



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, March 21, 2017

Day 11

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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

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

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

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

Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)

Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)

Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)

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

Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader

Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)

Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)

Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)

Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)

Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)

Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
Official Opposition House Leader

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

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

Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)

Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)

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Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)

Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC)

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Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)

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Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)

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

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

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

Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (ND)

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

Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)

Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)

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

Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)

Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)

Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Standing Committee on Private Bills

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

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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
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Babcock	Loewen
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, March 21, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect. May we always remember that our strengths outweigh our weaknesses and that by effectively collaborating and co-operating, we can have positive outcomes that will benefit all Albertans.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 4

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and say a few words about Bill 4, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017. The supplementary amounts provided by this bill reflect the fiscal picture outlined in the third-quarter fiscal update, released on February 23, which is likewise reflected in the forecast provided by Budget 2016. These amounts are necessary for the government to conduct business and fulfill its commitments for the current fiscal year. When passed, this bill will authorize approximately \$1.6 billion in voted expense funding and \$125 million in voted capital financial transactions for the government.

As the Minister of Finance previously mentioned in this Chamber, the single largest amount reflected in this bill is for the Fort McMurray wildfire disaster. I know that all members in this Chamber have a great deal of admiration and respect for the first responders who battled that terrible fire, and I know that all members of this Chamber have supported and will continue to support all Albertans who were affected by this disaster. At this time let me commit once again that this government and all Albertans have the backs of those who were affected by the fire then, today, and into the future.

Madam Chair, I know we have already had a good debate on these supplementary estimates during Committee of Supply and again during second reading. At this point let me just add a few additional comments.

In addition to the Wood Buffalo wildfire, this bill will provide authorization for additional monies and transfers for the following 18 departments: Advanced Education, Agriculture and Forestry, Children's Services, Community and Social Services, Culture and Tourism, Economic Development and Trade, Education, Environment and Parks, Health, Indigenous Relations, Infrastructure, Justice and Solicitor General, my favourite of Labour, Municipal Affairs, Seniors and Housing, Service Alberta, Transportation, and Treasury Board and Finance.

In previous debates on this supplementary supply there was one point raised which deserves further elaboration. As was discussed in second reading, there are transfers between Environment and Parks and other ministries' budgets to align accountabilities for each ministry's role in the climate leadership plan. I want to be crystal clear for the benefit of all members in this House that these are transfers and not increases in overall spending.

As I wrap up my remarks, let me acknowledge what we all know. This was a challenging year for our province. Faced with the worst recession in a generation, this government made a choice to protect the core public services that Albertans rely on, invest in infrastructure, and continue to work to diversify the economy. As our economy turns the corner and returns to a position of growth, adding 19,000 jobs since July 2016, our government is squarely focused on making life better for Albertans. Whether that's keeping tuition frozen, reducing school fees, or capping electricity rates, this government has the backs of Albertans and will continue to have their backs into the future.

On that note, Madam Chair, I urge all of my colleagues in the Assembly to support this supplementary supply bill and provide the government with the necessary spending authority to protect frontline services and pay for the Wood Buffalo wildfire.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Madam Chair. How are you? It's good to be here today. My thoughts on Bill 4 – are we on Bill 4? I didn't know I was on the speakers list. I'm actually going to yield the floor.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak briefly to the bill to oppose it not because the government is preparing itself to establish systems and keep the government running, to keep things running smoothly – I think that's valuable – but I oppose it simply because it's a proxy for the entire budget, which I cannot support. That's my challenge with it. The point of interim is to keep the government running until the budget is passed. If I might use an analogy, this engine needs to be throttled back. An engine that overrevs very quickly self-destructs, and I would suggest that our government needs to be spending less, not racing ahead and just continuing to spend at the same pace it has been. It would be valuable for us to throttle back a little bit.

The truth is that the amount here reflects, really, the amount needed for the total budget, and that's where my challenge with it really is. It perpetuates an endless spending problem that we have currently. We are here this year and last year advancing the highest deficits that Alberta has ever had and the highest per capita deficits in modern Canadian history of any province. There is a sense of which we need to throttle this engine back a little bit, not just keep racing ahead, not just keep pouring more fuel into an engine that's already overrevving and headed for a significant self-destructive event.

There needs to be some care expressed here in terms of how much we're spending. We just plain are spending the highest amount per capita of any province in Canada. Over the last 10 years spending has increased much more than inflation and population rates, so really we're experiencing expansionary budgets here. These are not budgets that keep up with the cost of living, that keep up with population growth. These are expansionary budgets, where government is taking to itself the freedom to spend more on a percentage basis than is needed, and in a time of economic difficulty

at least holding the line would be wise. There's no need to follow the government's farmongering and say that somebody else would maybe cut it and cast the province into chaos. At least holding the line would be the responsible thing to do. That would be the correct thing to do.

Alberta needs leadership on our spending problem. We have an addiction to spending as a people and as a government that we have not yet come to terms with, and we need to somehow get some help with that. There's so little accountability that some might say that there's no accountability on this spending spree. There are few program parameters that rein it in, and we just need to find some way to cut back some of our expenses, to cut back some of the misused spending, some of the excessive spending, and just act responsibly.

This is not a responsible budget. The media and the people have been extremely clear about that. They have been speaking to us over and over again that they wish that the government would be cutting back some. I have numbers and numbers of young people who have come to me and are very frustrated and say: "What are we going to do? We're going to be paying for somebody else's debt for decades to come." They're not happy as young people to be seeing a government that's spending their future today, so we need to cut back on spending. This interim supply does not indicate that. The government has increased taxes. It's increased costs in many different ways.

The Chair: Hon. member, I think you might be speaking to the next bill, Bill 5. We're on supplementary supply, not interim supply.

Mr. Orr: Supplementary supply. Yes.

The Chair: The bill that we're on is the supplementary supply, and that's what you're speaking to?

Mr. Orr: Yeah.

The Chair: Okay.

10:10

Mr. Orr: Thank you.

I speak to it this way because, quite frankly, supplementary supply is just, as I said, a proxy for the rest of the budget that's coming. It keeps the government going for a while. [interjection] Oh, I'm sorry. Supplementary. Interim. You're right. I will pass. Forgive me.

The Chair: All right. Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak to the supplementary supply bill, Bill 4? Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's great to see how many people on the other side of the House are so excited to see me today. I generally get that reaction.

I am, of course, rising to speak to supplementary supply. I do appreciate the opportunity. Madam Chair, it's kind of interesting because we're discussing supplementary supply after we've now seen the government's budget, which was read last week in this Chamber, a budget which was, quite frankly, horrendous. One of the interesting things, having had an opportunity to go back home this weekend to Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and speak to people who have now seen the budget – there's a lot of shock, a lot of fear, certainly, to see what this government has brought forward. I mean, the largest debts in our history, massive deficits, no ability at all, no sign at all of attempting to control spending. This is primarily what we're hearing back home over the weekend.

The reason I bring that up when we're talking about supplementary supply is that for me a real important question is: should we expect another supplementary supply bill this time next year? Is the government going to have to do the same thing despite already projecting a \$71 billion or \$72 billion debt by the time the next election comes? That's with the projections that the government has put forward for oil, which most analyses say are not realistic, so we could be seeing significantly more debt.

These are all things, of course, that I'm hearing in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. I expect that you're probably hearing the same in your constituencies, people deeply worried about this government's inability to get control of spending. We spend – and we often talk about it here – significantly more than our province to the west per capita, and we do not see significantly more services inside our province. I don't think anybody could put forward that argument. So the concern we have as we see these types of bills coming forward is that this government will not take steps to get our spending problem under control. Despite repeatedly being asked to show the plan on how they can do that, despite the opposition coming forward with many realistic options that we can get spending under control, we still do not see anything from the government.

In fact, they laugh when we talk about it, but I don't think laughing about borrowing against our children's future upwards of \$71 billion, \$72 billion, \$100 billion, wherever it's going to end up – I mean, as a father I find that scary. To me it's one of the largest intergenerational thefts that we've ever seen in this province, and I find that extremely troubling, particularly because this government is showing no sign, no appetite, no ideas on how to get our spending problem under control. We have a spending problem. Now, you don't have to be a business owner, though many of us are, and you don't have to be a farmer, which is, of course, a business, to be able to know that if you continue to spend more money than you're bringing in, you're eventually going to have a problem. How much debt can the province of Alberta take?

You know, this weekend when I was back home, I spent some time in Rimbey at their Fish and Game Association annual banquet, and some of the main topics that you would hear, when you would talk to people as we went through, were concerns over the money bills that this government is bringing forward, concerns that this government does not recognize that they're spending the good people of Alberta's money. The debt load is going to probably cause, maybe, credit downgrades again. We've already seen a credit downgrade under this government's tender. It's going to cause interest payments that are the equivalent of five, six, or seven government departments. That's a lot of hospitals. That is a lot of hospitals. But the government continues just to want to spend money, throw it in the black hole, and not get control.

That goes to the core of this bill and why there's a problem. The government is not showing the ability to manage the province. At its core managing our money and our finances is probably one of the most important jobs if not the most important job and role of government in our province. With \$71 billion worth of debt by their own projections – it probably will be significantly more because they're projecting a higher oil price than most people think is reasonable – to me, Madam Chair, that shows that this government is not doing their most important job, which is managing the finances of Albertans.

I've said before that if I go home on the weekend and my spouse informs me that she's now borrowing money at unprecedented levels for our household to pay for our electricity bill, that would probably be my first sign that I have a spending problem within my household. If it was within my business, if my accountant said to me, "You're spending more money than you're bringing in," that

again would be the first sign that I have a problem within my business, and I would need to restructure.

We have been warning this government about this since they started, and the government has continued blindly down the path of spending Albertans' money with no plan of getting the fiscal house in order, with no plan of dealing with the areas where we see a tremendous amount of spending.

Now, I do want to point out that there are some things within this supplementary supply that we support. Firstly, it is protecting front-line workers, something that is a big priority for the Wildrose Party. You know, we saw within my constituency last year an attempt to fire front-line nurses by the NDP government and Alberta Health Services. Luckily, we were able to convince them to back off from that, and I appreciate that by the government. Again, we're seeing signs that they don't actually support front-line workers, but this is a priority for us. Smaller classroom sizes. We definitely want to see those affected by the floods in 2013 finally helped all the way. Long-term care and affordable senior care: very important. Increased resources for our justice system, something this side of the House has been advocating for for a long time. We're seeing criminals literally being able to walk away after being criminally charged because of this government's incompetence. Often the government will mislead people about what is going on with that, but it is this government's incompetence.

We, of course, want the government to keep operating. Often when you talk about this, the government will say: "Hey, the opposition doesn't want the government to keep operating. That's why they want to vote against these bills." That's not true. We're not saying that we don't want to spend any money. We recognize that the province of Alberta has to spend money. We want Albertans to have the services that they need, but we don't want to keep spending more money than B.C. per capita with no increase in services to the people of Alberta.

You know, we often talk about how bloated our government is. Nothing – nothing – could prepare the people of Alberta for what they saw last week with this budget. We will be more bloated than we ever have been before, with no hope of this government taking the steps to fix it.

Now, I could tell you that this side of the House in a little over two years, when they're sitting on that side of the House, will take the steps to fix it once and for all. We will stand with Albertans. We will make sure they have the essential services they need, but we will work with our system to make it affordable, to make sure that it's cost-effective, to make sure that we can afford it, because that's how you would run a business. That's how you would run a household. The idea that you would continue to spend more money than other provinces, continue to push to have the largest debt that we've ever had in our history, continue to push deficits without getting spending under control: to just spend, spend, spend is fundamentally wrong.

Now, I talked about the interest payments, Madam Chair. Rocky Mountain House and Sundre are in dire need of a hospital. If you go to either of those communities, their infrastructure is crumbling. Reports have shown that those hospitals should have been replaced a long time ago. I could tell you that the interest payments that this government is going to create can buy a lot of hospitals across this province, can employ a lot of nurses. But, instead, they're going to continue to borrow so that we do not have the resources to be able to run the province.

For central Alberta, where I am from, the statistics that have come out about surgery cancellations out of Red Deer, for the communities that I represent and that many of my colleagues represent, are appalling – appalling – thousands and thousands more than for any other jurisdiction in the province. If somebody

has a heart attack right now in any of my communities, they are, like, 70-some per cent more likely to die because central Alberta is not getting the care they need. But we still have the largest debt in our history, the largest deficits. We keep spending money, but we're not getting our people the services.

If the government had a plan that actually showed that our bridges would be fixed and our roads would be working and actually had a plan on how to spend that money, then maybe you could justify spending more money than B.C., but we're getting less than them. Instead, all we are getting – all we are getting – is an enormous amount of debt, putting a tremendous amount of burden on our children and our grandchildren, and this government has no plan. The people of Alberta see through it. They know that this government has no plan. If they had a plan, they would rise and show us how they truly intend to get the deficit under control, how they intend to pay down our debt in the future so that we don't have to spend billions and billions a year on interest and so we can get the money into people's hands that we need to.

10:20

Instead, I think this government, the NDP government, will continue to mislead Albertans, as they always have, will continue to spend their money with no accountability, will continue to create an enormous debt problem, that generations to come are going to have to fix. That is why I intend to vote against this bill, and I encourage all of my colleagues to vote against this bill. I certainly hope – hope – that one day the members across the way, before their time is up, will do the right thing for the people of Alberta and stop putting their expensive ideological agenda on the great people of Alberta.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm happy to rise on this bill, the supplementary supply bill of this government. I just think it needs to be said that if ever there was a testament that this government is out of control, this is it. When they've got a supplementary supply of \$1.6 billion with – what? – 14 days left in the fiscal year, they didn't miss by a little bit; this government missed by a ton. They can't shoot straight. If you look in the supplementary estimates across the number of ministries that require more money to finish the year, one can only draw the conclusion that almost nobody got it right.

You know, I appreciate that government is big and that it's complex. Even if there were three or four ministries that had very good reasons – something was a surprise, or somebody missed their budget by a little bit – one could say: "All right. Well, this is within the reasonable scale of what a reasonable government might require in order to finish the year." But with this crew, Madam Chair, almost every ministry is requiring a lot more money to finish this year, which really speaks to the fact, unfortunately for Alberta, that the current government has no idea what they're doing, and they're not very good at doing it. That's just the fact that's obvious here today.

Now, the previous speaker talked about some of the things that I'm concerned about: the fact that they're taking \$1.6 billion more to finish the year, which will land them at a \$10.8 billion deficit this year; no plan to pay penny one of it back any time in the next 10 years; no plan to balance the budget, certainly, in this term and according to the Finance minister probably not till the end of the next term; no plan to protect our children.

Now, the government should care about Albertans, but if they can't care about themselves and the hard-working people whose

jobs they're taking away now and killing by driving out investment in jobs and business, perhaps they should actually care about Alberta's children. I know that many of the members on the other side have children and grandchildren, and I'm sure they do care about their children. I guess that at this point I would ask them to not support this because they care about their children and grandchildren. With the path that they're going, all of their kids are going to be paying for 2017 light bulbs when they start working and trying to raise a family and trying to put a down payment together for their first home, and thanks to this NDP government that is going to be harder because of them than it was before this government.

It's really quite disturbing, you know, when you think about it, the strain that they're putting on the young people of the future. Right now there are kids in elementary school who are innocently going to school and learning the things that they need to learn from their teachers, and unfortunately they are in most cases blissfully unaware that the government of Alberta is going to make the rest of their life harder because of the irresponsible way in which they are managing the money that is entrusted to them by Albertans.

You know what? When you think about it, I don't know how they sleep at night over there, Madam Chair. I really don't. They could actually redeem themselves to a certain degree if they were to vote against this supplementary supply bill, but if they are going to support this with all of the other policies, mistakes, three jobless job plans in a row, they really don't have any good reason that they could give Albertans why Albertans should let them borrow another \$1.6 billion on their behalf, which is why I won't be supporting this. I would recommend that all members of the House don't support this because this is bad for Alberta, it's bad for adults in Alberta today, and it's particularly bad for Alberta's children.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise just for a couple of minutes to speak about my opposition to the need for supplementary supply. I find it so disingenuous and so irresponsible that the government talks about bending the cost curve, reducing the accelerated spending increases from 6 and a half per cent, way, way past population growth and inflation, to some side of 4 per cent or 3 and a half, depending on the department. But then, as the hon. colleague before me just pointed out, when you are so far over budget, it just renders all that talk meaningless.

Say what you want, you know, but it's actions that count, and we've seen from this government consistently in two years almost 10 per cent in spending increases year over year at the same time that Albertans are taking 20, 30, 40 per cent reductions in their payroll and at the same time that unemployment is the highest it's ever been. I think the numbers support that our GDP actually dropped 2 and a half per cent last year, and that's a real misnomer because GDP also includes government spending, which is going up like crazy. So how much is the actual private side of our economy dropping?

Again, I see so often how the government doesn't try to get value for tax dollars, hard-earned tax dollars. My Wildrose colleagues and I have talked at great length about our desire to have cut school fees more, about our desire to push hard-earned tax dollars right to the front lines to ensure that teaching assistants, teachers, nurses, allied professionals, social workers are there where Albertans need them. I guess that when I look at, you know, \$1.2 billion in interest next year, \$2.3 billion in interest coming from the Alberta taxpayer in just two years, I'm very, very fearful as to where those cuts will have to come from, and I'm also fearful, with that extra spending,

that interest, about how much business, how much investment it scares away.

I've seen estimates that up to \$256 billion have already been driven out of Alberta because of our high spending, because of our taxation increase. You know, that's a big number. That's hard to get your head around. When I was at a community supper on Friday and was talking to one of my friends whose two sons, late 20s, are both almost in their second year of not working, looking for work, that's when that number drives home.

I want to talk about a couple of specifics, a couple of ideas where we can save some money. I believe that parts of this supplementary supply and going forward, of course, are the tremendous costs of the Fort McMurray wildfire. Again, a shout-out to our front-line workers – our fire departments, our people up there – that did an absolutely stellar job. [some applause] Thank you. It's not only them; it's Albertans too. When you hear about 10,000 Edmontonians and more thousands of Albertans opening their homes and their wallets and their time to help all people, that's what Alberta is, that's what Alberta is made of, and that's obviously something that we build on. So the fire, the great cost of the fire.

It makes me think of the Cypress Hills, the highest elevation, the same elevation as Banff. I believe it's the highest elevation in all of Canada east of the Rockies. Up until about 1985 we used to have local grazing, local people who took care of how many cattle to put in and keep the grass down. That made sense because up until about 1850 about a million buffalo a year used to roll through the Cypress Hills and eat that down. Now we have a government bureaucracy that hasn't taken care of ensuring that that grass is eaten, ensuring that the deadfall is properly picked up. There's even a report out, Madam Chair, that with a forest fire in the Cypress Hills, every single one of those 400 cabins could be gone in 20 minutes. This is absolutely something that – God forbid, hopefully, we're not talking about this in two years or 10 years, about how we had to put money into supplementary supply to cover that or to cover a similar emergency somewhere in the province.

10:30

Government, you have two years left of your mandate. This is a serious problem. It's a problem that locals used to take care of, where locals would ensure that the grass and the deadfall were at a more acceptable level. So I caution you that there are all kinds of those things in our province that are being left undone. Please do not leave them undone so that we're talking about it again in a year or 10.

Another suggestion I want to leave with you is local decision-making. I had the good fortune to have a tour of our hospital addition in Medicine Hat about three or four weeks ago. I'm very, very grateful to the taxpayers of Alberta for providing this for us. But when you look at the history, it's hard not to chuckle a bit. Originally promised at \$450 million, then \$400 million, then \$200 million, it started at \$220 million and now is some side of \$60 million over budget – over budget – we think. We're waiting. It was supposed to open in October. It still hasn't opened. There's no date as to when it might. It's needed in our community. We service a hundred thousand Albertans in that area.

It's hard to be too critical because it looks like Alberta Health and Alberta Infrastructure got the addition right. I mean, it looks like it's going to be a fantastic facility. But when it's already at least \$40 million over budget and when I'm talking to locals who are saying to me, "If they just would have listened when I tried to say: do this instead; do this while we're doing this; send me a copy of the plans and a copy of the description as to how it's going to be built, and I can show you how we can save money long term" – the government had a deaf ear and a blind eye. Madam Chair, local decision-making

involving our good local people will get us way more value, will save us money. Government, in the brief few minutes I have, I ask you to try to do that for us wherever you can.

As many speakers before me have said, you know, a 9.9 per cent spending increase with little regard for actually trying to stay within our budgets is just not acceptable. It's not acceptable for the mother of the two 20-year-olds I had supper with on Friday, who can't find work because so many people have been scared out of this province and from creating jobs and investment. It's not acceptable for that six- or eight- or 10-year-old, who's born owing tens of thousands of dollars before they even begin. As I've stood up in this House and said many times, interest only goes to rich people and rich corporations, and it's going to cost all of us services but especially the next generation.

Madam Chair, I'll be voting against the bill at this point, and I'd ask all my colleagues to do the same.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Are you ready for the question?

[The clauses of Bill 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 5 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments? The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. On behalf of the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance thank you for the opportunity to rise and say a few words in Committee of the Whole on the 2017-18 interim supply estimates for the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government. Let me remind the members that when passed, these interim supply estimates will authorize approximate spending of \$30 million for the Legislative Assembly, \$7.8 billion in expense funding, \$936 million in capital investment funding, \$149 million in financial transactions funding for the government, and \$241 million for the transfer from the lottery fund to the general revenue fund.

As the Minister of Finance mentioned previously, 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. Madam Chair, the amounts in these interim supply estimates will provide the government and the Legislative Assembly with two months of funding. Providing two months of funding is the prudent approach. It provides sufficient time to fully debate the budget, that was tabled on Thursday, and therefore allows the Assembly the necessary time to do its work.

Madam Chair, for the benefit of the Assembly let me once again remind members about how government arrives at the requested amounts that we are here to debate. Treasury Board and Finance works with officials from across government to forecast the requirements of 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 providers 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.

As budget information has now been tabled in this Chamber in the form of the fiscal and strategic plans, ministry business plans, and government estimates, members can now have a clear line of sight into the government's fiscal plan. I would like to remind all members that the government's budget and the spending priorities for all ministries will be debated for over 70 hours in estimates in the coming days and weeks. Therefore, I would encourage all members to prepare for those estimates, when the relevant minister and their officials will be available to answer questions in significant detail.

Finally, Madam Chair, let me remind all members that a full appropriation act will, as part of the regular course of business, come to this House once the estimates process is complete. On that note, I urge all members of this Assembly to support the interim supply bill so that we can keep our schools and hospitals open as we progress through the proper debate on Budget 2017.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'll be happy to speak to Bill 5, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017. I think I have the right one. It's really difficult to have a meaningful conversation on a bill that's basically a blank cheque and simply perpetuates the ever-expanding budget that we see year to year from this government. It's too bad that we can't actually figure out a way to produce power from our expanding budget. It would be a great way to produce some green power. Lots of energy there.

Basically, it's a bill that allows the government to continue to pay the bills until a budget is approved, and I understand that. In fact, when responding to this bill, the Government House Leader said that this funding is important as it keeps the lights on in our schools and our hospitals. I don't think anybody here wants to see anything shut down for two months while we wait for the budget to pass, so I agree that these are important issues. The government has the ability to plan ahead, though, so we could have actually come in in February and, you know, cut out a month of this budget just by starting the House early and getting things going that way.

Basically, the bill allows the government to keep the lights on. But don't worry. The Minister of Environment and Parks has a supercool plan that will not only give you light bulbs but also install them for you. Maybe that's part of the plan here. I don't know about you, Madam Chair, but most constituents I talk to know how to change a light bulb, and they're able to do it at a much lower cost than what the Ontario company this NDP government has hired to do the job will charge back to the government.

I'll give you an example. I had a call from a lady, one of my constituents. She was quite excited about this program, and she said: "You know, I've got 34 light bulbs in my house. If I call in here, they're going to come in and change these." So I talked to her a little bit about it, and I said, "At the current rate that they want to charge, it would come to, just for the light bulbs alone, \$816 plus the travel and installation to have this company come out and do it." I mean, they're not going to do this for nothing, so we're probably looking at somewhere in the order of \$1,500 to \$1,600 just

to get her light bulbs changed. I suggested to her – her husband is an oil field worker. He's fully capable of running a drilling rig, so he can probably install a couple of light bulbs. I said: you know, you can go to Costco. I looked up some pricing for her: the local co-op, six LED bulbs, \$19.99. So for a total of \$113 and a little bit of downtime on a Saturday her husband can save our province \$1,200, \$1,400. That's how Albertans save money, Madam Chair.

10:40

This bill is just another example of this government on the wrong track and not understanding how to time their budget properly. I know there are a lot of Albertans that are disappointed with the direction this government is taking. Over the last 10 years spending has grown at a faster rate than inflation and population growth. You know, like I said, if we could harness that expansion energy and produce some power from it, it would be awesome. Unfortunately, this government is more concerned with continuing on their current track of spend now and spend later as well.

It's very clear that this government has a serious spending problem, and this is simply a Band-Aid to get them through. This is the equivalent of paying your mortgage with your credit card and hoping your paycheque comes in before the minimum payment is due.

An Hon. Member: Yeah. Well said.

Mr. Hanson: Well, that's how a budget is. For anybody that actually understands finance, it makes sense.

That's not how most Albertans budget. Why is this how this NDP government chooses to budget our hard-earned tax dollars? How much of the money requested for this bill will have to be borrowed? It would be nice to have an answer to that, just some details. You know, I look at it, and all we have are line items. There have been some announcements recently, especially with the AAMD and C, that are going on right now. They're announcing projects and all that. It would be nice if we could have an update to this interim supply to just see how much of this stuff was actually budgeted for and where the money is going. It's not really too late to get some details on this. We do have until the end of May. I think we could probably see some line item additions in here.

Basically, on this side of the House we know that budgets don't balance themselves. I'd like to urge all my hon. colleagues to join me in voting against this bill because all it is – it just basically gives a blank cheque. It doesn't address any of the spending issues. It doesn't address any cost-saving measures at all. There's nothing in here that's going to help the budget in the future or deficits or the borrowing. I encourage my fellow members to vote against the interim supply.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The clauses of Bill 5 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 3 Voluntary Blood Donations Act

The Chair: Questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to address the bill before the House, the Voluntary Blood Donations Act. I'm astounded by the sheer ignorance of the bill compared to the realities of blood donation. Blood donations, of course, are a matter of life and death, and we should be pursuing every avenue available to secure a healthy, safe supply for Albertans in need and, in addition to ensuring this supply, to develop a supply for vital pharmaceutical resources. We do collect enough blood under our voluntary system in Canada for transfusion needs, but we do not – we do not – collect enough for plasma protein products. These products also save lives.

Canadian Blood Services, the agency tasked with the procurement and distribution of blood products, purchases plasma protein products like IVIG, albumin, and various coagulation factors from the United States and Europe. Madam Chair, I'll say it again. Canadian Blood Services purchases plasma protein products.

In 2012 Canadian Blood Services and Héma-Québec purchased \$630 million of plasma products from the United States and Europe – \$630 million in 2012 – only to increase in 2013 to \$670 million of plasma protein products purchased from the United States and Europe. Madam Chair, every year these numbers increase, year after year. Of course, the reason that we are forced to purchase these products is because the current voluntary system has resulted in a shortage.

Canada's volunteer-only donation system does not have the donor base to support our demand. When I say this, I want to give a shout-out to Medicine Hat. In Medicine Hat the Canadian Blood Services show up about every two months. It is very, very well supported. It is supported by our citizens, supported by our media personnel, so many of whom volunteer their time and come out and spread the word through their media. I know so many people that, when I talk to them, have donated for the 60th time or the 80th time. It's overwhelming. It's fantastic. [interjection] You're up there? Forty-eight? Good for you. Thank you.

Madam Chair, I bring this up for a couple of reasons. Here we have a lot of good Albertans doing all they can when they can. It's a sacrifice to give blood, but a large number of us are overwhelmed by our desire to help fellow Albertans, fellow Canadians, and fellow human beings. It takes time. It means a day or so of a different diet and maybe a lighter exercise period that day. It's a sacrifice. Again, there are a lot of volunteers and a lot of people doing it, but we are not meeting our need. Over the last decade the Canadian Blood Services has seen a rise of 6 to 8 per cent each year in the usage of IVIG, one of the plasma products. As a matter of fact, Canada is already the largest per capita user of IVIG in the world.

What is also interesting to me is that the proponents of banning the purchase of blood often cite things like safety reasons, ignoring the fact that even if we were not purchasing blood from Albertans, we are still inevitably and obviously purchasing blood from countries that allow paid plasma donations. I think that in Alberta alone Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health spent \$200 million last year on the purchase of plasma products from the United States, where they pay people to donate blood. In fact, no country in the world has been able to meet their need for plasma with a solely volunteer model. No country in the world has been able to do this according to a joint March 2013 presentation by Health Canada and Canadian Blood Services. This was announced or talked about at a round-table discussion addressing the topic.

Madam Chair, yet another concern often cited by opponents of the platelet/plasma donation model is that paying donors will decrease the number of individuals who voluntarily donate blood. Only about 3 per cent of eligible Canadians donate blood now publicly, and that's in spite of all the publicity, all the strong efforts

by volunteers, all the strong efforts by those that have time and are healthy and have the ability to do it. We just can't meet our needs, and we are paying citizens of other countries to do this for us.

According to a 2014 projection by the CEO of Canadian Plasma Resources, Dr. Barzin Bahardoust quoted: before the end of the decade we will be spending over a billion dollars a year on plasma protein products as a country. We will be sending a billion dollars, a billion Canadian dollars, out of Canada to the United States and Europe, where they pay blood donors. The CEO went on to quote exactly that: this money will all go outside the country.

10:50

Madam Chair, by maintaining the voluntary system while offering tax receipts or a cash incentive, all Canadians regardless of income level are incentivized to donate blood more proactively. These procedures are harmless, and they save lives. There is no ethical consideration more important, there is nothing more important than ensuring that life-saving treatments are available to sick children or adults.

Canadian Blood Services has said in the past that it is possible to maintain both systems, noting that "the experiences of other countries suggest both paid and voluntary plasma donation can safely coexist." My guess, Madam Chair, is that it may actually raise the amount of voluntary blood donations as more Canadians get involved as the awareness level rises. How good would that be if we can pull our share in the world?

Now we are being asked to support a plan that would see Canadian Blood Services reach 50 per cent of our pharmaceutical needs by 2024, but that is a very slow rate of progress. Other provinces are opening the door to another avenue for collecting plasma products, and we should keep that door open in Alberta, too. Madam Chair, I want to say that again. Other provinces are opening the door to another avenue for collecting plasma products, and we should keep that door open in Alberta, too.

I believe the NDP is doing right now what we've seen consistently for two years. Of course, we're hearing about private companies that want to set this up in an effort to increase our supply and help Canadians. Here we have a government slamming the door on some innovation, slamming the door on increasing supply from Albertans and Canadians. But not really. It doesn't preclude Canadian Blood Services from doing it. It doesn't preclude B.C. or Saskatchewan or Ontario or Nova Scotia or anywhere else in Canada paying for blood collection. Again, I think the number was \$200 million last year of our hard-earned tax dollars that left the jurisdiction and went to Montana, to Texas, to Louisiana, wherever the states are that pay for it, that pay Americans for blood collection.

I'm against this bill, Madam Chair. Again, we're being hypocritical, we're being ideological, we're getting in the way of a solution, and kids, old people, and Albertans are going to suffer. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm here to rise on the NDP's bill that essentially declares that Canadian blood is dirtier than American blood. [interjections] It's what the bill says.

When you think about it, the bill attempts to head off anybody collecting blood except for the Canadian Blood Services, but in fact blood comes into this country now from other places, where it is purchased. So what this bill does, very simply, is say that you can buy the blood somewhere else but not here. So I don't know how the government can argue that their bill declares that Albertans' blood is dirtier than the blood of people from outside of Alberta. That's offensive, and I will not be supporting this bill.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Chair. The intent of the bill is good from the government's side. We recognize what they're trying to provide. They're trying to ensure that our Canadian Blood Services has an adequate supply of blood because we need blood to live. As Canadians we will all give that voluntarily. There is no doubt about that. But that needs to be addressed not just through one week a year when Canadian Blood Services promotes their blood collection. That has to be steady year-round. We have to continue to provide that blood.

One aspect that this bill misses on that I hope this government will consider is the aspect about the biomedical industry and diversification of our economy. When we're looking at getting off oil, when we're looking at alternatives, the medical industry is a huge facet of our culture that we don't necessarily emphasize, and it is where we can diversify our industry. The biomedical industry invests in research, which has generated so many new discoveries over the years. These discoveries improve our health. They extend our lives, and they raise our standard of living. The measures that we use in health, like morbidity and mortality, have decreased. They've vastly improved because of the biomedical industry. We're less likely to succumb to many of the scourges of the past. Victims of disease live fuller, better lives, and they live better lives due to improved methods of treatment.

The medical industry is not just the pharmaceutical industry. It is the biotech, it is the medical device, and it's also the diagnostic sector. They all feed off the biomedical industry, and the end results are just simply benefits to mankind, to humankind. Vaccinations: the government side strongly believes in vaccinations. That's where vaccinations were discovered and come from, the biomedical industry. If we want to resolve something in our human bodies, we need samples from our bodies. We need those tissues so that we can do those tests and do that research to better our lives and eliminate disease.

There have been some high-profile cases over the last couple of years of people that had to go to the United States for testing or for their treatments, whether it was Bo Cooper, that you folks heard me talk about, or Haley Chisholm, who was down south. We as Canadians benefit from the biomedical industry, and it is an industry that we need to support.

I'd like to read a short excerpt from a letter written by Kevin Chief, Manitoba's former NDP minister of jobs and economy, to Dr. Barzin Bahardoust, the CEO of Canadian Plasma Resources.

Manitoba is very supportive of establishing new businesses in the life sciences sector. Thank you for sharing your business plans with us. I can confirm at this time that there is no legislation in Manitoba that would prohibit private plasma collection, and there are no plans to enact such legislation.

The Government of Manitoba would be prepared to fully assess and evaluate this opportunity should Canadian Plasma Resources decide to open plasma collection centres in Manitoba.

As you can see, the concept of plasma collection centres is not diametrically opposed to NDP views. The former NDP government in Manitoba was very supportive and very much saw the benefits of this, the benefits of creating new jobs and the economic diversification.

As such, I'd like to rise today and introduce some amendments to this bill. I will give these to the pages to be distributed. May I read while she distributes?

The Chair: Just give it a second till I've seen the original.

Mr. Yao: Certainly.

Again, it is about the diversification of our economy. If we're looking for a path to take to get off oil, the medical industry is key. We have the educational base. We have great colleges, universities, even high schools which help train us so that we are that educated workforce that the medical industry needs, so that we can create those scientists and those folks that develop and create these life-saving measures. They're the ones who create these vaccinations. They're the ones who create these medications, and a lot of these things require human products in order to be developed. That's why I'm imploring this government to consider that, and that is what my amendment is.

I move that Bill 3, Voluntary Blood Donations Act, be amended as follows. Section 2(3) is amended by striking out "or" at the end of clause (a) and adding the following after clause (a):

(a) with respect to an organization that collects blood for the purpose of biomedical or pharmaceutical production, or and section 4(1) is amended by adding the following after clause (b):

(c) any business premises of the facility that uses blood for biomedical or pharmaceutical production.

11:00

Again, I'm just asking that we allow companies that will produce these life-saving measures to operate here in Alberta and that they have the ability to collect it and that we also ensure that they are under our regulations and that they are inspected by our people to ensure that they have the highest quality and that we are not susceptible to any diseases that have affected us in the past due to poor blood collection.

It's also, again, by ensuring that we're maintaining this here in Alberta, that we can monitor it and look at it, and if we see something that is unethical, we can influence that to make it better and allow that certain things don't happen.

These are things that we need to live. Bo Cooper had to go down to the United States to get a treatment. They were so close to being successful, 99 per cent close. Why aren't we developing these solutions, these innovations, these treatments here in Canada? We need to grow that industry, and that's the biomedical industry. So I'm asking the folks in this House, especially on the government side, to consider this amendment to this bill. It is a worthy amendment. It's fair, and I ask that you truly, truly consider it.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any hon. members to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for the amendment. At this point I think that it is probably something that is unnecessary in the bill. One of the reasons behind that is because the collection of plasma to the distribution of finished plasma products to patients – the system's purpose is to provide blood and plasma products to patients who need it – is best carried out by Canadian Blood Services. The role for private industry is and under this legislation will continue to be fractionation, turning plasma into life-sustaining and life-saving plasma products.

CBS currently contracts this service out as there are no domestically located or owned fractionators in Canada. CBS has vetted the fractionators it uses very carefully, and the contracts they have with them ensure that the plasma we bring is batch-made into plasma products to be distributed back to Canadians by CBS. This legislation has absolutely no bearing on the ability for private companies to bring their investments to Alberta, where we have a very bright workforce with a great deal of experience working with chemical processes, and in fact we hope they will consider Alberta. I believe CBS would be very excited by the option to fractionate

domestically, but at this time there is no option to do so, so we will not be supporting this at this time.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays on amendment A1.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Having listened to the government-side member speak, it's clear that the NDP is trying to declare Alberta a job-free zone. This amendment is clearly designed to allow for jobs and business to operate here in Alberta to create economic activity and a good living for Alberta men and women to make to support themselves and their families. You know what? You would think a government that's had three failed jobs plans in a row might actually accept it when somebody throws them a bone of an amendment that will actually create some jobs here, but apparently they are that tone deaf.

Well, I'll be supporting this. I sincerely hope the government does, but based on what the government-side member just said, I don't have a lot of hope.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:04 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Loewen	Swann
Barnes	McIver	Taylor
Ellis	Nixon	van Dijken
Fraser	Starke	
Hanson	Strankman	Yao

11:20

Against the motion:

Babcock	Hinkley	McPherson
Carlier	Hoffman	Miranda
Carson	Jansen	Phillips
Connolly	Kazim	Piquette
Coolahan	Larivee	Renaud
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Dach	Loyola	Schreiner
Dang	Luff	Shepherd
Drever	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Feehan	Mason	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Goehring	McKittrick	Westhead
Gray	McLean	
Totals:	For – 14	Against – 38

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Mr. Yao: Madam Chair, it's really disappointing and unfortunate that the government side doesn't support alternate industries and health, doesn't support innovation, doesn't support the science of health, doesn't support diversification of our economy. It is truly, truly disappointing. With that in mind, I recognize that they're in their ideological state and aren't really thinking straight. But with that, I hope that after reviewing this for the next few years and

monitoring it and identifying what the issues truly are about our blood collection that they would reconsider some of the aspects of this bill and reconsider the diversification of an economy, the building of an industry, the development of our health, the development of our own vaccinations and our own cures and investing in science to alleviate all that ails us.

With that, I'm moving that Bill 3, the Voluntary Blood Donations Act be amended after section 11, so I'd like to submit another amendment, please. You know, Madam Chair, as it currently stands the Canadian Blood Services isn't even close to meeting our current demand for blood plasma for pharmaceutical production. The CBS has only just begun a process that, if the provinces agree, would bring us to only about half of our consumption by 2024. This is very slow progress, and the NDP is closing the doors on other options and is not moving us in the right direction.

With that, I move that the Voluntary Blood Donations Act be amended by adding the following after section 11:

Continuation by Legislative Assembly

(12) This Act expires on April 1, 2020, unless the Assembly adopts a resolution on or before April 1, 2019, that this Act be continued.

I'm asking for this sunset clause to re-evaluate our system and re-evaluate what will happen over the next few years, to see if we are reaching our goals and if not, to identify different ways of achieving those goals and rethinking our processes and looking to provinces like Saskatchewan and Manitoba to truly understand whether what they are doing is so malicious and so dangerous to people that they're promoting a negative lifestyle that is contrary to our Canadian beliefs and strengths.

The sunset clause would mean that we could reconsider this act so that, again, if there is not good progress made that we should reconsider and try to invite more industry into our province.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Madam Chair. The sunset clause is completely unnecessary. Legislation is regularly reviewed as a matter of course. Once CBS has been bolstered, there should be no need for this. And if this act needs revisiting in the future, that can be considered at that time.

I would encourage members not to support this amendment.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A2?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Back on the bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Yes. Good morning, Madam Chair, and thank you. I have an amendment that I would like to propose. I'll hand it to the pages, and I'll wait before getting into it, before reading it into the record.

Madam Chair, I want to preface my comments by talking a little bit about the distinction between plasma donations for further pharmaceutical processing and plasma and blood donations for transfusion purposes. Now, I know that this was probably covered to a certain extent in the previous debate, two amendments ago, but I do want to make it very, very clear that I understand the trepidation that some members have with regard to paying, you know, essentially for something that the human body produces. That is

something that has been foreign to what we do in Canada. It blurs the line that even gets to the point where you might consider paying for things that would go beyond plasma and blood – for example, paying for organs or tissues – that can also be donated by live donors.

I understand that level of discomfort. But at the same time, Madam Chair, I think it's critically important that we understand that when people say, "well, lives are at stake," and "this is about life," and "this is about the very essence of life," that that's exactly true. The very essence of life is the blood that flows through our veins, and that is a very, very valuable thing. I risk calling it or even suggesting that it should be a commercial commodity. I can very clearly understand why that makes some members uncomfortable. It makes me uncomfortable to a certain extent as well.

You know, I will point out that I'm the only person in this Chamber that, I would say, has done blood transfusions on four different species out there. I can tell you that when you do that . . . [interjections] You laugh. You laugh, but the thing of it is that what you're doing is taking from a donor an amount of blood, that in your professional judgment you feel will not sufficiently weaken that donor, to provide it to a recipient that is in need of either the red cells themselves, the plasma, or the platelets, the clotting factors. There's something in that blood. And sometimes it's more than one thing that is in that blood that is available.

Now, before I get into the amendment, I will share with you a little bit that as a veterinarian – veterinarians typically own large dogs. One of the reasons we tend to own large dogs in preference to small dogs is because it is the veterinarian's dog that is most commonly the blood donor in most veterinary clinics. I have had in my career three large-breed dogs – an Airedale terrier, a golden retriever, and a Bernese mountain dog – and all of them have been frequent blood donors. I like to think that they're voluntary. But in many cases it was a situation where, quite simply, there was a need for a patient. That blood would be taken from the donor. In this case I'm talking about my own dog. I'm putting my own dog's life at a certain degree of minimal risk in order to provide something that is vitally important to a recipient patient. So that is something that is relatively, you know, quite profound.

11:30

I'll share with you another anecdote of how profound that is. About 30 years ago I had another patient – in this case it was a horse, a mare – that had received a very serious cut to a digital artery in the back of one of her pasterns. That's the part of the foot that's below the fetlock. If you don't know what the fetlock is, I'll get you an anatomy book.

The digital artery normally is not something that when severed puts a horse's life at risk, but this particular horse had been grazing on sweet clover. Some of that sweet clover hay had been mouldy, and it contained a substance called coumarin. Coumarin is related to the coumarin that we use as a blood thinner, as an anticoagulant in human medicine. Because of that, this patient's blood was not clotting. This mare, this 1,100-pound animal, was bleeding to death before our eyes. I fashioned up a situation where we found another horse that was a suitable donor. We took a rather large volume of blood, some three litres of blood, from that patient and transfused the mare in question and saved her life.

The owner of that horse is actually here in Edmonton today – he's the reeve of one of our nearby counties in east-central Alberta – and he has never forgotten that episode that we did. Every time I see him now, even 30 years later, he reminds me of the time we performed a blood transfusion on his horse in the middle of a pasture in order to save her life. So I understand, I think, full well how profound blood transfusion is.

You know, I have to say that as I look across the way and I see the hon. members opposite busily engrossed in their laptops, no doubt reading things that are extremely relevant to this debate, it is a little bit frustrating that when you try to add perspective to something that is being brought up in debate, you're not entirely sure whether those hon. members are in fact paying attention to what's going on. But that's quite all right. It's quite all right, Madam Chair. I suppose if members are on duty, they can choose to use that time in any way that they wish. [interjections]

Madam Chair, if I might continue having the floor. What we are dealing with here is something that I understand just exactly how important it is, so at this point I would like to move forward by proposing the following amendment. I move that Bill 3, the Voluntary Blood Donations Act, be amended in section 2(3) by striking out "or" at the end of clause (a), by adding "or" at the end of clause (b) and by adding the following after clause (b):

- (c) with respect to plasma collected for the purposes of further processing.

Madam Chair, the effect of this amendment is to recognize the separation in donor streams between a voluntary donor base and a paid donor base and that a voluntary donor base, as we have in Canada right now, is providing the blood for transfusion purposes, the plasma for transfusion purposes that we require but is nowhere near providing the necessary plasma that we require for Alberta's and Canada's needs for plasma protein products for further processing. It recognizes that in order to do so in every other country in the world, they have had to go to a paid-for-plasma arrangement.

Again, I understand that for members that may be uncomfortable, but the reality of it is that medical innovation has moved forward sufficiently that we are now at a point where that is something that is possible, that is something that can be done because of the innovations and advances, and that the amount of plasma products that are required is growing at a rate of approximately 10 per cent per year. That necessitates having a large donor pool, and there has been no country in the world that has been able to establish the necessary donor pool to provide those plasma products without actually paying donors.

Now, I know that one of the biggest concerns – and it has been expressed here – is that if we start paying plasma donors, it will affect the voluntary donor stream. Health Canada has itself refuted that. Health Canada in its conclusion has stated: "There is no evidence that paying plasma donors compromises the safety or weakens a country's volunteer blood donor system." There is no evidence. In fact, Madam Chair, we can look at some of the largest countries that do have a significant paid donor base, and their voluntary donor rate is significantly higher than Canada's.

For example, in Germany, which has had a paid donor industry for some time, their volunteer blood donor rate per thousand people is 58.1 – 5.8 per cent of people are regular donors – in Austria that number is 57.5, and in the U.S.A. that number is 56.9. These are all countries that have paid donor systems in order to provide the necessary material that's required for plasma protein products. Canada's rate, by comparison, is only 36.6, barely half of what these other countries are. In the U.K., in fact, it's even lower. That's another country that has a purely voluntary donor base. So to suggest that, by necessity, it is going to reduce the number of voluntary donors is simply not borne out in the experience of these other nations.

To further suggest that Canadian Blood Services, through the investment of a huge amount of money and expansion of donor facilities – you know, this is curious because Canadian Blood Services in the last number of years has in fact reduced the opportunity for people to donate blood – could now turn around and

reverse course and suddenly expand the means by which they could donate, have suggested a program whereby \$100 million would be invested nationwide to get us to 50 per cent, this still would not solve the problem of a lack of plasma material. To me, when we have a private company, when we have a company that is prepared, without government assistance, to develop a form of economic diversification, to invest in our economy, to create jobs, I cannot understand why we would be opposed to that when there is ample evidence that it will not compromise the safety of the blood supply and when there is ample evidence that it will not compromise our voluntary pool.

The reason for this amendment, Madam Chair, is to recognize that there are parallel streams and that these parallel streams can in fact operate without affecting each other in terms of safety and security of supply. What it does is that it removes us from what I mentioned in debate on second reading, and that is the base hypocrisy of sourcing these products from other nations that are prepared to pay donors, that, in fact, have to pay donors – because there is no country in the world that has been able to do it on a voluntary basis solely – that we are prepared to pay those countries and indirectly pay those donors and make profitable American corporations more profitable by making those purchases.

It seems to me that there is a base hypocrisy to doing that when we could be doing that within our own borders but doing it recognizing that it requires us to shift what we perhaps have as preconceived notions. One of the preconceived notions is that blood transfusions and blood products are products that should never be paid for.

You know, I shared the story during debate on second reading that if I was still eligible to give blood, I would gladly give blood, and I would do it on a regular basis. The fact that I could be paid for it wouldn't change that. I would still give blood. But I've also explained why I'm no longer eligible to do that.

11:40

One of the realities that we have in Canada, that is also a challenge, is that there are a number of things that are being done culturally that are reducing our donor pool: getting a tattoo, getting a piercing, if you lived in the U.K. in the '90s. These are all things that eliminate you from the donor pool, in some cases for a limited period of time, but nonetheless they eliminate you from the donor pool.

Madam Chair, that is what we are discussing. We are discussing preserving our voluntary donor pool yet at the same time allowing for an industry that could develop in Canada. It has been developed well in other countries, and we make use of that from other countries. In my view, if we refuse to allow for paid donations, the only way we can take the moral high ground on this is to refuse to buy any plasma protein products derived from paid donors, to make that statement that we will not buy plasma protein products that are derived from paid donors because we don't allow paid donors in our jurisdiction.

But then you'd have some people to answer to. You'd have to answer to the families of patients that require these products. Because they do require these products. They're dependent on these products just as are people who are dependent on whole blood products or people who have suffered injuries or, like my father, someone who required many blood transfusions as he was fighting cancer in the end stages of his life.

Madam Chair, I'm doing this and I'm moving this amendment in an effort to try to get people to get past an obstacle or get past an obstruction, you know, in terms of their thinking. Again, I want to make it clear that I understand that. I do understand the base objection. I get it. I absolutely get it. But at the same time, our job

as legislators is to consider the greater good of the people that we are serving and consider the greater good of some of the patients that require these products and consider how this affects our overall economy.

I know that there are people that have an objection to generating an income from illness. You know, they think that that's somehow not moral or not ethical. As someone who spent close to 30 years in veterinary practice, I will tell you that I never felt morally or ethically conflicted because I earned a living by providing a service to patients that were ill. I don't have an issue with that, and I think if you asked our physicians, if you asked nurses, if you asked people that work in our medical system, they will tell you that they are not conflicted with that. So to suggest that there are no dollars involved in medical care is just not recognizing reality.

We don't do these things for free. In fact, I think one of the great weaknesses in our system today is the notion that there is no connection between the cost of providing our health care services – and the Health minister will know this very well. The fact is that nobody really knows what it costs to get an MRI, to get a CT scan, to get a full battery of blood tests, which is now becoming very common when you go to the doctor.

I mean, I had a very unusual situation not too long ago – well, it's a little longer ago now because I've been retired for a few years – where I had a nurse bring in a patient, a dog. We did X-rays. We did full blood work. We did a number of other tests on this dog. And when she came to pick up the dog, you know, I presented her with her dog and a \$450 bill. She was furious. She was furious with me. I said, "Well, we discussed all of these costs beforehand." The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park had a motion with regard to that. We had discussed it. There was approval. She knew what the costs were going to be. She said, "I had no idea that this stuff was all so expensive," and I said: "Well, you're a nurse. You work in our medical system. You know, what do you think it costs when it's done on humans?" She said: "It's all free. It's all free. It doesn't cost anything."

That's a problem, when there's a disconnect with the fact that there is a cost to provide these services, that there is a cost to install and monitor a CT scan. There is a cost involved in doing that. I'm not suggesting for a moment that we should take veterinary medicine and superimpose it on human medicine. Good heavens, that's not the headline I want in the *Edmonton Journal* tomorrow. But, Madam Chair, I want to indicate, though, that unfortunately we have separated ourselves from an understanding that there's a significant cost in providing these services. That, I think, is one of the issues that is also a challenge.

I'm sure the Health minister is well aware of this challenge that people don't really understand that, you know, during a course of, for example, a pregnancy one ultrasound – that's a really good form of prenatal care. In some cases maybe two or three might be necessary, but to get six or seven in order to have a prenatal photo album and scrapbook at taxpayer cost: that's going a little overboard. But that is happening in our system, and it's wrong because it can't be justified medically. Madam Chair, I'm urging members to try to get – and I get it. Like I say, I fully get it because, I mean, I've got some of that in the back of my mind, too, but we have to get over this notion that there can't be any dollars involved in the system.

I will take my seat. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just to clarify: is this questions or comments or is this full debate?

The Chair: This is on amendment A3.

Ms Hoffman: Full debate on the amendment?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms Hoffman: Sorry. Thank you for the clarification.

I just want to start by saying that absolutely there are times when members in this Chamber on both sides – I think right now about half the members on the other side have technology open. I respect them. I respect that they're doing their work, and I imagine that they are doing research and using that to further their education. I have to say, Madam Chair, that I find comments that try to speculate as to what people's behaviours are in this House disrespectful to both sides of this House. I think it's important that we have the tools available to us to do our jobs, and I want that on the record, Madam Chair.

I also want to tell the member opposite how much I appreciate his sharing of stories and his experience in making sure that he provided quality care to animals over many years. Those stories about blood transfusions in the field are beautiful stories, and I expect that that horse was happy to give of his or her blood without having to be paid for it, Madam Chair, because blood is just too precious to go to the highest bidder. A horse shouldn't stand in a field and say, "Okay. Now who's going to give me the most for this pint of blood?" just like a human shouldn't be doing that.

I'm very proud of the system that we have here in Canada that is rooted in the beliefs as ruled by the Krever commission that blood is just too precious to go to the highest bidder. Blood is just too important to put a price on in the international market. Blood is just too important to say that. There is a cost to medicine, but there is no cost to me in going and giving a blood donation.

It's true that the limits that the member opposite referred to as to some of the reasons why people can't donate blood are absolutely true. So is travel to certain jurisdictions in the world, so is loving somebody of the same sex and having sex with that person sometimes a limitation to being able to donate blood. He is absolutely right that there is an important opportunity for education. I think there's also an important opportunity for science to keep moving forward because blood is so necessary for so many people, and the demands for blood products continue to grow, Madam Chair.

I also want to clarify exactly what this amendment is intending to do, in my reading of it, and that's to put a massive loophole in to undermine the whole intention of the legislation. The intention of the legislation is to protect Canadian blood for Canadians, to protect the voluntary system, to say that this is something we are proud of and we are going to continue to build, and the intent of this amendment is to undermine that, Madam Chair. With that in mind and with the very simple value that we should be finding ways to remove barriers and support one another in giving something that takes us usually less than an hour if it's whole blood donations – it takes slightly more if you're donating plasma, and you can do it more frequently.

11:50

I have to say that another reason why you might not be able to donate blood – my mom donated I think it was 99 times at the point in which she was diagnosed with cancer and had chemo. When she had chemo, she could no longer donate blood, but she donated 99 times, mostly plasma, actually, because she could do it so frequently as a retired person, and she is so proud she did that. There are so many families who rely on their friends and their neighbours – and they don't even know them – to be donating these essential products to save lives. I love hearing people say that, you know, a

monetary payment wouldn't change their motives about donating or not. That's excellent. But saying that there is no evidence that payment does undermine the voluntary system just isn't true.

We don't have to look very far to see what's happening in Saskatchewan. It has been a trial project for a year, Madam Chair, and, yes, it's plasma that has the paid donations, and, yes, donating plasma has absolutely led to reduced donations in the plasma market of the voluntary system as well as in the whole blood donations. Let me tell you a couple of stories about why. Regularly there are mobile blood clinics that go to places like postsecondary institutions. I know that when I was at Concordia here in Edmonton, we arranged for one once a year to come and set up in the student centre, and people could donate blood very easily. The same thing happens in other jurisdictions.

What's been happening in some of the places in Saskatchewan is that those organizations that have regularly had a relationship with Canadian Blood Services in allowing mobile blood donor clinics to come to their university, their workplace, their church have been approached by the private, for-profit company. The company has gone there and has provided what people think is a very similar service, and they're actually getting paid for it or maybe the church is getting a donation. What's happening, Madam Chair, is that that blood is not staying within the Canadian markets. We don't even know where it's going right now. It has the ability to go to the highest payer anywhere in the world, and as a result, just in this last year there has been a 14 per cent reduction in the blood that Canadian Blood Services has collected in Saskatchewan. That's one very clear example.

Also, when they're calling through their regular donors and saying, "Hey. You're eligible to come in and donate again," people are regularly saying, "Oh, but I just donated last week" because, honestly, people don't necessarily take the time to read and distinguish between who they're donating to and for what purpose. And this is about making sure that we make it easier, Madam Chair, to donate to Canadian Blood Services, make it easier for people to know that when they see a sign saying, "Your donation could save up to five lives" or "This bench has enough room to provide services for five people," people understand that that's Canadian people, that's Canadian Blood Services, and it's a voluntary system.

Madam Chair, of course, it is far less expensive to have blood and plasma products through the voluntary system within your own nation. CBS has a very, I think, tangible plan that they are proposing on how to expand that opportunity and to get us to that 50 per cent mark while demand continues to grow. It is absolutely heading in the right direction, and I am not willing for us to close the doors where we need it to purchase extra products, and that's why we do have the exemption in the legislation for Canadian Blood Services to do that purchasing just like they do today, usually from the U.S. markets, which, yes, I know are regularly paid donors. We need to make sure that the Canadian blood supply is able to meet its needs as much through voluntary as possible. That's why I don't want to undermine our Canadian voluntary system by bringing in competition into this province but also by creating opportunities for CBS to be able to meet the demands that they have so that every patient gets the products they need throughout the country.

I just want to say, Madam Chair, that we've had an opportunity to look at other jurisdictions. We'll be the third one to bring in this legislation or something similar should we move forward on this path. Ontario was the first, and we were able to look at their legislation, take the very best pieces, and make sure that we're

implementing it in a way that will protect Canadian supply, protect Canadian donors, protect CBS, and enable them to still give things like a pin for recognition and provide a bowl of soup or a cookie after you've donated to make sure that you're well nourished and able to get back on the road. I think that our blood is, once again, just too important to be sold to the highest bidder no matter where they live.

Again, I think that's fantastic that that horse's life was saved. I think it's great to have donors and recipients. I was in Beaverlodge recently and talking to a woman who worked in emergency for many years, and she talked about how there were regularly instances where one of their physicians would hook himself up to the patient in the middle of surgery because he was a universal donor and they would do that. Obviously, we have a much higher standard than we did a hundred years ago when we did these blood transfusions on-site. I imagine that everyone wants to make sure that we're moving forward in that way.

The best way to provide strong integrity and a consistent supply is by supporting the Canadian Blood Services, not undermining them, Madam Chair, and that's why I'm so proud to bring forward this bill to provide that support to an integrated Canadian system that keeps all of us with peace of mind and assurances that if something happens, we're in good hands, that our blood will not be sold on the international markets, and that we're finding ways to strengthen opportunities for Canadian donations within the voluntary system instead of undermining them.

Again, given that I read this amendment as an intent to undermine the intention of the bill, to create a massive loophole for private, for-profit opportunities right here in the province when we're trying to make sure that we are working to support Albertans, support the blood supply, bend the cost curve, Madam Chair, I just can't in good conscience vote for this amendment. I will be opposing it and encourage my colleagues to consider doing so as well.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the Committee of the Whole must now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 4 and Bill 5. The committee also reports progress on the following bill: Bill 3. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? Say no. So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government Whip.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just considering the time, I move that we call it 12 o'clock and adjourn for lunch and reconvene at 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:57 a.m.]

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