fees right now, why we took two years to look at and determine the best direction forward with this, is because our Minister of Education took a great deal of care and time to study the potential impacts these moves could make.

Now, I recognize that members across the aisle seem very concerned. I know the Member for Calgary-Hays just expounded at length about his concerns about the impacts this could have on

schools and where they're going to find the money, and again it's good to hear that this is a lesson that he's finally learned. It's good to know that this is something now that they think about and care about.

Our Minister of Education, of course, understood the necessity of doing just that. He undertook a careful study of all school fees in the province of Alberta, recognizing that different boards are charging different fees for different purposes. It's not a simple system. It's a complex system that, frankly, grew up over time, much like a thick forest of weeds, due to neglect of previous governments. Again, they implemented cuts that were not thought through, that were not carefully planned, that did not take into consideration the needs of individual school boards but, instead, simply downloaded the responsibility for that thought and care to the individual school boards and told them: deal with it.

As a result, we had basically this forest of school fees which sort of sprung up on that untended ground, leaving us with this complex system of different fees for different purposes all over the province, largely because previous governments consistently failed to properly fund the education system. The Minister of Education undertook to weave through those labyrinthine paths to determine what fees were happening where, to consolidate that data. We heard yesterday, apparently, that the members are very supportive of collecting proper data to understand problems, so I'm very happy that the minister undertook the time to do so, and I hope that they appreciate that. The minister took that information. He considered carefully what needed to be done, how we could best move forward in addressing these fees, and based on that careful consideration, he is moving forward with our first step towards fulfilling that campaign promise.

Now, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat observed that his caucus and his party would completely, one hundred per cent, eliminate all school fees. That would be wonderful to see. It would also be wonderful to see how they would actually plan to do so. Being as they intend to cut billions of dollars out of the Alberta budget and being as they intend to cut public services, one has to wonder, then, where they're going to find the millions of dollars required to eliminate all school fees. Perhaps they intend, as previous governments, to simply make that cut and let everybody else figure it out. Certainly, they have yet to show any calculations, even on the back of a napkin or an envelope. We look forward perhaps at some point to seeing some actual, concrete examples . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Edmonton-Centre has the floor, please.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that. I realize that this is something that they may feel a bit concerned about. Being as they don't have any information to put forward, they can instead only heckle. But we'll take it as it comes.

Now, we recognize that it is important that we move forward with this legislation, having done the careful time and study and the minister having worked within his ministry to find the efficiencies and the cost savings to be able to enable this step, again, Madam Speaker, taking care and attention that previous governments often did not take. That minister, having found those savings, now has the funding needed to compensate school authorities.

The Member for Calgary-Hays was very concerned about where the money was going to come from and that his school boards were going to have to cut other fees. No, Madam Speaker, they will not because this minister took the time to carefully study, find the savings, and provide the money that these school boards need so that they can look out for their students, providing proper funding

to support parents rather than asking parents, asking Alberta families to step up and pay more. So the funding needed to compensate those school authorities for this lost fee revenue will come from these efficiencies that were found, and details of that will be tabled in the budget this Thursday. I'm very encouraged that I'm seeing this work on behalf of our minister.

I know that the Minister of Health has been engaging in similar careful study to look at how we can make thoughtful, careful improvements in our health care system rather than rash, reckless cuts, knee-jerk reactions based on political ideology that do not take due care and consideration for the impact this has on Alberta families. I will tell you, Madam Speaker, that the impact of this bill on Alberta families will be to make life more affordable and to make life better. That is something that I find very encouraging because while I do not have children of my own, I do have 13 nieces and nephews ranging in age from about four years old up to about 24. They range across the grades in the school system, range across systems of schooling. I have some nieces and nephews that are home-schooled, others that are in school, in public schools. In fact, my oldest niece just began her first year in her career as a kindergarten teacher in St. Albert.

I have many friends who have children. I also hear regularly from parents in the communities I represent. In my work with the African and Caribbean communities here in Edmonton I've gotten to know many families who have children in our schools, many families who are new to Alberta, who are just getting their start here, who are working at minimum wage jobs as they work to get their certification, jobs which, thankfully, due to the actions of our government will pay more. Still, even with the increases to minimum wage these are families who are struggling as they try to build new lives here in this province. This is a bill that impacts them directly. This puts more money back in their pockets so that they can look after their families, so that they can spend that money in our local communities, helping boost our economy, helping to support the goods and services that we all need, much as our government is committed to supporting the services that all Albertans need. And I will make note that that was a commitment in our platform, and that is another commitment that we are keeping.

To tie it all together, Madam Speaker, I'm very proud that this is our Bill 1. I'm far more embarrassed for the members across the aisle, who can't seem to comprehend the value of this bill, the care and attention that has gone into developing this bill, how important and valued this is by Alberta families. I have not heard one negative comment from any family I've spoken with about the fact that they will no longer have to pay these particular school fees and that our government will continue to find careful savings and efficiencies to further reduce school fees in the future. That is our commitment, and we will stand by that.

I am proud to serve with a government that looks out for Albertans first, that is not beholden to political ideology, that will not make reckless cuts, that will not try to find efficiencies on the backs of other people in this province but will instead ensure that we have the stable, secure education system we need, one that does not place needless additional burden on parents just so that we can claim that we have such a sterling fiscal record. We're not here to cast illusions, Madam Speaker. We're here to do real work on behalf of the people of Alberta.

With that, Madam Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

5:20

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Seeing as we had anticipated our discussion of interim supply to take rather longer and we've made some additional progress on top of what we

even anticipated doing, I would move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:21 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875