



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, 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

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

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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
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Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND),
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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
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Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
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van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
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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 21, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon.
Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Hanson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand today and introduce to you and through you a group of 49 grade 6 students from Ashmont elementary school along with teachers and chaperones Mrs. Kam, Ms Warholik, Ms Kuryliw, Mrs. Podloski, Mrs. Guinup, and Mrs. Weimeier. If I could get all of you to please stand. Congratulations on your new school that will be opening up, hopefully, in the fall.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you on behalf of the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater Thorhild central school. The students are accompanied by their teacher, Miss Jess Sereda, along with their chaperones, Mrs. Nicole Howard and Mrs. Christina Gabbey. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.
Hon. members, are there any other school groups today?
Seeing and hearing none, the Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly April Steele. April is a nurse practitioner, a passionate advocate for health care in Alberta, and a long-time colleague of mine from my days as a public health nurse. April joins us today from my beautiful constituency of Lesser Slave Lake. I thank April for coming all this way to be with us today and ask her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. It's an honour to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Julia Vandersluis and Sonja Durinck. Julia, one of my incredibly dedicated constituency staff, has been a wonderful asset to my office and the Edmonton-Meadowlark constituency as a whole. Sonja is a strong advocate for continued improvements to our public health care system and for patients living with a rare or ultra-rare disease. I will speak more about Sonja in my member's statement today. I'd ask them both to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly members from the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is in Strathcona

county. They are Bijan Aidun, George Collins, Shirin Ghobad, Jeremy Martin, Mary Martin, Betty Putters, Selam Somani, Parvaneh Tashakor, Rostam Tashakor, and Janice Yu. I'm pleased that they've come here today on this very important day for the Baha'i. I will be speaking later on in my member's statement about Nowruz. I would like to ask this group to please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.
The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the pleasure of introducing to you and through you several dietitians from communities in and around Edmonton. March has been declared dietitian month by our government, and earlier today our guests were in the lower rotunda sharing some of their information and expertise. The advice and information that dietitians provide is tailored to the needs and values of their clients and communities, and they help clients manage conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. I would ask that Karen Boyd, regional executive director with Dietitians of Canada; Doug Cook, registrar with the College of Dietitians of Alberta; and the other dietitians joining us today please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly Sandra Azocar and Trevor Zimmerman. They are my guests from Friends of Medicare. Sandra is the executive director, and Trevor Zimmerman is in communications. I would ask them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the first lady of Banff-Cochrane, my amazing wife, Marcella. We first met at Nipissing University, where we dissected rats in the neuroscience research lab together, and that was how the romance began. She is my rock, the smartest person I know, and bears the burden of snuggling our two fur babies while I'm away at the Legislature. I'd like to ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. On this day 57 years ago 69 people were shot to death by police at a peaceful demonstration in Sharpeville, South Africa. They were killed for protesting the legal systemic racism known as apartheid.

On January 29 of this year six men were shot dead as they attended evening prayers at a mosque in Quebec. At a vigil the next night I stood with our Premier, MLAs, and community leaders as

well as thousands of Albertans who came out on that freezing night. We stood together as members of one community and one race to remember those six individuals whose lives were cut short by a cold-blooded act, fueled by hatred against their religious beliefs. Since then, Mr. Speaker, we have learned a lot about hate, and let's call it hate because that's, quite simply, what it is, hate.

This year's theme for this day is Racial Profiling and Incitement to Hatred, Including in the Context of Migration. We know that there are people who can't accept that we are all inherently equal regardless of where we were born, the colour of our skin, our religious beliefs and regardless of our choices. When we think back to those killed in South Africa, those killed in Quebec, or those who are killed every day in acts of hate, we must never forget them nor their struggles for equality and to be treated with basic human decency. At the same time we must not forget all those who allowed or enabled those tragedies to happen, those who encouraged and benefited from a system that allowed them to flourish on the backs of others.

Today is more than a day to condemn racism. We need to look at our own words, our own actions and ask ourselves whether we serve those we have the privilege to represent. I know that many of us here today have seen discrimination or witnessed hatred in our communities in some form, and I know, Mr. Speaker, that all members of this House agree that no one should be discriminated against, no one should be hated for where they were born or the colour of their skin or the way they sound.

Lately, Mr. Speaker, those who weaponize hate seem to be getting stronger, louder, and more effective. It's deeply troubling when people around us promote voices that claim that the Quebec mosque shooting was a hoax, an inside job, a controversial subject with a shifting narrative. These are voices that claim that the problem with the mass murder of Muslims is that the facts just aren't clear enough. I'm not sure what Albertans should take away from that. They give a megaphone to the voices of hate in our communities and amplify them. Those standing with such hate-mongers must not forget that they are not only accomplices to these hate forces, but they are also motivating others to do the same.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, I have personally experienced discrimination, and I have lived through hate. I know what it's like to be judged based on where I was born, the faith I was raised in, the colour of my skin, how I sound, how I don't wear my emotions on my sleeve and the like. For me, as with many Albertans, discrimination and hate are very real parts of our lives. For many of us it comes in the form of Islamophobia which is used to promote hatred and for the political profiling of Islam and its followers. For others it comes in the form of anti-Semitism or anti-indigenous sentiment or antiturban sentiment. Few of us have escaped racial slurs, jokes, or the racism of lowered expectations.

Mr. Speaker, it is something that tears us apart every day individually and as a society. Hatred and discrimination do not make our communities and our province safer. I know full well where I stand and who I stand for, and I hope that all members of this House will stand with me in condemning all forms of hate and discrimination, including Islamophobia.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Standing ovation]

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour today to rise and address the House on International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and, of course, to reaffirm my profound commitment to racial equality and religious freedoms in Canada and across the world. I'm so privileged to represent the riding of Fort McMurray-Conklin. It's a diverse riding. It's young, hard working,

and very ethnically diverse. In fact, at Syncrude itself I've been told that some 87 different languages are spoken at the plant site on any given day.

When you come to Fort McMurray, you'll see people of all races and religions pursuing a better life for themselves and their families. In fact, Mr. Speaker, you'll find many houses of worship right across Fort McMurray. That lends confidence to what we are doing in Fort McMurray as being accepting to all people, as we must be in Alberta and in Canada. I myself have a large aboriginal family in northern Alberta, living in three different communities. Our communities across Alberta, our provinces, and our country are testaments to the strength of inclusion, and we must use days like today to spread our message of success as a peaceful, multicultural nation.

What happened in Quebec, as the minister has said, is inexcusable. While we face many issues within our country and even in politics, still one thing is clear. Racism and hate have no place in this country. Racism hurts us, Mr. Speaker. Racism divides us. It destroys us. It destroys families, and it creates more problems than it will ever, ever solve. Racism holds us back from realizing our full potential as a nation. I want to take this opportunity to condemn racism in any form, whether it's on Canadian soil or internationally across the world.

We know that there are parts of the world that are riddled with death and despair because of racism. We see what's happening in many parts of the world, and we all sympathize with those nations and especially with those people. We pray for these people, and we pray for these places. We vow never to fall into that dark trap. We must always remember why we left that place. As we prepare to celebrate 150 years of Confederation, we must also remember the plight of all those who came before us and who struggled under the heavy weight of racism.

Mr. Speaker, we must also celebrate our leadership as a nation, a nation of peace and inclusion, and what we provide to the world as an example, an example of success, an example of inclusion, an example of where racism is not tolerated and hate has no place in the nation. We are truly here in Canada and in Alberta a beacon of hope, a beacon of hope for the world, and we must continue to pursue that path, the path of what is right, what is true, and what is just for all people. We are a nation who believes in the promise of this mighty land. May we be together in this forever.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Oh, yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the House grant unanimous consent to the leader of the third party and to the two independent members to respond to the ministerial statement.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, colleagues, for the opportunity. I rise today on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus to recognize International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Today is an incredibly important day to acknowledge the efforts made to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination and to continue those efforts because while we have made progress on eliminating racism in Alberta, we have so much more work to do.

This year's theme for International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is Racial Profiling and Incitement to Hatred. I'm proud of our PC caucus and our commitment to ending racial

profiling, particularly when it comes to efforts to end the act of police carding. Police carding, or the act of IDing community members solely based on their race or socioeconomic background, is against our fundamental rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Members of this caucus have worked closely with ethnic community groups and police services to educate the public about their rights regarding police carding and to help build bridges between law enforcement and Alberta's ethnic communities.

As the world of global politics becomes more polarized, our PC caucus continues to cut through the rhetoric and work towards tangible solutions. When it comes to ending racial discrimination, there are no party colours in this House, I believe, and we are proud to work with all members of this House to protect the rights of marginalized Albertans. It cannot be emphasized enough that the work being done to end racism in Alberta is vital to our province. As Nelson Mandela once said: to deny people their basic human rights is to challenge their basic humanity.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the PC caucus I'm proud to continue fighting for humanity and against racial discrimination with all members of this House.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Liberal caucus I'm very pleased to stand in observance of today's international day against racial discrimination. It's taken on increasing relevance in light of recent events here in Alberta and around the world. Unfortunately, there are still too many examples of hatred and discrimination based on race and religion. Just last week police in Calgary were called to investigate anti-Semitic, anti-Islamic graffiti in an off-leash park. And a recent attack in Quebec in the mosque has demonstrated that hatred has a cost, a cost that is paid in human lives. That is why we take a stand today to support and promote the Albertan and Canadian values of mutual respect, inclusion, and diversity. We must be clear that such hatred is not acceptable.

I'd also like to take the opportunity to call our attention to more subtle forms of racial discrimination, particularly against indigenous people. Already burdened with the long and destructive legacy of residential schools and racism, that we have only just begun to address, First Nations people continue to struggle with racial discrimination and stigma that robs them of opportunity, contributes to isolation, mental illness, suicide rates five times the average, and violence. I acknowledge the leadership of this provincial government and the federal government in this regard.

A recent *Maclean's* article compared aboriginal Canadians to African Americans and found that aboriginal Canadians were in a worse state on almost every metric, from median income to incarceration rate to life expectancy. We cannot be complacent about this racial discrimination happening beneath our noses, Mr. Speaker. So I stand with the members of this Assembly in condemning any and all forms of discrimination. All people among us are worthy and have the right to live free of discrimination. Clearly, we must do more individually and collectively to put these fine words into action with policies and funding every day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

1:50

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise to speak to the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which is observed annually on the anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, where police opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration against apartheid.

The theme this year is Racial Profiling and Incitement to Hatred. Every person around the world and in our province should be able to live their lives without discrimination, and they are entitled to full protection of their human rights. Unfortunately, in many parts of the world and even in our own province that is not true. Discriminatory practices, sadly, are widespread, including racial and ethnic profiling with the intent to incite hatred and violence. We have seen recent hateful acts in our own country like the shooting at the Islamic Cultural Centre in Sainte-Foy, Quebec.

In Alberta our diversity is a source of strength and pride. We condemn racism, hate, and xenophobia in all its forms, including those which we may find close to home. While I am proud of the vast, vast majority of Albertans' openness and acceptance of all people, the rise in intolerance in our province must be addressed. Indigenous people continue to face systemic exclusion and outright racism; vandalism of mosques, synagogues, and other places of worship continues; and online hatred is on the rise. Alberta is a remarkable place to call home, but it's up to all of us to ensure that it is safe and open for all, and that is what today is all about.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Budget 2017

Mr. Jean: The NDP has a spending problem. Rating agencies call the budget a disappointment. I call it a disaster. B.C. has a half a million more residents than Alberta does, yet according to DBRS rating agency B.C. will spend a full \$7 billion less this year than this NDP government. Because Alberta's three-year increases in this budget outpace B.C. by \$4 billion, by 2019 it's going to be much, much worse. B.C. is making efforts to control their expenses while this Premier and her cabinet and the NDP just can't seem to spend enough. What will it take for this Premier to finally admit that she has a spending problem and look to our provincial friends next door?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the Wildrose would have more credibility on this fiscal issue if they weren't proposing a \$1.2 billion tax giveaway to those at the top. That's the choice that they have made. They would pay for it by cutting front-line services to families. So let me ask the Leader of the Opposition the question he ducked yesterday. If you're so concerned about our finances, why are you proposing over \$600 million in tax giveaways to Albertans struggling to make ends meet on \$300,000 a year?

Mr. Jean: It's time for the NDP to do a reality check, Mr. Speaker. Billions spent on killing coal jobs, free light bulbs for Albertans, and socialist-style laundry services that help their friends: it's a huge problem, a \$71 billion huge problem. That's how much the NDP expect to rack up by the time Albertans get a chance to kick them out of office. By then we'll have more debt per capita than Saskatchewan, B.C., Manitoba . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Jean: . . . and most of the Maritimes. This NDP government is racing Ontario for the first-place prize of the most subsovereign debt on the planet after Ontario. To the Premier: how will it take . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the member work a little bit harder on getting his facts correct. Nonetheless, I will say this. Overall the math is not hard. Make Alberta families pay more and get less: that's the Wildrose plan. Wildrose is also planning to give a \$600 million tax break to the most profitable corporations. That's what they want to do. They want Albertans to pay for that giveaway by having fewer services, higher school fees, spiralling tuition. That's not standing up for Albertans, and that's not the way this government is going to govern.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, we would need to see record world oil prices in order to see a balanced budget from these folks, and even then I would suggest that it's never going to happen. We're already on track to spend \$2.3 billion every year on debt servicing alone, and it's clear that interest rates are only going one way, and that's up. This Premier won't cut spending, she won't freeze salaries, and she won't address the problem. There is a real problem, and no government in history has taxed itself and spent its way back to prosperity. Why is the Premier jeopardizing public services of future generations by ignoring the problem right now, that she has created?

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite want Albertans to believe they can do everything: massive tax giveaways to those at the top, cutting billions from public services without it impacting any front-line services, and then balancing the budget in a couple of years – and you know what else? – getting Elvis to play the Saddledome sometime next year. But here is the bottom line. Wildrose people want Albertans to buy in to their reckless agenda, but that isn't investing in Alberta's future. We are investing in Alberta's future.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Mr. Jean: A future of high payments, Mr. Speaker, because of interest rates.

Albertans are seeing their taxes go up at a time when they can least afford it. While many families are already feeling the pinch of the carbon tax raising the cost of gas, groceries, and everything else, this year's budget confirmed that the NDP are increasing that carbon tax by 50 per cent, Mr. Speaker, and it'll go up again the year after that and again and again and again. Albertans didn't ask for this tax – they didn't campaign on this tax – and they don't want to see it continue to climb. Why won't the Premier listen to the people of Alberta and scrap the tax?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, here's the thing. Here's what we can do. We can reverse the approval of two pipelines, and then we can ask the government of Canada to come in and make decisions about our climate change policy. But that's not what Albertans want. Albertans voted for a government that would take climate change seriously. We were very clear about that in the election. That's exactly what we're doing. In addition, we got two pipelines – two pipelines – compared to zero over there.

Mr. Jean: Today the Premier said that Albertans could rest assured that there won't be a PST introduced because during the election she, quote, specifically said that it would not be. End quote. Well, pardon me if I'm a little skeptical, if Albertans are still a bit wary as well because this Premier's taxation plans are just not the way she says they are. She didn't campaign on a carbon tax, then she brought in a carbon tax. Mr. Speaker, Albertans will see the debt continue to climb, and they know this is the work of this Premier,

who also didn't campaign on a \$3 billion carbon tax, that Alberta families are now paying more for everything than they ever have. Why on earth would Albertans take you at your word in relation . . .

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

Hon. members, I have not heard it personally, so I'm at somewhat of a disadvantage. I have got the earphone with me today. If there is anyone saying things like "Don't tell the truth," I want to encourage you to no longer say that and to respect each hon. member.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that the member opposite appears to be looking longingly to the east, to a regime that is poised to increase a consumption tax on voters, who were not told about it in the election. However, what we ran on was increasing affordability for Albertans, and that's exactly what we delivered in this budget. Cutting school fees, freezing tuition, capping electricity prices: these are the things that make things more affordable for Albertans, and we are proud of them.

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to see the Premier is looking around, because if she did, she'd see the warning signs in her own budget about her government's spending problem. That's right. The fiscal plan clearly spells out that rising interest rates coupled with the NDP's debt load will make borrowing and refinancing of debt more expensive. Future generations of Albertans will be saddled with paying off this debt that you're borrowing today, and it comes at a cost. Every single dollar going to debt is a dollar taken away from Alberta's front-line services. That's deplorable. Will the Premier acknowledge her plan is only doing long-term damage to our province?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I know that the Leader of the Opposition loves celebrating and talking down Alberta every time, every opportunity that they get. But let me quote some other folks. The mayor of Fort Saskatchewan: this budget is very good news for the prosperity of Alberta's Industrial Heartland. Or the chair of the Edmonton school board: we are pleased that this government is continuing to make education a priority. Or the mayor of Strathcona county: "This [budget] is good news for our community." If the member spent less time fighting for his job and more time talking to Albertans, he would know that they . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Third main question.

Federal Equalization and Transfer Payments

Mr. Jean: There's no doubt about it, Mr. Speaker. The equalization system has ripped Albertans off for years. Albertans don't like it, but the NDP don't even want to move an inch. There's an easy solution to fix this. We'll send Ottawa the message that Albertans want to be treated fairly, like the rest of Canada, after sending hundreds of billions of dollars out of province. A strong mandate from Albertans through a referendum would force Ottawa to the negotiating table. Yes, it would, Madam Premier. Does the Premier believe that this is a good idea, a referendum? Yes or no?

2:00

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite was in Ottawa for years and years when they were in government, and his new BFF was in cabinet in Ottawa for years and years when they were in government, and they came together and with the former PC government in this Legislature. They made no changes to the

equalization formula, no changes at all, so it's a little bit rich that this is a priority for them now. We're going to focus on our work here at home, and we're going to support Alberta families and carry on with our agenda to make life better for Albertans.

Mr. Jean: I wasn't there at that time, for renegotiation, Mr. Speaker.

Albertans send \$24 billion more to Ottawa than we receive back in transfers or services every year. Twenty-four billion dollars, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are tired of being treated like pushovers. They want solutions from this Premier. The courts have been clear on this matter. If a province comes forward in a referendum with a definitive majority to renegotiate equalization, Ottawa would have to meet with them. Yes, that's right, Madam Premier. You have that opportunity. It's simple. It's easy. It could be held during municipal elections and would send a strong message to the rest of Canada. Will the Premier put this forward at this fall's municipal election? Yes or no?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to giving spending power over to Ottawa, what we won't do is give them spending power over our climate change leadership plan. We're going to develop that plan right here, not hand it over to Ottawa the way the folks over there want to. As I've said before, the member opposite was part of a government that fundamentally ignored this issue for a decade, and he just has no credibility on raising it now. And you know what? We are going to focus on the job that we can do here in Alberta. That's what we were elected to do.

Mr. Jean: So that is, Mr. Speaker, a no, that the NDP government won't stand up for Albertans. I understand.

Ottawa is trying to force Alberta to have a carbon tax. They're killing coal jobs and also benefiting from a generous equalization program. That's just not going to cut it anymore, Mr. Speaker. Peter Lougheed, a great Premier, was right to challenge the national energy program in the 1980s through a reference case. Alberta can do the same thing, asking why Ottawa feels it's entitled to include our nonrenewable resources when it collects equalization. They shouldn't be able to do that. This move would have the support of Albertans. Will the Premier give Albertans a chance for a fair shake in equalization? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that it's a little premature for the member opposite to start trying to wrap himself in the cloak of Premier Lougheed. Give him another three or four months on it. You know what else? The fact of the matter is that for the last few months or years that the member has been the Leader of the Official Opposition, they've engaged in a strategy of yelling at Ottawa, yelling at people out east, yelling at people out west. You know what? Our government engages in constructive, mature, sophisticated engagement, and you know what happened as a result of that? Two pipelines. Two pipelines, Mr. Speaker, and we're going to keep at it.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, two pipelines won't save this government.

Budget 2017 (continued)

Mr. McIver: The Finance minister took his smoke-and-mirrors show called Budget 2017 to the Calgary Chamber yesterday. The

business community was not impressed. They called the budget a disappointment – and that was polite – \$10.8 billion in red ink this year, \$10.3 billion next year, no plan to balance. Not good. To the Premier: since it is business that creates jobs and wealth, not government, will you listen to the business community, or are you and your government tone deaf to these experts, who create the dollars you spend and who are left to pay back the obscene debt load you are creating?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, in fact, I have a great deal of respect for business leaders across this province, and that's why last year the minister of economic development moved very aggressively to support business. We cut small-business tax by one-third. We introduced a capital investment tax credit. We introduced an investment tax credit. We made capital available to help them with business development. We work closely with the business community. We will continue to do that as we focus on our job of creating jobs for all Albertans.

Mr. McIver: And they wiped out all that goodwill with the carbon tax.

Mr. Speaker, the government is recklessly spending with no regard to the warnings from businesses, working Albertan families, and now even credit-rating agencies. After last year's budget credit-rating agencies put Alberta under review and then came back with downgrades. When this happens, it's more expensive for government to operate, and debt servicing in Alberta will soon exceed the cost of running Children's Services. To the Premier: since you say that you do good things with the money you take from Albertans, wouldn't it be a good idea to control debt-servicing costs and, as a result, maybe have some more money to spend on services?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, speaking of businesses, let me quote the CIBC: Alberta will have one of the lowest debt burdens among Canadian provinces and a significant tax advantage. But you know what? Let me quote a few other people because there are other people in the province of Alberta. The chair of the Edmonton Catholic school board: this new provincial budget again demonstrates that education remains a priority for this government. The mayor of Red Deer: a new Red Deer courthouse helps respond to the pressures on our local judicial system through access to timely justice. Our job is to serve all Albertans, and that's what we're going to do.

Mr. McIver: And they've gone from a debt to GDP of 3.2 to well over 10 and getting worse. They're killing the advantages the Premier is talking about.

Budget 2017 is heading towards a staggering \$71 billion in debt by 2019-20. This will take our children and grandchildren decades to pay off. To the Premier. Think of Alberta's children. Is it fair to ask kids in elementary school today to pay for 27 light bulbs and operating costs when they're trying to start a home and start a family 10 or 20 years from now? Is that fair?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the member some questions about what he thinks is fair. His budget proposed taking \$4 billion of operating money out of our budget. He talks about children. That would mean cutting the Children's Services ministry eight times. Eight times. That is ridiculous. You know, let me talk about one thing that one other Albertan said, someone who is getting home care as a result of our changes to the budget: it's really important for us to be able to stay at home, next to our neighbours,

with our son and be able to keep the family together; it keeps me healthier. That's what . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Hon. members, as we move forward, just using that as an illustration, when we go past speaker 5, no preambles. The example of the last member may be what you don't want to do in terms of preamble. But since you're in the first five, you get away with it.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Why, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, common sense says to hope for the best but prepare for the worst. This government is hoping for the best and hoping for even better. The Alberta Party's shadow budget uses a realistic oil price forecast but still balances within four years without cutting front-line public services. If the government's forecast is off by only \$2 a barrel, they are in deep trouble. To the Premier: how does an overly optimistic oil price forecast make life better . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, when the member opposite says that he can cut what he is cutting without affecting front-line services, he hasn't actually been in the room, going over the budget. I think that's the important thing to remember. The other thing to remember is that we've talked about balancing the budget by '23-24, but that is based on every risk adjustment going completely south, so it is the most conservative estimate possible. It takes into account the most conservative oil price projections over years and years and years. We're very confident that we've taken a cautious, careful approach, and Albertans . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Clark: If this is a cautious plan, I would hate to see a reckless plan, Mr. Speaker.

Now, our plan budgets \$500 million every year for disaster recovery and still balances in four years without cutting front-line public services. The government, on the other hand, budgets less than half that for disaster relief even though their budget is well below the 10-year average of what disaster relief costs this province. To the Premier: how does that make life better for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

2:10

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The way our budget makes life better for Albertans – and thank you so much to the member opposite for asking that question – is that we're cutting school fees by 25 per cent, we're putting a cap on electricity fees, we are freezing tuition, we're investing more in home care. Just today we announced 24 new schools being built for our growing communities across the province. We're ensuring that water for First Nations across the province will finally be drinkable. That is how we are making life better for Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Party shadow budget prioritizes shovel-ready capital projects. The government, on the other hand, keeps announcing and reannouncing projects they can't build. How do we know that? Because last year they promised to build \$1.2 billion worth of projects they didn't deliver,

and the year before that it was \$1.3 billion. To the Premier: how do misleading announcements make life better for Albertans?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the hon. member should know that last year this government moved out over a billion dollars more in spending on important infrastructure programs than the year before. We actually increased the number that we were able to get in the ground and get built because we want to improve lives for Alberta families. We want to give them the roads, the hospitals, the schools, the courthouses that they need in order to have the best possible life here in our province. We're doing that every day. We're working really hard to make sure that we make life better for Albertans.

Home-care Services

Dr. Turner: Mr. Speaker, enhancing community-based health care means that more people can live at home in their community, enjoying the support of family and friends and saving greatly on health care costs. Given that the government recently announced a \$200 million increase to home care, bringing the total funding to over \$2 billion in 2017-18, to the Minister of Health: in the last fiscal year how many Albertans have benefited from publicly funded home care, and were there any fees?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much to the member for the important question and for sharing some time with me in his constituency yesterday with one of his constituents, Jaye Fredrickson, who absolutely is able to continue living at home with her family. Being a mom, having a son who was only 16 years old when she was diagnosed with ALS, not only does it make her life better being able to stay at home, but it makes her son's life better, too. I have to say that her dedication, her determination, and her positive spirit are an inspiration to all, and we are very proud to increase those opportunities for Albertans throughout our province.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many of my constituents, like Jaye, have complex medical needs that often require acute-care admissions, to the same minister: can Albertans receive such services at home?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. I am very proud of the variety of expertise that we're able to have dispatched into people's homes to support them right where they're living, including respite care, bathing and personal care, medication administration, physical therapy, and mental and social supports. Some members of this House want to see cuts that would absolutely impact these kinds of services and making sure that Albertans can get care when and where they need it. This government was elected to make life better for Albertans. We're proud to do this, and increasing investment in home care is one of the ways we're doing that.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

Dr. Turner: Thank you to the minister for that very helpful information.

To the same minister: what do we expect to see as a rate of increase in the use of publicly funded home care in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last year 116,000 Albertans accessed home care throughout our province. We've been able to increase that throughout the year so that by the end of the year we saw a 20 per cent increase over how it started at the beginning of the year. I know that we continue to have an aging population throughout our province. Speaking personally, nine years ago, when my dad was diagnosed with terminal cancer, he wanted to stay at home. We knew that, and we were able to access those supports, including nurses and having a doctor come to visit. It absolutely enabled us to make sure that we could provide the very best transition for him and for our entire family.

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

Alberta Hospital Edmonton

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our office has received information about closures at Alberta Hospital Edmonton that is very concerning. The Minister of Health has made the unilateral decision to shut down 20 beds at the hospital next month. This decision was made without consulting doctors or front-line workers, who are completely against it. This is not in the best interests of the extremely vulnerable patients who need these spaces. Why is the Health minister closing down these beds against the best advice of those who deal with the most vulnerable?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I hazard to say this, but I expect that the member has misinformation. This is the kind of thing that we're getting used to hearing regularly from members on the opposite side of the House. They like to throw mud in this Chamber and at members of this House. I'd be happy to provide opportunities for people to raise concerns in an appropriate venue using facts. The assertion that was made by the member opposite is absolutely inconsistent with the facts.

The Speaker: The first supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We can table the documents.

Given that these 20 critical spaces are being closed to fund new emergency beds at the Royal Alexandra hospital and since that will result in these acutely mentally ill, suicidal, and agitated patients being housed in an already overcrowded emergency room or perhaps even finding themselves on the street with no supports, can the minister explain why she is closing these beds when, if she listened to the advice of experts, she would know that these transitional beds are desperately needed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I absolutely work with experts each and every day to make sure that we have the best care so that all Albertans have access to the right care in the right place at the right time. I'll be happy to follow up on the assertions made by the member opposite, but I can assure you that this government is putting investment into front lines, including enhancing mental health and addiction supports, to make sure that we have more supports for Albertans, not fewer, unlike the members opposite who keep pushing for deep cuts, which would result in exactly the things that the member opposite is accusing us of. However, we are providing stable, consistent, and appropriate growth in the areas of

health to make sure that we have the backs of Alberta families and make their lives better.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Minister of Health received a letter from the doctors involved asking her to reconsider this disastrous decision and since the doctors have critical experience and information that should inform a decision like this, including a strong desire to ensure that the needs of patients are met, will the minister stop her heavy-handed decision to close the beds until she has consulted with the front-line staff, and will she consider other alternatives that don't leave vulnerable Albertans and their families without the critical supports that they need to address their mental health needs?

Ms Hoffman: Again I need to reinforce that the language that the member opposite is using is completely inflated and does not represent the facts of the experience, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that I will be happy to discuss this with him and others.

In terms of the work that we are doing to make sure that we're supporting patients, there are opportunities for certain programs to be aligned to make sure that people have the best access possible. We're going to keep working with patients, their families, and health experts to make sure that we move forward in a way that supports all patients and makes life better for Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, your volume is escalating. I can't hear to identify the other people, but I'm hearing yours.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Oil Price Forecasts

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's budget is no surprise, with ever-increasing spending and borrowing buoyed by unrealistic oil price projections. U of C economist Dr. Trevor Tombe points out that west Texas intermediate futures will remain stagnant through 2020 at around \$50 per barrel, yet the government is projecting WTI prices of \$55, \$59, and \$68 per barrel in that same period. To the Minister of Finance: even with your risk adjustment what will the additional debt burden be if oil prices match market predictions and not your questionable thumbnailing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. As the Premier has already indicated today, the approach that the government has taken is prudent and conservative with respect to predicting oil prices. Moreover, Mr. Speaker, risk adjustments have been built into the budget. I think the hon. member is just trying to sow fear and distrust, but I think that this government is right on track. Our budget is going to make life better for Alberta families in a thousand ways.

2:20

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that even with risk adjustments Albertans will be \$3.5 billion further in the hole than budgeted if oil prices remain at \$50 per barrel and given that overprojecting the price of oil by \$5, \$9, and \$18 represents a significant risk to Alberta's finances and given that Don Braid opened his budget column with "The NDP had better be right, or this province is screwed," again to the minister: have you overinflated oil prices to mask the fact that your spending is even more out of control than the irresponsible billions presented in red ink last week?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, no.

Mr. Gotfried: Always great to get a straight answer.

Mr. Speaker, given that we continuously hear this government state that they are getting off the oil roller coaster . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, again, no preamble comments at the front end, please. Keep going.

Mr. Gotfried: . . . and given that in his *Maclean's* column Dr. Tombe stated that "the government's projection for gradually declining deficits is entirely driven by rising future oil prices," again to the minister. Either there are additional revenue sources that Dr. Tombe has missed or your government has been spinning a line that is demonstrably false. Which is it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, neither. I happened to read the article by Dr. Tombe, and one of the things that he makes very clear is that the opposition's claims that doom-day is around the corner as a result of the government's budget are completely false. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Renewable Energy Site Reclamation

Mr. MacIntyre: Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House the environment minister incorrectly told Albertans that renewable projects don't need a decommissioning plan for bankruptcy because "renewable projects are quite different from subsurface access . . . and are arrangements between the private landowners and the companies." A news flash to the minister: when a company owes its creditors more than it's worth, the creditors don't leave any money for necessary cleanup and reclamation. When will the government stop this recklessness and get real about protecting Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, reclamation plans are part of the process and part of the negotiation with landowners as these projects move forward in order to deliver an expanded property tax base to municipalities, revenue to landowners and to farmers, allowing people to stay in rural communities and allowing those communities to thrive because they create jobs and income. Those jobs and income: the Wildrose would slam the door on those opportunities, slam the door on the opportunity to diversify the economy and to ensure that rural communities can thrive . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. MacIntyre: Renewables sites are like oil and gas leases, with rights-of-way, easements, access roads, rents to property owners, setbacks, creditors, yet this government seems to think that they're immune to failure, and given that this government is pursuing a rapid-fire renewables strategy requiring thousands of these sites to be dependent on government handouts, which will not be sustained, will this government take lessons already learned from our energy industry and protect landowners and taxpayers from the risks of insolvency?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, the Wildrose has consistently taken the position that they're going to talk down new investment in this province, billions of dollars of new investment, thousands of new

jobs, thousands of new dollars into the pockets of landowners, farmers, municipalities, and so on that benefit from these projects. The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake went so far as to call renewables companies "hogs to the trough" in this Chamber. They are slamming the door on diversification, slamming the door on new developments in this province, and it is shameful.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. MacIntyre: The average two-megawatt turbine is a hundred metres tall, requires 60 truckloads of concrete, 50 tonnes of rebar, and a foundation about 20 feet deep. Given that the contracts for renewables are lease agreements on prime farmland and given that the soil restoration will be left to someone should these companies fail, to the minister. After a hundred years of energy exploration Albertans expect industry to respect our province's legacy and return sites to pristine conditions. Will this government demand that renewables companies act equally responsibly?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, in the approvals process there are reclamations and other requirements, including wildlife directives and other siting requirements. This is standard within the approvals process. Now, what is not standard is a group of people in this Chamber who dare to stand in their place and refuse new opportunities for Albertans to make a living. Albertans in southern Alberta, in northern Alberta are all looking for these opportunities, and the Wildrose has rejected all of them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Capital Projects in Central and Rural Alberta

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans just can't keep up with the constant infrastructure priority changes. With this NDP government promises made can be promises changed, and it seems like central and rural Alberta are going to be out of luck again. Another session and conditions are getting increasingly worse. At the Wainwright hospital pipes have burst, floors have been flooded, and 35-year-old backup generators are at risk of failing in an emergency. Why do projects that were once on the priority list, like the Wainwright hospital, disappear completely?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Of course, it's important to us to make sure that we have appropriate investments throughout the province. That's one of the reasons why I'm so proud that we increased the infrastructure maintenance plan money that we have in our budget substantially over the last two years. For decades, since the deep cuts of the 1990s, we've seen investment in these important facilities that Albertans rely on languish, and on this side of the House we're not going to cut deeper. We're going to make sure that we're investing in facilities like the Wainwright hospital to make sure that they have opportunities to be there for generations to come.

Mr. Taylor: I still wonder why that priority list project was dropped.

Since health care infrastructure . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, again, no comments at the front end. Keep going.

Mr. Taylor: Since health care infrastructure in Alberta has not kept pace with the rest of the province and given that central Albertans are not able to access the care they need close to home, which we all know is a cause for longer wait times for the entire province, to the Minister of Infrastructure: why play these political games with central and rural Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I don't think anything could be further from the truth. We're not playing political games here. What we're doing is investing to make life better for Albertans throughout the province, from one end to the other.

Now, just recently, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member has driven by Red Deer, he may have seen an infrastructure project under construction there. It's the Gaetz Avenue bypass. If he goes a little bit further north, he'll see construction that's taking place at Red Deer College. There are investments in the hospital in Red Deer. And by the way . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Taylor: Since we can see that the new capital priority for the NDP government is Edmonton and Calgary and is purely politically motivated and that even though thousands of dollars, if not millions, have already been spent on documentation proving that central Alberta has worse infrastructure and has been neglected for years, this government continually gives central Albertans and doctors many reasons or excuses why they cannot attain the priority list. What is the real reason for not supporting central Alberta? Will you give us the plain truth, please?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, just to finish my last thought: by the way, the Minister of Justice has just announced a new courthouse for Red Deer. So whether it's justice, health care, schools, road infrastructure, central Alberta is well supported. And I might just also mention that we've approved a major new facility for the Reynolds Museum in Wetaskiwin. That may not be central enough for the hon. member, but the list goes on and on and on.

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

Budget 2017 (continued)

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During his budget speech the Finance minister stated, "We are keeping spending growth lower than the combined rate of inflation and population." But in his analysis Dr. Trevor Tombe noted that in the four years covered by the budget, total government spending rises by an average of 4.3 per cent while population growth plus inflation is actually 3.4 per cent. To the Premier: I am sure that the Finance minister did not mean to misspeak during his Budget Address, so would you like to take this opportunity to correct your numbers for the record?

2:30

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government is focused on making sure that the budget supports Albertans and supports jobs in the private sector. As well, we are just coming out of a recession, and I think the opposition's radical agenda of cuts would jeopardize that recovery before it even got under way. You know, I can't be

lectured by a party that has a billion-dollar mistake in their budget preparation.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it's important to be accurate and that a recent Mainstreet poll indicated that over half of Albertans believe the NDP's plan to return to balanced budgets by 2024 is too slow and that almost a quarter of Albertans indicated that their first priority for the NDP – this is Albertans – was to reduce spending to lower the deficit and given that the NDP did not address either of these concerns in this budget, to the Premier: since you missed the mark again this year, will you rethink your prebudget consultation efforts so your fiscal decisions might have a chance of accurately representing the wishes of Albertans maybe next time?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to correct the hon. member. This government is focused, and this government was elected and has a mandate in order to protect the important public services that the previous government was going to cut. We have reversed their cuts to health care, which were massive. We've made sure that there are teachers in schools so that class sizes don't balloon. We've cancelled their health care premium tax, that they wanted to impose.

Speaking of polls, Mr. Speaker, I might also mention that polls showed before the last election that that party was going to win another term. They didn't. Thank you.

Mr. Rodney: Given that it's important to stop blaming and start governing and that despite repeated warnings about impending credit downgrades, the NDP has once again made absolutely no effort to constrain spending to any responsible level and given that Albertans have been pleading for this government to finally show some leadership by making good, forward-looking fiscal decisions just as Albertans do at home and at work, why is the NDP government handcuffing future generations and governments with reckless spending decisions? Do they realize that the hard choices they are skipping right now will not save their government in May of 2019?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll just give one concrete example of something that we're doing in order to bring down spending in this province. The previous government appointed all sorts of friends and insiders to the various government boards and agencies. They were paid, in some cases, massive salaries, hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. They got free golf memberships. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, we've done away with that. That kind of waste and that kind of financial largesse for the friends of the previous government has ended under this government because we're standing up for Alberta taxpayers. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members and ministers.
Edmonton-McClung.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the lack, once again, of leadership under the previous government there has not been a significant investment in seniors' and affordable housing in decades. I

hear regularly from my constituents in Edmonton-McClung that there is an urgent need to create new spaces and renovate existing buildings. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing: how is the government addressing the deficit in affordable housing in the city of Edmonton?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the important question. In a tough economy everyday Albertans deserve a government that makes life better. Budget 2017 will be a continuation of our \$1.2 billion investment in seniors and affordable housing. The city of Edmonton will see projects like Londonderry move into construction, putting Albertans to work. Youngstown and Strathcona Place redevelopments also received planning dollars.

But let's talk about what the opposition would do. They would cut hospitals and affordable housing to pay for tax giveaways to their friends at the top.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Oftentimes projects are announced and span a couple of years before completion. Given that the provincial affordable housing strategy is intended to guide the investments in affordable housing, can the minister update the House on the ongoing projects across this province and how these fit with the provincial affordable housing strategy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much. The previous government overpromised and underdelivered. Our government is building affordable housing. There are over 40 seniors' and affordable housing projects currently in the works. Budget 2017 will see new projects in Leduc, Calgary, Banff, Barrhead, and many more. Building affordable housing fits with our provincial affordable housing strategy, expected to be launched shortly. While this side of the House has a strategy to build affordable housing, the other strategy the opposition has is to cut funding to long-term affordable housing and seniors.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that my constituents are also concerned about affordable home ownership, to the same minister: what is the government doing to support low-income Albertans, particularly newcomers to Canada hoping to own a home?

Ms Sigurdson: Alberta is one of the first provinces to partner with Habitat for Humanity to make home ownership possible for low-income Albertans. Our government is proud to invest \$4.1 million to help fund 75 new affordable homes for families in Edmonton. Budget 2017 will invest to build 250 homes through Habitat for Humanity across this province. This summer we're taking part in the Carter work project, where President Jimmy Carter himself will help to build homes in the neighbourhood of Laurel. Mr. Speaker, again, on this side of the House we're working to make life better. On the other side they're . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Grain Disease Prevention

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Farmers in my constituency are getting increasingly worried. Not only has the 2016 cereal

crop deteriorated over winter, but disease threatens this year's crop. Significant levels of toxicity and Fusarium were evident in fall-harvested cereal grains. Spring-threshed grains will possibly have little salvage value and increase the risk of disease spread. Can the minister give farmers assurance that he has been in consultation with his department officials and AFSC, and have they come up with a disease prevention plan that will lead to a successful 2017 crop?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. There are a lot of pests and other diseases on the landscape out there. Weeds come into the landscape as well. In the southeast corner there was a new weed introduced a few years ago. Absolutely, the department is on top of this. We have the responsibility to make sure that all pests in the fields are controlled one way or the other. That work continues with all our public servants, AFSC, and our research people to make sure that we do what we can to support farmers.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that farmers are receiving mixed messages on the best path forward and given that AFSC insurance expects the crop to be harvested yet industry experts are concerned with the potential disease risk that this will have for the 2017 crop and given that these producers are asking whether they should thresh, burn, bale, disk, or whatever and given that there is an increased risk of disease for the 2017 crop with spring threshing, does the minister have a plan to deal with this disease risk, and when will producers know what that plan is?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The options vary, and the options will vary depending on the conditions: geographic conditions, climate conditions, weather conditions, spring conditions, whatever that might be, including even certain bylaws in the county. So I would recommend and hope that all producers out there will contact the AFSC office. Also, they can phone 310.FARM to talk about existing programs before they take any action. I really encourage them to do so to make sure that everything is in place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that there have been farmers from constituencies all over northern Alberta calling our offices for answers and given that these farmers need certainty from the department of agriculture on how to proceed and given that this is not about minimizing the insurance liability to AFSC but the potential disease risk for the industry and the 2017 crop – Minister, producers need certainty in order to ensure the success of this year's crop – will this minister ensure that his department has a disease prevention plan that will get released in a timely manner?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Other things to take into consideration are wildlife damage, grade loss when the crops are left out. A lot of things must be considered, including those options. The farmers have options to consider. Again, I very much encourage them to contact their local AFSC office for those conditions. It's going to vary from condition to condition, field to field, site to site. There's not going to be one solution for everything.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

2:40

Bail Process Review

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two years ago Constable Wynn was killed by a dangerous criminal who was out on bail. Since then I've been asking the minister to ensure that Crown prosecutors rather than police handle bail hearings. The minister, however, waited for a review of the bail-hearing system. When it finished, almost a year ago, the number one recommendation was that prosecutors preside over bail hearings, but the minister insisted on initiating a court ruling. Well, she recently got it, and Chief Justice Wittmann upheld the need for Crown prosecutors to handle bail hearings. To the minister: when is the life-saving measure finally going to occur?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know how critical our bail system is to ensuring both the rights and the fundamental safety of Albertans. That's why we took the step of doing a bail review, a process that this government undertook, which came forward with recommendations. There was a difference of opinion amongst our police partners in terms of how to best move forward, so we went to the court, and we asked for their opinion. We've gotten their answer back, and they have told us to have those forces in place by August 8. We will have them in place before then. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that you've been forced to implement this critically important, life-saving measure two years after I first recommended it and one year after the Alberta bail review recommended it – now, I know that I'm just one of those uneducated Albertans – and given that we have had this unnecessary delay, which put the public safety at risk for two years, Minister, can you please tell Albertans what the cost was of obtaining this unnecessary court ruling?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're very proud of having launched the bail review and doing something about a system that that government set up. It ran along under that government, unlike every other province in the country, for a number of years. This government took office, and we examined it, and we are moving forward on making the necessary changes to ensure that all Albertans can be safe.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Chief Justice Wittmann, in his decision ordering that Crown prosecutors handle bail hearings, provided the government with a deadline, of course, of August 8 of this year and given that the Justice ministry has shown resistance to proactively implementing the Alberta bail review's number one recommendation, which is now a year old, just to reconfirm: Minister, will the Crown under your leadership, as you previously stated, for sure meet the court's August 8 deadline? Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to rise once again in this House and say that we are taking

care of a situation that the last government ignored. We have launched the bail review, we went to the court, we got the opinion, and we are going to move forward with the changes that are necessary.

Mr. Speaker, while I have some extra time, I'd also like to talk about the fact that we're ensuring that the right information gets into the right hands in terms of bail, the most important thing in ensuring that Albertans are safe. We're very proud of the work we're doing, and we think it'll make lives better for all Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we'll continue with statements.

Members' Statements

Nowruz

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, this day is not only the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, but it is also Nowruz, celebrated by people from western Asia, central Asia, the Caucasus Mountains, the Black Sea area, and the Balkans. Nowruz is also celebrated by people of the Baha'i and Zoroastrian faiths.

It has been a joy in my life to be introduced to many faiths and beliefs and to participate in celebrating important festivals. About 15 years ago I helped a hospital develop a religious and spiritual care department, and I had the opportunity to obtain a deeper understanding of many faiths and religious beliefs.

In Sherwood Park we have a Baha'i community, and I introduced some members to this Assembly earlier on. Nowruz is the traditional festival of spring, which starts at the exact moment of the vernal equinox. Traditions vary, depending on country of origin and faith, but like most celebrations it involves food and visits with families and friends. Of relevance, I think, to the hon. members of this Assembly is the belief that whatever a person does on Nowruz will affect the rest of the year. If a person is warm and kind to their relatives, friends, and neighbours on Nowruz, then the new year will be a good one. On the other hand, if there are fights and disagreements, the year will be a bad one. So let's make sure that today we all have a good year.

The Baha'i faith has been present in Canada since 1898. It is based on the teaching of Baha'ullah, who taught that there is only one God, that there is only one human family, and that all major religions represent unfolding chapters in God's teaching for humankind. Baha'is undertake various community-building initiatives aimed at empowering the residents of their communities to take charge of their own spiritual, social, and intellectual development. Members of the Sherwood Park Baha'i congregation are very involved in the Strathcona County Diversity Committee, for example.

I encourage all members of the Assembly to help me wish . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Bill 202

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before anything else, I'm a father. That means taking a lifetime vow to love, cherish, and protect another human being. I take every opportunity to teach my children about right and wrong choices. But in a world that is changing so fast, I often find myself learning more from them than they are learning from me.

Kids today are growing up in a different world than we did, and this new digital world has brought a host of new challenges. It's up to us to keep pace with the rate of change online and protect our

kids from a new breed of criminals. Bill 202 does just that. It tackles an issue that affects too many girls and women; that is, revenge porn. We've all heard the stories of Amanda Todd, Rehtaeh Parsons. This issue is killing our kids, and it's only getting worse.

I got the idea for Bill 202 from a conversation with my oldest daughter. She explained to me how damaging this issue was for young girls. One poor decision can be a life sentence. We were all kids once. Kids all make mistakes. We can all probably look back at things we used to do and say: oh, boy, that was sure dangerous. Things are different now. One mistake means a lifetime of consequences. Let's not sugar-coat this: those who distribute intimate images online without consent are criminals.

Let's be a leader in this, not a follower. Alberta was one of the last provinces to mandate seat belt laws. We were also one of the last provinces to ban indoor smoking. Bill 202 will send a very powerful message to online predators.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Government and Opposition Policies

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been in Alberta for 16 years now, and during that time I have been inspired by the enterprising and caring spirit of Albertans. I've also been a member of this Legislature for a year, and I've observed that the NDP's ideological agenda is out of sync with our great province. This government is hurtling us towards fiscal and cultural ruin. Something else I've noticed over the past year is that our PC caucus and our colleagues in the Wildrose caucus are in sync with Albertans and with each other.

2:50

That's why I am so pleased that the PC Party took a big and a positive step last weekend towards forging a strong, united alternative to this accidental government. Together let's offer Alberta a government that is fiscally conservative yet helps citizens who are less fortunate, supports and fights on behalf of all industry for they are all critical to our economic success, and holds taxes in check because that's the Alberta way, Mr. Speaker.

Most of all, Albertans need a government that reflects their values, Albertan values. They don't need a government which imposes dogma that is profoundly wrong. In just a few short years this NDP government has eroded the strong foundation that Albertans have spent the last century building. It is destroying our proud culture because it's too arrogant to care to understand it. That's why I'm urging all free-enterprise Albertans to join together under this big tent. Let us focus on what unites us and not on what divides us. We must free ourselves from this incompetent, socialist, mean-spirited, arrogant government for the sake of all Albertans, and we will do so at the earliest opportunity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Rare Disease Awareness

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I had the opportunity to introduce a wonderful constituent of Edmonton-Meadowlark, Sonja Durinck. I would like to share with this Assembly a little bit about Sonja and the work that she has done to raise awareness of the health challenges faced by those with a rare disease.

Sonja was diagnosed in 2011 with not just one ultra-rare disease but two. Sonja's condition went undiagnosed for a period of more

than 20 years. As a result, Sonja faces life-threatening challenges as she is adrenal insufficient and steroid dependent. Despite these daily challenges Sonja remains a very active community member and is determined to do what she can to help improve the lives of others.

Sonja is a patient expert and ambassador with the Canadian Organization for Rare Disorders, a board member on various national and international organizations, and a founding member of both the Alberta Pituitary Patient Society and the Canadian Pituitary Patient Network, among her many other accomplishments. She has done an incredible job bringing awareness and recognition of the unique challenges that come with having a rare disease.

Rare Disease Day is recognized on February 28 or on February 29 in the years that this rare date does occur. This day raises awareness of the millions of Canadians directly affected by over 6,000 rare diseases and disorders. On this year's Rare Disease Day Sonja organized for the city of Edmonton to light up the High Level Bridge in recognition of the day. She is also building awareness of national Cushing's syndrome awareness day, that will take place on April 8.

I would like to thank Sonja and others like her who maintain not only their strength to battle their condition but the dedication to improving the way we understand and treat these conditions. I am committed to being a partner and advocate in support of all Albertans to have access to the diagnostic and treatment services that they need. I am proud to be a member of a caucus that is committed to supporting the public health care system in this province.

Thank you very much.

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

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this day, March 21, 1960, police killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration in Sharpeville, South Africa, protesting apartheid. Proclaiming this day in 1966, the UN General Assembly called to redouble its efforts to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, my experience is that this discrimination continues to lurk and manifests itself in subtle but insidious ways even today. One of my earliest memories in Canada as a child was watching other children ride their bikes in front of my home, yelling at my older brother as we played in the front yard to: go home, you dirty Chilean. These children, from my brother's school, had racialized him for being different and not yet being able to speak the language fluently. The behaviour of these children was learned, their actions a product of the predominant attitude of the time to racialize those who are foreign, which, unfortunately, continues to occur to this day.

Mr. Speaker, my hope for today is that this message reach every Albertan. I request them to have a heart-to-heart with their family members and discuss the importance of ridding our society, communities, and homes of the ugly reality of racial discrimination. I request that they pledge to condemn acts of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance against refugees and migrants and, most importantly, those nations that originally welcomed us here to their territory: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.

We must decolonize ourselves and, throughout this process of action and reflection, focus and learn to treat one another with dignity and respect. I remind us all that our children are watching, just like those children that rode their bikes in front of my home all those years ago. It is important that we each be committed to counter the attitudes and behaviours related to racial discrimination,

particularly those regarding hate crimes, hate speech, and racial violence. Let us be the example future generations require. On this International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Local HERO Air Ambulance Service in Wood Buffalo

Mr. Yao: Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to rise today to highlight a local event that I had the pleasure of attending. It was a fundraiser for the Local HERO Foundation in Fort McMurray. It was an East Coast Lobster Party featuring world-renowned Canadian chef Michael Smith, and it was an absolutely fantastic evening that raised money to help keep HERO 1 in the air and save lives in our region. This money will help cover fuel, maintenance, and operations of our helicopter.

HERO is Wood Buffalo's regional rotary air ambulance program. The region, 65,000 square kilometres, is one of the largest in Alberta and Canada, with communities like Janvier and Conklin being over an hour away by ground. Industry has a large presence around Fort McMurray, with thousands of men and women working in outlying, isolated, and difficult-to-access areas. Though the characteristics of the region dictate the need for a rotary air ambulance, we could not afford STARS. Their proposal to our community was simply too expensive.

In my previous life as an emergency responder I can tell you how this service was so important to the quality of patient care throughout northeastern Alberta. The Local HERO Foundation exists to promote and deliver 24-hour, seven-days-a-week emergency helicopter services to respond to motor vehicle collisions, workplace accidents, and medical emergencies. Time-sensitive issues like trauma, strokes, and cardiac issues could be resolved much quicker than if they were two hours away. They could be accessed in far less time, and it helped improve patient outcomes.

Phoenix Heli-Flight has provided this service to Wood Buffalo since their inception 26 years ago. They are able to operate in conjunction with the Fort McMurray fire department, the local emergency services, with amazing paramedics and EMTs. They are able to operate based on industry contributions of 22 per cent, our local municipality's contribution of 50 per cent, and AHS currently pays a fee for service. As good fiscal conservatives this organization has been able to provide an excellent service for our region.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I would move for unanimous consent to continue the Routine until its completion.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Yao: Thank you, sir. Mr. Speaker, I rise to table five copies of a letter from the minister of jobs and the economy from Manitoba's former NDP government which I quoted this morning, in which it demonstrates that they do support the life sciences sector in their province. They weren't hypocrites.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I proudly rise to table five copies of the Alberta Party shadow budget Pathway to Prosperity, our detailed fiscal plan 2017 through 2021, which shows

that it is, in fact, possible to balance the budget within four years without cutting front-line public services Albertans rely on.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other tablings? Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of Dr. Trevor Tombe's March 18 *Maclean's* article titled Alberta Needs to Be Honest with Itself about the Budget.

Further, I table five copies of Don Braid's March 16 *Calgary Herald* article titled A Budget that Gambles with Alberta's Future.

Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, any other tablings?

I rise to table five copies of a letter from the House leader of the Progressive Conservative caucus dated March 20, 2017, stating that there are no changes to the PC caucus appointments and that the Member for Calgary-Hays will remain as PC caucus opposition leader.

Hon. Government House Leader, I think you had a point of order.

Point of Order

Parliamentary Language

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today in question period during an answer that was being given by the hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo at 2:15 yelled out: lies. It's not the first time, but I want to just review previous Speakers' rulings with respect to that. In terms of the word "liar" there was May 8, 2000; March 15, 1995; February 22, 1995; May 23, 1990; July 21, 1989; November 22, 1983; and then "lies," "lying" and so on, November 21, 2013; April 18, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, there are at least 20 citations in the past of previous Speakers' rulings with respect to this matter. This is unacceptable. The hon. member knows that this is unacceptable in this House. It is perhaps the most egregious word that can be spoken in this place, and it is never acceptable. I would ask that you rule that the hon. member is out of order and ask him to stand and apologize and withdraw those comments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The opposition deputy House leader.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the Government House Leader that the word "lies" is unacceptable language in the House, so we will apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Provincial Fiscal Policies

13. Mr. Ceci moved:
Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate March 16: Mr. Cooper]

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

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity today to speak, of course, about the budget and have a response in

relation to the budget. Obviously, I'm disappointed. I was hoping for something different, and I think most Albertans were hoping for something different. It's unfortunate that we see this particular direction from the NDP. It's just a spend, spend, spend budget.

You know, I understand that when times get tough, sometimes people think that they just can run out and spend a lot of money and it will make them feel better. But it doesn't make any of the people that work for this money feel any better. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the money that this government is spending is earned by the people of Alberta. They work very hard for it. So when they throw money around left and right and don't look for any efficiencies whatsoever, I think most Albertans are very disappointed with that.

I have to say, though, that although I was disappointed, I wasn't really that surprised. Even though we all know that Albertans are struggling right now and Albertans are having a tough time no matter where you go in the province, I wasn't surprised because I've worked with NDP governments before, and this NDP government is very similar to other NDP governments that I've had the opportunity to see. It's very ideological. It is blindfolded as it makes decisions because it doesn't make them on the basis of the facts that surround the circumstances.

What I mean by that is that right now we have a situation where we have a record number of Albertans, a hundred thousand Albertans, that are applying and trying to find the opportunity from the federal government to receive unemployment insurance. A hundred thousand, Mr. Speaker. Now, that's a record for Alberta, and it's very troubling. There's another hundred thousand people that are just out of work. We've lost 80,000 full-time jobs since the NDP came to power, over 20,000 just in January.

And what's the response? Spending more money without looking around to see what's going on. What's going on, Mr. Speaker, is that there are no taxes being paid because businesses are not making any profits. That's why corporate taxes are down. Of course, businesses can't pay taxes because there are no profits to pay taxes on.

It's the same with Albertans. The average Albertan family: their income went down \$3,500, 3.5 per cent. Now, that \$3,500 is just as a result of a change in the employment situation in Alberta. That's \$3,500 that comes out of the average Albertan family's pocket, not earned anymore. That's taken out of their pocket, Mr. Speaker. They don't have the opportunity to spend that like they did the year before.

In fact, if you take the carbon tax – and I know I've talked a lot about the carbon tax. I talk about it because as I travel the province, people really don't like the carbon tax. This carbon tax takes another thousand dollars out of people's pocket, but this time it goes to the government. It doesn't just disappear – well, it does disappear, but it disappears into the general revenues of the government, big slush funds, green slush funds. Mr. Speaker, I know you're concerned because \$2,000, \$3,000 is a lot of money for you. In fact, I'd suggest that it's a lot of money for all Albertans except for those Albertans that obviously have control of the public purse.

That's why I'm so disappointed. How can you explain the situation of having net financial assets of about \$20 billion when this government started – and that was less than two years ago when we had \$20 billion of net financial assets – and today we're about \$10 billion in the hole? Ten billion dollars in the hole in less than two years. I know that \$20 billion is a lot of money. Twenty billion dollars would pay for a lot of hospitals, pay for a lot of schools, hire a lot of front-line workers. But, Mr. Speaker, that's not the most troubling part. The most troubling part is that we're going to be in a net \$35 billion hole by the time the 2019 election rolls around. And, yes, that does equate to \$71 billion in debt, and there will be payments on that debt.

Since I was speaking about the \$3,500 that we don't have anymore and the thousand dollars of the carbon tax that goes into the government slush funds, we also need to talk about that \$71 billion in debt because that means another \$1,800 to \$2,000 in interest payments that Albertans will have to pay. And, yes, that is another \$1,800 out of their pocket, on the table. But this time it doesn't go like the first \$3,500 that just disappears because of bad NDP policies. It's not like the thousand dollars of carbon tax that goes into the government coffers and gets to be spent on slush funds. This money – Mr. Speaker, you're going to be so happy to hear it – this \$1,800 on that \$71 billion of debt goes to big banks. To big banks. That's right: big banks.

As I've said in this place before, I can't imagine anybody I'd rather give my money less to than big banks except for NDP governments. I don't think these big banks are going to provide schools for us. They're not going to provide teachers or nurses or front-line workers. They're not going to build any of that great infrastructure or bridges that we need. They're just going to take that money and give that money to their shareholders in New York or Beijing or Europe or wherever. That's money gone, Mr. Speaker.

So when you take \$3,500 from the average Alberta family, then another thousand that goes to the government, then another \$1,800 that goes to interest payments, that's a lot of money. That's a lot of money, Mr. Speaker. We're talking serious percentages. Where they had the choice before of paying for their children's hockey or ballet, they can't do that anymore. They can't pay for that summer holiday that they were going to take and build their family up after a hard year of work, after they've had an aunt or an uncle laid off, and maybe somebody has moved into their home because they can't afford to live on their own. I know that's what's happening because I see it happening. And the idea that this government would blow our savings and then run up a credit card debt of \$45 billion in just four years is nothing short of hysterically bad news.

Now, I will give this government a little slack because we know that they did take over at a time when Alberta was already the biggest, largest spending government in Canada. We have seen that the previous government was able to balance the books from time to time because they would have a surplus in oil, they would have a royalty year like they did two years ago, three years ago of over \$10 billion, the biggest royalty year we ever had. But I don't think we're going to see those for a little while, Mr. Speaker.

3:10

That's why I would implore this government to be more particular about its fiscal prudence, about making sure that all of those things we need, whether it's a good justice system, where we keep criminals in jail and make sure that they see judges that throw them in jail, not just get out of going to trial because we don't have enough resources put in it by this government – justice is important. Until you are a victim of our justice system – and I do mean victim – you don't understand how important it is. Notwithstanding that we spend more money than almost any place in Canada on our justice system, we still don't have the results of other jurisdictions.

Even building schools, Mr. Speaker. I do applaud this government for some of their capital initiatives. I always said when I took this job that I would point out the good things but I would certainly point out the bad things, the things this government is doing wrong. They did build some schools. I know it took a long time for the previous government to get to the point where they would, but I'm glad to see that this government, this NDP government, took that file and moved forward with it. I think it's important.

I'm just really hoping that they don't follow the example of other NDP governments in Ontario, Nova Scotia, B.C. because we've seen time and time again NDP governments that are not effective

with capital investment. They don't look for the return on investment. They just take the money and shovel it out as fast as they can into the economy. That's not the right way to do it, Mr. Speaker.

We need someone that manages our economy properly, and that means managing the pennies because the dollars take care of themselves. Manage the pennies, Mr. Speaker? I would just be happy if they managed the \$100 million cheques that go out. This is a government that just increases spending every year, increasing spending now at a time when we have less revenues, less people, and we should as a result have less demand on our infrastructure and on our services.

Not every NDP government has spent inefficiently. I'm going to talk just briefly about Roy Romanow's government in Saskatchewan. Now, Mr. Speaker, when they got elected, they actually came in and they cut government spending by 15 per cent. Wow. I know, anybody standing in this Chamber would have fallen down on their chair recognizing that an NDP government looked for savings, but they did.

I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that that's why that government had successive success at re-election. Notwithstanding the cut, notwithstanding they looked for efficiencies in the services, the people in Saskatchewan actually rewarded them and they said: well, you did a good job, so we're going to keep re-electing you. They did lose their way, and that's why finally they were ejected from government, but they did spend some time in government even after looking for those savings.

I think most Albertans agree that there is no excuse for why we can't find savings in what we're doing today because, obviously, we have less money coming in. When Albertans are sitting around their kitchen tables and they're saying, "Okay; we have less money for Johnny or Sally; we have less money for that holiday or that vacation; we have less money for that new vehicle; we have to put it off another year," I think Albertans expect their government to do the same. I think this year the Finance minister should have gone out and got a new set of soles for his shoes or reconditioned them, not got a new pair because right now, Mr. Speaker, Albertans can't afford a new pair.

What we can afford is to lift the hard-working men and women up in this province and make sure they have jobs, and if not jobs, then make sure they have training, that they have access to education, that we get our schools and our universities and our colleges and our trade schools actively participating in recruiting unemployed people into their programs and get them retrained and educated today.

These are initiatives that have been tried by other governments, and that's why I said in question period today: please, Premier, please, NDP government, look around. Every government in Canada manages their government better than we do fiscally. They get a better return on investment than we get on just about any service we provide to Albertans, including health care. Better outcomes, better wait times, and less cost. They do, Mr. Speaker.

That's why I'm saying to this government to look around, go to Saskatchewan, pick up a phone and make a phone call, talk to British Columbia. My goodness gracious, talk to Manitoba. Actually, we would just ask that they talk to anybody outside of this dome because they have dome disease, Mr. Speaker. They don't leave here. They need to go and speak to the average Albertan in the places that their policies are affecting the most – Forestburg, Hanna, Grande Cache – places around this province that are seeing investor confidence drain, that are seeing businesses close down, houses close down because people are moving out of their homes and banks are taking them over.

I met a couple in Grande Cache when I was there just last time, and that couple, Mr. Speaker, were living in their car. I mentioned

this once before in this place. They moved out of their house. They lost their house three days before, and they were living in their car.

An Hon. Member: Unbelievable.

Mr. Jean: It is unbelievable that in a place like Alberta, when we're so rich in resources, where we have the amount of food that anybody wants to eat, we hope, have shelters around the province, the riches, the wealth, yet we have families living in their cars, losing their homes, losing their jobs, and losing hope.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what do we see when we travel the province? Well, we see a 30 per cent vacancy rate in downtown Calgary in those big, beautiful office towers. We see an unemployment rate in Calgary of 10 per cent, more or less, the highest unemployment rate of any city in Canada, and what's the response from this NDP government? Let's cap our oil sands. Let's make sure we have a cap on it so nobody wants to invest any further in Alberta and bring jobs to Alberta. Or let's bring in a carbon tax.

I know you're going to not believe it, Mr. Speaker, but I'm probably going to be talking about carbon tax for a long time. That's because it's so unpopular, and I've heard from working families shocked – absolutely shocked – to see their gas bill, and I know this because they send me their gas bills. If you look at my Facebook feed, I put them up on there. They send me their gas bills, and there's a 40 per cent increase. A 40 per cent increase. Most people can't even afford to balance their books today, and this government is imposing regulations and policy to change their gas bill by 40 per cent.

They say that they're making life better. I don't think they are. I think they're making life worse for a lot of people. I've talked to small-business people. They're seeing their costs skyrocket, whether it's delivery of product, whether it's their employees. It's not a good environment to be in business in, and it is as a result of the policies this government has brought in.

The clear direction I'm getting from across Alberta is this, and this is the best indication. The clear indication that I'm getting, the clear direction I'm getting from the majority of members of the Wildrose Party, the majority of the members of the PC Party, and the majority of Albertans is: "Unite. Get rid of these guys as quickly as possible. Let's just find a silver bullet and get rid of them." That's what's going on. Any option, just not this option.

They want them gone, and I think part of that reason is because they don't see them out around the province. They don't see them in Calgary, Mr. Speaker. They don't see them in any small town in Alberta. Many of the MLAs have moved out of their constituencies. I know that I have heard that from many people, that they don't show up in their constituencies. Now, I will tell you: I don't think that's the way to represent people, and I do believe that when politicians lose the ability to talk to their constituents, they lose the moral authority to govern. That's why they need to stay in touch with the people, and that's why I continue to implore them to go out and do that.

Now, I recognize that Albertans want a party that's uncompromising and that's an accountable and ethical government, and I'm hoping that we receive that privilege, Mr. Speaker, sometime because we can't see a situation where people, Albertans, politicians are using politics for their own personal gain. I do believe that these politicians would be well informed if they would go out and talk to people and to see how they feel, to talk to the everyday Albertan, to reach out to them and speak to them about the justice system and how they feel about the justice system or how they feel about the increase in taxes or how they feel about the increase in regulations, how they feel about the carbon tax, the accelerated shutdown of coal, the cap on the oil sands. All of these things are significant. All

of these things affect the people of Alberta. All of these things can be reversed.

Mr. Speaker, I do ask that this government consider talking to Albertans, because if they do have that opportunity and they see what's going on with the health care system, the education system, our justice system and talk to everyday Albertans that know they want to see something different, I think these fine folks would actually go in that other direction if they just had the opportunity to listen.

3:20

I have talked about this budget a bit, Mr. Speaker – and I'm not going to take any more of your time – but all I can tell you is that the government was extremely disappointing to me personally, to see this come forward. It's not a good budget. It's not one that is going in the right direction. It's actually a budget that sees an increase in spending, not a decline. At a time when we see fewer revenues, the first thing any government should do is do no further harm and make sure they get their finances in order, and I implore this government to consider that as they possibly go around Alberta and talk to the people of Alberta and get the authority to continue to govern the people of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any others wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Nixon: I enjoyed the Leader of the Opposition's speech, and I think he actually probably does have a couple more comments he would like to quickly make. I also suspect he would like to move to adjourn debate.

Mr. Jean: You know what, Mr. Speaker? I don't know how he did that. It was like he read my mind, but . . .

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is raised.

Mr. Mason: I withdraw the point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jean: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate that opportunity. As the House leader was about to say, I would move to adjourn debate.
Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is where some of the confusion was. In fact, under 29(2)(a) you cannot adjourn the . . .

Mr. Jean: Unless there's unanimous consent.

The Speaker: I'm not sure about that even.
Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great to rise to discuss the budget. I think the Leader of the Official Opposition did a really good job of articulating how I feel about it. I know that I and my constituents are quite shocked by how far this government is willing to go.

The Speaker: You're adjourning?

Mr. Nixon: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I do have the floor right now. With that said, I would move to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: Yes, hon. member, you have the floor. I'm aware of that. There's no need for you to point that out to me.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Member for Calgary-Hays

16. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that in accordance with section 28(3) of the Conflicts of Interest Act the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Ethics Commissioner concerning the Member for Calgary-Hays dated January 4, 2017, and that the member be required to apologize to the Assembly and pay a fine of \$500.

Mr. Rodney moved that the motion be amended as follows:

- (a) by striking out "concur in" and substituting "receive";
- (b) by adding "the Assembly defer its decision on the recommendation" before "that the Member be required to apologize";
- (c) by adding "until such time as the Court of Queen's Bench has given a ruling with respect to the judicial review filed by the Member for Calgary-Hays on February 23, 2017" after "\$500".

[Adjourned debate on amendment March 16: Cortes-Vargas]

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recuse myself from this debate.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to Motion 16? It's on amendment A1. Anyone wishing to speak to amendment A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Speaker: I believe we are now back on the original motion.
On the original motion?

Mr. Hanson: Yes.

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I wasn't going to speak to this, but the more I look at it, this motion actually kind of bothers me a little bit. Basically, what you're asking me and what this motion is asking all of us to do is to mete out a punishment to a person while his case is in appeal, before he's had his day in court, not for voting on a bill or promoting a bill, simply for asking a question in the House. That really troubles me because the implication for this, you know, could be very, very far reaching and set a precedent here that could affect all of us. For instance, does it mean that a teacher that's sitting as an MLA can't ask a question about education or the education system? Is that what it means? Does it mean that a doctor that is a practising doctor can't ask questions about the remuneration of doctors? I mean, we've had talks about that in the House. Does that mean that a doctor would have to recuse himself from discussion or from asking a question on health care?

Social workers: are they not allowed to talk about issues that affect their profession? We're going to be talking about labour laws in Alberta, and I know that a lot of the members opposite are probably past union representatives or maybe still hold memberships in unions. Is that going to mean that you can't be open in the discussion and ask questions on it?

What is the punishment here? We're looking at a \$500 fine and an apology. We seem to be in an all-fired-up rush to pass judgment before the man has had his day in court. I don't see what the rush is. It's a simple matter of waiting one more year, until next spring.

If he's found guilty by a judge – like, we're not judges. We don't have that right here. Let's leave it up to the judge. If he agrees with the Ethics Commissioner, then so be it. We'll mete out the punishment here in the House. That's our privilege. But what if not? What if we, you know, drag him up, slap him on the wrist, make him apologize and pay the \$500 fine, and then next January he's found innocent? How are you going to feel then? Put yourself in that place. It could happen to any one of you, to any one of us here. There are people here who have businesses on the side that have been very successful in life. Does that mean that they have to recuse themselves from question period because they're asking a question about the economy that could affect their livelihoods? This is ridiculous.

I ask all the members here: put yourself in the shoes of the hon. member that sits here accused, that has not had his appeal date in court, and vote against this motion because it could affect all of you at one time or another. Believe me, if there's an opportunity to call you on it, you're going to get called on it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any questions under 29(2)(a) to the member?

Seeing and hearing none, are there any other individual members who would like to speak? Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's the first chance that I've had to rise on this motion, and I will be brief. I think the last speaker articulated some of the concerns I have with the specific issue of whether or not the hon. member in question should have a fine or something levied against him. Really, it's not even up for debate at this stage. We live in a society that strongly believes in innocent until proven guilty. This is before the courts. For the government to proceed to use this, in my view, for political purposes without allowing the situation to play itself out and while doing so to force members of this Assembly to have to cast a vote with regard to another hon. member without knowing the end facts on something that's before the court is, I think, fundamentally wrong and, quite frankly, insulting.

You know, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that many people that I speak to back home find most shocking is how often opposition members are asked by this government to vote on legislation and items without adequate time to consult with their constituents or to consult with experts that are involved. If you talk to Members of Parliament, they are often shocked and appalled at the process that we have here in Alberta, how fast legislation can move through. It's the same thing.

You know, it's one thing when the government is attempting to use the process of the Assembly to move through legislation at breakneck speed without adequately consulting Albertans; it's another thing to ask hon. members to vote on something as serious as this with regard to one of their colleagues without allowing the process to play itself out.

It's fundamentally wrong, and I think that the government should reconsider it. If they don't, I will of course cast my vote against it, not because of anything that – you know, I haven't had time to determine whether or not it's valid, but I do know that something is before the court. It's fundamentally wrong and insulting that the government would continue with this.

The Speaker: Any others who wish to speak under 29(2)(a) to the member?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

3:30

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hold on, hon. member. I'm advised that you have spoken to the motion originally.

Mr. Rodney: Sir, I actually made an amendment. I didn't speak to the motion.

The Speaker: You spoke to the motion and then introduced the amendment. That's how you did it. So I'm advised that you are out of order in speaking.

Are there any other members who wish to speak to the original motion?

Mr. Rodney: Clarification, please.

The Speaker: Clarification?

Mr. Rodney: Simply that I went straight to the amendment. I did not debate the motion on purpose.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I'm just getting the standing orders confirmed.

Hon. member, I stand by the ruling. Under Debate on Amendment, Standing Order 20(1), you are out of order.

The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: To close debate, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: To close debate? Adjourn?

Mr. Mason: To close debate.

The Speaker: Okay. You can sit down.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I just want to kind of reiterate what's already been said about this. This is something that's before the courts. The government, when we're asking questions in question period, often say: "This is before the courts, so we can't answer that question. We can't discuss that issue. We can't do anything about this because this is before the courts."

Mr. Speaker, I think it's only reasonable that the same rules apply at all times. This is before the court, and here we are coming up with a decision on a punishment for something that's before the court. I mean, it doesn't even make sense. I think the only proper thing to do would be to withdraw the motion, let the court finish, let a decision be made, and then we can go ahead based on whatever the court decides. But to do this before the court has decided, I think, is not a reasonable expectation of what we should be doing in this House. This isn't what's in the best interests of the time of this House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, under 29(2)(a)? I'm sorry. Yes, you. Thank you.

Mr. Rodney: To the point of the last speaker, I appreciate his comments. Specifically, again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is for comments and questions. I wonder if he could consider clarifying a few important points for the House. This motion indeed refers to section 28(3) of the Conflicts of Interest Act. I'm sure he's aware that it actually states:

If in the report from the Ethics Commissioner the Ethics Commissioner has found that a Member or former Minister has breached this Act and the Ethics Commissioner has recommended a sanction, the Legislative Assembly shall debate and vote on the report within 15 days after the tabling of the report . . .

But it goes on:

... or any other period that is determined by a resolution of the Legislative Assembly.

So I'm guessing that this member is recommending, as I've heard from other members on this side of the House, that this would indeed occur at an appropriate date, which would of course be after the date it is heard in January.

Mr. Loewen: Sensible.

Mr. Rodney: It's only sensible. Thank you, Member.

So the first question is: why would the government motion be worded in a way that it would show unfair bias in favour of accepting the report that would seem to unfairly prejudice the debate in the House?

Now, we go back to section 28(3). Since the report has been tabled, we could have exercised the option to pass a resolution to debate and vote on this later.

I think there's a substantial argument – perhaps the hon. member would agree – that we should not pass this today because what the motion is proposing is that we punish a member of this Assembly for, really, doing his job and for exercising his use of free speech in the House. Does that not send a very chilling effect through everyone's bones in this Assembly? Does it not warn us all that there could be an extremely dangerous precedent for us all? And I don't mean just us here in this Chamber. I mean Legislatures and Parliaments around the world in the Commonwealth. This has not happened before in history.

Members come from almost every walk of life in this Chamber. I've seen it for four separate elections. I've admired the experience and expertise that so many people have brought to this Chamber. It makes for better debate and better policies when people are not afraid to speak. I am extremely concerned. I wonder if the member shares the concern that people will be afraid to speak up if this motion passes.

We could go through our seating plan, Mr. Speaker. No matter what a person's experience or expertise is, if they have experience or expertise in a field that is related to any ministry or they have a family member who does or they have any topic to discuss from which they have a personal, professional, or political background, will they be silenced from now on? That is a very serious question that needs to be asked in good time.

Would the member agree that the tradition of being able to speak freely on the floor of the Legislature is one of the primary privileges of this Assembly? Would he quote *Beauchesne's*, section 25? It is "the least questioned and the most fundamental right of the [member] ... on the floor of the House and in committee" as well. It's been upheld, Mr. Speaker, time and time again that a member not face sanctions for what's been said on the floor of the House. It's one of the key parliamentary privileges, and to abrogate that privilege should require far more than simply what's been stated here today, which is a government motion slid in at 3-something on this particular day.

This is the substance of the suit that has been brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Hays, to decide what context and to what extent the Conflicts of Interest Act can limit the parliamentary privilege of free speech. This is serious, serious stuff. It's a matter that we should allow the court to decide before we debate this further even today. Until then we have a duty to maintain and uphold the ability of members to speak freely in this House and be passionate advocates for their constituents. That's why we got elected.

I therefore ask members of this House to perhaps join this member and me and others to vote against this motion or potentially

risk sacrificing the parliamentary privilege of free speech, which is an extremely dangerous precedent on a go-forward basis.

I just wonder if this member has anything else that he would like to say with respect to any of these points, whether it's related to *Beauchesne's* or previous rulings in this jurisdiction or others around the world.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if I might seek unanimous consent to revert to introductions for a moment. We've had some very important guests come into the gallery.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just glanced up in the gallery and saw a whole bunch of familiar faces that have arrived out of the blue. I do know them all, but I won't name them all in the interest of time. I see officials, both elected and staff, from the town of Rocky Mountain House, the village of Caroline, and, of course, the beautiful Clearwater county here in the Assembly watching a little bit of an interesting debate. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome to all of you. I hope that maybe you could share with the House at some point in the future how collegiality is practised in a very constructive fashion on your various councils. Welcome.

3:40

Government Motions Member for Calgary-Hays (continued)

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to the motion? The Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't take too long. Since my election in 2012 and moving along here for the past number of years, I've seen several things that have come across this Assembly that have been fairly concerning, but this one stands out in my memory as being one of the most unusual and one that is very controversial. It would seem that it has a lot to do with the Conflicts of Interest Act, and it seems to have an awful lot to do with our basic roles and responsibilities as elected officials.

It is surprising to me that we're dealing with a matter that's before us like this when it is, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed has mentioned, before the courts. I agree with all the points that were raised by the Member for Calgary-Lougheed during the questions he was posing to the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, so I would like to add my name to the list of the names of those who have been speaking against this motion for the past several minutes in respect to this situation.

I would encourage all those in the House this afternoon to give this very serious thought before they vote on this matter today. Thank you very much.

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

Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's an interesting question, one that I think we've been wrestling with for some time. I compare it, to some extent, to the issues that I would face, for example, as a physician – my wife is a physician – if I were to rise in the House and try to influence this House in relation to negotiations with physicians. I think I'm aware enough and I think I'm mature enough to recognize that there might be a perceived problem there.

We as a Legislature have identified and appointed officers of this Legislature to be watchdogs over us to ensure that we follow due process, that we recognize conflicts of interest, and that in many cases if there are issues to be passed on, we pass them on to a fellow party member, a caucus member, to address the issue rather than place ourselves in a conflict of interest. I've looked at a little bit of the literature. A similar occurrence has occurred in B.C. It was referred to the courts in B.C., and the B.C. courts sent it back to the Legislature, saying: this is a matter for the Legislature to decide.

I think it's fairly straightforward that when there's a pecuniary interest, when someone in our own family or ourselves are going to benefit from pressing on a certain issue, there is a conflict of interest. I think we do a disservice to this Legislature if we don't honour the appointments that we've made to those official independent officers – independent officers – who try to, you know, keep this august body accountable and ethical and act in the public interest to even in this mild way say: this is not an appropriate action in this particular case.

I don't doubt that the member was not aware and did not think about the possibility, but I will be supporting this motion, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any questions for the hon. member under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Yes. I'd just like to clarify that the hon. member understands that the member wasn't voting on a motion, wasn't voting on a bill, that he was simply asking a question in the House.

Dr. Swann: I think it was very clear from *Hansard* that he was trying to influence the decision on the bill. That's the position that the Ethics Commissioner took, that he was trying to influence, through his influence as the leader of the party and through his particular position in this House, the decision of the government. Whether it was in the form of a question or it was actually in the form of an assertion, it was clear to many of us.

I defer to the Ethics Commissioner. I actually believe that she is acting in good conscience and acting on behalf of all of us to try and make sure that our reputation in the public is not tainted, that our reputation is upheld as honourable members that are acting strictly in the interests of the public. I stand by what I understood to be the *Hansard* remarks and the good office of the Ethics Commissioner, who I think is acting in the best interests of all of us in the final analysis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), hon. member?

Mr. Rodney: Yes, please, and thanks. I appreciate that the member has spent almost exactly the same amount of time as I have in this House, and it's the first time both you and I have had anything like this in front of us, so I'd ask the hon. member: since the constitutional question has been raised and the Justice minister has been served, why do you think it's appropriate that this would be raised

at this point? Would it not be prudent for rulings of other bodies to be decided so that this is done in the correct order? Why would it not be adjourned until after the court decides on a constitutional matter? Do you think the Legislature does not have jurisdiction to interpret the Constitution or decide about the scope of its own privilege? That's for the courts. What are your comments on this topic, again, that will affect every member not only in this Chamber but in other Legislatures, the Parliament in Ottawa, and the Commonwealth beyond?

Dr. Swann: Well, I think this is the essential question that we're wrestling with, and none of us have dealt with this before. I guess what I'm saying is that based on what I have read and what I have seen in B.C., the B.C. court punted it right back to the Legislature, saying: "These are your rules. You should be able to interpret your rules, and you should honour the commitments that you've made through your appointed independent officers." I'm no expert on constitutional law. That's why we have an Ethics Commissioner. That's why we have courts, and ultimately I guess the courts can still overrule this decision readily if they choose to. I don't think we prejudice the court in any way. We vote, and we make our decisions here. If the courts decide that we are in error, then so be it, but the evidence from B.C. is that they want nothing to do with conflicts of interest related to the Legislature.

The Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View?

Seeing and hearing none, are there any other members that wish to speak to the motion?

Seeing and hearing none, the Government House Leader to close.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, yes. Thank you very much. I want to go over a few things here, and I want to respond to a few things that have been said. I want to go back to the ruling of the Ethics Commissioner, which was issued on January 4 of this year, to quote some of the sections of her report.

[The member] contravened s. 3 of the Conflicts of Interest Act when he asked [a question] . . . during question period . . .

[The member] was trying to influence the Crown to drop both of these policies. If he succeeded, it would protect his wife's company and if he failed there could be detrimental effect on her business . . .

Therefore, as a result of asking the question, in a manner which tried to influence the Crown, [the member] was in breach of s. 3 of the Conflicts of Interest Act as he sought to influence the Crown's decision to implement (or prevent) certain policies, the unintended result of which, had he succeeded, would further the private interest of his direct associate, in this case his wife.

Given the small size of the interest and the probability [the member] was more interested in scoring political points than worried about his wife's business, it is my recommendation that an apology to the Legislative Assembly by [the member] and a fine of \$500 is the appropriate penalty for this breach of the Act.

Now, in response to this report, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member at the time made the following statements. These are some quotes from that statement:

I respect and accept the Ethics Commissioner's findings regarding the conflict of interest that occurred during debate on Alberta's electricity market.

While the investigation clearly shows that my actions in the Legislative Assembly were not intended to protect my wife's business, there could have been unintended consequences and as such, I was in violation of the Act.

He went on to say:

I fully accept responsibility for my actions and going forward, I will continue to not participate in any question period activity, debate or vote in relation to Alberta's electricity utility industry until such a time that the Ethics Commissioner gives me permission to do so.

Mr. Speaker, we brought this forward in compliance with the Conflicts of Interest Act, which does require the Assembly to move and vote upon any findings or sanctions against a member in the Ethics Commissioner's report.

3:50

Now, to deal with a couple of points that have been raised again, I will again reiterate that in our system, the British parliamentary system, or the Westminster system, there is a division of powers that has been recognized by the courts. This is made more explicit in the American Constitution, but it comes from the British system, where it's a well-developed system that divides authority between the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch, Mr. Speaker. Each has authority within its own realm, and the courts have repeatedly refused to take jurisdiction in matters that are clearly within the Legislative Assembly's prerogative, and we believe that that is, by far and away, the most likely matter.

Now, the question of the principle of sub judice has been raised. You've ruled, Mr. Speaker, with respect to that, that it does not apply in this case. We are not talking about an external court case where we might influence a court. We're talking about something within our own area of jurisdiction, where the courts are very unlikely to intervene.

The last point that I'd like to make is that this in no way takes away the hon. member's recourse to the courts should he choose to. If he's dissatisfied with the process, if he's dissatisfied with the Ethics Commissioner's report, he still has recourse to the courts. Now, I suspect that the courts will not take jurisdiction in those matters, but we are in no way removing the rights of a member to take this forward to the courts if he chooses.

Mr. Speaker, I think we're acting within the law, within our area of responsibility, and our obligations as a legislative body to treat these matters in a very serious fashion. Not my favourite thing to do, but I think that it is exactly what has to be done, what our obligation and our responsibility are. So I'd urge hon. members to vote in favour of the motion to support the recommendations of the Ethics Commissioner in this matter.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 16 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:53 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Babcock	Gray	Miller
Bilous	Horne	Miranda
Carlier	Jansen	Piquette
Carson	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Connolly	Larivee	Sabir
Coolahan	Littlewood	Schreiner
Dach	Loyola	Sigurdson
Drever	Mason	Sucha
Eggen	McCuaig-Boyd	Swann
Feehan	McKittrick	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Westhead
Goehring	McPherson	

4:10

Against the motion:

Anderson, W.	Hunter	Rodney
Ellis	MacIntyre	Starke
Gotfried	Nixon	Stier
Hanson	Panda	
Totals:	For – 35	Against – 11

[Government Motion 16 carried]

Mr. Rodney: Mr. Speaker, a point of privilege.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you're rising on a point of privilege, as I understand it. Is that correct?

Privilege

Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do indeed rise on a point of privilege with regard to the passing of Government Motion 16. As I alluded to in my earlier remarks on this motion, the privilege of members of the Legislature to speak freely on this House floor is one of the most securely held privileges afforded to members. I refer, as my first citation, to *Erskine May*, 24th edition, page 203:

Parliamentary privilege is the sum of certain rights enjoyed by each House collectively as a constituent part of the High Court of Parliament; and by the Members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions, and which exceed those possessed by other bodies or individuals.

Further, from the same page:

Certain rights and immunities such as freedom from arrest or freedom of speech belong primarily to individual Members of each House and exist because the House cannot perform its functions without unimpeded use of the services of its Members.

I would argue, with the greatest respect, Mr. Speaker, that Motion 16 as debated and passed in this House constitutes a direct breach of the privilege of free speech in this House. Many points of privilege have been argued in this House, but the charge of infringing on the privilege of free speech is indeed very dire. I recognize that, and I trust that you also are aware of the gravity of the precedent you are setting.

To quote directly from *Beauchesne's*, the second citation is section 75. It reads:

The privilege of freedom of speech is both the least questioned and the most fundamental right of the Member of Parliament on the floor of the House and in committee.

Now, the reason that the privilege of freedom of speech is so fundamental is that it deals directly with the ability of the member to perform their duties. If a member is precluded from speaking on the issues that affect his or her constituents, then that member is being obstructed in discharging the duties that they were elected to do.

Leaving aside the issue of whether or not the members opposite believe that the question asked by the Member for Calgary-Hays was unethical, he enjoys, as every single one of us does, the privilege to speak in this House about issues that matter to our constituents.

As citation 3, Mr. Speaker, page 222 of *Erskine May* states:

Subject to the rules of order in debate, a Member may state whatever he thinks fit in debate, however offensive it may be to the feelings, or injurious to the character, of individuals; and he is protected by parliamentary privilege from any action for defamation, as well as from any other question or molestation.

I would argue that the motion and debate here today were clearly in contravention of exactly this. A further quotation from the same page:

The Speaker having claimed and statutory recognition having been granted to the privilege of . . . speech, it becomes the duty of each Member to refrain from any course of action prejudicial to the privilege which he enjoys.

Mr. Speaker, I seriously question whether what transpired in this House just now and last week with regard to Motion 16 could be interpreted as anything other than prejudicial to the privilege of free speech.

I would like to be respectful of the members' time, so I will end my references there. I will simply say that I believe we have demonstrated a prima facie case of breach of privilege, and I urge you, encourage you, implore you, and thank you for making the prudent ruling here to protect and preserve the privileges of every one of the members of this House, Legislatures, and parliaments here and around the world within the Commonwealth.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member from the third party has raised a question of privilege, which is, of course, a very serious matter. I was unaware that this point of privilege was coming forward. I would respectfully request time to prepare my response and, with the greatest of respect, ask that we be allowed to reply to this point of privilege tomorrow.

The Speaker: Hon. members, points of privilege are always very, very serious in this House, and for the particular point of privilege being raised today, I too would like to have some time to look at the issues. I want to also reflect upon the rulings that I granted earlier with respect to this subject matter, so I would like to defer the matter to a future date. We will bring the matter back for discussion, and at that time other members may wish to make some points with respect to the matter as well.

I think that for today I would leave that matter there and move on.

Ministry of Education Main Estimates

17. Mr. Mason moved:

Be it resolved that, notwithstanding Standing Order 52.01(1)(a), the 2017-18 main estimates for the Ministry of Education be considered by the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Normally this would be considered by another standing committee, but when we looked at the workload for estimates of the various committees, we found that it was considerably imbalanced. In order to provide a more equal workload and to allow the estimates to proceed more efficiently, we are requesting that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future be tasked with hearing the estimates of the Ministry of Education.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, anyone wish to speak to Motion 17?

[Government Motion 17 carried]

4:20 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 3

Voluntary Blood Donations Act

The Deputy Chair: We are currently on amendment A3. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered in respect to this? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this amendment a second time and perhaps address some of the concerns that were raised this morning by the hon. Health minister. I'll start by apologizing to the members opposite for suggesting that in some way their perusing of their laptop computers was not related to debate. There is certainly every possibility that that's exactly what they were doing, and I should not have made the assumption that they were not engaged in that very worthwhile activity, so we'll set that aside for starters.

But I will say, Madam Chair, that while the Health minister seemed to be bemused by my sharing of stories and other members opposite suggested that, you know, perhaps donors in my veterinary practice were not financially compensated and that therefore neither should be extended, in point of fact what we are talking about here is indeed very serious.

I would like to say that I'm very proud of our system and proud of Canadian Blood Services, the work they do, but I think, actually, that Canadian Blood Services has some significant shortcomings that need to be addressed. While we like to say, you know, that our systems that we have here in our country are always working particularly well, I think that when we look at the statistics and we look at the donor rates of Canada compared to other nations, we in fact are not doing nearly as well.

In the case of Canadian Blood Services I feel that at least part of the reason for that is that they are not making it easier for people to donate. In fact, they're making it harder for people to donate. Canadian Blood Services used to make it very convenient for people. They would do donor days in rural areas. I know that they would regularly come to communities in my constituency, usually two or three times a year, with a mobile blood donation clinic. That was a day that, quite frankly, a lot of people from our community would get together on, and they would go out to donate. Those are hardly held anymore. To donate now, it is required for people to make an appointment and then travel down to the Canadian Blood Services office in Edmonton. This isn't always convenient, and this isn't always easy for people. I think some of this contributes to the reduction in the number of donors.

I also want to talk a little bit about the Krever commission and Justice Krever's inquiry that was initiated in 1993 on the heels of the worst public health disaster that we've ever had in our nation. That was, of course, the tainted blood scandal of the '80s, in which some 32,000 Canadians were inadvertently affected or infected by blood that had one or more viral agents in it. The main concern, of course, was HIV but also viruses such as hepatitis. In the aftermath of that very, very serious public health disaster, essentially, for Canada, the largest one of its kind in our history, Justice Krever was asked to look into our blood system.

It was at that time one of the recommendations was that the responsibility for the collection and distribution of blood and blood products be removed from the Canadian Red Cross and turned over to Canadian Blood Services. Of course, the Krever commission also made the recommendation, which has been documented and has been referenced a number of times, about having a completely voluntary system, that we have a system that is entirely reliant on volunteers.

One of the things, though, that we have to recognize is that the Krever commission and its recommendations are 20 years old. Those recommendations came down in 1997, when, in fact, the

processing of plasma for plasma protein products and the treatment of a number of conditions with these plasma protein products were indeed just in the stage of developing. It was in its infancy, and the possibility for attaining self-sufficiency in plasma products would have been much higher at the time of the Krever commission.

In point of fact, though, as the demand has grown and as we continue to see a need for more and more plasma so that we can have plasma protein products for the treatment of a variety of different conditions, it is certainly determined that more and more plasma is required and that having a purely voluntary system is simply not providing an adequate volume of plasma to meet our needs. Indeed, if we look right across the world, there is not a single jurisdiction where there is a sufficient volume of plasma collected on a purely voluntary basis in order to provide that.

You know, the Health minister did reference that one of the reasons for that and, I think, one of the things that is very important that people understand is that plasma donations are different from donating blood. Donating blood is a relatively short process that can happen in approximately 20 minutes, donating a unit of blood. In fact, sometimes the registration and the answering of the questionnaire that is part and parcel of a blood donation takes longer than the actual donation time itself. The other thing that is important in regard to donating blood is that donation takes only 20 minutes, but it can only be done in the case of men every 56 days, every eight weeks, as a maximum frequency and for women every 84 days, every 12 weeks, as a maximum frequency.

Plasma donations are quite different. A plasma donation takes an hour and a half, and that is because a plasma donation involves a situation where the blood is taken, the red cells are then separated from the plasma, and then the red cells are returned back to the donor. This also allows the donor to donate more often, up to once a week. In fact, the plasma that is lost is regenerated by the body in something that's quite incredible, a matter of about 24 hours. These are some of the things that I think we have to consider.

There's one other thing that I've hesitated to raise, but I do think it has to be addressed, and that is the motivation that is claimed by the folks that are moving this. The motivation behind this is the safety of the blood supply. I think I've pointed out that the safety of the blood supply is not impacted whatsoever, whether you have paid donors or voluntary donors. Plasma products specifically are processed to such an extent that there has never been a documented case of a disease being transmitted as a result of a plasma donation that came from a paid donor. There's not a single case of that, and Health Canada as well as Canadian Blood Services both agreed at the round-table that was done in 2013 that safety is not an issue. So we can set that one aside.

The second reason that is often given is the effect it will have on the donor base, and the Health minister referenced a decrease in donors in Saskatoon after the opening of that paid plasma centre. That's one year of data. That's one year of data in one specific instance, and somehow we're to take that as being more significant and more telling than 30 years of operation of the paid plasma donation centre in Winnipeg or the experience that has been seen in countries like Germany and Austria and the United States, where they do have parallel paid plasma situations.

While I agree that we should watch what is happening with the Saskatoon clinic very carefully, I think we should also drill down and look at those numbers a little bit more carefully. Can we attribute the entire decrease in the number of donations to that one single factor, opening that plasma resource collection centre? Could there potentially be other reasons? I think that needs to be looked at before we simply point to one situation with only a one-year track record and determine, therefore, that we shouldn't be embarking on this.

You know, I'd also point out that the Health minister mentioned that we wouldn't be the first province to do this. Ontario banned payment for blood and plasma donations relatively recently, in just the last couple of years. The Quebec ban on payment for blood and plasma donations has been going on. Actually, they passed their law approximately, I think it was, about 25 years ago. Quebec has had a long-standing ban on this. That's fine. Those provinces can make those decisions.

4:30

But I would point out that the province of Saskatchewan has approved this. The province of Manitoba has a long-standing approval of payment for plasma donors. The province of British Columbia has no opposition to this, and the Health minister of the province of British Columbia has indicated very clearly that there is no specific problem in his mind with paid-for plasma donations. The province of New Brunswick has similarly said that they do not have an issue, and the federal government has said that they will leave this up to the provinces because Health Canada does not have an issue from a safety standpoint with regard to payment of plasma donors. You know, we can bring out and say that, well, other jurisdictions are doing this. Well, thus far at least in Canada, that I'm aware of, only the provinces of Quebec and Ontario have banned paid-for blood and plasma donations.

The other issue that I'd like to raise – and I'd like, actually, to hear some responses to whether this is an issue or not – is that Canadian Blood Services is a union shop. Canadian Blood Services: the employees there are employed by CUPE. In fact, at the announcement that was made by the Health minister last week, the CUPE rep from Canadian Blood Services was on hand for the announcement.

Now, again, I've said in this Chamber before that I don't have a specific objection to labour unions. Labour unions have an important role to play in terms of representing the interests and representing collectively the needs of workers. I was once a labour union member, when I worked at the packing house in Edmonton as a student, and I think I also shared with the group that a labour union helped pay for a good deal of my education. So I have no reason to have an axe to grind with labour unions. But I do have an issue when jobs are being specifically protected and shielded in a union situation and when private-sector, non-unionized workers are being specifically, you know, prevented from entering a market in order to preserve and protect union jobs. I don't think that's right.

If, in fact, this is strictly, as the hon. member's office has repeatedly stated, because of a strong feeling that they should not have payment for blood products, I say, you know, that's fine. I think from a moral, ethical standpoint that's a hard position to take when you are taking blood products from paid donors in other jurisdictions and you know full well that they are paid donations and you know full well that even if we ramp up to a high extent the donations through Canadian Blood Services and that all of a sudden after a period of contracting and having fewer donor centres, they have now suddenly more donor centres – even after that and after an investment of \$100 million taxpayer dollars, you're going to have 50 per cent of the required plasma and still need to buy the other 50 per cent. I need to know whether members can stand up in the House and with absolutely, you know, clear statements say that this is not to protect CUPE union jobs at Canadian Blood Services.

If that's the case, well, that's fine. But I have to say that the past track record of this government doesn't necessarily indicate that's true. I would reference the decision made to invest \$200 million in a unionized laundry service for Alberta Health Services rather than continue to allow a private contractor to do it.

So, Madam Chair, I think that it is critically important that we take a very clear look at this. I'm going to say again and to those

who are listening who have a philosophical or a specific objection to payment for blood and blood products that I understand that. The purpose of this amendment is that for blood and plasma that is going to be used for transfusion, used in our own jurisdiction here, it would continue to be based on purely voluntary donations. It is my view that we could continue to have a sufficient voluntary donor base to meet the need.

But I have a problem when we have a situation where we have the potential to have a whole new industry employing people, diversifying our economy, and have new jobs created, have new investment, and, specifically, have plasma that is collected, processed, and the products produced here in Canada. That's not being done currently. Instead, we're taking taxpayers' dollars and paying highly profitable American pharmaceutical corporations, big pharma, which I know for a lot of people is something that they're not particularly keen on supporting, and we're taking taxpayers' dollars to keep big pharma profitable.

You know, the other thing that was talked about by the Health minister was that these products shouldn't be sold to the highest bidder. Well, in point of fact, Canada is one of the highest bidders right now because of our demand for plasma products and the fact that we simply don't have very many plasma products because we don't have the processing facilities here. If we're ever going to have the processing facilities here, if we're ever going to be in a situation where we can have Canadian plasma from Canadian donors, whether they're paid or voluntary, but Canadian plasma from Canadian donors, used to treat Canadian patients, that has been processed in a Canadian facility, the only way we're going to do that is if we have sufficient plasma that is collected.

I do not have a level of faith in Canadian Blood Services, given their past track record, that they will be able to build up the voluntary donor base to allow that to happen. Part of that is borne out by the experience in other countries. Canadian Blood Services, as I stated this morning, has only achieved roughly half the donor rate as other nations that have a paid and a voluntary parallel system. So to somehow now make the leap of faith that Canadian Blood Services is going to be able to do what no other nation has been able to do, what no other country, no other blood service anywhere in the world has been able to do, and make Canada self-sufficient in plasma donations for all purposes – you'll forgive me if I'm a bit skeptical about that.

In my view, it would make sense to do what many other provinces have done – B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick, and it's being considered for other provinces – to not shut down plasma donations that can then be used for Canadian patients, that can then be processed in Canadian facilities, which are yet to be built. I recognize that, but once those facilities are built, we will then have that opportunity here locally. I think that's something we shouldn't just shut down in its tracks. In fact, that's something that we should at least allow for. This amendment does that. This amendment at the same time preserves and recognizes the voluntary system for both transfusions of plasma and for blood.

For that reason, Madam Chair, I would encourage members of the Assembly to support this amendment to this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. Are there any members wishing to speak?

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm very disappointed in the government side. I am disappointed that they do not desire to diversify our economy here in Alberta. I am disappointed that they have no support for the biomedical industry. I am disappointed that the Health minister has denied so many people from getting medications and other treatments that are only available in the United States and that given the opportunity to possibly do something to attract these very industries that can provide these life-saving adjuncts and medications, they still say no.

This is bigger than plasma. This is bigger than blood. We are talking about stem cells and so many other things. Stem cells alone are demonstrating to be a huge, huge breakthrough in medical therapies and treatments, and it would be so great to see an industry here in Alberta, where we would be the ones trying to solve all these ailments that impair us.

4:40

Madam Chair, I'm also disappointed in the government's comments about, you know, the fee-for-service aspect. I couldn't help but notice in this legislation that there is one group that is possibly allowed to do pay for service, and that is Canadian Blood Services. They're totally exempt from this. In my mind there are concerns about that.

But recognizing that oversight, we also have to recognize that there are other oversights in this, and that is that at the heart of this we don't want the people who are actually donating these fluids – the blood, the plasma – to be victims in all this.

With that, I would like to move an amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Your amendment will be referred to as A4. If you can just wait till I have the original, and then please go ahead.

Mr. Yao: You know, it's interesting to note that provinces like Ontario and Quebec, that have banned payment for these products, made these rules a long time ago, over 20 years ago, when the report was released. Technology has changed. We are doing more. We have mapped out the genome. We've been experimenting more and more with even manipulating viruses into helping the body and to killing these cancers and whatnot. A member from across the way even pointed out that they still have old stereotypes of people, and that is why he cannot donate blood. These are ancient stereotypes that just don't exist, and it's unfortunate. We need to make sure that the donors in this case aren't affected in a negative fashion.

I move that Bill 3, the Voluntary Blood Donations Act, be amended in section 7 by adding the following after subsection (5):

(6) For greater clarity, an individual from whom blood is collected by an individual or corporation that contravenes section 2 is not guilty of an offence under this Act.

To clarify, we currently will fine companies that pay or offer to pay for these products from people. We also have to make sure that the people themselves aren't fined and penalized for this.

With that, I ask the government side to consider this and ensure that the people who are donating aren't held guilty under the law.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A4 as proposed by the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo? The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to thank the member for bringing forth this amendment. You know, I think that his dedication to clarity is important. To be clear, the phrasing of this legislation already indicates that the prohibition and subsequent

punishment would not fall to the individuals who are motivated to accept payment for their plasma but rather to the entity that would seek to buy it. Though this amendment is a little redundant, we understand that it is in keeping with the spirit of the bill, and I would encourage all my colleagues in the House to vote in support of this.

I would however like to remind the member that there is no domestically owned or operated fractionation in Canada at this time, and the legislation, as we've stated numerous times today, has absolutely no bearing on the ability for a private company to come to Alberta, as we encourage them to do.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A4 carried]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 3 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 1

An Act to Reduce School Fees

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour to stand up and support this very important bill. I know we had some really important discussions a few days ago. Like I said before – I think it bears repeating – this is something that I hear all the time from parents. Every September they're thinking: how am I going to pay this bill? When people have large families, the bills add up very quickly. You know, sometimes families are wondering, when they have to buy back-to-school clothing. They may have gone on a summer vacation, so money can be tight around that time of year. This government is devoted to making life more affordable for Albertans by lowering their school fees.

Everybody has a right to a public education. One of the most fair ways that we can ensure all our children get the best possible education is through a fair taxation system. We obviously have to be very prudent and careful with taxes, and I'm proud to say that Alberta has the lowest taxes in Canada. We have a nearly \$9 billion tax advantage over the next lowest taxed province. The folks on the opposite side will idolize Saskatchewan, but we just heard today, or I read it in the news, that the Premier there is quoted as saying that people aren't going to like the Saskatchewan budget. I'm paraphrasing, but those were roughly his words. They're also contemplating increasing their provincial sales tax there, Madam Chair.

When provinces go through difficult times, there are multiple approaches that governments can take. We've seen the approach that the third party took when they were in government. They downloaded those costs to families. They sort of hid them in a way. One of the reasons that we ended up with school fees in the first place is because, despite their best intentions – like, school boards

have done an admirable job dealing with the situation that they were given by the previous government. But part of the problem was that there was no sustainable or predictable funding for school boards, so school boards were kind of forced into a position where with the flat tax, that the Conservatives had, it gave tax breaks to their wealthy friends but downloaded those costs to families.

4:50

This is something I hear they may be planning to do again with the flat tax. Instead of lowering school fees for hard-working families, they'd rather give tax cuts to profitable corporations. Madam Chair, this was something that we ran on as one of our election platforms, bringing in a fair corporate tax and also bringing in a fair progressive tax. You know, we were up front with Albertans about this, and I don't apologize for that. I think we deserve a fair taxation system. Like I said earlier, we obviously need to be careful about that. We need to maintain an advantage here in Alberta, and we've done that, so that's something that we can be proud of.

I guess what I'm trying to get at is that the money to pay for schools has to come from somewhere, and the way that the former Conservative government kind of managed to hide those things and make it look like they had artificially low taxes was by kind of taxing people on the other end and not calling it a tax. They called it a school fee.

You know, I don't have kids, but I think I deserve to pay my fair share of transportation costs and material costs because I know that it gets us a better kind of society, where kids grow up to get good jobs. I know that investing in our children's education is one of the most important investments a government can make in their province, and I'm proud of that, Madam Chair. I think it's something that we've done a really good job in. It's about setting your priorities. I would rather help make life more affordable for all Albertans by acting to reduce school fees and by having a fair taxation system.

We know that when kids get a good education, they grow up and tend to get good jobs, and when people have good jobs, they tend to be more healthy, so they tend to use the health care system less and rely on other social supports less. Socioeconomic status is highly linked to health outcomes. I've heard various figures, but the one I recall is that for every dollar we invest in public education, we save \$7 down the road on avoided costs to do with social security, health care, crime, all these kinds of things. You know, we refer to things as investments, and I think that's a good way to look at it because, sure, it costs us money, but it also avoids costing us money down the road.

It's kind of like, you know, when you're thinking about making a financial investment. You could buy a GIC that has a low interest rate, or you could pay off your mortgage, that may have a higher interest rate. Sometimes people think: well, I'm going to buy a GIC; it's a sure thing. But on the other side, if you think about a mortgage, you're going to owe that interest on the mortgage anyway, so you might as well pay down the mortgage to save. You actually get a higher return. It's kind of counterintuitive thinking.

Mrs. Aheer: That's a budget. It's a good idea.

Mr. Westhead: Yeah. Thank you. It is. Providing free financial advice here in the Legislature. I appreciate that. I'm not a financial adviser, but I do know about, you know, making wise investments in terms of: should you pay your mortgage down, or should you buy a GIC that has a lower interest rate than a mortgage?

You know, school fees are only one element of a good investment in our education system. Another good investment is ensuring that

we're funding for student enrolment to make sure that children have teachers in their classrooms. When we build these new schools, it costs money to build the schools – that's for sure – but they're something we need anyway. Alberta is a growing province, and when we build the schools, it's not enough just to have a building; you have to have people to run the buildings: janitors, principals, administration staff, educational support staff. These aren't optional things, Madam Chair. These are things that Alberta needs.

Even folks on the opposite side know that. They're good people, too. They know that they want to invest in education. I think everyone agrees on that. That's not what's in disagreement. It's a disagreement of sort of, I suppose: when do you pay the bill? My preference and I think the preference – I'd hazard a guess – of folks on this side is that because we need these things now, it makes sense to create jobs by building the schools. We know that there's an unemployment situation in our province, and by investing in infrastructure, it creates good jobs for folks.

Another thing that's really interesting in this kind of economy that we find ourselves in is that the bids for these construction projects are coming in much lower than we expected. If I recall correctly, I think the Minister of Education said that it was something around 10 per cent lower in terms of how low the bids are coming in. I can't recall that number precisely, but I think it's a countercyclical way of ensuring that we're investing in our province, creating jobs, building the things we need, and saving money all at the same time. It's a question of: when do you build these things?

I guess I'd be interested to hear from the folks in the opposition about their plan because they agree we need schools, that kids need teachers. But it's confusing for me, Madam Chair, the contradiction that I see. If you want to lower taxes, cut the spending, and build the schools all at the same time, those things seem to me a little bit – like, on all three of those things, low taxes, cutting funding for operations, and building schools, I'd like to learn from the opposite members how they could do those three things all at the same time. It seems a bit mutually exclusive to me.

When we have a crash in the price of oil that's affected our bottom line in the province, it doesn't mean that people don't still need health care and that people don't need education. When someone needs surgery, they don't want to be told: I'm sorry, but we don't have nurses for you because the oil price is low, so we've closed the hospitals for the day. It probably won't happen, but I guess the question for the members on the other side is: how do you replace a \$10 billion structural deficit when the revenue system collapses?

I think the way we need to deal with that is through diversifying our economy. The Minister of Economic Development and Trade has done a remarkable job in terms of going overseas to find new markets. There's an export program that he's developed. Not only that, but the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry has also undertaken trade missions abroad where he's trying to help diversify the markets for agricultural products. There are different ways that governments can react to price shocks in the economy. We've said it before, and I think it also deserves repeating: we're trying to act as a shock absorber to our economy.

In Saskatchewan they have yet to release the details of their budget, but I think it's going to be an interesting kind of tale of two provinces. Sure, our economies are similar but different. Obviously, Alberta's economy is quite a bit bigger, but a lot of our revenue is based on nonrenewable resources. The Saskatchewan government is going to take a certain approach and we're going to take a certain approach, and we can kind of see how those different approaches play out in the different provinces. It's going to be a good case study

to see how things happen in Saskatchewan and how things happen here in Alberta.

I guess one other point I'd like to make before I conclude, Madam Chair, is that I think – sorry. I lost my train of thought. In Saskatchewan they're trying to deal with things differently. They've talked about a PST increase, but that also puts the burden on people who can least afford it. I think there are other ways that we can look at managing this kind of environment that we're in.

I'm really proud of the Minister of Education for the initiative that it took for him to work very closely with all the different school boards to find where it makes sense to lower these school fees because of the haphazard way that the PCs left the province and with the school boards taking various approaches. It was no small task for the minister to kind of find out how best to do that, so I applaud the minister for taking that action.

5:00

Well, I thank everyone for hearing me out this afternoon. I really look forward to hearing members on all sides of the House talk about the different approaches that we can take to address the situation and how, you know, the other side might do things differently. They had a plan to eliminate school fees entirely – and that's commendable – but we've yet to see any kind of plan on how that's going to happen, so perhaps they can enlighten us as to what they would have done differently.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I have to say to the member across the way, Banff-Cochrane, that one of the things you said was that our children are a good investment. Actually, they are the investment. I couldn't agree with you more. I believe with all my heart that "investment" doesn't even begin to explain the necessity to make sure that our children have the education that they need, that the teachers have the supports that they need, that we have these buildings to hold our children as they go to school. I one hundred per cent agree with what the member said.

I would also like to say that just because a person doesn't have children doesn't necessarily mean that they don't have an excellent opinion and a perception about what should happen with education in this province. We need all voices and all thoughts on this to make sure that we're able to move the dial on what needs to happen with education, and that means that there are going to be a lot of different voices at the table. It's very, very necessary.

Yesterday we saw some amazing, tremendous actually, collaboration between the government and the opposition on my colleague's Bill 202, regarding the nonconsensual pictures. That was just fantastic. Education is like that, too. It shouldn't be politicized. I think that's happened in the past. When it comes to our kids, I just think we need to get back to the basics of what it is that we're trying to accomplish here.

As you can probably tell and as I've said very, very vocally and publicly, I support this bill, so I'm hoping that that trend will continue today and in the future because I'd like to bring forward some questions regarding the bill, an Act to Reduce School Fees. Like I said, I've been extremely public about how glad I was to see this government following through with their election promise – even though it's not the full 50 per cent, it's a start – on mandatory school fees. Quite frankly, I mean, within the Wildrose we would love to see that go even further. As you know, we campaigned on that, to eliminate mandatory school fees altogether. That's one of our policies and one that we would intend to fulfill given the

privilege of sitting where you are right now, as government, in the not-too-distant future.

As I said before, Bill 1 is a great start, and on behalf of Albertans – like all of us, I have the amazing opportunity to reach out and speak to people and get their feedback. So I'm hoping that some of the questions that I'm asking will stimulate these conversations to keep the momentum going on something that's a good start. The first question that I have is around the efficiencies that have been found. The Member for Banff-Cochrane was mentioning, you know, that you have to decide where your investments are going to be. We're talking about \$54 million in efficiencies that have been found to fund the reduction in school fees. In light of an economic downturn and even with the green shoots of optimism that our Minister of Finance put forward, I would like to know and I'm sure Albertans would love to know: where have the efficiencies come from?

I think this is a great opportunity for the government to shed some light on that and share with all of us how that happened. As we all know, it's easy to say those words and hope that no one asks any questions on how you get from point A to point B, but I'm asking. I would love to understand where those efficiencies came from. It's a big chunk of change. So congratulations, but we'd love to understand it because as we go forward, a lot of this will shake out in the wash. There are other questions around that, too, as to how those dollars are going to be spent.

If we're looking at school boards – and the member previous, who spoke on this, talked about how school boards had done a pretty good job and that they need stable funding. The school boards are concerned that they might actually be tasked with finding these efficiencies. Are they going to be seeing funding reductions to other programs in order to compensate for this? This is a question that – I've received quite a few about that.

I have to say to the Minister of Education that I'm so happy to see a bill enacted that attempts to follow the government mandate of making life better for Albertans – it's great, and this shows that – and that, if enacted, will take the appropriate steps to reduce some costs for families. I just wish that the legislation, this reduction in school fees, could have its maximum impact at a time when families need it the most. Unfortunately, as we all know, this is just going to make a very small dent in that. So while the bill is a small step in the right direction, let's not pat ourselves on the back too quickly. Albertans have wanted, as you know – and the minister would know this – these reductions for a long, long time. Even though this is a small reduction, given the current economic situation we very much appreciate the effort to start the process.

Madam Chair, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade only yesterday was talking about the potential for growth in this province. In addition, the government loves to tell us over and over and over again about the two pipelines that they take credit for and how this will obviously bring much-needed prosperity to our province. But, I mean, we actually need to see this critical infrastructure get in the ground and get built. So let's make sure that that happens. We can talk about the two pipelines, but let's get that going first because, obviously, with increased prosperity and with the efficiencies that the government has miraculously found, the monies to fund the reductions in the school fees at this time, I would hope that with increased prosperity and increased efficiencies, we can expect additional reductions to the school fees in the near future.

I mean, I can only assume that the government found the \$9 million to promote the climate leadership action plan. And the government is able to somehow find \$2.3 billion to basically give away to big banks for debt servicing. The member that just spoke previously talked about other governments downloading onto the

taxpayer. Well – hello? – welcome to the world of downloading. That's not acceptable. That could be anywhere from \$3,500 and up for a family. Plus, the government chooses to lose billions of dollars through the PPA debacle. That is not acceptable either.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

I would love to see the monies to fully fund education and not have families needing to foot the bill through school fees. Mr. Chair, imagine for a moment what those billions of dollars would have meant to the education system. Alberta families have entrusted this government with their hard-earned dollars. This is a tremendous, tremendous amount of trust, and unfortunately we've seen the government lose the trust of the people who elected them. Teachers have contacted me with concerns that their classroom supports are going to be cut or that new supports will not be funded as a result of the efficiencies. We are already seeing a shortage of resources to meet a huge array of students' learning needs across the province, and we want to be sure that our students are not going to suffer.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Other questions that I've heard include: is this reduction in school fees sustainable? Will school boards and parents be able to count on these lower fees for years to come? We have a start. It's getting going. We know that that's working. We know that this is happening. Are we going to be able to continue the process? It's one thing to start it right now, but are we going to be able to sustain that? More importantly, many, many people are concerned about what will be cut as a result of the reduced funding to these programs. This is again the question that comes. I would love to have some answers to these questions, to make sure that those reductions are coming through appropriately.

Another concern is that there's no clear definition of the basic instructional fees. So what we're wondering is if the fees associated with the future ready initiative such as fees related to learning outside of the classroom – field trips, technology, and a whole variety of the CTS courses and options – will be covered. If the government is committed to this idea of future ready and has a vision of preparing our students for the 21st century, these pieces of their education, I would assume, would be considered basic instructional fees and be partially refunded as well.

5:10

There have been a few other questions that have come through as well. Probably one of the biggest, one of the more prominent questions that has come through is the impact of the carbon tax on Albertans generally, of course, and on school boards specifically and how that will change the potential impact of the reduction in school fees. I've asked the question before. Was that taken into consideration in that 25 per cent? Is it considered a 25 per cent reduction in school fees when transportation is included in that? Is that technically the way that that breaks down? If we're talking about mandatory school fees, I think transportation is a different piece. Nevertheless, I would like to be able to assure Albertans that not only is it going to be sustainable but that the government has taken into consideration the fact that the carbon tax will have a direct impact on the amount of money that is going to actually impact the parents and the students.

While the government is using this bill to partially meet the promise to reduce mandatory school fees for parents, the government started this year by raising the cost of education in this province through the carbon tax. It will cost school boards tens of millions of dollars every single year, and that's money that will eventually come off the backs of parents and students. We estimate that when the carbon tax is fully implemented, at \$50 per tonne,

school boards could have an increase of nearly \$30 million per year. And busing fees as well as the cost for heat and electricity for schools will continue to climb as a direct result of the carbon tax.

It seems that through this bill the government is trying to apply a bandage to a gaping wound. On one hand you're increasing taxes and, on the other hand, insufficiently paying parents back by reducing some of the school fees. It just doesn't make a dent compared to the damage that's already been caused by other policies. If you had not placed such an onerous tax on the school boards, that ultimately will fall to the families to cover, then the impact of this reduction in school fees may have provided significant supports to families, especially now.

We have questions about the transportation fees as well. How will the transportation change, and for whom? Given that transportation costs will be increasing as a result of the carbon tax, some of the questions we have fielded from school boards include: will there be a benefit to the boards that have reduced their transportation fees already? There are already school boards that take care of this. They've already found efficiencies within their own systems where they're able to cover the transportation fees. Will all boards benefit or just those that have significant cost overruns on their transportation budget, and how is that being determined?

What happens when a school of choice actually is the only option available to meet a specific set of student learning needs? Is that going to be considered, then, a designated school or not? How are we going to determine that? I imagine that will be in some of the regulations and decisions coming forward. Will parents still bear the transportation cost to meet their child's special learning needs? I realize that there are going to be some discussions coming up about special needs and transportation. I think these are very, very important discussions, but we need to understand the dollars and cents. We need to make sure and be able to provide some clarity for families going forward that they will actually have a say in this and actually be provided for appropriately. Madam Chair, these are just some of the questions that we have been hearing from Albertans in response to this bill.

I have one additional concern. There is little or no specific detail in the bill. The government is asking us to vote on this bill, yet all the consultations with stakeholders and developing the entire set of regulations, that will provide substance to this bill, will actually happen after the bill goes through the legislative process. This is a continual pattern with this government with legislation. We're voting on a piece of legislation, but we actually have no idea of the outcomes. I'm just not completely comfortable with that. I don't think Albertans are comfortable with that. I think it would be great if the government could offer some clarity on the direction that this is going. I mean, again, I support the bill, obviously, but there's a ton of space here that things could move in a direction that may not be helpful.

We have seen how the consultation process has not worked well for the government in the past 20 months or so. So while I would love to think that the government will engage in a robust conversation with education stakeholders, including parents, I'm not so confident that this authentic discussion will help to formulate the regulations. We need to make sure that the government is providing equity across the province with respect to either the transportation or the instructional fees.

On the positive side, this is a cost savings to Alberta, \$54 million, starting the fall of 2017. These transportation changes will impact 140,000 children and their families, and the school fee changes will impact 590,000 children and their families.

I'm just hoping that the minister and the government are open to continued collaboration. I've heard that the door is open, so I fully intend to make use of that and to make sure that we continue to

collaborate on this to make sure that the direction goes in a way that we can collaboratively go together and make sure that we're reaching out to all these families and school boards.

So while I still have questions and concerns, I do support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the hon. member for her questions. There were quite a few in there, you know, but I did write them down the first time, so I think that between the two we can have an exchange of information that helps to clarify Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, here in the province of Alberta. The title sort of really captures it very well. We're not eliminating school fees in the province of Alberta, but it's an act to reduce school fees and also to get a handle on the school fee landscape across the province.

For many years school boards were trying very hard to build their budgets and to deliver the high quality of education for which we have a very strong reputation across the country and around the world. But with the absence of long-term funding guarantees, the capacity to plan on long-term funding, school boards did what they could, and you ended up with this very uneven landscape of school fees across the province. So this is an act to reduce school fees, but really it's an act to rationalize the school fees situation here in the province of Alberta, too.

I mean, that's obviously going to be a process, and it's a process that I look forward to working on with everybody. It's a way, you know, not dissimilar to curriculum reform, where you open the doors and you allow people to give you the information of individual circumstances and individual schools and school boards and districts, and then we start to build something that's equitable and sustainable and actually has a meaningful reduction to the pocketbooks of Alberta families with children.

I believe that we have made a very, you know, significant stride here in difficult economic circumstances. Finding \$54 million is not easy at the best of times, so this is a reach into basic instructional fees and a reach into some of the busing circumstances that we see in the province as well. I won't pretend that it is an all-inclusive sort of reach into either of those categories, but it's certainly, I think, a strategic way of doing so.

From the beginning I had always said that we were canvassing all of our school boards and looking for some things in common that we could reduce school fees on. Basic instructional fees: I mean, there are lots of definitions of that out there in the province, but we have, by collecting information, looked for some common grounds between the 61 school boards that we are targeting in this particular bill. Those definitions seem to be common.

5:20

Yes, there are quite wide variations in what people do charge in this category. I do recognize that, but part of the way by which we can sort of clean up the situation, as I've been saying, is by saying: okay; we're going to have a category of fees that we eliminate, and then over time, over the next number of years, we look for a better way to tackle it and perhaps a better way to fund as well over time. I mean, these will all be discussions that we'll have.

I'm just going to try some of these questions that the hon. member did put forward and see if I can answer them to her satisfaction. The first one: do all school boards benefit from this, or is it just some? All children with families in school in the 61 school boards will benefit as instructional supplies and material fees are charged by all boards. All boards with the exception of two will

benefit as they charged fees in the reporting category that we used for the funding in the 2017-18 school year. We will have discussions with those other two boards to ensure that they have some flow of income for another initiative. Those two school boards in northern Alberta had made some provision to eliminate these instructional supply and material fees before, so we are doing so to make sure that they're not left out.

You know, of course, in the long-term, three-year plan we have put aside \$45 million over the next two years for the school fee strategy, but we just felt as a caucus and as a government that we needed to get started on this sooner rather than later because, of course, it'll take a while to sort through many of these other categories of fees. Plus, for parents and guardians and people who are putting up the money every fall, it is onerous. I mean, you have circumstances where people are paying hundreds of dollars or, if you have two or three kids, even more, a thousand more dollars, to school fees in the fall, so we thought we could get going on this a year sooner than we had planned. I feel really good about that choice, and I think that we've hit a chord, judging from the comments from all members, that we probably have done the right thing at the right time.

There are about 15 boards that are charging a fee for eligible transported students, about 140,000 students altogether, so it's these boards who will receive some funding to offset this revenue. Again, this is a start. It's not like we're eliminating school bus fees, but it's looking at a category that seemed, Madam Chair, most obvious to both myself and our department and those that I explained it to. That is a category of students that are travelling by bus to their eligible school. Of course, when I thought of the basic principle of, you know, public education, we don't have barriers to that basic education. Well, I thought that instructional supply and materials are very basic, and getting to that school, if you need to take a bus with the 2.4 kilometre designation, again, is an obvious thing that you need to get to school to learn.

Using that measuring stick, I think we hit it looking for the most kids, 660,000 kids, with the instructional supply and materials and with the eligible bus category, which will positively affect about 140,000 kids, too. Again, it's a start. I think it's quite a clever start, and we will carry on with that in close discussion with the public, with school boards, parents, teachers, and here in the Assembly Chamber.

Another question I heard, just looking through here – oh, you had the one, of course, on the efficiencies to pay for the bill. Will we see ongoing costs to cover the bill? We review our programming every year to see how our funds are best allocated. As we said, this is about a \$54 million savings for families. Now, it's important, Madam Chair, to always note that our education budget cycle is different from the government because we go September to September and the government goes March to March. So this year to pay for An Act to Reduce School Fees is a \$31.5 million responsibility. From that source of funding we in Alberta Education found efficiencies to the amount of about \$15 million, which include staff attrition and hiring restraints, a reduction in department travel and related costs, a reduction in supply costs, and review of existing grants and contracts with Education partners.

These reductions do not affect funding to school boards, so we are not passing those reductions on to school boards. This is very important information to repeat over and over again because there have been some people, I know, saying that this will be a cut to the classroom teachers and that they'll have to lay off people. That's not true, Madam Chair. We are making these reductions in Alberta Education through the Department of Education. It was not an easy process, but of course the results, as we can all see, everybody likes quite a lot.

We also have one grant reduction, and this is a \$5.6 million grant reduction to the credit enrolment unit cap. For all of us who may not know what that was or what it is, it is the method by which we fund high school credits. Probably everybody here went to high school, I'm guessing. You have credits for high school courses: five credits and three credits and so forth. Some people spend many years in high school, as I heard someone point out. That's great. Good for you. Anyway, the current boards – the enrolment unit cap that people were having allowed high school students to take up to 60 credits per year, but we saw that the average, Madam Chair, was about 37. I believe I moved it to 45, so that amounted to a savings of \$5.6 million in our annualized budget, that is a grant reduction.

Now, it should be noted, Madam Chair, that this reduction – there's also a phenomenon or an evolution of funding for high schools. High schools are moving away from the credits and to what we call high school redesign. It's been a very successful program. In fact, we've reached a point now where we have more high schools in high school redesign than we have using the strict credit system. So for all of those schools, you know, they don't see, really, a reduction at all, and then spread over the rest of the school system we see about a \$5.6 million reduction there. It is a reduction in grants. I mean, I had to look very carefully at each of the grants that we do provide for annualized funding for schools, and I found that this would be a place where we could go. That's where we found that.

Then the other \$10.9 million are from savings from other ministries and then reallocated to Education, so you see other efficiencies coming through from various ministries across the GOA. This is the means by which we could finance this through Treasury Board and direct it back to parents – right? – and to reduce school fees.

The future fiscal plan already allocates, Madam Chair, \$45 million annually for the reduction of fees, but, you know, we will obviously work to find the rest on an ongoing basis, which is perhaps the answer to the second question in regard to: is this a one-time thing, or is it moving forward? Yes, it is the new normal for school fees here in the province of Alberta, and it's part of our initiative over time to further reduce school fees and to rationalize the system in general. We all know that school fees were too high – right? – and this will be an ongoing budget line in Education and across the government of Alberta. It's not something that just comes and goes and flashes in the pan, not at all. In fact, if anything, it's the signalling of working even more on school fees to reduce schools fees here in the province of Alberta.

5:30

I mean, that's great. That's good news for people with kids. You know, it's a responsibility that we have. At various times we have children going through school, and we all sort of pitch in together in order to make sure that our kids get the best education and that it's affordable. This downloading of school fees onto Alberta families over the last number of years – a decade, for sure; it's been quite marked, probably, for the last 20 years – the gradual increase in school fees have not been acceptable to the pocketbooks of Alberta families.

But I think, you know, in regard to ideology – right? – that we have public schools, and public schools are a place where regardless of your ability to pay, you get the very highest quality of education possible. I mean, I confess here now, Madam Chair, that I am ideological, and I believe that publicly funded education must be of the very highest quality in the province of Alberta and that all students will have access to that public education regardless of their ability to pay.

It sounds like not such a scary ideology, really. I mean, it's quite practical. I can see many beneficiaries of that ideology play out

here, with the high quality of education and learnedness of our caucus and of members opposite as well.

An Hon. Member: Exhibit A.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Perhaps I'm exhibit A. I was in public school, of course, K to 12. There wasn't even a kindergarten when I went to school. There was just 1 to 12.

An Hon. Member: Dinosaurs.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. We were fighting dinosaurs in the morning, and then – you know, that was kindergarten, I guess.

Anyway, let's stay on topic, shall we? The basic instructional fee. We defined it as including textbooks, workbooks, printing and paper costs, and so forth.

In regard to these other fees, you know, the member, obviously a fine product of public education as well, asked a very succinct question: what are we doing, then, with all of these future ready initiatives and dual credit programming and so forth? We are pushing in that direction, and we know that there's a definite benefit in that direction, but we do incur extra costs as a result. Yes, we will look at those things as we move forward, but it's not cheap, by any means.

I think that every time we weigh an individual fee, we have to look at, of course: is it essential to the instruction of that particular course and is it essential to the education of that person within the boundaries of what we consider public education as well? I mean, we don't want to build a school fee system that obstructs schools and school boards from charging some extra fees for services that parents might want to have for their kids like field trips or specialized sports programs and things like that. A good, balanced public education doesn't preclude those things from being offered, but I think we have to be very careful to not overstep people's expectations as to whether we pay for some of those fees as well.

Another question at the tip of many people's tongues – I think it came out a little bit wrong in the media for a little while there, and we corrected it, but let me correct it again – is that this is not eliminating lunchroom fees at this time either. An Act to Reduce School Fees does not cover lunchroom fees. I know that, again, there's lots of room for improvement in rationalizing lunchroom fees across the province. We have quite wide variations in what is charged for lunchroom fees. Some schools don't charge them at all, and some people charge a lot. You know, we need to obviously direct our attention to that as well, Madam Chair. But Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, here in the spring of 2017 does not address the school lunchroom fee situation, save to say that it does address the direction not in terms of reduction but of us making a proper analysis of those school fees and how they are charged, including lunchroom fees, around the province.

Other issues or questions that the hon. member asked. She asked about the carbon levy and its effect on school boards and families. I mean, it's all good fun to have numbers and throw them around, but I think we should be very careful with those things. You know, I've asked all of our school boards to give us an estimation of what that carbon line in their budgets will be, so we will put that information out. It will be their assessments; it won't be mine. As we get that, then let's use those numbers because – I won't even say the number you said, but . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Thirty million.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Right. Okay. It's not really that at all. I mean, we don't know. We'll see when it comes out through the system.

But part of the climate leadership initiative is to ensure that there's universality in the way that we attack this, and on a very practical

level what better place for us to start on the education process – indeed, our own children probably could educate many of us on these issues better than the other way around – than in our schools, right? It's the perfect place for a climate leadership strategy to reside.

Also, of course, what better place to start to make practical reductions in the use of energy in the province of Alberta than in those public institutions where we pay those energy bills, right? Obviously, schools, with their lights and their heat and their buses and so forth: what a great place to aim that and to look for efficiencies and to reduce those bills, because we end up paying those bills anyway, right? We might as well use some of those funds to attack that. You know, you save money. I mean, I'm all for reducing GHGs and so forth, but I'm definitely for saving public monies and reducing the bills that school boards have to pay, so it's a good place for it to be.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees. In 2015 our government campaigned on making life more affordable for families. Reducing school fees was an important part of that platform, and I'm happy to see, with Bill 1, that we are doing exactly that. By reducing instructional materials and busing fees, we will save Alberta households \$54 million, which represents around a 25 per cent reduction in the overall cost of sending a child to school, which will affect about 600,000 students.

I can tell you, Madam Chair, that during the 2015 election I had the opportunity to meet with thousands of constituents in Edmonton-Meadowlark. Since then I have met with thousands more – on their doorsteps, in their homes, at local events – to hear more about their priorities, and I can tell you that the majority of them are and have been for a very long time concerned with the rising cost of school fees.

Madam Chair, though I don't have any children myself yet, I know first-hand the impact that school fees have on families in our community. I was raised by a single mother until about the age of 10, and I will add that she was very, very young. To put it into perspective for the House, she turned 40 this year. I know she made a lot of sacrifices along the way to give me a good quality of life, but there were many times when she had to make tough decisions when it came to budgeting, especially as she put herself through university as I went through the K to 12 education system.

When we talk about reducing the cost of education for Alberta families, we need to remember the incredibly diverse circumstances that families in our province face. Consider the cost to a new Canadian, a single mother or father, a parent with disabilities, the caregiver of a child with disabilities, or a large family that has struggled through the economic downturn. Each story is different, but the importance of ensuring our kids are in those classrooms stays the same.

Of course, Bill 1 is not the first initiative put forward by the government to make life easier for Albertans when it comes to education. We've seen pilot projects for school nutrition programs roll out. We've seen tuition freezes for three years in a row now and a commitment to do it again next year thanks to our government. Most importantly, we saw stable funding for population growth across our province. Though these initiatives might not sound like front-page news to the Assembly, I have seen the impact that they have had on my community.

When a constituent comes through my office concerned about the supports that they are getting in the classroom, I can't help but

imagine how much worse it may have been under our social conservative opposition parties. We heard the Member for Calgary-Hays stand up in this Legislature and tell us that we are not doing enough, that in two years of our mandate this government has not done enough. Well, Madam Chair, where was he over the last many decades when our infrastructure for our classrooms was crumbling and the cost of inflation on our students and our families continued to rise? I didn't hear them complaining then. He was in this government making those decisions. We heard their stance during the last election, Madam Chair: cut front-line staff, support market modifiers for postsecondary students, increase something like 57 taxes, including a health care levy that would go into general revenue.

5:40

The fact is that it looks like someone on that side of the House might be stepping down to force a by-election, which will cost our system upwards of hundreds of thousands of dollars – that is money taken away from our classrooms, Madam Chair – not to mention that the opposition parties are hoping to replace one of their members with an ex-MP who also stepped down, forcing a by-election. After that happens, they will merge and ride into the sunset. I look forward to it.

My point here, Madam Chair, is that while the opposition fights over who is the natural-born leader of our province to lead their united social conservative party into the sunset, we as a government, as a social democratic government, are moving to make life better for Albertans. Since the introduction of this bill I've been having discussions with families in Edmonton-Meadowlark and across this province, and I've heard some of them talking that they may save upwards of \$1,000 per year, depending on the size of their family. I am very proud of our Education minister moving to make these changes, among many other changes that we've seen so far, and of the conversations that will continue into the future about making life more affordable for Albertans. I just would like to thank him for bringing this legislation forward, thank my colleagues for the continued discussions that we have about making life more affordable for Albertans.

I stand here to support Bill 1, and I would encourage all of my colleagues to do so as well.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. To start, the minister talked briefly about credits, and most people will receive about 35 credits per year. Myself, because I was in drama and band and French immersion, I usually received approximately 51 credits, the one extra credit being from psychology because that's three credits per term, which adds up to six credits. I would actually be kind of depressed that I wouldn't be getting those extra six credits. However, I understand the need to find good places where we can reserve money so we can do things like Bill 1.

Now, I am very proud of Bill 1. Bill 1 is great for teachers, and it's great for students, and it's fantastic for all the parents who live in my riding as well. When I was running for election, I heard from many families asking me . . . [interjections] I know there's a lot of noise coming from the other side, but I'll try to speak a bit louder while they try to have their little side conversations.

I was very proud to stand on the doorsteps and talk to families in my constituency of Calgary-Hawkwood about reducing school fees. That was top of mind for many parents, young parents in my riding who have always had trouble paying those bills.

To be quite honest, my family could have greatly benefited from having a reduction in school fees. In 1996 – I'm going to date

myself – I was two years old, and my parents got divorced. I see the Clerk just holding his head in his hands. I know. I am fairly young. However, in 1996 my parents did get divorced. For me, I didn't notice. I was two years old. I was going to preschool at the time. I have two older siblings, who were both going to school. For my mom, who was a teacher who recently separated – and her mother, my grandmother, died later that year – it was very difficult to pay those school fees.

As a teacher my mom took a large pay cut because of the cuts by Ralph Klein. Because of those cuts, she was worried about putting food on the table. She was worried about clothing us and feeding us and then had these school fees right in September, when all of us were trying to go to school. I didn't know any different because, again: two. My sister was telling me that it was very emotional. She remembers my mother crying, trying to figure out how she was going to pay these school fees, how she was going to feed and clothe us while trying to go through a divorce. That's an incredible hardship to go through.

As a teacher she felt she needed to pay those school fees. She felt like if she signed the form saying that she couldn't afford those school fees, it was going to reflect poorly on her and therefore reflect poorly on Alberta Education. She didn't want to do that even though it would have greatly helped us. I wouldn't say that she was too proud to do it, but in the long run she was probably embarrassed because she didn't want to do that. She didn't want what the opposition calls a handout even though it's not a handout. It's more of a hand up. Those school fees are very burdensome. They are very difficult to pay. That's why I'm so proud of Bill 1, which will finally reduce school fees at least 25 per cent for the majority of Albertans.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

Being a public servant and going to schools with kids who are in classrooms of over 40 kids – when I was in high school, in my English class, if every child showed up, there weren't enough chairs. Somebody had to either stand or sit on the ground, and that was directly because of the cuts from the previous government. That was directly from the cuts from the '90s and early 2000s that they put in place, cutting salaries of teachers, and then, on top of that, cutting resources for schools, cutting resources for hospitals and nurses. Almost every public service in this province took a cut just because they wanted to balance the budget for no other reason than to be able to hold up a sign that said: we balanced the budget. Balancing the budget means nothing if you have crumbling infrastructure, if you have crumbling schools, and if your classrooms are too large to even be able to teach all the children that are in those schools.

I am so proud to be part of a government that is careful about schools, that is making sure that all schools are funded equally, making sure that all schools are funded properly, making sure that hospitals are not crumbling, making sure we're not destroying hospitals. That's also another important thing, destroying things that we desperately need. I don't see why there was a reason to destroy the Calgary General hospital. It's a little bit off topic. Sorry. I'm just kind of going off. But destroying the Calgary General hospital is kind of a giant metaphor for what the Klein government did to my family and to many Albertans.

That's something I never want to see in this province again. I ran to make sure that Alberta Education was fully funded; to make sure that when children go to school, they feel safe and cared for; to make sure that teachers feel respected by their government; and to make sure that teachers have enough resources to teach students. These aren't people that go to work just for an extra paycheque.

They go to work because they care about the students. They go to work because they really want to make this province a better place, and that was the way they could do it. Cutting teachers, cutting resources for schools: that is something that I will never want to do as an MLA, and I never plan on doing that as an MLA.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Now, the previous government had a huge culture of disrespecting students and teachers. I remember that back when I was in high school, Madam Chair, I received a letter from the then Education minister, which was Thomas Lukaszuk, and he sent this to every student in the province. It said: if you have any ideas on how to improve Alberta Education, on how to help us move forward, please send them; either e-mail us or phone us or tweet us, and we'd be happy to receive those ideas. Then I, being a budding grade 11 or 12 student – I don't know exactly which year it was now – decided to tweet then Minister Lukaszuk and tell him exactly what I thought would be great for Alberta Education. [interjection] I know the Member for Calgary-Lougheed just yelled out "names." However, because he is a previous member, not a current member, I'm allowed to use his name.

I received that letter from Minister Lukaszuk and sent out about five tweets saying what we needed to do to improve Alberta Education. I put things like repeal Bill 44, which made it a human rights violation for teachers to talk about sexual orientation, sexuality, or religion in the classrooms without having written permission from a parent, which, really, was homophobic and discriminatory against LGBTQ-plus Albertans. On top of that, I said to add resources for schools, to build more schools so that when I went to school, I didn't have to sit in a classroom with 40 other kids, with people sitting on the floor. And then I said a bunch of other things.

5:50

Then he replied to me: that was a large number of tweets; did you save time for homework? It just showed how that government did not care about students and did not actually care about the ideas of youth. He was politically posturing, saying, "We care about education; we care about what you have to say," but in reality he just wanted to send a letter to say that he's the Minister of Education. I could not stand that, and that is why I ran in politics.

I ran in politics so that I could put bills forward like Bill 1, support Bill 1 because that is what we need in this province. We need more things like Bill 1. We need to help parents. We need to help teachers and nurses and students and all Albertans, help them have a real education, whether it be advanced education or K to 12 education. It's very important that we actually put these bills forward, that we give a hand up to these parents, and make sure that these students and these schools are not treated the same way that they were treated by the previous government.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll have my seat now.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to clarify a couple of things for the previous speaker from Calgary-Hawkwood, talking about the credits grant reduction. This was the only grant reduction that we did utilize in Education to pay for this Bill 1. It's a reduction of credits. Currently school boards could account for one student getting 60 credits in a year, so we've reduced it to 45, okay? The average I saw across the province, including summer school, was 37, so I thought 45 was still pretty good because I know

myself as a teacher that it's pretty rare for students to achieve that many credits. You can be taking some extraordinary programming, which can help. Sometimes people take summer school, and that tops it up, but with 45 I still think we can probably cover it off in a reasonable way. So I just wanted to clarify that.

Also, you know, when we were talking about specific questions about funding and buses, I had a question in regard to transportation service obligations – right? – so school boards that might choose to use municipal transit as their mode of transportation. It does not change the definition of eligible students, taking your school of choice that might be further away, but that is not covered by this, Madam Chair. I know that this is a bit of a sensitive topic, but again we're working within the parameters of a certain expenditure, a not insignificant expenditure of about \$54 million. But if you start to sort of branch that circle out, let's say, for people picking a school of choice – let's say that you're going across town to take German immersion or something like that – then, no, that is not covered under this bill. Again, we need to have clarity on that.

I know that there's lots of room for us to carry on with building more school fee reform, but that's where we're at now. I think we've taken a good stab at it. It doesn't cover all busing. It doesn't cover all school fees. But, then, that would have been quite a bit more money, and I think we all know that that's not something in large supply at this juncture for the government of Alberta and for parents, too, for that matter.

I just wanted to try to clarify those two pieces, and I certainly welcome more specific questions. You know, in a way Committee of the Whole is one of the best parts of the legislative process because you can have a discussion with people, and you can also sit in different chairs, so that gives you a different angle on our jobs as well.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for that, and I . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) I must now ask the committee to rise and report Bill 3 with some amendments and report progress on Bill 1.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 3. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 1. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in this report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. With a view to the hour and the wonderful progress that has been made this afternoon, I would move that we advance the clock to 6 o'clock – this is not daylight savings time; I'm just saying – and adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:57 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Introduction of Guests	401, 418
Ministerial Statements	
International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination	401
Oral Question Period	
Budget 2017	403, 405, 409
Federal Equalization and Transfer Payments	404
Home-care Services	406
Alberta Hospital Edmonton	407
Oil Price Forecasts	407
Renewable Energy Site Reclamation	408
Capital Projects in Central and Rural Alberta	408
Affordable Housing	409
Grain Disease Prevention	410
Bail Process Review	411
Members' Statements	
Nowruz	411
Bill 202	411
Government and Opposition Policies	412
Rare Disease Awareness	412
International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination	412
Local HERO Air Ambulance Service in Wood Buffalo	413
Tabling Returns and Reports	413
Orders of the Day	413
Government Motions	
Provincial Fiscal Policies	413
Member for Calgary-Hays	416, 418
Division	420
Ministry of Education Main Estimates	421
Government Bills and Orders	
Committee of the Whole	
Bill 3 Voluntary Blood Donations Act	421
Bill 1 An Act to Reduce School Fees	424

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