



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, April 6, 2017

Day 17

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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

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Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
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Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (ND),
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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
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Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
Official Opposition House Leader
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Government Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W)
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Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
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Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
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Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

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

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 6, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

If we could all bow our heads and pray or reflect, each in our own way. As we conclude our work for this week in this Assembly, allow us to return to our constituencies and be reminded of the powerful diversity that exists in our communities. These communities are home to various cultural, ethnic, and diverse people who give this province and our country its very unique and special identity. Let us embrace, recognize, celebrate, and show respect for them by finding ways in which we can agree in here.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very distinguished visitor, the consul general of Israel, Galit Baram. She's accompanied by Stan Fedun, government relations officer at the consulate in Toronto. The consul general brings a wealth of international experience to her posting in Canada, including serving as counsellor for Public Affairs and Academic Affairs at the Israeli embassy in Washington, DC, counsellor for Economic Affairs in Cairo, and most recently as director for the Department for Palestinian Affairs and Regional Cooperation. Canada and Israel are long-time friends and also share a free trade agreement. Most Albertans would be surprised to know that Israel has significant reserves of oil and gas. Alberta, of course, has considerable experience in this field and welcomes opportunities for further collaboration. I'd like to thank the consul general for her visit to Alberta and ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome to our Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a pleasure to rise again for the third day in a row to introduce part 3 of the staff, students, and parents from C.W. Perry school in the wonderful and beautiful constituency of Airdrie, which is also part of the fifth-largest school district in the entire province, the Rocky View school division. I will introduce the teachers and then the chaperones. Please rise as I call your name: Mr. Rob Saibe, Ms Katelyn Dutton, Mr. Brian Jackson, Ms Stephanie Wilson, Miss Michelle De Cruz, and chaperones Mr. Rick Roberge, Mrs. Veronica Gutierrez, Mrs. Jenifer Landels, Mr. Gary Seabrook, Mrs. Erin Forsyth – she's a relation, maybe, to our former leader – Mrs. Jamillah Folkes, Mr. Michael Stormont, Mrs. Shelley Huebner, Mr. Shane Vincent, Mrs. Sarah Hughes, and Mrs. Andrea Van Sluys. Students please rise as well and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

I realize that the Member for Airdrie has filled the galleries with students today, but I do need to check: are there any other members who have classes with us today?

Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you today to all members of the Assembly Miss Mila Pesevic and Ms Brittney Vander Linden. Mila is a grade 6 student from Dunluce school in Edmonton, and she is studying the different roles in the Alberta Legislature. Today she is visiting to learn about the project she is doing on the Speaker of the House, and of course she wants to see us all on our very best behavior. She is accompanied by her teacher, Ms Brittney Vander Linden. Mila and Brittney are seated in your gallery, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives from Strathcona county library, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary and the bookmobile's 35th. Today with us we have Sharon Siga, the CEO; Diana Balbar, the bookmobile manager; Sally Neal, communications specialist; and Leah Lewis, who is a member of the board. I would ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Calgary-Bow.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you a constituent of mine, Brian Crawford, and his mother, Venora Galon. Brian has been an off-leash ambassador since the beginning of 2013 and is a volunteer for Working Dogs Day, that is held in Calgary annually. May I say that I always look forward to this event. These talented dogs are vital in helping serve Albertans every day. His mother, Venora, lives here in Edmonton, and she is a corporate tax consultant and is also a volunteer for Working Dogs Day. I would ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly members of the Alberta Common Ground Alliance, representing some of Alberta's leading companies with buried infrastructure. Every year thousands of buried facilities are accidentally damaged by digging activities, disrupting services or, worse, causing injury or death. Research shows that over \$1 billion in damage is caused every year in Canada to buried infrastructure. April is national dig safe awareness month, and many hon. members are wearing the Dig Safe pin today and will be taking part in awareness activities. The alliance is working hard to keep Albertans safe by raising awareness. I'd like to personally remind Albertans to click before you dig for any projects affecting buried infrastructure even if it's as simple as putting a fence in your backyard. I thank the alliance for joining us and for their advocacy. If you would please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly Joe Sparling, president of the Postdoctoral Association of the University of Calgary and chair of the Canadian Association of Postdoctoral Scholars. Dr. Sparling holds a PhD in neuroscience from the University of British Columbia, researching treatments for spinal cord injuries. His postdoctoral work at the Hotchkiss Brain Institute at the University of Calgary is focused on understanding the nature of neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's. I thank Dr. Sparling for his contributions to the academy and Alberta, and I ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

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

School Nutrition Program

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has announced an expansion of its school nutrition program. It's a meal program that will help students get a healthy start to their day and help them focus on their learning. It's one way that this government is making lives better for Albertans, and I couldn't be prouder. This program will now be available to every school district in the province. That means students from every single corner of Alberta will now have fresh, nutritious meals and snacks. At some of the schools the kids themselves get to be involved in the preparation of the food.

Now, I'm so proud that this budget is funding this program's expansion, but I was shocked to learn that the Leader of the Opposition questioned the value of a wholesome nutrition program for kids. He seemed to doubt that kids ever go to school hungry. He didn't seem to understand that well-intentioned parents sometimes don't have the means to pack a healthy lunch for their kids. The Leader of the Opposition seemed to suggest we should cut this program. When the Wildrose says that Alberta can't afford school nutrition for kids, it shocks me, Mr. Speaker, because you can't balance a budget on the back of ham sandwiches and apple slices.

Mr. Speaker, I say that we can't afford a generation of kids who go through school hungry. I say that we can't afford to have kids worry about not bringing lunch rather than working on their class projects. And I say that we can't afford these heartless Wildrose and Conservatives who can't recognize after 44 years in power that there are hungry children in schools and we need to fix that. In a province like ours every single child deserves a shot at learning, with a full belly instead of a rumbling one, and I can't think of a better way to make lives better for children across Alberta.

Thank you.

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

1:40

Battle of Vimy Ridge

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The spirit of any great nation stems from great moments in their histories, moments that define them. Sadly, these moments are often conjured during war, where the true soul of a country is laid bare. For Canada no one need look any further than the Battle of Vimy Ridge to understand the defining spirit of what it means to be a Canadian.

In 1917, just 50 years removed from Confederation, our country was still considered by many of the world to be part of the British Empire. Far from home 100 years ago we had one of the greatest moments. We accomplished what had been deemed by many to be

impossible, the capture of Vimy Ridge. The French and the British both had paid a terrible toll in previous attempts to capture the ridge. The ridge had become a symbol itself of the Great War, a symbol of death and despair.

Young, wide-eyed Canadians in their olive-green uniforms trained and trained for months in preparation for this battle. This was the first time all four divisions of the Canadian Corps would work together as one Canadian unit. On that cold Easter morning, in the face of enemy fire, snow, and sleet, we lost thousands. But our soldiers advanced, and they captured the ridge piece by piece. It was an absolutely stunning victory.

Our effort was celebrated the world over as a distinctly Canadian effort. No more was Canada just a dominion of the British Empire. At Vimy Ridge a nation, the nation of Canada, was truly born. So strongly had we distinguished ourselves that when the Treaty of Versailles was signed, ending the war, we weren't included with the British Empire; we stood proudly as Canada.

It's been 100 years this weekend since that great battle. We owe everything to these brave Canadians who stood for freedom, who fought for all of us.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Chronic Wasting Disease

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Chronic wasting disease, CWD, is a highly contagious, fatal, transmissible brain disease that threatens both wildlife and the entire agricultural sector. CWD spreads among cervids – deer, elk, moose, and caribou – and persists and remains infectious in the environment. An expert scientific panel years ago confirmed that CWD came to Alberta through captive elk imported from the U.S. in the '80s. It is a sister disease to BSE, or mad cow disease, which crippled the agriculture sector in the U.K. and seriously compromised our own beef industry for a decade.

CWD is vastly more difficult to contain than BSE because the infectious prions move readily between living animals and have repeatedly actually jumped species barriers. The 2016 Alberta government update indicated that "the geographic distribution of CWD continues to expand" and now includes the Milk River, Red Deer River, North Saskatchewan River and northeast Alberta.

CWD poses a significant threat on at least two levels. The first is biological. In addition to animal-to-animal transfer, it persists in the environment and can infect other cervids through the soil and infect root systems of the plants growing in CWD-infected soils. This jeopardizes wildlife ecosystems and hunting- and wildlife-based communities such as our First Nations, who depend on deer and elk for food.

The second threat is economic. With the science and biological threats now documented, it's only a matter of time before large markets such as Europe recognize CWD as a risk to their own wildlife, their landscapes, and their economies. This may result in a ban on North American agricultural products. Without immediate action to address these risks, repercussions are enormous. Only immediate, aggressive, and co-operative interprovincial control measures will mitigate this growing risk in both sectors. We need to remember the lessons from BSE and do something to get ahead of this.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

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

Urban Development in Calgary-Klein Constituency

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Urban development is a fine balance of creating density with livability, public transportation, and maintaining safe and enjoyable green space. In Calgary's greatest riding, Calgary-Klein, a four-tower development that could be home to nearly 2,000 people is being proposed on the site of a former nine-hole golf course.

Recently the affected community associations, Highland Park and Thorncliffe Greenview, as well as several community members throughout the area and the nonprofit group Calgary River Valleys held the Rally in the Valley. The Rally in the Valley highlighted the concerns that residents have in regard to the proposed development. This development will see the removal of nearly 600 mature trees of all varieties that are home to many species of birds. The area is also a thriving wetland that serves as a stormwater management solution for north-central Calgary. Confederation Creek also runs through the area but has been vaulted for many years. It, too, helps with moving rainwater from the area.

Mr. Speaker, I know the people of these communities, and they are not NIMBYists. They believe in densification and livable, vibrant communities. They just want it done right, and they don't believe that the project should have been approved before the regional water study was available. In Edmonton the buried Mill Creek was daylighted, and the same could be done for Confederation Creek. Instead, Confederation Creek is slated to be buried beneath tonnes of backfill, potentially increasing the risk of flooding.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, an opportunity is being missed where purposeful urban planning and conservation come together to create a development that truly adds to the city of Calgary. Ultimately, the development could have been more innovative and thoughtful, and the city of Calgary should have pushed for design excellence before approving the plan. Conservation and meaningful community engagement should not be an afterthought for development but an integral part of development. Rest assured that we haven't heard the last from these communities.

Thank you.

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

Strathcona County Library 40th Anniversary

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Strathcona county library is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year. My guests today are representatives from the library's initiatives that are made possible because of them. I am proud to be part of a government that is making life better by supporting these local initiatives. The library's tagline is Your Place for Literacy, Leisure and Learning. I have personally experienced all of that and more.

I immigrated to Canada from Colombia when I was six years old, and I have fond memories of going from school to the Strathcona county library in its then temporary location of many years. I had immigrant parents who had limited money, but they always provided me with opportunities, and walking into that library was just that, with every resource at your fingertips. I found the library to be a safe, welcoming place where I could gather information about my new home, and sometimes settling into a new community is hard. The library resources and services which were not otherwise available to me allowed me to explore a new way of life and new surroundings.

I know my appreciation of the library is not unique. So many people in our community use these services. To expand its reach and to provide services to rural communities, the bookmobile was

established 35 years ago. The first bookmobile was converted from a donated school bus. In 2012 its unique design won an award for innovation in public service.

I stand here today to congratulate the organization and to thank them for the positive impact they've had on me and on our community.

Thank you.

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

Parental Choice in Education

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe the best decisions by government are made at the most local level by the people that are most directly affected, and I believe that the Charter of Rights and the Alberta Bill of Rights are trusted tools to be used to create a just society that lives in harmony. I believe that parents have the primary responsibility for making the key decisions in their minor children's lives, and while the government has the right to act and make laws, those actions and laws must represent the will of the people and respect their rights. A democratic government has the right to rule, but it is restricted by the rule of law and what would be considered reasonable in a free and democratic society.

I've been told by many Albertans that the actions of this government are very worrisome. This government supported an amendment that challenged the right of parents to a diversity of educational choice and then withdrew it under pressure from the opposition. This government used their power to deny 3,500 students and parents their school of choice, and it took the courts to force the government to address the issue in a reasonable, democratic fashion. The Minister of Education inserted himself into a locally developed course because he believed the course to be a throwback to the 1950s and therefore not what schools should be teaching modern young women. Not the minister's call. The government has threatened to defund and to deregulate two independent religious schools, and the minister has ordered schools not to inform parents under any circumstances if their children attend a GSA as if he believes the government is the guardian of those children.

While the government has a duty of protection, it cannot use that as an excuse to restrict parental authority and informed decision-making as outlined by the law. While the government has the responsibility to oversee education, it must respect the rights of parents, diversity of educational delivery, the right to equitable access to taxpayer funding for education, the right to freedom of religious belief, and the rule of law. This kind of balance, this restricted use of power, is the hallmark of democratic decision-making and one that I will defend on behalf of my constituents.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Public Service Contract Negotiations

Mr. Jean: Here is the state of Alberta today: 81,000 full-time jobs have disappeared since this government came into power; 100,000 Albertans are on unemployment insurance; and for those that have exhausted all other options, well, there are nearly 55,000 Albertans relying on income support. That's 20,000 more than just two years ago. This is what's going on outside of the dome here at the Legislature. People are suffering. Albertans are out of work and cannot afford more pay hikes and perks. Why, then, does the Premier refuse to take pay hikes off the table for the public sector?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I have said I don't know how many times now – a lot of times – our government is absolutely committed to negotiating in good faith with the good people who work hard for the people of Alberta in the best interests of Albertans and in the best interests of taxpayers. But in order to ensure that we do that well, we are also going to respect the collective bargaining process, and that is where we are going to do that job. We are not going to do it in this House with the member opposite screaming for people's heads. That gets us nowhere.

Mr. Jean: As of April 1 74 collective bargaining agreements ran out; 400 will be gone in 2017. In just two years public-sector compensation is already on course to go up by a billion dollars. A billion dollars. Alberta is on track to be \$71 billion in debt. That means billions of dollars going towards billions of dollars of interest payments every single year instead of what we need them to go towards, sustaining the public service. This is simple. We don't have any more money left. We can't risk digging ourselves into even a deeper hole. Why doesn't the Premier agree with this?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think, you know, it's interesting when the member talks about what we have money for and what we don't have money for. The member opposite wants us to move forward aggressively on giving \$600 million back to the wealthiest Albertans, who are struggling to make ends meet on \$300,000 a year, and at the same time the member opposite needs six or seven weeks to figure out if he's in support of a mere \$10 million program to feed hungry kids in school. There are choices that are being made, and I think we're making the right ones.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Average weekly earnings were nearly 4 per cent less at the end of January than when the NDP took power, Mr. Speaker. Four per cent. Life for Albertans outside of the cozy halls of this government has been brutal. I've looked families in the eyes who have lost everything, their jobs and their homes. Borrowing indefinitely with no plan to pay it back is simply wrong. It is the wrong move. We can protect jobs without driving our province further into debt. We can. Why can't the Premier just tell the public sector right now that there is no money left, freeze salaries?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the taxpayers of Alberta are really lucky . . .

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Notley: . . . that we're in the process, that we're in the chair, and that we're the ones that are leading bargaining because if the member opposite were in charge, you know what would happen? The whole bargaining process would be sent to the courts, and we'd have the Supreme Court of Canada telling us to redo it five years from now, creating a whole bunch of confusion and uncertainty for Albertans, for their families, for investors, and everyone else. Thankfully, we understand the bargaining process even though they don't. We will respect it. We will do the best we can for Albertans, and that's what they elected us to do.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Crime Prevention and Law Enforcement

Mr. Jean: The most up-to-date crime statistics available in our province show that crime is on the rise in our big cities and in our

rural areas all across Alberta. Albertans want to feel safe where they live. They want to know that when a crime is committed, the accused will see their day in court. I know the Justice minister has made progress with Crown appointments, and that is good news, but we know that that alone won't be enough. It's simply not going to be enough. What is the Premier doing to ensure that resources are properly allocated and that we reduce backlog in our courts as soon as possible?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's interesting. One question is a cut question; the next question is a spend question. It's really hard to kind of keep track of it all. Thankfully, though, we have a minister in this government, the minister in charge of Justice, who has been advocating very strongly to improve and to strengthen our system of justice to ensure that our communities are safe, that our rural communities are safe, that our courts are working better. She's done brilliant work, not yelling at the federal government but talking with the federal government, getting us judges that we've been waiting a decade for. All of this stuff is getting results for Alberta families and building security.

Mr. Jean: Actually, Mr. Speaker, it's about good management of money that doesn't belong to them; it belongs to the people of Alberta.

Recently the Justice minister talked about the importance of police spending more time on the streets and less time filling out paperwork. I think that's a good idea. I couldn't agree more. Efficient use of our existing resources is crucial to ensure that justice is actually served. We hear stories of communities trying to do what they can for law enforcement. They have now done that because of the cap on resources, Mr. Speaker. What specifically is the Premier doing to reduce red tape and time filling out paperwork so that our police can spend their time on the streets instead of filling out that paperwork?

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to get up and talk about this. In the last session we passed a bill that made it the case that warrants won't be issued for minor criminal offences so that police are not spending their time on C-Train tickets but on more serious things. Also included in that bill was a portion that allowed them to do e-ticketing so that they don't have to fill out paperwork. In addition, our Crown prosecutors will be taking over bail as a result of a bail review we did, and that will put way more police officers back out on the streets. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mr. Jean: I know there were many frustrated residents in Chipman last week after a double homicide took place. While the officers who responded to the call were able to apprehend a suspect – and I thank the RCMP for their hard work – there were serious concerns about the extended length of time it took for the officers to arrive on the scene. It diminished the feeling of safety in the community, Mr. Speaker, and I think all Albertans believe that it diminishes the feeling of security. What actions is the Premier taking to ensure that when an Albertan calls 911, help is on the way in a timely manner, especially when a violent crime is occurring?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, every Albertan deserves to feel that they live in a safe community. That's why we work very closely with the RCMP on such issues. Certainly, deployment is a matter within their jurisdiction, but one of the things that helps police the most is to ensure that they aren't spending a lot of their time at calls that are maybe not best placed with police. That's ensuring that people have access to housing. It's ensuring that people have access to education and hot lunches at that education. It also involves ensuring that they have access to the health care system. So we are making those investments to ensure that the police can be used for dangerous criminals.

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

Care Worker Safety

Mr. Nixon: Valerie Wolski was a 41-year-old care worker assigned to care for a developmentally disabled man. He had a history of aggression, especially towards females, and was a giant of a man. Pages of his file were hidden from Valerie's employer. Although it had taken several RCMP officers to previously subdue him, Valerie was left alone to supervise him. As a result, Valerie was strangled to death in 2011. It wasn't until February that the fatality inquiry was released. What has the minister done to ensure that what happened to Valerie will never happen again?

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

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the front-line workers that provide care for vulnerable individuals and disabled individuals in our province do an amazing job in supporting and protecting them. The sacrifices that they make should never mean that they aren't supported to do their job safely. These tragic, terrible events clearly highlight the importance of ensuring that we provide the safety to our staff.

You know, Mr. Speaker, in terms of supporting our care providers, we remain committed to their safety and well-being, and we remain committed to continuing to work through our ministry and with contract providers . . .

2:00

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Nixon: What happened to Valerie wasn't a new problem. There was already a recommendation to mitigate the hazards of working alone. The judge wrote, "One is left to wonder whether [Valerie] would be alive today if the recommendations made . . . back in 2008 had been followed." The ministry should be tracking and implementing the recommendations that come out of these expensive public fatality inquiries. Will the minister confirm that recommendations are being tracked, and if so, why can't even our judges find out whether her department is paying attention to these recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. Well, of course, the member opposite is absolutely right. Throughout the history of this process recommendations arising from fatality inquiries have not been tracked. That is why our government is moving forward to develop a database so that we can follow up on these recommendations, so we can track responses by both outside agencies and by government.

Mr. Nixon: The judge's fatality inquiry report rerecommended that at no time should a caseworker be assigned to a resident that the caseworker cannot physically manage, but just a few days after the report was released to the public, there was another serious attack on a caseworker at Elk Island youth ranch. Heather Vanderzee was alone and was almost murdered by two teenage boys. Will the minister please update us on the status of that rerecommendation and tell us what she is doing to make sure that our hard-working, compassionate care workers are protected and will not be killed at work?

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

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It goes without saying that we should be doing everything we can to protect the workers who make the sacrifices to take care of Albertans. You know, after that terrible event we've certainly been working with the Elk Island youth ranch, had their licence on conditional status, and are working with day-to-day oversight with them. There are a number of investigations that looked into that. The RCMP are investigating. Certainly, internally we're doing a review of policy and licensing requirements, and we will act quickly on any findings because, absolutely, we need safety for our contracted staff and we remain committed to ensuring that happens.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. leader of the third party.

Job Creation

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For months this government has been spinning like tops, trying to convince Albertans that they have a handle on the economy. The Finance minister goes on about green shoots while more Albertans than ever need public income support programs to make ends meet. According to U of C public policy more than 50,000 Albertans are currently on income supports as of January, and the numbers are only climbing. To the Premier: since your income diversification and job creation plans have failed so miserably, what are you doing so that more Albertans than ever don't need income support?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much to the member for that important question because, of course, we do know that as a result of the drop in the price of oil and the recession that our province is just trying to come out of right now, people have lost their jobs and families have lost their incomes. One of the things that this government is doing is having their backs. That's something that wouldn't happen if \$4 billion was taken out of our operating in one given year, which is exactly what the member opposite proposed to do when they introduced their draft budget. Thankfully, our government is in charge. We're doing everything we can to support Albertans, and we are continuing to work on job creation.

Mr. McIver: The government has Albertans' tax, not their backs. While government handouts might be saving some Alberta families a few bucks here and there, what they really need are jobs: good-paying, full-time jobs, not the temporary and part-time jobs this government constantly settles for. U of C researchers say that the number of people relying on income assistance is as useful an indicator of economic health as GDP or unemployment data, and by all of these measures the NDP is failing miserably. To the Premier: what do you have to say to the tens of thousands of Albertans forced to rely on income assistance because your

government has failed to create the jobs over three jobs programs that you promised? What are you going to do?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll direct the member to look at the Alberta jobs plan document, which is what our government is doing to help diversify the economy through a number of initiatives. We introduced two new historic tax credits, ones that the business community asked the previous government for for decades, which they failed to deliver on. It took a New Democrat government to listen to businesses, to come up with two tax credits that are going to help grow and diversify our economy.

Mr. McIver: The shiny magazine isn't getting people jobs, Mr. Speaker.

As we've said time and again, nobody blames the government for the price of oil. It's how they've responded that's made it so much worse for Albertans: several job creation plans that have created no jobs, an economic diversification strategy that is relying on the craft brewing industry to pull all of us out of the recession, reckless and irresponsible spending today at the expense of the prosperity of our children and grandchildren. We all like beer, Premier, but don't you think it's time that some of the other economy got some help from you? Albertans need help. They need jobs. They need economic opportunities.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's why our government is doing things like investing \$30 billion in infrastructure, creating 8,000 to 12,000 jobs a year. That's why our government is making capital available to small businesses and to entrepreneurs. That's why our government cut the small-business tax by one-third. Those are all things that we are doing to diversify the economy. You know what else we're doing? We're investing in renewable energy and becoming a North American destination for renewable energy infrastructure and investment. There's so much that we're doing. I'm very excited, and we'll keep at it.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For over 20 years I've worked with families and individuals accessing AISH, and there have been serious issues about this program, including accessibility, efficiency, and transparency. Given that the Auditor General raised these same concerns about long-lasting issues plaguing AISH, to the Minister of Community and Social Services: what action is this government taking to address these important concerns?

The Speaker: The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. I'm proud to be part of a government that is making life better for more than 55,000 Albertans who rely on this important program. We inherited long-standing issues with this program, and we took action, and we publicly posted our plan that will help us improve this program. As well, I've also posted a video for those who rely on this support to understand this plan. We are making significant changes, and we hope that will make life better for many who rely on this.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the AG's report he raises concerns about accessibility of the AISH program. Given that people accessing this program are among the most vulnerable people in Alberta and that they rely on successful and timely access to AISH, what steps is the government taking to make sure that the AISH program is easier to access and use by Albertans who need it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. We are absolutely committed to making sure that the program responds to the needs of Albertans. I am very proud that we are improving the accessibility by making the AISH application simpler, launching a new website with user-friendly information, and developing guides for Albertans who need help. We are also improving the appeal process and public reporting to ensure the program works for Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great to hear that this government is taking action after so many years of neglect. To the same minister: when will these changes be implemented?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, again. We are committed to making significant changes to the AISH program to make it work better, and we plan to have all the work completed by December 2017. During the coming months ahead we will keep Albertans up to date on what is being done to improve this program. Most importantly, we will continue to listen to the people with disabilities to make sure that all of the provincial programs relating to disabilities work for their benefit.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Energy Efficiency Rebate Program Contract

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When asked if the bid package was designed specifically for their Ontario friends at Ecofitt, the environment minister was incensed, claiming the process was open and transparent, and, quote, they were the lowest cost provider, end quote. Well, it looks like this government has misled Albertans again. According to the same minister during estimates yesterday, Ecofitt was actually the third-lowest bid. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: was the government lying when it said that Ecofitt was the lowest cost, or did they mean to say it was the lowest cost from a company with an NDP world view?

2:10

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just to reiterate what was said yesterday by the minister, there were a number of criteria, including the completeness of the package and the ability to deliver the full program, that were taken into consideration. In terms of the completeness of the package and the ability to fulfill, this was the lowest bid that met all of the criteria. But I want to say to the member who asked the question that in the city of Grande Prairie there are over a thousand people who have signed up for this

program, and when people discredit it, they discredit those Albertans who are finding these programs useful and helping them save money and are choosing to sign up for it. I think that's really disrespectful to the people who gave that member his job.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the government lied and it's just the latest reason Albertans can't trust this government and given that the NDP is ripping millions of dollars away from charities and . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, you surprise me that you would, after all of the discussions we've had on this matter, so early on be so emphatic with that kind of comment. Before you move on any further, please reconsider the words that you're using in this House.

You have 20 seconds. [interjections]

Mr. Loewen: Given that the government misled . . .

The Speaker: Excuse me. I don't need comments from other members as well when I make a ruling. Please, hon. member.

Proceed. You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the government misled the people and it's just the latest reason Albertans can't trust this government and given that the NDP is ripping millions of dollars away from charities and families and destroying local energy efficiency businesses, all to the benefit of their friends in Ontario, that aren't even giving us the best deal, does the minister realize how insulting this is to Albertans? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to highlight some of the other good work that's happening in attracting businesses from across this country to set up offices in Calgary. The members opposite talk about the outrage at having vacancies in Calgary, and we're doing something to make sure that those are filled. We're attracting good investment to the province of Alberta. Let's talk about some other ridings represented by the Official Opposition. What about in Fort McMurray, where over 800 households have signed up for this very program? They're putting \$112 back in their own pockets, and we're proud to be the government that's making that happen.

The Speaker: Your second supplemental.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you. Given that this was a pretty simple question and the government didn't tell the truth to Albertans when it was said that this was the lowest cost provider, did the minister know Ecofitt was not the lowest cost bid? If she did know, why did the government not tell Albertans the truth?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I would ask that you please withdraw the statement "did not tell the truth." Would you please withdraw the statement? Hon. member.

Mr. Loewen: I apologize for the way I said what I meant.

Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the work our government is doing to make sure that we're making life more affordable for Alberta families. That's why we're taking a made-in-Alberta solution. I know the members opposite are used to getting direction from Ottawa, but we're taking a made-in-Alberta solution. We're moving forward to make sure that Albertans can put money back in their own pockets, and Albertans are signing up for this program. In the city of Calgary alone over 37,000 households have signed up

for this very program. We're proud to support these residents and residents in all parts of Alberta in making their lives more affordable.

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

Marijuana Legalization

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government has said that it will introduce legislation to legalize marijuana in a few weeks, but over the past year it has made it clear that its legislation will leave much of the regulation and administration of recreational marijuana to the provinces. Ontario, Manitoba, and British Columbia have all been busy analyzing their policy options and even introducing stopgap legislation. To the minister: other than travelling to Colorado, what specific areas of policy work is your ministry working on?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. We'll probably have to take the answer offline since I won't get it out in 35 seconds. Some of the areas we've started working on have to do with who's going to handle retail, who's going to handle distribution. How do we best keep pot out of the hands of young people in our province? How do we continue to keep our roadways safe as legalization comes forward? Those are our sort of main areas of focus and priority, but we will have lots and lots to say about this.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that the Justice minister has admitted that there's an enormous amount of work that needs to be done in the province to prepare for recreational marijuana and given that provincially controlled issues include making decisions about, you know, where marijuana can be sold, the age of consumption, the sale of edibles, permitted places to smoke, allowing landlords to make rules governing grow ops, again to the minister – maybe I'll allow you to expand on this – will you please indicate your government's preferred direction on at least one of the above issues?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we have been doing an enormous amount of policy work around this. As I've said, our primary areas of focus are ensuring that we keep marijuana out of the hands of children and ensuring that we're keeping our roadways safe. But a lot of this will turn on the consultation that we ultimately have with Albertans. We're going to be going out, as the Premier has said, to talk to them about age of consumption, about their safety concerns, about, you know, what they want to see protected in their neighbourhoods and in terms of their children. Certainly, some of those policy directions we have already, but some of them are certainly going to be waiting until we've spoken to Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Consultation is vital on this major cultural shift.

Given that roadside saliva testing is not yet available but provinces have the ability to set the same administrative rules for

drug-impaired driving as they do for alcohol and given that Alberta has a successful zero tolerance rule in place for alcohol, that could be extended to marijuana, to the minister – let me just ask a very specific question – are you at least considering the same zero tolerance rules for novice drivers for marijuana that we currently have for alcohol?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member quite rightly points out, Alberta can be incredibly proud of its administrative sanctions, which have reduced greatly the amount of impaired driving on our roads, and the government is certainly examining what we can do with respect to those sorts of administrative sanctions when it comes to marijuana-impaired driving. As the member has correctly pointed out, the challenge is that there is no sort of per se limit as of yet in terms of where impairment occurs, but we are examining all of our options.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Health Care Capital Funding in Central Alberta

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Health care professionals organized a public meeting in Red Deer on February 28. The room was packed as they presented information regarding health funding shortfalls within the regional capital plan. In fact, central Alberta makes up roughly 10 per cent of Alberta's population yet receives only 5 per cent of the capital funding. To the Health minister: what is being done to equalize the amount spent in central Alberta with other parts of the province?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It's important that no matter where you live in this province, you get . . .

Mr. Cooper: Right health care.

Ms Hoffman: . . . the right care . . .

Mr. Cooper: Right place.

Ms Hoffman: . . . in the right place . . .

Mr. Cooper: Right time.

Ms Hoffman: . . . at the right time. Even the members opposite are starting to remember what my mantra is. I like that, Mr. Speaker.

That's one of the reasons why as soon as we were elected, we reversed the deep cuts that were coming under the former government, Mr. Speaker. That's one of the reasons why we're providing stable, predictable funding to the front lines. That's one of the reasons why we're investing, in the Red Deer hospital alone, \$21 million to ensure that infrastructure upgrades are done in the Red Deer health facilities, that we require. I'm proud of that.

Mr. Strankman: Again, Mr. Speaker, given that rural residents are seeing resources unfairly directed towards cities and given that an unjust allocation of resources away from smaller centres and rural areas actually puts more strain on centralized facilities, increasing wait times and decreasing positive outcomes, to the Minister of Health: how can you justify the inequity of resource allocation per capita in the central region?

2:20

Ms Hoffman: Well, it's fun to imagine what types of investment would happen in the province of Alberta if the party that's asking the very question moved forward with their plan – thank goodness the voters didn't give them that opportunity – because they wanted to cut \$9 billion, Mr. Speaker, just from infrastructure projects. That certainly would make sure that things were far worse not just in one part of the province but in every part of the province. I'm so proud that we're working in partnership, working with a number of community leaders in local ways to move forward on ensuring that we do get that right care throughout our entire province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that all Albertans deserve a high standard of health care and don't need governments picking projects for political reasons and given that this issue is affecting the lives of those in seven central Alberta constituencies, to the Minister of Health. In the central Alberta health region stats show a dramatic shortfall. Who is responsible for this unfair resource allocation?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you to the member for the question. Certainly, he does speak about inequities over many years; some might say 44 years. So next time he's dancing with his new best friends, I encourage him to ask them that very same question, Mr. Speaker. I have to say how proud I am to be part of a government that's making sure that we're putting investments into health care . . .

An Hon. Member: You can dance if you want to.

Ms Hoffman: . . . into education, into the front lines instead of moving forward with cuts that both opposition parties are pushing for, which would make life far worse. Instead, we have a government making life better for Alberta families.

The Speaker: I heard "dancing." I missed something in the event. [interjections] I don't know. National dance week.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the NDP. They have increased their support in Alberta by 160 per cent. They went from 1 per cent of the vote in the Medicine Hat by-election to an average of 2.6 – 2.6 – per cent of the vote in two recent Calgary by-elections. Clearly, the Minister of Finance is doing something right. Perhaps it's the \$5 billion carbon tax, or perhaps it's the \$10 billion deficit. Does the minister consider the level of Calgarian support for his party to be an endorsement of their fiscal plan?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, what we are doing on this side is we're making tough times better for Albertans. We're assisting Albertans by supporting them each and every day. We're not cutting back their programs and services, something that that side would do without blinking an eye. We are supporting Albertans. We'll continue to support Albertans. We'll continue to work for Alberta.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, asking this minister a question is like trying to nail Jell-O to a wall. I ask a question, and he gives a haiku about some irrelevant topic that nobody asked about.

Yesterday the Member for Calgary-West asked the minister three – three – times if he would appear before the heritage fund committee to address accusations of political meddling in AIMCo . . .

The Speaker: I think that's a preamble. What's the question, hon. member?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given that three times the Jell-O just slid down the wall, I'll ask the minister real slow: will you or will you not appear before the committee?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have been clear several times in this House that there is no interference, and if I went to the committee, I'd say the same thing there. There is no interference with regard to AIMCo. Their independence is assured. They invest their money for pension funds, and they do it at their own leisure. They do it, and they do a good job. They were able to get about a 9 per cent return on their investments. They're doing a job. They continue to invest independently.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I would respectfully ask that you contain the preambles. In fact, you already know that's not accepted, so please ask your question without the preamble. Please proceed. Thank you.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I smell a rat, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, there's no need for that comment.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, it's called question period, not answer period, for a reason.

When you're responsible for a \$54 billion budget, Albertans expect real answers, not talking points written by some partisan out-of-province apparatchiks. Given that he refuses to answer questions about AIMCo, he refuses to answer questions about our credit downgrades, he refuses to answer questions about how . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, please. [interjections] Hon. ministers. The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Tourism Data Collection

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whether you love the Fraser Institute or you hate it, it's hard to argue with their motto: If It Matters, Measure It. That's why it was so stunning last month in estimates when the tourism minister stated:

. . . it is not useful to do an economic impact assessment on an annual basis. The relatively small changes in overall tourism revenues on a year-to-year basis do not have a significant impact on economic measures such as jobs, companies supported, and taxes.

Wow.

Minister, if you measure what matters but you're not measuring tourism, are you saying that tourism doesn't matter?

The Speaker: The Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that tourism makes life better for Albertans by bringing people to our province, creating good-paying jobs, and diversifying our economy. The issue that the member is raising is something that he himself is familiar with, an issue that we've had for a very long time, and that's that the methodology that's being used by Stats Canada is not the most reliable one. So we're looking for ways in order to increase the transparency and to find a way to measure all of these things in forms that we can actually use to make informed decisions.

Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that noted management guru Peter Drucker stated that what gets measured gets managed and given that managing the tourism industry demands measurement of

economic activity, jobs created, businesses impacted, and tax revenues generated and given that the tourism minister is responsible for providing leadership and vision for Alberta's tourism industry and given that this tourism minister intends to fly the tourism flame in the fog, in the dark, with no chart, compass, altimeter, or instruments of any kind, to the minister: how are you going to provide strategic leadership to the tourism industry when you can't even be sure which direction it is headed?

Miranda: Mr. Speaker, speaking of flights, we can announce that we've just added a new flight from Mexico directly to Calgary in addition to the ones we have. Obviously, I know a thing or two about flights.

What I can tell the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, is that when we look at tourism, we know that it actually diversifies our economy. It supports good-paying jobs. We're very happy about what we've seen. We're going to continue doing what we're doing right now because it's actually working.

Thank you.

Dr. Starke: You say that it's working. You have no clue whether it is or not.

Given that this government is constantly telling Albertans how tourism is a key component of economic diversification – we just heard it – and given that Drs. Trevor Tombe and Robert Mansell of the U of C's School of Public Policy recently published a research paper entitled *If It Matters, Measure it: Unpacking Diversification in Canada* and given that the tourism minister has decided that measuring the impact of tourism is not useful, to the minister. You've stopped making measurements, you've stopped collecting data, yet you still claim that tourism is growing and diversifying the economy. You just did. Without any metrics, how are you going to prove it?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. minister.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. As I explained to the member during the estimates, we are looking at the methodology to actually determine the best way forward. There is no consensus between the different jurisdictions on how to measure tourism because somebody landing in Vancouver who makes their way to Calgary, for example, is counted as a tourist in Vancouver but not in Calgary because they're travelling by land. There are disparities in the way by which you measure these things, so we're trying to find a way to come up with a methodology that makes sense. However . . .

An Hon. Member: Time.

Miranda: . . . we're very proud of the work we're doing in this province to support good-paying jobs . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Point of order noted.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Gender Identity and Expression in Human Rights Act

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ten years after a Supreme Court ruling the government finally amended the Alberta Human Rights Act by adding gender identity and gender expression. Recently we've heard the new leader of the third party, a supposed self-proclaimed human rights champion – he said that he would repeal all of the legislation our government has passed. To the

Minister of Justice: how has this legislation impacted the lives of Albertans?

2:30

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I was very proud to be able to add gender identity and gender expression to the Human Rights Act. No Albertan should be discriminated against on the basis of who they are and who they choose to be, and no one should be denied basic services just based on who they are. We have heard from many stakeholders that this protection makes a huge difference in the lives of individual Albertans and it makes their lives better.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the new leader of the third party stated in an interview with *Maclean's* magazine that he found the idea of a woman wearing a niqab in public profoundly offensive, to the same minister: what is the government doing to protect Albertans and ensure that their rights are respected and preserved?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. The Alberta Human Rights Act specifically prohibits discrimination on several bases, including race, colour, ancestry, gender, and religious beliefs. It's no secret that the purpose of the act is to ensure that all Albertans are offered an equal opportunity to earn a living, a place to live, and to enjoy services that are available to the public. We're very proud to defend that record, and I think it should go without saying, but we expect everyone to respect the law.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many Albertans are concerned regarding comments made about repealing all of the legislative changes made since 2015 and given that these changes protect the rights of the LGBTQ community, to the same minister: what impact would repealing this legislation have on Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This legislation was passed to empower transgender Albertans to confront stereotypes and discrimination, which we know still exist throughout society. Repealing the legislation would take Alberta back to the past. Our government is working towards a future, a future where life is better for all Albertans.

Veterans' Licence Plate Eligibility

Mr. Cooper: Outstanding constituent Neil Lowes has served his country for 35 years, including a short stint in the Canadian armed forces and a long and distinguished career with the RCMP. Mr. Lowes contacted me about being denied access to veterans' plates despite being available to retired RCMP officers in other provinces. To the Minister of Service Alberta: why won't your government show respect for the brave men and women of Alberta that have served our country, this small but important recognition of veteran plates?

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our department is actually very proud of our Support Our Troops plates. When the Support Our Troops plates were brought in, it was done in consultation with a number of community groups, including our legions, in order to determine which groups were going to be recognized. One of the issues around this plate is the identification of where funds from the plate would go to, and those funds go to support our troops. We're very proud of this plate and the funds that it provides to military officers who are retired or who are in tough times as a result of their service, so it does support the community.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that the executive director of the Royal Canadian Legion has written to the minister endorsing the use of veterans' plates by retired RCMP members and since retired officers are also advocating for the use of these plates, it seems to me that the only person who doesn't think this is a good idea is the Minister of Service Alberta. Why won't the minister respect the Royal Canadian Legion, respect the RCMP, and grant these retired members access to veterans' plates?

Ms McLean: Thank you again for the question. Mr. Speaker, the contract for our plates certainly allows us additional flexibility, and our department has been looking into additional plate options that we can provide to Albertans. I'm certainly happy to be doing that work, and we are going to continue to provide specialty plates to individuals across Alberta as our resources permit. I certainly have had my department have discussions with the Legion about this very issue, so we have followed up on it.

Thank you.

Mr. Cooper: Yes. Your department told them no.

Mr. Speaker, given that the retired RCMP members who have served abroad are entitled to these plates and given that retired RCMP members from other provinces have access to these plates, why did the minister write the Legion's executive director stating that the NDP had no plans to amend the regulations which prohibit Alberta's retired RCMP members from receiving this small but very important recognition?

Ms McLean: Mr. Speaker, certainly we receive a number of requests from the community to change a number of our regulations. Service Alberta, I'm happy to say, actually has the most laws and regulations of all of the departments, but, you know, we're very happy to have discussions with the individuals that the member is referring to to discuss what possible plans we can make going forward in order to ensure that we can have capacity within our legislative agenda to ensure that we can make changes that are important to Albertans and make life better for them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Support for Unemployed Albertans

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the hypothetical family in my member's statement was struggling to make ends meet due to the failure of a variety of disastrous NDP policies. This morning Social Policy Trends was released by the U of C School of Public Policy, highlighting – guess what? – skyrocketing and troubling social assistance caseloads over the last two years. To the Minister of Labour: noting that the proposed PC budget increased Community and Social Services funding by \$33 million, what

specific initiatives is your government undertaking to assist Albertans in seeking gainful employment?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government has been focused very concertedly on making sure that there are resources available for Albertans who are currently looking for work. Through the Ministry of Labour we have a number of workforce strategy programs as well as partnerships with the federal government for labour market development agreements to make sure that there are funds available to support those looking for training or retraining both through employers and through agencies set out to help unemployed Albertans.

Thank you.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, it's not working. Given that the number of income support caseloads skyrocketed, reaching over 54,000 in January, with no signs of plateauing or even curve bending, and given that these numbers are especially troubling as a last resort after other supports such as EI run out and given that these already troubling numbers do not include AISH, to the Minister of Community and Social Services: what are you doing in support of struggling Alberta families to address this alarming crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Yes, the income support caseload has gone up, and what we have done is that we have added more money into it instead of cutting funding, as that side has proposed; \$5.8 billion or \$2.6 billion. That would have made the situation worse. We have increased funding for that. We have come out with a new Alberta child benefit. We came up with a new investment in FCSS. We came up with a \$15 minimum wage. We are doing a number of things to help Albertans retrain, get back . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that the number of individuals exhausting EI and being forced to collect provincial income supports continues to increase rapidly month after month and given that the unemployment rate in January 2017 was 8.8 per cent, up from 7.5 per cent in January 2016, and given your flagship job-creation strategy, which was an integral part of your campaign platform, was cancelled after creating only one job, to the minister of economic development: you claim to be diversifying the economy and creating jobs, so how do you explain these damning statistics?

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member. What I will clarify for the member is that since last June 19,000 full-time jobs have been created in our province. I can tell you as well that the Conference Board of Canada, TD Bank, and a number of economists are all forecasting that Alberta will lead the country in growth this year and next year, more than any province, and you know why? Because the budget that we've tabled is stimulating the economy. It's creating jobs. It's diversifying the economy. It's protecting front lines. That government couldn't get it right, and this one would be a disaster.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

2:40

Rural Education

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Throughout rural Alberta school boards are facing unique challenges and are seeing growing gaps between urban school boards and rural school boards because economies of scale simply don't carry over to rural life. Given that some rural schools may be in a position where they'll be forced to close, to the Minister of Education: how is the government addressing equity in education funding for rural school boards?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. Our government certainly supports small and rural communities. Our funding takes into account that rural school authorities often need and have unique challenges. The equity opportunity grant, for example, and the small school by necessity grant are designed to help rural school boards overcome these challenges. These grants are approximately \$113 million and \$50 million per year respectively. Certainly, we're working hard to ensure the viability of small schools and rural schools. We know how important they are to the community, and we are investing in them.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's per-student funding model doesn't account for the basic costs of operating a school. Given that enrolment may fluctuate over a school's lifetime yet the cost to keep the lights on and the doors open remains fundamentally the same, to the same minister: how is the government working to ensure the long-term sustainability of our rural schools?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I mean, that's a very good question. School construction and modernization represents one of the most important investments that we can make in our children's futures and in the future of the province. That's why we've invested more than \$1.9 billion today to support more than 200 school construction projects, and over half of these projects are located outside of our urban centres, projects like the new schools in Irma, Huntsville, the Camilla school replacement. These are projects that will be home to thousands of children over their lifespan and become important community centres for those communities.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Education: besides the names he has mentioned, what is the government doing now to support rural education?

Mr. Eggen: Well – and this is very important indeed – throughout Budget 2017, despite the significant economic challenges by the province, we are supporting our students by continuing to provide school authorities with stable funding. Alberta Education and, for example, Ag and Forestry have partnered together to fund a research report on the impact of schools in rural communities. A progress report was presented by a research team in 2016, Alberta Rural Education Symposium. The report is forthcoming. Our government is also providing rural transportation grants to the tune of about \$141 million, which is almost 50 per cent of all of our transportation . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. members, I have a request for unanimous consent to introduce a group who has arrived.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a class from The King's University. This class is here to learn about climate change and how the government functions. I was pleased to hire one student from a similar class last summer, and I know that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and I share a great respect for the students of The King's University and their instructors. I would ask the class and their instructors, Dr. Michael DeMoor and Dr. John Hiemstra, to rise and receive the customary welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Cooper: I'd like a point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order. Okay
You have 20 seconds. We could clear those who wish to leave.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 34(3) I'm rising to advise the House that on the next available Monday written questions 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, and 10 will be accepted, and written questions 3, 4, 5, and 6 will be dealt with. Also on the next available Monday, Mr. Speaker, Motion for a Return 6 will be accepted, and motions for returns 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 will be dealt with.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Bill 7

An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce Bill 7, An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining.

Our government is committed to fair legislation that makes life better for hard-working Albertans, and we are committed to complying with the Supreme Court of Canada decision guaranteeing Canadian workers the right to strike. Bill 7 would modernize the labour relations model for the postsecondary sector so that labour rights at Alberta's universities and colleges are consistent with the rest of Alberta's public sector and with the postsecondary sector across Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

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

Bill 205

Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 205, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill would establish an advocate for persons with disabilities in Alberta with the power to represent the rights, interests, and viewpoints of persons with disabilities. Creating an advocate will make the lives of Albertans better. It will provide much-needed support to people with disabilities and their families in this province. I am pleased to say that this bill responds directly to concerns that I've heard for many years from the disability community.

I look very much forward to the discussion with my colleagues in this House, and I thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings, with your indulgence. The first is the latest report from a group of experts in North America from the Alliance for Public Wildlife: The Challenge of CWD.

The second is a reprint of a science article from Norway highlighting that Norway plans to exterminate a whole herd of reindeer to stop the fatal infectious brain disease.

Dr. Starke: Who will pull Santa's sleigh?

Dr. Swann: Not funny at all.

The third is actually a restaurateur in Calgary-Mountain View who has identified that the carbon tax is going to increase his costs by \$10,000, local property tax increases have added to his losses, and the minimum wage increase has meant a total loss of about \$40,000 per year from his restaurant business, The Main Dish, and Jason Zaran is the owner.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today with respect to the questions asked by our caucus leader and myself. One is an urgent media advisory from the University of Calgary School of Public Policy titled Increase in Social Assistance Caseloads in Alberta: Numbers Rocketing Upwards with No Sign of Plateau.

The second tabling is also from the University of Calgary School of Public Policy, titled Social Policy Trends: Income Support Caseloads in Alberta.

Thank you.

2:50

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

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies to table of yet another paper from the School of Public Policy at the University of Calgary, by Dr. Trevor Tombe and Robert Mansell, which I referenced in my questions in question period. It's entitled If It Matters, Measure It: Unpacking Diversification in Canada.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and table a letter written by the hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Status of Women to a Ms Tammy Wheeler, the executive director of the Royal Canadian Legion Alberta-NWT Command, giving the legion

an indication that the government would not be acting on what is a very, very reasonable request.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, I believe we may have arrived now at the points of order. I came to work with a lunch kit in my hand and a song in my heart, but it has been an interesting day.

I think, Opposition House Leader, it was a point of order that the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre raised.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Cooper: Yes. Thank you. On behalf of my colleague from the riding of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre – oh, I'm speaking, for those of you following along at home, from Standing Order 23(j), language of an abusive nature likely to create disorder.

Mr. Speaker, it's a little unfortunate to have to rise two days in a row. I know that the language that was used by the Minister of Municipal Affairs is unlikely to be found in the Blues because it certainly wasn't directed at you. From time to time language across the bow, as you might say, does increase in a manner that isn't positive. Yesterday we saw the government calling the opposition idiots. Today the minister called us a bunch of morons. I don't think that either of these is parliamentary. I would ask if he would withdraw and apologize because that's certainly what members on this side of the House heard him say.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am informed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs that he did not say those words, so I don't know where the Official Opposition House Leader is getting it from.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as the Opposition House Leader has indicated, I did not hear the phrase, and I'm not, therefore, in a position to rule on it. I accept the hon. members at their word, but I would therefore move on.

Government House Leader, you have a point of order.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it's been a busy day. In explanation for my short memory, this morning was my estimates, so I'm a little bit shell shocked, but that's fine. It all went fine.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky said the word "lie," Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Could you sit down, please?

Mr. Mason: Yeah. Sure.

The Speaker: I believe, if that's the matter that we're dealing with, I received an acknowledgement from the member, which, rightly or wrongly, I accepted. If it's the reference to the member for Calgary Wapiti, I accepted... [interjections] Grande Prairie-Wapiti. My apologies. Sorry. It's been a busy day. My apologies. For those who are listening, it was not Grande Prairie-Wapiti. Grande Prairie-Smoky. I accepted the apology from the member, and therefore I would respectfully like to suggest that we move on to the third point of order.

Point of Clarification

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That being equal, I'm rising, then, on a point of order. The point of order that I am rising

on is under Standing Order 13(2), "The Speaker shall explain the reasons for any decision on the request of a Member." It does happen to be on this particular point that we almost had a discussion with respect to the use of language inside the Chamber.

Last week, Mr. Speaker, you made a ruling in this House that words like "misled," in fact, if they weren't directed at one member of the Chamber, were not unparliamentary. My colleague from Grande Prairie certainly did not say that any member of the government had lied but only said that the government was lying or had lied. It is significantly different. The Minister of Energy had an opportunity to say that the opposition misled this House, which you ruled wasn't out of order. As such...

The Speaker: Hon. member, which point of order are you speaking to? Which matter?

Mr. Cooper: The point of order is under 13(2), where you required an apology from a member of the House, my colleague from Grande Prairie. You required an apology from him, yet there have been times when the government has used unparliamentary language in making an accusation against the opposition, saying that we misled the House, which is in our opinion unparliamentary, but because they said that all of the opposition misled the House, you ruled that it wasn't.

In this case my hon. colleague said that the government had lied to Albertans, which is virtually the same thing as misled, and you asked him for an apology, yet you didn't from the government side. So I'm just looking for some clarification on your ruling, on why you would make that ruling in this case and not in another.

The Speaker: I've determined that it's the same issue that you're talking about. The explanation is that – we have discussed this many times in this House – it's about context, the context in which words are used. The fact of the matter is that we've had a considerable waste of time, quite frankly, in my humble opinion, in the last three to four days about uses of various words in this House. In this situation I cautioned not only today but also two days before about using these words, and we saw the consequences of that in here.

So my explanation is exactly the same one that I've used in the past: you cannot continue to use those kinds of words, particularly once I've asked that they not be referred to. In fact, in this instance I did accept an apology, but as is apt occasionally in this place, sometimes there are conditional apologies that are offered. All of us ought to look to using sincere words when we do make such apologies.

I believe in the same way that I addressed the Government House Leader with respect to the explanation of the use of apologies, I would consider, with the ample information that we all know, the matter closed.

Are there any other points of order?

Point of Clarification

Mr. Cooper: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because points of order aren't heard during question period, as you know, I raised this point of order at the end of question period. It is again with respect to a ruling that you made during question period and seeking some clarification so that we can ensure an orderly functioning of the House on an ongoing basis. I'm seeking clarification as to why you chose to withdraw a question or to not allow the question to be completed when my hon. colleague from Strathmore-Brooks was asking the Minister of Finance a question about whether or not he would be attending a committee. As you know, the standing orders

allow for any member to seek some clarification from you, so that's what I intend to do.

3:00

Preambles, Mr. Speaker, inside the Chamber here in Alberta have been an issue of significant discussion over a long period of time. There has been a lot of precedent that has gone into the use of preambles and what indicates a preamble and what doesn't. As you know, I have advocated on behalf of the rules of the Assembly to have a much clearer rule as well as getting away from preambles; however, we have not arrived there yet.

As such, my hon. colleague from Strathmore-Brooks had on numerous occasions throughout his question – and I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but I believe written on his question here is, in fact, three times where he utilized the word “given,” which traditionally in this House has been accepted as the continuation of one question. That then allows a member and the opposition side of the House to do what we are here to do; that is, to hold the government to account. As such, he was engaging in utilizing language that has been traditionally accepted in this House. However, you, sir, chose to go in a different direction and removed both his opportunity to finish and the minister's opportunity to answer. I'm just looking for some clarification around how we will know when you will and when you will not be removing questions and potentially infringing on the speech of members here in the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it is very apparent to me that the Official Opposition is engaging in a campaign of testing the limits of the House. They repeatedly tried to provoke the government as well as yourself in question period today by using terms that they know are unparliamentary like “lie” and are attempting to challenge the role that the Speaker plays.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks started his supplementary question with the words “I smell a rat, Mr. Speaker.” Well, we let that slide. We easily could have raised a point of order. But it's clear that the opposition wants to make as many points of order as possible, trying to prove some sort of a point because they didn't like a ruling the other day. It's rather childish, and it's really beginning to affect the ability of this House to conduct the business of the public. We need to deal with it, and I think that you have been doing an excellent job today with respect to that.

I wanted to read from *O'Brien and Bosc*, page 497, Mr. Speaker. It says:

Presiding over the daily Question Period is regarded as one of the most onerous and difficult tasks undertaken by the Speaker.

I think you have probably plenty of sympathy from Speakers past, Mr. Speaker, around the Commonwealth.

The Speaker ensures that Question Period is conducted in a civil manner, that questions and answers do not lead to debate and that both sides of the House get to participate. As Speaker Fraser noted in *The House of Commons at Work*:

Question Period places heavy demands on the Speaker of the House. He must at all times remain keenly alert and attentive, keep a perceptive eye on the whole assembly, be aware of the mood of the House and be familiar with the national and international issues likely to be raised.

The Speaker: Government House Leader, you've gone on at some length. Brevity, please, to the point.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. Okay. I've skipped a bunch to get right to the point, Mr. Speaker.

In ruling a question out of order, the Chair may suggest that it be rephrased in order to make it acceptable to the House. Or, the Speaker may recognize another Member to pose the next question.

Mr. Speaker, it is my view that you're well within your authority given the attempts by the Member for Strathmore-Brooks to create disorder in the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Today the member frequently disregarded my interventions and requests in the use of his language. Particularly, the use of the phrase “I smell a rat” is quite significant and could in fact reflect on this House. It's entirely the Speaker's prerogative and, in fact, I would submit, responsibility to proceed to the next question given the kind of disregard that I saw today. For background I would cite page 169 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. If a member persists in refusing to obey the direction of the Speaker in the chair, he refuses to recognize. I did not name the member; however, to me, it was quite obvious that my responsibility was to address the particular comments that were made, that clearly had an impact on the tone of this House.

Might I say to you again, members, that maybe House leaders want to get together and see if you can find a better way of communicating with each other other than the language that's used.

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 22: Ms Renaud]

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

Mr. McIver: On the budget?

The Speaker: Government Motion 13.

Mr. McIver: Government Motion 13. Okay, here we go. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, indeed. The business plans and the budget. That's what I was looking for, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I'll be brief because I have to get to the children in care committee continuation that occurs at 3:30 today, Mr. Speaker.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Or Madam Speaker. I think I was right both times because they just switched. Usually I'm wrong both times, but we'll call that a happy circumstance.

Madam Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise to speak briefly on the government's budget and business plans. Sadly, Madam Speaker, I wish I had happier things to say about the government's budget and business plans, but, alas, they are not in the best interest of Albertans. They're not in the best interest of Albertans today, and they're not in the best interest of Albertans in the future.

Madam Speaker, yesterday in this House I think it was quite telling that the environment minister stood up during a couple or three of her answers and emphatically talked about \$10 billion. The only thing she didn't do was bite her knuckle like that guy from *Austin Powers* when she said: \$10 billion. To be clear, she didn't bite her knuckle like the guy from *Austin Powers*, but outside of that, it sounded just like that. And she was right in making the point that \$10 billion is a lot of money. I agree with the environment

minister that \$10 billion is a lot of money. I think I can make that point without biting my knuckle either right now, Madam Speaker.

The fact is that that's what the government's deficit is this year and was last year, more than \$10 billion. The environment minister, I think, gives all of us quite a lesson about what a negative path this government is going down, taking us into a \$10 billion plus deficit every year, with no plans or promises from the Finance minister to even balance the budget for more than five years. I think it's about 2024.

Madam Speaker, the government I think reduced their deficit this year by one-tenth of a billion dollars. So using that math, at this rate it will take them 102 years to balance the budget. Then it will take them – oh, I don't know – 500 to a thousand more years to actually pay it all back after they're done that. I don't think anybody in this House thinks that's reasonable, yet that unreasonable path is exactly the one that this government is on on behalf of Albertans, and it's unconscionable.

3:10

What we do know from the government's numbers, not mine, is that in three or four years we're going to be in debt, that Albertans will be in debt courtesy of the NDP government \$71 billion. Horrendous. Everybody in Alberta should be concerned about that, especially when we hear in recent weeks the Finance minister saying: well, Albertans shouldn't have to pay for that. Well, Madam Speaker, there's no one but Albertans to pay for that. No one is going to ride in and pay for it. This isn't like your first credit card when somebody helps you out if you get in trouble with it. No one is going to ride in and pay Albertans' debt, but the NDP government doesn't seem to have any concept or understanding or appreciation of that fact. They are just piling obligation after obligation onto today's children and grandchildren and, more immediately, Albertans that are out of work.

If there's anything that accentuated just what a bad job this government is doing and what a bad budget they've put forward, it's the University of Calgary's research, that was tabled by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek today, showing 55,000 people on income support, 20,000 more than a few months ago. That's not 20,000 more than when the previous government was here; 20,000 more than a year ago with this government.

As much as this government likes to say, "Oh, it's all the oil price; that's the only thing that's bad," the oil price has been low for the whole two years, and it's getting worse and worse and worse because this government is making it worse and worse and worse with every move they make. And the biggest moves they make to make it worse and worse and worse are the moves that they make with their annual budgets, driving Alberta into the ditch financially, laying huge burdens on our children and grandchildren.

Thirty years and 20 years and 10 years from now when children in Alberta who are today in elementary school are trying to get their first job after they're finished school, are maybe trying to get married, maybe trying to save up to buy their first house, they are going to be burdened with the yoke of a huge debt that they have to pay before they can raise dollar one for that down payment on that house. Why? Because they're going to be paying for light bulbs that this NDP government has bought in 2017. Disgraceful, despicable, unconscionable. I'm sure there are a lot more words. This government and these NDP MLAs are part of supporting a budget that is completely against the best interests of Alberta.

Now, the only good news that I can give you on this, Madam Speaker, is that at least in two Calgary ridings where there was a federal by-election this week, 97.4 per cent of people rejected the NDP. Why do I know that? Because only 2.6 per cent of them voted for the NDP. That's 2.6. You know what? That should be a lesson

to these members. You know, I would advise the members who are not in cabinet that the next time you're in a caucus meeting, you might want to take your cabinet and your Premier behind the woodshed and tell them that they need to put Alberta on a better path. [interjections] They need to put Alberta on a better path.

I can see I'm under their skin because they're trying to take my time here, Madam Speaker. I'm sure they feel so passionately about it that they'll be happy to pop up and defend \$71 billion in debt. They'll be willing to get on their feet and defend 55,000 people on income support, many of whom are there because of policies that their government has put in place and defends today and that will put more people on the unemployment line in the weeks and months and years to come. They are the cause, and Albertans know that. At least, all but 2.6 per cent of them seem to know it, as measured most accurately by an election that took place this week.

Madam Speaker, this is a very bad budget. This is a budget that destroys jobs instead of building them. This is a budget that drives investment out of Alberta instead of bringing it in. In fact, we've seen evidence of that, too. You know what? The NDP has largely killed international investment coming into Alberta. Not only have they made it harder to bring international investment in, but billions of dollars of international investment that were in Alberta have left in recent weeks. Shell oil: billions of dollars. [interjection] Yes. You know what? CNRL bought that. CNRL is a Canadian company, and they're fantastic, and I'm so grateful that they bailed Alberta out and partly bailed this NDP government out, but it doesn't change the fact that it cut off billions of dollars of international investment that used to be here and isn't here now.

Now, I'm probably talking to the six people that are watching on television because I'm not sure that the government members have any intent to appreciate what's good for Alberta. I guess we'll know that when they vote for this budget. That'll be all the evidence we need that there's no intention to vote for the betterment of Alberta because it's clear to all but 2.6 per cent of the people that this is bad for Alberta. It's as obvious as the day is long.

Madam Speaker, when I talk to Albertans, whether I'm in Edmonton or Calgary or anywhere else, what I still constantly get is angry support, and what I mean by that is that people grab me by the lapels and say: you better be ready to become government in two years because they've got to get rid of that government. It's not because they love me so much; it's because they have to get rid of the government they have today. They are disgusted by it. They know it's killing their economic future. They know that it's killing their future today. They know that they all have somebody that they love that has lost their job or will lose their job because of the policies of this government. They're driving businesses out of business. You know, 30 per cent of the towers in downtown Calgary are out of business.

The biggest export this government has is jobs to Houston from Calgary, high-paying jobs. They used to pay for the schools, they used to pay for the hospitals, they used to pay for the roads, and they used to pay for the social services because those high-paying jobs come with a big tax load as well. The jobs went out, the tax load went out, and the cupboards are becoming more bare every day as a result of this budget of this NDP government and the harm and damage that they are doing to Alberta. I believe it will take two, three decades to undo the damage, starting in 2019, that these people are doing.

Why do I think that? The analogy that I use is that if you give somebody a shoelace and give them 10 minutes to tie knots in it, it will take a lot more than 10 minutes to untie the knots in that shoelace. This government is tying so many knots in the shoelace that Alberta is depending upon that it is shameful. They are setting this province back decades before this province will have any

chance of being back to the economic powerhouse that it was before they started their efforts to trash it in 2015.

Madam Speaker, I have to get to another committee. I know the government actually needs to hear more from me. It would do them some good. It would really do them some good if they actually heeded the good advice in the warnings that I'm giving them.

I'll say this in closing. Between now and 2019: tick-tock, tick-tock. There is very little time for this government to start making better decisions than the abysmal decisions they've made up until now, which is why I do not support this. Why do I not support this budget? Because I love Alberta, and I support Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Mrs. Littlewood: Is there 29(2)(a)?

The Acting Speaker: Yes, there is. The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I always love to hear what the Member for Calgary-Hays has to say about budgets in this province. He asks if we support the spending and support the decisions that we're making in this budget, and I absolutely support the decisions that we're making in this budget.

I read something a while ago, and it talked about people that come into government with progressive points of view who believe in social safety nets, people that believe in investment, people that believe in taking care of each other. It said that the longer those people are in government, unfortunately they start to lose sight of the things that they were elected on. I think about that every day when I do this job. I think about the impacts that I make to every single person that needs help in this province.

I think about my mom, and I've talked about my mom a number of times in this House. Taking care of her since I was about 14 has not been easy, and I know that it's a story that a lot of people in Alberta share. So when I think about the things that we spend money on and that we have something coming forward in investing an extra \$200 million in home care, I know that it makes an impact on real, everyday, hard-working Albertans that need support.

3:20

If I need to remember why I do this job and why I care about every single person in my community, I go to my mom's house and I do things that I don't love to do. I go into my mom's house and I clean her shower. I go into my mom's house, and she deals with incontinence at her age, and that's a tough thing to deal with. So I go in and I wash her floor, and that reminds me every single time why I care about doing what we are doing. Every time I go into her house and I see the medication that she gets home care to assist her with, that someone comes to her home twice a day to make sure that she has her antidepressants, that she has her medication that helps with hallucinations, I know that those things are not just my story. I know that those things affect people in every corner of this province.

Investment is something that is important, and to decry that investment is just such a shame. It tells me that there are people that have been doing this for too long and have become disconnected from the real struggle that people have in this province.

That's what I do. I think that it's important and incumbent on every one of us to do things every day that make us uncomfortable because it reminds us of how important it is. It reminds us why we ran. It reminds us of why it is so important to go out into our community and talk to people about what they are still struggling with.

I am so proud that we have a government that stands up for people like my mom, somebody who has been on disability for almost her entire life because she has struggled so hard with mental health. It makes me so proud to finally have a government that cares about that, that doesn't just do piecemeal work to allay the worst that happens that we see. In recent history, in the last 40 years, it's only when we have the worst outcry from the public that something is done.

I want to be proactive. I want to invest in things like home care and health care and continuing care and long-term care. I want to invest in making sure that we are looking at how AISH serves Albertans. I am so proud that I can go to my mom and I can tell her that we care about her and that we are doing something about it. We are not just talking about it, and we are not just making it a platform pledge or an election pledge. We are actually doing something about it.

Those people that come and help my mom: they are godsend because without them it is very difficult, being an MLA, to take care of my mom. With that support I can actually make a difference in her life, and I can make a difference in the lives of every hard-working Albertan in this province.

With that, I will conclude my remarks and just say that I am so proud of this budget. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Miller: Madam Speaker, I'd like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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 1 An Act to Reduce School Fees

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment that I'll circulate, and I will proceed when I hear from you.

The Deputy Chair: I just need the original, Member, and then you can go ahead.

Dr. Swann: My amendment reads as follows. I move that Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, be amended by striking out section 4.

Let me start by saying that I support the intent of the bill and what the bill does to make life more affordable for parents, guardians, and students in school. In fact, the Alberta Liberals believe the government should go even further by eliminating school fees altogether. However, I recognize that the government has chosen to take a step in that direction by reducing school fees.

I'd like also to point out that the government needs to find a more sustainable way to continue to reduce school fees other than, quote, finding efficiencies. There needs to be a funding plan that will continue to reduce fees over the long term, especially as our population grows and our education system becomes more costly. I expect the government may have an idea about where it wants to find these funds, and I will speak more about that in a moment.

When Bill 1 was announced, a government news release indicated: "If the bill is passed, Alberta parents will no longer have to pay school fees for instructional supplies or materials or for eligible students taking the bus to their designated schools." This was great news and well received by many if not all Albertans. But when people started to take a closer look, it turned out that the term "Alberta parents" did not mean that all parents will no longer have to pay school fees. In particular, those who have students in charter schools can expect to get a different treatment altogether. Why is that?

Well, let's take a look at what a charter school is. According to the government of Alberta's Charter Schools Handbook:

A charter school is a public school that provides a basic education in a different or enhanced way to improve student learning.

... In general, charter schools complement the educational services provided in the local public system. They represent an opportunity for successful educational practices to be recognized and adopted by other public schools for the benefit of more Albertans. Although types of charter schools vary ... they do have the following common characteristics.

Access – Charter schools cannot deny access [to any particular individual or group] ...

Choice – A charter school will provide enhanced or innovative delivery of public education to students. This means that parents and students have increased opportunity to choose an education that best serves [their child's] needs.

Curriculum – The curriculum delivered by charter schools will be structured around a basic education as defined by Alberta Education and described in the Programs of Study. Generally, education programs must meet the conditions outlined in section 39 of the School Act. This allows students to transfer to or from any public school with a minimum of disruption and to obtain a high school diploma ...

Funding – Charter schools are eligible for the same provincial funding per student as any other public school ...

Tuition Fees – Charter schools shall not charge tuition fees. However, they may charge parents for fees for instructional supplies or materials, as may all schools in the public education system.

It seems pretty clear to me, Madam Chair, from the government's own description that charter schools are, in fact, public schools. Again I ask: why the special treatment? Why are they not receiving a reduction in school fees?

I received a letter from the Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools in which they write:

As full-fledged members of the public school community, we find the decision to exclude us from Bill 1 An Act to Reduce School Fees quite concerning.

... This is an excerpt from this letter:

"In publications and the Minister's letter to parents ...

And this is from the government side.

... we read, 'Our government understands that times are tough for Alberta families and is working to make education more affordable. We believe that all students deserve access to a quality education in an Alberta school, and we are committed to reducing financial barriers such as school fees.'

Given this laudable and strong statement of support for Alberta's families during tough times, we [in the charter school community] believe it may have been an oversight not to include those families who choose a public charter school for their child(ren)'s learning environment."

Now, here is where I would disagree. I don't believe this is an oversight at all. The association is likely being diplomatic in their language to the minister. It's quite clear to me that the government is intentionally singling out charter schools for different treatment. My question is: why? Why is it not being transparent about its

intentions? It appears to me the government wants to draw a line in the sand with regard to funding. On one side are the public schools; on the other are private schools. Clearly, in this bill the government is lumping charter schools together with private schools.

Now, if anyone was curious about the motivations, they would need look no further than Public Interest Alberta's media release of February 23, 2017, in which they with 13 other organizations said, "[We] urge the provincial government to phase out the public funding of private schools ... over three years and reallocate the money to fulfill its education-related campaign promises." I think this is exactly the scenario the government is setting up with this bill, and if it is, they should be honest about it and not do it covertly through regulations. They should come right out with it and tell charter schools, their students, and parents that the government is going to reduce fees for everyone else, gradually raise fees for charter schools so that parents can get accustomed to paying more, and then slowly defund charter schools.

3:30

To be clear, Alberta Liberals believe public funds should go to support public education. Furthermore, we believe accredited private schools either need to be incorporated into the public system and be subject to all the same requirements or not receive public funding.

But charter schools are not private schools; they are public schools. In fact, many of these charter schools serve marginalized, low-income, and less abled students. They're providing an essential support for some of the most vulnerable people in the province. For example, Almadina School Society serves the lowest income families in Calgary. The Boyle Street Education Centre in Edmonton is the same. The Centre for Academic and Personal Excellence Institute serves special needs in Medicine Hat. These charter schools and others like them play a valuable role in society and Alberta education. They are not cherry-picking students. They are filling a need, a need that has been recognized and accepted by the government.

Limited resources. If the government has acknowledged that – and they have – then limited resources should surely be directed to the lowest socioeconomic status schools, whether charter or other public. If we're going to cherry-pick, let's cherry-pick those who are most vulnerable financially. This is a move to help families with affordability and access to education. Do not discriminate against those who are most vulnerable. It's against your principles. Do they not deserve the same treatment, especially given their vulnerability, many of them? Do the parents of their students not deserve the same reduction? When people see noncharter public schools not getting breaks, what does that do to enrolment?

The minister appears to be establishing one set of rules for those with school boards and a completely different set of rules for the charter schools. The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools doesn't think this is right, and I don't believe that the government is being transparent on this matter. If the government wants to eliminate funding for charter schools, say so. Otherwise, the government should treat them like all other public schools and include them in the reduction of school fees.

This is why I'm proposing an amendment to strike out that section of Bill 1 and leave the original wording in the School Act. This would keep charter schools together with public schools, and any changes to the fees they can charge would be applied consistently across all public schools and to all parents, as was promised when the bill was announced.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do want to thank the member for the amendment. I think that there are some concerns that I have about this amendment. To be very clear, the government made a decision to invest over \$50 million with An Act to Reduce School Fees. That's a first-step measure, right? We're moving in a direction that – this is something that affects the most number of students we possibly can. That's over 600,000 students that are going to be affected by this legislation. What this amendment would do is that it would create a situation where charter schools would no longer be able to charge fees – either they already have or need those funds – without necessarily having that funding recovered. That would create a situation where we could see detriments to student education.

I think that because of that, because this is a first step, as we move forward, the conversation will evolve and continue. This is An Act to Reduce School Fees, not to eliminate them. But as we move forward, there will be many more discussions to have. I look forward to those in this House, but right now I think that we should focus on this over \$50 million that's going to support over 600,000 students. To maintain that quality of education for all students, I would encourage my colleagues to vote this down.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? Seeing none, are you ready for the question on the amendment?

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:35 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Cyr	Schneider	Swann
Gotfried	Strankman	Yao
Hanson		

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Payne
Babcock	Hoffman	Piquette
Bilous	Horne	Renaud
Carlier	Kazim	Rosendahl
Carson	Kleinsteuber	Sabir
Ceci	Littlewood	Schmidt
Connolly	Loyola	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	McKittrick	Shepherd
Dach	McLean	Sigurdson
Dang	Miller	Turner
Eggen	Nielsen	Woollard
Feehan		

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 34
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill, Bill 1. Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 1 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.

The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that we rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Mr. Hinkley: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill: Bill 1. I wish to table copies of the amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 6

Northland School Division Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce Bill 6 and to speak to it in second reading, the new Northland School Division Act. This is an important piece of legislation that was built in the communities of . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. minister, I'm sorry to interrupt. Are you moving second reading?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Oh, I'm sorry. I'm moving second reading.

The Acting Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Eggen: I'm sorry. Madam Speaker, I apologize. You know, sometimes these things slip by me.

Okay. Here we are. This important piece of legislation was built in the communities of our Northland schools, and it is, Madam Speaker, a very, very large community. I just want to give you . . .

Cortes-Vargas: Can you just say that and read it?

Mr. Eggen: Oh. I am moving second reading of Bill 6, Madam Speaker.

Connolly: I'm sorry; I missed it.

Mr. Eggen: You can read *Hansard* later.

All right. For those of you who are not familiar, the Northland School Division Act was first proclaimed in 1965, and it was, I believe, even previous to that, in 1960. At this time Métis schools in our province were run by a government organization, and many of the First Nation students in the area at the time were attending residential schools run by missions or were not able to access schools at all. The Northland school division was seen as a way to bring those students into the public education system and to

improve educational outcomes for First Nations and Métis students and students living in remote northern communities.

The large geographic area that is Northland was established by the first act, and this area remains largely unchanged today. While Northland is made up of just 23 schools, we know that it is spread over an area that is just a little bit short of the size of Germany. So it's big, very big.

Now, we know that historically the governance model of Northland did shift, but for at least the last 30 years the division's corporate board was made up of 23 chairs, which were called local school board committees. In 2010 former Minister of Education Dave Hancock dissolved that board and put an official trustee in place. I have had a chance to discuss the circumstances with the former minister, and he has said to me that, among other things, the governance model that was previously in place was not working for students. It was much too large, and there was a blurring of lines on roles and responsibilities between the corporate board and the staff in Northland schools.

Cost was also an issue as we know that Northland was spending about \$300 per student just on governance while some of our other school boards in the province, just to give some perspective, spend as little as \$30 per student on governance.

Last year I made the decision to put a new official trustee in place by the name of Lois Byers. Her role and her work are largely focused on making her own position obsolete, the classic job where you end up working yourself out of a job. Ms Byers has been tasked with helping my department re-establish this elected board.

This Northland School Division Act sets out a path by which to do so. Through Bill 6 we will be moving the division to a ward structure that is typical of our 60 public Alberta school boards, but Northland will be a bit larger, with a composition of between seven and 11 trustees. This is a recognition of the very large size of the division, Madam Speaker. We will also replace the local school board committees with more traditional parent school councils, and we will enshrine a formal engagement process that will require routine discussions about education at the local level, the ward level, and the jurisdiction level.

The details of this act were developed through a series of consultations that go back several years, but the most important piece of that was a series of 24 engagement sessions that we held between last November and February of this year. First, we held pre-engagement discussions with community leaders and other influential representatives in Northland communities. We followed that up with a series of open houses that all members of the community could attend. Then we held one-on-one meetings between my department and some of those who attended the previous sessions. Together we reached more than 200 people through this process.

4:00

I also have personally contacted the Treaty 8 organization and had a good discussion with Grand Chief Rupert Meneen as well as Billy Joe Laboucan, chief of Lubicon Lake, and Chester Auger, education director for Bigstone Cree Nation. I've also met multiple times with Gerald Cunningham, president of the Metis Settlements General Council, and I was proud to have him stand by my side as we introduced Bill 6 here in the Legislature.

President Cunningham said on that day, and I quote: the Métis settlements are very inclusive when it comes to our governance and decision-making processes, so restoring a democratically elected board for Northland school division is a positive step towards giving our people a greater say in who makes decisions at the school board level. Unquote. Then he also went on to say, quote: because this system is a significant enough shift from the way Northland has

been governed in the past, we are optimistic that it will allow for greater investment toward the success of our Métis settlement learners.

I was also joined in the Legislature media room by Beth Ann Auger, who had been working very diligently to set up a school council in Mistassiniy school in Wabasca. She grew up in a Northland school, and she described that over time the community had lost its way a bit. Some of the challenges with the governance structure of the division were removing the focus away from the students. One of the highlights of my time as minister was hearing her speak in favour of this act. It did move her to tears, Madam Speaker. Beth Ann and the other members of the Northland community know that this legislation is good, but it's only a start. It marks the first step to improving student attendance, achievement, and the quality of education being provided.

I have stated that I intend to put in more funding as well, Madam Speaker, and have support and resources for Northland once we have the new board in place. I will be working with my department to increase per-student funding, and this will give the new board the tools to make a real change in the division.

We know that we can do better, Madam Speaker. We can invest in improvements to our curriculum and introduce indigenous content, history, and perspectives at every grade level. As this House likely knows, we are also in the middle of a six-year development of new curriculum across six subjects, and we have numerous First Nations, Métis, and Inuit representatives involved in that work.

In Northland we can also work to improve their already impressive school nutrition program, which is available to every Northland student, and we can undertake much-needed modernization projects in Northland schools that were way, way overdue, Madam Speaker. There's lots and lots of work that just wasn't done for many, many years.

When I look back to Mistassiniy school, for example, where Beth Ann is working so hard on her school council, we know that the community was promised a modernization by the previous government, but that work had been stalled. Certainly, we can do much better – we have to do better – and it begins with the return to democratic elections in Northland this fall.

Should this bill be passed and then proclaimed, we will do another round of consultation almost immediately on the final ward boundaries for this fall's election so that we have those set by June 1. As I said, the act will set out that Northland will be represented by between seven and 11 trustees. The act also maintains the practice of having Albertans living both on-reserve and off-reserve be allowed to vote in Northland elections because we know that 95 per cent of Northland's 2,700 students are First Nations or Métis and that the entire community needs to have a say over local representation. Once the board is established, they will work both with myself as minister and our official trustee to set a new direction for the division.

Quite frankly, I can't wait to get started on this work, Madam Speaker. This legislation will protect and improve education for students in Northland, and I believe it will mark a start of our efforts to make life better for Alberta families with kids attending Northland schools.

I would ask for support from all members on both sides of the House for this legislation, and I thank you very much for your time this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This is an issue that is very close to my heart because this is a school organization that is supposed to support schools and constituents in the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. These are my constituents.

For over 50 years the school board has been in place, and for over 50 years it has not met the needs of the students. The epitome of this lack of support is the fact that the Red Earth Creek school left the Northland school division and joined the Peace River school division. The irony is that the Northland school division is headquartered in Peace River.

In 2016, last year, Madam Speaker, the chief and council from Janvier expressed interest in writing to the MLA for Fort McMurray-Conklin for Father R. Perin school to leave the Northland school division and join a local school board, whether separate or public, within the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo.

So we know that the board did not meet the needs of the students. There are very low levels of high school graduation and student achievement rates. There was also a very dismal attendance record. Kids simply did not go to school, and when they were there, not a lot happened. The board was fired in 2010, and there's been an appointed trustee ever since. What has changed? Nothing.

Now, I understand why this government would wish to reinvigorate the school division despite its history of failing to provide education to our indigenous and Métis peoples. I hope that this bill is a good start and forms a reset for the schools in the Northland school division, but we need to see changes on the ground and changes to outcomes for students. What I don't want to see is for us to simply throw additional funds at the problem, create a process for a new administration and a fresh mandate, with a couple of tweaked guidelines, and then forget about it: it's done; we have a board taking care of it.

I believe that this is a nonpartisan issue and that we all have a part to play in supporting education in our rural and indigenous areas. I believe that this bill presents us as legislators and representatives of the citizens, regardless of their bloodlines, to challenge, support, and work with the communities who are directly affected by this bill. I would like to see what is happening in other jurisdictions with similar issues across the country. While I'm not so sure that the ward system will be any more effective than the previous system, I do believe that we're on the right path by reinstating an elected school board.

I must emphasize that this just isn't the Ministry of Education that needs to focus on this. We need the Ministry of Indigenous Relations to also participate, and we also need the Ministry of Community and Social Services to contribute to this. As well, Her Majesty's Loyal Official Opposition is here, waiting to help assist our good ministers. The shadow minister of Indigenous Relations, the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, would like to assist not only as a part of his portfolio but also as someone whose constituents are affected by this bill. The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, who is our shadow minister of Education, desires to ensure that these Albertans are fully supported with a comparable education. The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre greatly desires to help these Albertans as he understands their underlying concerns in this very complex issue. I am sure that the members for Peace River, Lesser Slave Lake, and, of course, the Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin and others will also want to participate in this as this is something that we can all contribute to in a positive fashion.

I would propose that this bill be used as an opportunity to open the channels of discussion with our indigenous partners, to challenge these communities with embracing a school division that can provide them with support that ensures a quality school. We

need to challenge them to support these schools and these teachers and this process. We need to challenge them that they play a large role in the success of the school, that they're the ones who need to get their kids to school and that they're the ones who need to ensure that these kids are being properly supported to succeed in school.

It's the communities that need to ensure that their children attend and are respectful to teachers and need to instill in our youth the desire to learn. When it comes to success in our school system, there are multiple partners involved in ensuring this: the school boards who support the schools, the teachers and principals who facilitate that direct education, the students who attend these schools, and, most importantly, the parents and the community who must embrace, support, and encourage their children to succeed.

I ask this government that we not be the typical bureaucrats and politicians who throw money at a bill and then move on. This is an issue that will require direct support over a duration of years. My hope is that this government, this 29th Legislature will be the one that makes a true difference in the Northland school division and all of our indigenous brothers and sisters.

Thank you very much.

4:10

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm delighted to speak in favour of Bill 6. I have a long history with Northland school division. I have taught within the division. I worked as an educational psychologist within the division. I visited over half of the schools in the division through my time there.

I have been so interested in the process of getting the board back up and running. I knew about the appointed, you know, board member to run the school in 2010, when it happened, when the old board was dissolved. When I heard that it was up and running, I started on a process of seeing what people I still knew within the division and letting the Ministry of Education know some people throughout Northlands who would be good people to go to, good resource people.

One thing I found interesting is that so many of the people were still working within the division. This is a school division in which there are so many people that stay. They've got very deep roots in that division. They care what happens to the students. They are involved with the schools. These are parents, these are teachers, these are support workers and bus drivers and administrators of all kinds. They are totally invested in what is going on in their schools. This matters to them.

We all want what's best for the students in these schools, but it's not a simple solution. If it was a simple solution or it could have been changed simply, it could have been done years ago.

Walking into the schools, you have never seen such warm, caring, helpful places to be. There's a really, really good bunch of people at work here.

I'll just quickly read – I know I haven't got too much time, but I've got some more things to say. This is a little passage written by – you mentioned Beth Ann Auger from Mistassiniy school. Being as I taught in a neighbouring school, at St. Theresa school in Wabasca, I thought I'd read this. She said:

I completed grade 9 out in Mistassiniy school in the '60s, so that was a pretty long time ago, and it used to be a pretty good school, and we got some pretty good successes out of Northland. I went on to Grouard, then over to Athabasca, and then came to Edmonton to get a college program and went to work for the government. I moved back to my community after leaving for 44 years, intending to retire. That didn't work very well.

Then I started meetings at the PTA back at Mistassiniy. I realized that there were a lot of things that we could do there. My grandkids are all First Nation. They're going to be going through the school program from kindergarten through high school, and I want them all to attend university or college. I'm just so excited. I see this model coming up as a holistic approach to education. That's how I grew up, in a tiny little community with no roads, no water, no lights, and everybody knew each other. There's a lot of work to be done to bring all of that together, and this new model, this new act is going that direction.

I feel so blessed to be here today, to be able to speak about it and to be invited here. This is so overwhelming. It's touching, and I want to thank you for doing the work that you're doing.

That's one representative.

One other thing that I was noticing when I was preparing to come and speak to this bill is that when I went through the list of the people who are on the local school committees right now, so many of them are people that I knew through the years working there. These are people that care about what happened, and they are working towards the success of this division. This is important to people. This matters, and people will do what needs to be done to make it keep on working.

Okay. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none – sorry. The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mr. Horne: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was waiting to see if any of the opposition wanted to jump in and get in on this conversation.

I am very, very excited to see this piece of legislation before us today. I know that you, Madam Speaker, and several members know that I myself am a member of the Métis nation, and I try to go to many of their events. This is something that I know is very important to many of the Métis people.

This is one of the largest jurisdictions that I know of in the province, the Northland school division, ranging effectively from Grande Cache all the way up to Fort Chip. That is truly a massive undertaking, to try to manage all of that. I can't imagine the challenges that that would pose. I think that there are many good

steps in here towards that end, trying to balance that. You know, there's a slightly higher number of trustees than usual, and I think that that's a good measure to address the massive geography of the Northland school division.

I am aware that the government underwent several phases of consultation on this. I myself was unable to be there, unlike a few of our members, but I did hear about these consultations from many members of the community. They were really heartened to see the amount of dialogue there. Yeah. I know that there will be ongoing engagement, in particular on what the wards look like and the initial structures of the school board, that will then be under the school board's authority, but we have to make sure it's all set up first. We have to figure that out before the elections are held in the fall.

You know, this act: a big part of the reason why I'm so happy to see this is that it's really renewing the democratic processes for the families that are part of the Northland school division, and I think that is something that is very important to see, to see the levels of community engagement. I know that many of the schools had a council system, some of which continued even when the board itself was no longer in place, and I think that that really speaks to the demographics that make use of it. That community discussion based approach to governance is something that is very important to many First Nations and Métis peoples. I think it's good to see that that is still present in this bill going forward. I'm just really happy to see that there is a new level of democracy in there, with the community engagement piece automatically built in. I think that's a really good balance here.

I am happy to rise in support of this bill, and I hope all members of the Assembly rise and do the same. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Anybody wish to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, anybody wishing to speak to the bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

Cortes-Vargas: Madam Speaker, seeing the progress of the day, talking about the budget, two bills, I'd say that we move to call it 4:30 and come back on Monday at 1:30. I move to adjourn the House.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:20 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 3rd Session (2017)

Activity to Thursday, April 6, 2017

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sittings.

Bill 1 — An Act to Reduce School Fees (Eggen)

First Reading — 6 (Mar. 2, 2017 aft., passed)

Second Reading — 105-10 (Mar. 8, 2017 morn.), 192-96 (Mar. 9, 2017 aft.), 235-42 (Mar. 14, 2017 morn.), 269-71 (Mar. 14, 2017 aft.), 273-74 (Mar. 15, 2017 morn., adjourned), 282-91 (Mar. 15, 2017 morn., passed)

Committee of the Whole — 424-31 (Mar. 21, 2017 aft.), 556-58 (Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed)

Bill 2* — An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence (Ganley)

First Reading — 67-68 (Mar. 7, 2017 aft., passed)

Second Reading — 110-11 (Mar. 8, 2017 morn.), 192 (Mar. 9, 2017 aft.), 314-22 (Mar. 15, 2017 aft.), 336-39 (Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed)

Committee of the Whole — 455-59 (Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed with amendments)

Bill 3* — Voluntary Blood Donations Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 208 (Mar. 13, 2017 aft., passed.)

Second Reading — 323-36 (Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed)

Committee of the Whole — 394-400 (Mar. 21, 2017 morn.), 421-24 (Mar. 21, 2017 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading — 472-80 (Mar. 23, 2017 aft., passed on division)

Royal Assent — (Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 cV-5]

Bill 4 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017 (\$)

First Reading — 191 (Mar. 9, 2017 aft, passed)

Second Reading — 306-07 (Mar. 15, 2017 aft., adjourned), 322 (Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole — 389-93 (Mar. 21, 2017 morn.)

Third Reading — 449-52 (Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division)

Royal Assent — (Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c2]

Bill 5 — Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 266 (Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed)

Second Reading — 310-14 (Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole — 393-94 (Mar. 21, 2017 morn.)

Third Reading — 452-55 (Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division)

Royal Assent — (Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c1]

Bill 6 — Northland School Division Act (Eggen)

First Reading — 524 (Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed)

Second Reading — 558-61 (Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed)

Bill 7 — An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining (Schmidt)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 201 — Justice System Accountability Act (Jean)

First Reading — 127 (*Mar. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 208-20 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., defeated on division*)

Bill 202 — Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act (Cyr)

First Reading — 245 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 375-86 (*Mar. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 203 — Alberta Standard Time Act (Dang)

First Reading — 253 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 496-503 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft., referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future*)

Bill 204 — Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Stier)

First Reading — 444 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 503-07 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 205 — Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act (Jansen)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017 (Kazim)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr2 — Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act (MacIntyre)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

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