



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, May 2, 2017

Day 26

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, May 2, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Please join me in a moment of reflection. As we near the anniversary of the Fort McMurray fire, let us always remember the power of community and the strength that working together can bring. In times of crisis working as one, co-operating, is the only way we can make it through.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 6

Northland School Division Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you. It's my pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 6, the Northland School Division Act.

Madam Speaker, since introducing this bill a couple of weeks ago, we have received a great deal of feedback from communities in the Northland school division, and our official trustee has continued travelling around to our 23 schools in the district to discuss this legislation with communities. Our partners in the region have largely recognized that this legislation is an important first step to improving education and support for our students in the Northland region, with the restoration of democracy and a democratically elected trustee board in said region.

It's very important to recognize that while this bill will move Northland to a more typical board structure, as we might see in the rest of the province, we also put in a great deal of effort on maintaining a community voice and building unique structures within this bill to address this. We will be working to establish the school councils, as described in the bill, in each of our 23 schools, and we will be as well establishing ward councils, that will be made up of the resident trustee, the school council members, and other members of the community as the population sees fit. We will also be enshrining jurisdiction-wide meetings at least once every electoral term to allow the community to come together and to have a collective discussion on protecting and improving education in the region.

As was described so well by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, who has worked in Northland school division for many years, the people in Northland are very kind and caring and committed to students. There are deep roots in the community, and we must work with elders, youth, and others to effect change, to improve attendance, to improve graduation rates, to improve the sense of community that can reside in each of our schools.

As I said previously, this legislation marks the start of a larger plan for the division, and we will be introducing new funding and supports once we do have a new school board established. I'm looking, Madam Speaker, for us to use creativity and a sense of collaboration between all school boards in the region in northern Alberta to work together to improve those outcomes I have described – attendance, graduation rates, and the sense of belonging and community – in each of those schools. We'll be continuing to

work with other ministries through the steering committee that has been established, working with Health, working with Children's Services and Infrastructure as well, you know, to look at some of the physical buildings that we have in the region that might require some assistance for the teacherages in each of the school areas as well.

All of us should feel very proud that we are taking action to restore democracy in Northland after seven years. We are turning the direction of education back to the community, and we will be here to offer guidance and support. The legislation, Madam Speaker, is about improving education for our students and about preparing them for future success, to be leaders in their community, and, of course, making life better for Alberta families throughout northern Alberta.

I ask for support from all members here for this bill, and I thank you very much for your time.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very happy to rise to speak to this bill on third reading, and I really, really hope that this bill opens the doors to changing the rates of student success.

I'd also like to take a moment to thank the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek again. When we were speaking about this bill last, I just thought it was inspirational, the way that you spoke about the people and, especially with your background in educational psychology, your tremendous work as a teacher throughout that region, the amount of work that you've done getting kids ready for university. You've done a ton of work out there. You're probably the best expert that could be in this space right now to make sure that this bill is everything that it is intended to be. Thank you so much for that. Again, it really, really influences a lot of us that don't maybe know those areas as well, and you're a great representative for those people. Thank you for doing that.

A couple of things I would like to add in as we go forward. As the minister said, and I agree completely: this is one step in probably a very long process – and I think, as the member had mentioned, they're called co-operatives if I remember correctly – in order to make sure that that is honoured and that those co-operatives work together to make sure that they have the best outcomes for those kids out there.

The question is: well, then, how do you ensure student success? This is a very, very fleeting comment, even. It's an easy political thing to say, but the actual question is: how do you do that within the structures of how you put those things together? Ultimately, at the end of the day, that's what we're looking to achieve. The questions, then, are: is it an administrative, legislative framework, or is it addressing those student needs that you spoke about? Do we focus on an electoral process, or do we get bums in seats, kids in the classroom?

As the member had also mentioned, a typical classroom in these areas may not be what we would typically see throughout the rest of the province. We have, I believe, a 95 per cent Métis and First Nations group of people out there. There's a massive amount of influence in that part, where we need to bring in elders and family and all of those different supports to make sure that the education is meaningful for these families and for these children.

My questions, I suppose – and this is not in any way not to support the bill. This is in ways – I'd like to ensure that the bill does what it's intended to do. Do we start at the furthest point from the students, or do we start with the actual students: their learning, their needs, their interests, their backgrounds, and their teachers?

An example that I'd like to use is a personal example. It's slightly different because my focus and the way that I teach are different because I only get my kids maybe for an hour and a half a week if I'm lucky, so the influence that you have is a little bit smaller. But in a community like where I'm from, Chestermere, where hockey is, like, the top priority – right? – in terms of extracurricular activities, as a music teacher trying to inspire young boys and girls to come to a music studio when sport is really at the top of the agenda, it was a very interesting dynamic, but it worked.

The reason is because you focus on what those kids need and what is meaningful. Sometimes if you're looking from a classical perspective – you have to learn your scales; you have to learn the theory and all that, and there are students and there are people that are prepped to do that. That's what they want to do, and they go through that process. But there are many groups of kids and their parents that want to see those outcomes as well. If you're wanting to learn a Tom Petty song, you're not necessarily going to go through all of the scales and everything that you would learn to be able to learn a Bach piano concerto, right? It's a completely different mechanism, and that meaning is going to be slightly different.

In order to learn a Tom Petty song at Christmas for the concert, for their parents to be able to see that this child can play and sing together, you're going to have a slightly different mechanism to make sure that that's meaningful, and that's not necessarily the structure of the building or the stairs going up to that building or the administration that you create around that. That actually is going to come, hopefully, from the teacher and the relationship with that teacher and that student. We just want to make sure that – we want these kids to be successful. We want the communities to be successful. We want them to end up in the classroom. I didn't focus on zoning laws when I was reaching out to students. You're wanting them to be engaged in music at whatever level that is.

10:10

Once the students are in your studio and you've got them all committed to you, you create these beautiful things together. It's such an overwhelmingly positive process. I could only hope that within the mechanism that's being put forward, that positive process will also engage and bring this group of very unique school boards together and produce something that they can all be proud of and that they can put forward and that we have the numbers to show it.

As I understand it, when the trustee that was elected went forward to meet with all of these schools, they're looking at trying to get a 5 per cent increase in attendance per year. I certainly hope that this structure is able to actually do that, but the bill does not give us any insight as to how we're going to build those. It just is an administrative piece of legislation.

We want to make sure that those resources for the students engage them in a meaningful way. We want to make sure that they want to show off to us and everybody else in their communities what it is that they're learning – right? – that they're engaged, that they're showing that, you know, if you're going to teach Cree, for example, if that's one of the languages that is important and meaningful, they're able to produce something that is worthy of those people and them and that those teachers are engaged and they've brought that together. Well, how do you do that? Is that through this framework? I don't know.

This is certainly a starting point, but what I'm really looking for is to see how this bill actually produces that end result, that outcome. I recognize the need to make sure that the administration is there and that the legislation is all in line, but as the minister said, this is truly a starting point, isn't it? We want to make sure that that

best legal, administrative foundation is there, but if the students are not in the classroom, then we have failed. We want to make sure that that's not what happens here. It's already been unmeaningful. They've already seen that, so how do we get to this other side?

That's why I'm asking these questions, because in the AG report that came forward – and I don't know if those were listed in order of priority – the top of the list was student attendance and then, of course, monitoring and making sure that they're staying there and also making sure that there is a structure whereby these students will want to come to school, right? Like I said, I don't know if that was in order of priority, but it certainly would be for me, that student engagement piece.

I don't know. Maybe the minister will have an opportunity to answer this, but is there a reason, then, that the legislative framework took precedence over putting together the wards and the boards versus – and maybe this outreach was done also, along with presenting the administrative foundation, what it was that you were going to do to reach out and engage with these families, students, school authorities, and everything to make sure that children are engaged, that they are in their seats, because Bill 6 doesn't address the teacher or the classroom. With the legislative framework, where do we go from here?

I agree. The Minister of Education was saying that there's a strong appetite for improving educational outcomes across Northland, but this bill doesn't address low attendance, does it? It doesn't address student achievement rates. I understand that that is, hopefully, the outcome, but I really believe that in a piece of legislation, when you're bringing that forward, you want to also understand how that's going to impact the outcomes. It's one thing to say it; it's a whole other thing to follow through with that. Thank goodness that that member is there because I'm sure that you will follow through to make sure that that happens.

There's a lot of strength and wisdom that comes from reaching out to these areas. I support it, and I will be watching to make sure that those next steps are addressed in attendance and learning. I think there's a lot that we can learn from this area. I think that if the outcomes are shown to be positive and we're seeing that 5 per cent or whatever – sometimes these numbers are just random. Who knows what the outcomes will be, right? But let's hope that we see some change in outcomes and that some of those things can be applied to maybe some of the other situations. It might be very interesting to see because it is a unique area.

I believe all Albertans will be watching to see if this electoral change actually translates into student learning. I think that that, Madam Speaker, is actually at the guts of what needs to happen here. Are we actually seeing student outcomes? Are we actually seeing students in their seats? Are we actually seeing meaningful education that relates to the world around these folks? We really hope that the communities will rally around these elections and become engaged in their children's success. We also would expect and would demand that the teachers are supported and have the resources they need to ensure that their students are successful.

Again, I really do hope that this bill opens the door to changing success rates for the students of this school board. Thank you.

Mr. Rosendahl: Madam Speaker, tansi. That's hello in Cree, by the way. Hopefully, I pronounced it right. The elders that I work with in West Yellowhead are continually trying to teach me a few of the words to use.

Anyhow, through the Northland School Division Act we're continuing to make life better for children and families in Alberta, and that's the important aspect that we need to consider. We are committed to protecting and improving education in the Northland school division for the Susa Creek school, which lies in my

beautiful constituency of West Yellowhead. I had the opportunity to visit that school a few days ago, and they were so excited that an MLA actually showed up to visit with the principal, the teachers, and the students in that school. It's quite a small school. It's made up of a collection of portables and that kind of thing. But they were really excited, and they had no idea what to do because they've never had an MLA show up there before, and they certainly wonder why nobody has ever been there before now. I don't know. I can't speak to that. But they were sure excited when I showed up there.

In looking at this, the students are really the most vulnerable in the whole region. Their social and cultural needs are very unique. Of course, most of the students that attend Susa Creek are totally indigenous. The community history and cultural heritage in that school must be considered, and their education needs must reflect who they are and the many additional struggles they continue to face. Their education must honestly address the multigenerational impacts of unfortunate government policies of the past like the issue of the residential schools and, of course, the '60s scoop.

Many parents in these communities have not completed high school and may not have had the best experiences with education. That's understandable when you look at what has happened in the past, especially with the '60s scoop and the issue of the residential schools and what's happened to those people right from the point when they were removed from Jasper national park and they settled in the area. Their trust in what the governments of the day did was not good, so a lot of them didn't even attend school for fear that things were going to happen and that the kids were going to be removed from them. That is something that is really difficult to work around because the parents really didn't have the education and they didn't understand, so it creates a whole problem in itself.

Many parents in these communities, like I said, have not completed high school at all. These factors have produced some of the lowest academic achievement scores and some of the highest dropout rates in all of Alberta. It's understandable when you look at what has happened to some of these people. So it creates a problem in trying to improve dropout rates and have the students continue their education. The school division leadership must be keenly aware of these struggles in order to move forward. They have to recognize that these problems are there and try to work through them. Cultural and community-specific responses are totally essential to working with these people.

10:20

Through the introduction of Bill 6, the Northland School Division Act, we are taking the step of re-establishing an elected board of trustees during municipal elections this fall. That is something that's very important, that we need to do. Specifically, the new Northland School Division Act will introduce a governance structure with between seven and 11 wards, each with an elected trustee. I think that principle is something that's very important. It will replace the existing local school board committees with school councils and have similar roles and responsibilities as other school councils in Alberta, so that structure will be the same as in other jurisdictions.

These school councils can include nonelected members, which is important for community involvement. In this way, elders, youth, parents, and other interested community people will be supported and become involved. That's one way in which we can try and improve things in the school division. If we have an inclusive society where everybody feels that they're involved, they will hopefully support education for their children.

This act will establish a formal engagement process that strengthens community voice, including the involvement, like I said, of elders, youth, First Nations, Métis, nonstatus, treaty, and all

other communities for whom the division provides educational services. Like I said, we have to be inclusive. With these changes, we will be working as a government towards strengthening educational environments for Northland school division communities.

I personally support this bill because we are working towards building communities and schools. It's very important that these people recognize that this is the direction our government is taking, where First Nations people are included as equals and are supported in contributing to everyone's well-being – it's something that is very fundamental, that we need to ensure that we are doing – where schools work to teach everyone, not just aboriginal students, to understand and respect the indigenous culture. That is fundamental in order to keep the students going to school, because if we don't do that, they don't have a feeling of belonging, so subsequently they drop out and don't attend. It's where indigenous children learn about their people's history and practices alongside their nonindigenous classmates. Like I said, it's important that we promote that. It's where learning about indigenous history and practices is viewed as being of equal importance to passing along knowledge from nonindigenous societies.

It was important when I asked the principal at Susa Creek, for example, how they work with the culture in the area of Susa Creek, and he said that they have a huge input from the elders that attend the school regularly to ensure that the students there understand the culture and beliefs that they practise. It's important that we promote that so that the students have a feeling of belonging. It's where students of all backgrounds and abilities are encouraged to advance their knowledge of aboriginal cultures. That, like I said, is why I'd asked that question of the principal, to make sure that the students are getting a knowledge of the culture that exists in that area.

It's where teachers are given the books and resources that they want and need to include indigenous perspectives, history, culture, and stories in the curricula. It's where all school staff, for instance, can pronounce and spell the names of all local indigenous peoples, and in some cases that is a problem where the teachers can't pronounce their last names. It's a way of inclusion and of respect for them. It's where all teachers, for example, are able to explain the significance of indigenous structures and important indigenous community events. That is also important so that they feel included. It's where respect is shown for the indigenous peoples of each area by including elders from these traditional territories in important school events and, of course, a large part of forming the educational program.

It's where indigenous children, for example, are challenged throughout their learning to support them in reaching their highest potential. That is something that we really need to do in order to keep these students motivated so that they have the idea that school is a place of learning. It's where indigenous children are expected, for example, to graduate with full credentials and to pursue higher learning either at the college or university level or even, for that matter, to enter the trades. It's where indigenous students, for example, are supported in feeling that they are important, equal, and highly valued members of both the educational and the greater community. With that in itself, if we practise that, we may get higher attendance at schools where their cultures, like I said, are respected. It's where we all work together, both indigenous and nonindigenous, to build a better society that works for all of us. I think that's the goal that we need to really consider here.

Northland school division needs our support, and our government is committed to make life better for students and families in the northern region such as Susa Creek. Like I said, I recently visited Susa Creek school and met a lot of amazing kids who are hungry for knowledge but need specialized support to be able to continue

with their education. The biggest problem they have is when they complete grade 8 and end up going to the public school in Grande Cache, for example. The transition issue is huge. Maybe somewhere along the line we can address that. I don't know if that's at this point, but it's certainly something that we need to look at doing.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the principal and teachers at Susa Creek school for their contributions and great work as part of this very unique school division. Like I said, I had a great visit with them, and they were very excited that I was there. Meeting in person and having the opportunity to see them at their school has helped me to better understand how special and important schools like Susa Creek are for the culture and for the community of Susa Creek. That was a very important aspect for them.

We will also be providing additional funding to the division in the years ahead and working to improve teacher retention. Of course, teacher retention is a huge problem in places like Susa Creek. How do you get teachers to move up to such a remote area and then retain them? That is a huge issue that we need to look at going forward. Transportation and other support services definitely need to be front and centre to help student learning.

Ultimately, the newly elected board will determine how this additional funding is used to support the students in their learning, to produce better outcomes, and it is important that we do that.

Our government launched three phases of community engagement regarding the Northland school division back in November. We held initial talks with community leaders to get a sense of their support for a path for Northland. There were sessions in nine communities from December 2016 to January 2017 as part of how the engagement process was carried out. We then held postengagements that involved one-on-one discussions with individuals who participated in the sessions to gain their personal feedback, which was important.

Finally, these discussions will continue over the summer as we work hard to encourage greater understanding and awareness of the plan, and that's important to promote the plan moving forward. By talking with everyone involved, we will be building relationships to strengthen and support community engagement.

10:30

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments to the hon. member. The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Yeah. The hon. member made some great points. I would care to hear the remainder of his conversation and hear if he could elaborate a bit more about his school division.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you very much. Like I said, the discussions will continue over the summer. It's important that we continue to do that so that we can make sure that we're looking out for the best interests of the school division itself and especially by supporting the Susa Creek school. Like I said, they were so excited that I showed up there. It was just something else. Our government is working hard to ensure that they're able to make the most of educational opportunities for all children living in the most remote regions of the province, and that is something that we need to continue.

I'd like to end with that. Thank you very much. I hope that we can all support this bill.

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

Seeing none, are there any further speakers to the bill? The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a great joy for me today to be able to stand here alongside my colleague the Minister of Education in support of this legislation, that has been many years in coming. I was actually working as a researcher for the now Premier at the time this board was abolished, and it came as a surprise. I don't think a lot of people saw this as something that the government was anticipating doing.

When the announcement of the official administrator, or the not a trustee, for lack of a better term, was made to run the organization for what many thought would be a year or two, this was in 2010, right before the then school board elections. Colin was fantastic, I have to say. I think his heart, I think his expertise were all in the right place. I think he thought he'd be stepping up for a couple of years maybe to help them through a tough patch, to make sure that they hired a superintendent, that their student achievement got focused in the areas it needed to be, and to work with the community to develop a model that would be effective, moving forward, to ensure adequate participation, engagement, and voice for those who live in the region and who are parents, grandparents, friends, and neighbours of the children. I have to say that he sure served a lot longer than a year or two. I believe it was about six years, actually, that he was in the role. I want to thank him for the work that he did during that period of time and the now interim trustee, not a board member, as well, who has past experience, I believe, being an elected school board member.

But no matter how well intending they were, I think it was a disservice that the community didn't have an opportunity to be fully engaged and provide direction through an organized structure. I had a chance to ask, before I was elected to this House, the then Education minister about his plans, and I was deeply saddened that under former ministers it seemed like this wasn't even something that was on the radar, giving democracy back to communities that had had their voice taken away from them for so many years. So it is with great pride that I stand today beside our Education minister working to make sure that engagement is brought back to the community.

I have to say that in our mission for truth and reconciliation acknowledging the truths of residential schools is one piece, but true reconciliation is making sure that we do not have to say sorry twice. Today's bill is a step in that direction: making sure that we're engaged in having communities make decisions for their own children, making sure that we honour traditional knowledge and teachings, making sure that we acknowledge the historical legacy and the intergenerational trauma that occurred over generations. I have to say that if this were a school board in another part of the province, I don't think it would have taken a change in government to make this exercising of democracy come back to the people of northern Alberta who are First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, who, just like all other representatives in the province, deserve to have a voice in making local decisions to support their children.

Is this bill absolutely perfect? I think it's great. I think it's far better than where we came from today and the system that we have in place today, and I think that the community will continue to work to evolve the system. But I am very proud that we'll be bringing back a local voice. I think that the ward system will be well served in this community, and I think it's important for children that when their family members, their neighbours, and their friends want to be engaged in their education system, we put in every means possible

for that to happen, because it's good for democracy but also because it's good for student achievement.

I recall many surveys and academic papers from my time at the U of A and as a school board member that showed that student achievement is higher when children know that their parents, their family members care about their educational success and when they're engaged in it. For some kids, that might look like sitting down with your mum and dad and doing your homework together at the end of the day. For others, it might be your mum waking you up in the morning and saying: it's really important that you go to school; I want you to be successful. For others, it might be having a parent volunteer. For others, it might be about being part of a democratically elected governance structure. But kids need to know that their family is engaged and committed to their achievement, and if they know that, they themselves are far more likely to achieve.

It's something that seems so basic, but when for generations we've stripped children away from their families and told them that their parents don't have the expertise to help make those decisions, when they were sent to residential schools and told that the system knew better, we certainly did not respect the role of their families, the role of their communities, or the importance that it was to that child's own success to have family members engaged in their education and their well-being.

I have to say again to my colleague the Education minister that it's such a proud moment today that we're doing this to respect the communities, to fulfill in a small way our commitments to reconciliation, to ensure that voice and opportunity for guidance and for kids to know that their community cares, that it isn't just about some outside experts making decisions about their education. This is about making sure that their own communities are involved and making sure that they have those opportunities. I do in my heart of hearts, as well as from looking at educational research, believe that this is going to make a difference for student achievement as well as honouring the many people who are committed to making sure that they have an opportunity to serve their children and the community.

I think it's going to be still a long journey, I think there are lots of challenges, and I think that Northland has been a great model. I hope that we're able to support these students in achieving the same educational opportunities as any other child in our province, and I think that this is certainly a very good step forward in that regard.

To the people who are thinking about running in the upcoming elections, because it's not that long from now – it'll be in the fall – it has been far too long since they've had an opportunity to do that. In 2010 they didn't have an election, in 2013 they didn't have an election, but this year they will have an opportunity to elect and ensure that they have a voice moving forward. I hope that there is great interest in Northland school division for participation in this regard, and I would encourage anyone who is interested in being involved to reach out to their local school, possibly to an elections office, or to the minister's office to learn about how they themselves can be engaged in this democratic process. I hope that we have many contested opportunities to lead in this community and that all positions are filled in short order as well as with other elections that are happening in other parts of the province.

10:40

I think this is very good news. I think that the structure that's been created has enough voices at the table that it will be able to acknowledge the regional perspectives as well as a reasonable number to conduct a meeting, which is also important, I think, making sure that decisions can be made in an efficient, effective

manner and that people can themselves participate in the meetings, whether it's through technology or face-to-face encounters.

I want to thank the minister and his team for the work they've done to prepare this, to work in partnership with the community, to honour the hopes and concerns that they have, and to make sure that we find a win-win, and I think that this bill certainly does just that.

Again, today is a great day of pride, and I imagine that many former trustees, who are watching this with great interest, are proud as well as we move forward today. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, are there any other speakers to the bill?

The hon. Education minister to close debate.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I was struck by the wise and thoughtful comments by all members here this morning and indeed throughout the process of bringing this bill to fruition. Again, I hope that we might have all members voting in favour of this bill. We need to move forward to re-establish democratically elected trustees in Northland school division.

You know, this is a way by which we can restore decision-making power to the people in Northland school division, and I think that's very important. We know that strong leadership improves student outcomes from start to finish. We can track it very clearly from school board to school board across the province and, really, across the country as well. We have a lot to offer. We have a strong school and education system here in the province.

When you're trying to improve student outcomes in terms of attendance and achievement, I always aim for where you can find most improvement, and indeed in Northland school division there's lots of room for that. I believe that there are many students there in the region that will be going to school as a result of the work that we will do together with this new, democratically elected board.

The idea is for us to support and not just sort of hand back Northland and not provide the financial and logistical support to improve student outcomes. I've already made it clear that we are willing to increase our student funding in Northland over the next number of years. As well, we're working together with postsecondary institutions and so forth to provide more First Nation, Métis, and Inuit leadership in terms of teachers, administrators, and even to the highest level of superintendents, who have people from the region representing the school system at all levels.

Again, as my hon. colleague talked about the elections coming up, I encourage many people to run in this fall election. It will be an exciting time, a historic moment, and a very fulfilling choice to help to shepherd the new Northland school division and to build a brighter future and to make life better for Alberta families in the region.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a third time]

Bill 9 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move third reading of Bill 9, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017.

I enjoyed this morning so far and the discussion on Bill 6, another great Bill 6, a bill that reintroduced a measure of democracy, as does Bill 9.

I would like to thank all my colleagues for their thoughtful questions and comments on this bill. We've had a number of MLAs here who have offered very valuable feedback on what this bill will mean for producers in the province. I was encouraged to hear support from my colleagues, from both sides of the House, for the important principles this bill brings forward. This government is well aware that the one-size-fits-all approach does not work for our diverse province nor for our diverse agricultural industries. That is why this government is restoring autonomy to agriculture commission members by providing them with a choice to implement the service charge model that works best for them, whether refundable or nonrefundable.

During the second reading debate we discussed several implications of the legislation, and I would like to address those questions in supplement to the answers provided by my colleague the MLA for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

The MLA for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock had a question about whether or not there will be any directive given to the commissions on what a service charge would be. No, there will not be. It is up to the commissions and their membership on what those charges look like. I would consider that to be included in the issues that ought to be left up to producers to decide on.

There was another question by the member about the frequency with which a commission's membership can hold a plebiscite. In the legislation there's no limitation on how often a plebiscite can be held. As outlined by the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, plebiscites could be held for a variety of reasons beyond issues to do with service charge models. This is clearly enabling legislation meant to give members the choice they're entitled to on what occurs within their commission. To put any sort of limitation on how often they should be able to make those choices at a membership level would go against the intention of this bill, which is to provide flexibility and autonomy. While the marketing council can disallow a plebiscite, they are trusted with the responsibility of ensuring that commissions are run in accordance with legislation in the best interests of the membership. That said, a plebiscite is a laborious undertaking for a commission and its membership, and producers understand that. I do not think it is something that will be taken lightly or overused.

The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock also inquired about how eligible producers are determined and by whom. I want to clarify that the section of the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act the member cited referred to determination when a new commission is first established, which outlines how eligible producers are determined through the Alberta Agricultural Products Marketing Council. However, for existing agriculture commissions eligible producers are defined in the commission's plan regulation, which is specific to each agricultural commodity.

As for decisions around the criteria needed to meet the minimum requirements of a plebiscite, the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville discussed those criteria in detail. As the MLA for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock noted, there is some flexibility in those criteria, including the role of the minister and Lieutenant Governor in Council. The important purpose of these criteria is to provide a clear framework but not to be something so rigid that the legislation starts to stray into the one-size-fits-all territory. Each commission's membership and industry is completely unique, and the variability between them absolutely must be considered when deliberating a plebiscite's conditions. Once again, this process honours the diversity of industry and puts power and choice in the

hands of producers, who could help communicate what those unique conditions may mean for a plebiscite.

Last month I appointed a new marketing council. The board members were selected as a result of a thorough recruitment process. They have a wealth of experience in agriculture, agribusiness, governance, human resources, interpreting legislation, financial management, and risk management that will serve them well as they help ensure that the marketing council continues to meet the needs of the 20 marketing boards and commissions and the agriculture sector. The experience, diversity in representation, and skill that they bring to the table are what gives me the utmost confidence in their ability to work with the commissions.

With the passing of this bill there will be a strong expectation that the marketing council will be working together closely with the commissions. I as minister will want to see evidence of robust consultation with the commissions by the council, and board membership at the commission level in turn will be expected to consult with their membership. It's important that it's ensured that the plebiscite process is open, fair, and transparent and gives producers a clear voice in the decision.

Members' support of Bill 9 reinforces the commitment of this Assembly to the importance of flexibility for agriculture commissions and our respect for Alberta's agricultural producers.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

10:50

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I very briefly rise today to lend my voice in support of Bill 9, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017, commonly referred to as MAPA. As discussed through all readings of this bill, the MAPA amendment applies only to agricultural commissions. This proposed amendment to MAPA will once again allow the producer membership as a whole to choose via plebiscite either a refundable or nonrefundable service charge model for their individual commission. That's why allowing a plebiscite to change the funding model or to remain with the status quo is so, so important. Each commission will be given the wherewithal to determine the method and the rules around the individual plebiscites or if indeed there is even a desire by the members to hold one. The ability to determine the direction that each commission will ultimately take will reside with the membership. It will be those folks as a membership that have the ability to initiate change or not.

Our caucus and our party have always believed in letting grassroots members determine their own path, and members on this side of the House understand the role that these commissions play. Actually, we have members of the beef, barley, canola, wheat, and pulse commissions represented right here. These groups operate in a self-funded model, where service charges assessed and collected from members are often the main source of income for operations. There have been some concerns raised by colleagues in opposition, but despite that, I believe that it's time we returned Alberta to the pre-2009 model.

This amendment to MAPA will now bring legislation in line with other jurisdictions in Canada. Additionally, this amendment returns commission members to a state of self-determination with their respective commissions. It is for these reasons, Madam Speaker, that I will be supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, it's my honour to rise and speak in relation to Bill 9 and my support of Bill 9. I know that there are a few eyebrows raised about this person who lives in suburban Calgary speaking about something that really impacts the farm. Well, I am the grandson of a farmer who settled in Innisfail from Slovakia.

I've had this very unique opportunity to actually sit with the Member for Little Bow as the chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future, and we looked at ways for us to explore the expansion of value-added in the agrifood sector. When we were doing deliberations, it was quite fulfilling. I felt like I was sitting on a metaphorical yacht because we all kind of worked together, just as we have been today, to find some very positive feedback that came in relation to what we proposed. It was similar to when we were talking about wetlands earlier today and speaking in relation to Ducks Unlimited, how they protect ecosystems, protect things like frogs, and many of those other facets.

Reflecting on when we were in deliberations for diversifying the agrifood and agribusiness sector, one of the things that was very important was that we could actually seek out information from many of these commissions, and they were very key stakeholders that brought us a lot of feedback. It was great because they brought feedback from grassroots members. You know, while we're wearing our sandals and relaxing in the summer, they are bringing forth the food that we put on our table and are working extraordinarily hard to ensure that we are all well fed and well organized.

They outlined some very important things. They outlined the importance of us looking into expanding into foreign markets, and they provided us with significant feedback. They provided us and the ministry a lot of support while the government has been doing tours of the Asian markets. These commissions provided us with significant feedback to expand the continental drift to the European markets and the Asian markets while we deal with a lot of the uncertainty in the U.S. We continue to expand this industry, an industry that's been growing by 7 per cent year over year despite the fact that there's been some uncertainty coming from the U.S. markets while they determine what direction they want to go in relation to trade.

You know, I've heard comments in relation to a one-size-fits-all model not necessarily working. I think that's why it's important for our commissions to have that autonomy to make the decisions on what direction they want to go in relation to the refunding of these monies. Another thing that we outlined when we were in our meetings was the need for education, especially domestic education, in relation to what we're doing in farming.

To share a story of what I've seen from some of these commissions, just recently I went to Aggie Days in Calgary. The Calgary Stampede puts it on. It's an agricultural fair that educates students, and schools will bring kids to the grounds to learn about this. It's put on for free by the Stampede board, and some of the key partners that actually help support this are some of the commissions as well. When I went there with my kids on the weekend, I saw big bristol board signs that talked about things from pulses to beef producers, chicken producers. Basically, almost any field that's covered within our agriculture sector was covered at this event. I think one of the most empowering things about this was that it was the grassroots memberships, really, that were providing us with a lot of this education, really educating my kids and letting them know something that they took for granted, which is the food on

their plates and where it comes from, and sort of providing that important respect that they need to have for the farms in Alberta.

One of the things we also look at as we diversify our economy locally is that buying local has become a huge, huge factor for a lot of the restaurant industries and for a lot of the commercial industries, and some of the important people that we really need to rely on for distribution and to support this growing trend are a lot of the commissions. Allowing them to have that grassroots feedback that they can provide, allowing them to have these votes on how they want to direct themselves, how they want to direct their funds is crucially important because, at the end of the day, they need to have that support, and they also need to be the experts in their fields because they're the ones talking to a lot of these individual producers.

You know, when we were in deliberations on diversifying the agrifood sector, one of the things that was most remarkable was when we were talking to a distillery operator. It was remarkable because he's over capacity. He stopped taking orders because he can't produce any more. He said that one of the most remarkable things that he can do is to talk to local farmers, actually go across the street and just have those conversations with the farmer about his barley purchases and the direction that he wants to go in expanding his business. So it's a very collaborative approach that we have, whether it's the individual farmers or whether it's the commissions actually talking to producers, whether it's value-added foods, the processing of food, whether it's the manufacturing of our craft industry, whether it be craft liquors or craft beers. It's really putting us on the map, and a lot of that is led by the individual commissions that are really driving this process.

One of the most fulfilling things I saw when we were talking about this and what I was learning about when I had the opportunity to sit in our six-month deliberations looking at value-added within the agrifood sector was how much information and how much feedback and how much these commissions support our economic development. You know, it's easy for us to say one day that we want to set up a Freezies factory, but at the end of the day we need individual stakeholders, individual commissions to really drive the narrative and really provide us with positive feedback for their stakeholders and be stakeholder directed to help us really grow our industry and grow our economy here in Alberta.

You know, if there's anything I can really say to a lot of these commissions and to a lot of these individual famers – and I don't think they get the praise and the appreciation that they need – it's: thank you for that support and, honestly, thank you for providing us with that crucial feedback during the deliberations. That really helped us to come together as united members and to pass 13 motions unanimously. I can only envision that if they weren't in that united form how unproductive we might have been, but because they brought so much information to the table and provided us with data-based feedback, we were able to get a lot done in that committee and move forward and actually see a positive direction with our already growing and influential agrifood and agribusiness sector.

With that being said, I'm happy to support Bill 9, and I encourage all members to do the same as well.

11:00

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

No other speakers to the bill?

The hon. minister to close debate.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. There are many life and work experiences in this House. We have doctors. We have

businesspeople, including farmers, social workers, nurses, educators. The list goes on. Now we are politicians, and once in a while we get to reintroduce a level of democracy, perhaps in a little way but I think not insignificant. This bill, Bill 9, does just that.

I've heard from every commission in the province, many individual producers. All to some degree do not oppose this; they were supportive of it. Some of the individual producers and commissions welcome this change with great enthusiasm, and I have to tell you, Madam Speaker, some with a level of emotion attached to that. This is something they've been looking for for, well, 10 years now, I suppose. It's something that they felt was needed, as I do.

I really welcomed the discussion and the debate in the House and the support of everyone in the House for this. We all recognize that if you're looking for a level of democracy or a level of governance, it's best done closest to the source. This brings this closer to the source, to the producers themselves, and is able to shape their check-offs, to refund or nonrefundable, to their commissions.

There are some that will work hard at this to make what they feel are those necessary changes with the voice from their membership, from the producers, and there are others that won't, so it's going to be a mixed bag. It's going to be interesting to see this development over the next year or so about where folks go. I'm looking forward to continuing working with these commissions on this, on how the marketing council will assist them with their plebiscites and other issues that they have, knowing that the commissions are, I believe without a doubt, doing the best they possibly can for their membership in marketing their products and doing research and the many things that they do with this check-off money. It's not just check-off funds to run their organizations; it's to do the good work that they've all done.

We live, you know, in somewhat uncertain times, I suppose, if I could use those words, in marketing to our largest trading partner, but it's still our largest trading partner. It remains vital. I think this change for some of the commissions will go a long way in standing up to some of those challenges and looking for those opportunities, whether it is to our, you know, great big neighbour to the south or marketing abilities right across the globe, including Asia and Europe.

There are, I think, some great emerging markets. It's funny how we still talk about China as an emerging market. It's not. It has emerged, right? It is there. We are marketing a lot of our products, you know, not just agriculture but other products as well to Asia, including China, but I find India to be a very fascinating market. It is in line to become the third-largest economy in the world here in a few years. Having the ability for our commissions to have the funds necessary to take advantage of that I think is important and to bring that democracy to their producers, to be able to do that. Other commissions perhaps aren't going to be looking for a change because that's what their producers want.

I want to thank everyone in this House for the support of this Bill 9 and welcome them if they have any questions or concerns past this, perhaps from their own commissions that maybe some people from across the hall belong to. I'd be welcome to answer those questions.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

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

Bill 10 Appropriation Act, 2017

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak on Bill 10, and I want to put on record that I'm not in favour of Bill 10 because . . .

Mr. Cooper: That's for sure.

Mr. Taylor: That's for sure, yeah.

I'm not in favour of Bill 10. We're looking at a \$10.3 billion deficit, and that frankly is a lot of money that we'll be going into debt for. There's a consequence to debt. As debt grows, so do interest payments and servicing the debt. When we have more debt, the expenditures grow over time and over time will not go to services. The money will not be going to services if we have too much debt because we're servicing that debt. To me, frankly, that gives me certain concerns, concerns over: where is the money going to be for schools? There will be less money for schools. There'll be less money for teachers. There's going to be less money for front-line staff as we service that debt, and that's a problem.

Albertans pay taxes for services. They expect good return for their hard-earned taxes, that hard-earned money that they worked for to compensate for what they've given to the government. That's just a fact. It's not an ideological statement. Those are monies that are being taken away from Albertans and being used just to pay for interest. In exchange for the money they expect hospitals, schools, roads, law enforcement. All these things are important to Albertans.

The debt servicing is unsustainable. We'll be at \$71 billion by the next election, and this is being passed to future generations, so it's going to be our children, our grandchildren that will be paying this debt because it's frankly unlikely that I'll be living long enough to be that person that's going to be contributing. By the way, I have a grandchild as of April 21. I don't know how indebted my grandson is, but it is part of what the process is. My grandson will be having to pay for part of this debt that we are now building up.

I had some questions that were not able to be answered during the estimates process. There was not enough time. I was going to use some of this time to be able to ask these questions, to be able to put them into the record. Some of the questions that I would like to get into there also dealt with health facility questions. At the time I was told by the Minister of Infrastructure that these were questions that dealt with Health and that he was not able to answer them as opposed to being able to give me an answer at the time.

11:10

The infrastructure. Being out of Wainwright – this is a question that he may remember. There's a hospital in Wainwright. We need to have one, but a hospital takes between seven and 10 years. That's just a fact, that they take between seven and 10 years from the time that they plan a hospital to the time that they actually have the patients ready to move in, they're ready to do the work, and they're ready to carry on and have patients going through the hospital. That's 10 years after it's been given the green light to build, so we're talking a substantial amount of time, Madam Chair, for this.

On the list on page 46 of the capital plan for 2017 to 2021 there's something missing here because the Wainwright hospital was there. The Wainwright hospital went from number 2 on the project list for Alberta Health's capital list to not appearing at all, so I would like to know if the minister, the Minister of Health or the Minister of Infrastructure, can explain to the people of Wainwright and area

why they are not a priority and why there isn't at least a little dribble of planning dollars sent to this.

Another question here. Why have facilities like the Wainwright hospital been identified and addressed as a major priority then later on removed from being priority projects at all? There must have been a rationale. There must have been a purpose as to why they were put up to that part of the list, but now, like I say, they are removed from that list. I'm sure there are probably explanations because part of the staff that are probably sitting in the government right now would have known what the hospital was like when it was number 2 on the priority list, so they should be able to help give an explanation for that to the minister as part of that question.

The Minister of Infrastructure – this is another question – mentioned that this next question would have to be directed to the Minister of Health. Since there's nothing designated in the budget for more beds for the Red Deer hospital – 96 acute-care and 18 emergency beds have been needed since 2015 – does the ministry realize that the patients are waiting for days for an in-patient bed at the emergency ward and surgeries are being cancelled, causing a huge backlog in the system, which causes rural residents to be redirected towards cities, increasing costs of transportation via ambulance and increasing delays in the Calgary and Edmonton hospitals?

I see it in our hospital. They're regularly being taken via the ambulance to Edmonton, to Red Deer, to Camrose. That's a costly expense when they could have a room, they could be in a room in Wainwright and be looked after, but instead we're being transported out, which causes another problem. When the ambulances are transporting patients out, they're not there in Wainwright; they're just now shuffling people back. But if we have an emergency and the ambulance is, like I say, taking patients from Wainwright to Edmonton or to Red Deer or to Camrose, we're leaving ourselves exposed, exposed to a code red. Again I ask: does the ministry realize that patients are waiting for days and that these delays are causing problems in Calgary and Edmonton hospitals?

Another question that I, frankly, didn't get an answer to and one that was directed to the Minister of Health is the constant struggle to attract and keep medical professionals in these communities when there isn't proper infrastructure and equipment provided in rural communities. You know, time and time again we hear from doctors about a lack of adequate infrastructure and equipment that is holding them back from taking a position in many of our rural areas. What is the ministry doing to address the infrastructure deficits in hospitals in central Alberta?

We have a wonderful ability in our hospital to be able to have cataract surgeries done, but because of a lack of infrastructure in Wainwright we cannot do those cataract surgeries. That was brought forward. It was passed. Everything was good to go. We were green-lighted on that until they looked at our operating theatres and they looked at the infrastructure of the hospital itself. Infrastructure deficits in hospitals in central Alberta: a huge question for us.

Now, if we go to estimates on page 176, ministry support services, let's discuss ministry support services. Well, I can see here that if you look at the whole, there's been a slight decrease, and if you look back to 2015, this section was increased by \$1.6 million. Then if we go to line 1.4 in 2015, there was a \$137,000 increase in human resources. You mentioned at that time that the reason for the increase was "due to the finalization of the reallocation of budgets that are [being] associated with the . . . reorganization," which you mentioned would "ensure that the organization is designed, structured, and aligned properly to fulfill the mandate," understanding that this may occur when there's a switch of governments. Now, since the switchover is done – we've got a new

government; you've been there for two years – why are we still seeing these slight increases?

This is the next question. The October 2016 AG report states that Infrastructure needs better processes to prioritize projects that ministries submit. This recommendation has been outstanding since 2007. This long overdue recommendation has had obvious costly ramifications because it's not been properly taken care of. Has this government come up with a rational plan and better processes to prioritize these projects? This is the next question. What has the ministry done to correct this problem in the current budget?

Another question. The Wildrose government would support local decision-making and take all Albertans' health care needs into consideration and devise a capital project list to benefit all Albertans to fix these issues. Now, where is the Infrastructure sunshine list that the ministry promised during the campaign, and will they prioritize that list so that we know what is going to be on the top of the list and what is going to be done maybe in one, two, four years from now?

Are there any building Canada fund projects in Alberta being held up waiting for federal approval? How much of the building Canada fund money remains unallocated? Did they transfer the money to the ministry or Treasury Board and Finance, and is it sitting in some sort of investment vehicle? Albertans would like to know that if their money is sitting there, it's sitting in some kind of investment vehicle at least making some kind of return so that we can offset some of the money being lost with all the interest payments that we, frankly, are paying out. How much interest has the money sitting there generated? Can you please provide me with a number?

This is on a different part of the budget. You went and talked about a deeper greening project for Infrastructure. I would like for you to be able to explain to me what that deeper greening project is because I couldn't frankly find anything on the Internet that explained what that was.

11:20

Next question. Infrastructure has received some of the funding. What is the funding used for on the deeper greening? What kind of infrastructure projects would you be looking at funding with this? Can stakeholders also apply for this funding?

Finally, in the capital plan 2017-2021 page 2 of 10 details the 200 new and modernized school projects. We see a grand total of \$1.5 billion will be spent over the next four years. Why is there no detail? The pages, frankly, are blank. There's no detail as to what's going on with it. Can you explain how much money will be spent on each of these schools? I'm just asking you to be able to fill in those blanks.

For the reasons I've explained beforehand and some of these questions, I will not be supporting Bill 10. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments?

Any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for this opportunity. You know, this government has said that it has Alberta's back, but when we have a budget that is in around \$55 billion, with no pretense that it has even tried to find efficiencies to reduce government spending in any way, it's somewhat disingenuous at best. In reality it's insulting to Albertans for this NDP government to claim that it's doing them a favour with its out-of-control spending.

I haven't even touched on the fact that this is the NDP's third multibillion-dollar deficit. This is the latest budget that will put us

a further \$10.3 billion as we soar towards a whopping \$71 billion debtload by the end of the NDP's only term in office. We know it's likely to run even higher than \$10.3 billion because, as we've seen in the past, if more revenues unexpectedly come in, the NDP finds unexpected ways to spend the funds.

In the latest round of government estimates a number of trends became very clear. For one, we see a lot of blaming the past government for a fiscal record that ironically was in some perspectives the envy of North America. Let me remind everyone that when the former PC government left office, it bequeathed the NDP a \$1.1 billion surplus, a \$6.5 billion contingency account, a triple-A credit rating, and a 3.2 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio. Now Alberta has no savings, a \$45 billion debt by the end of the fiscal year, an alert that our credit rating is going to fall once again, and a debt-to-GDP ratio of almost 14 per cent. Please explain how this is helping Albertans.

The NDP's deflect-and-blame game became very evident to me when the Justice minister cut the Alberta Crown prosecutor's office budget by \$5 million over two years. A year ago she proudly pointed to reducing the prosecutors' budget through finding efficiencies, which included leaving 35 prosecutor positions open. Then the Supreme Court brought down the Jordan decision, and Alberta had to scramble. So while this budget injects needed dollars into the justice system to hire more prosecutors, this government refuses to take responsibility for its role in causing the backlog in the court system. Let's go back over that tactic once again. It cut the prosecutors' budget, got caught, and then blamed the past government.

If that doesn't shake your faith in its ability to budget, here's another one. In estimates for Children's Services I asked the minister to please explain how our government came up with the figure of \$25 a day for affordable daycare, and she did not have an answer. As a father of three, of course I fully support the concept of affordable child care. As a former police officer who has seen parents in all levels of society struggle to raise their families, of course I support programs that assist them. But the NDP government has \$10 million in this year's budget for its \$25-a-day daycare pilot project, that is an experiment. If this experiment works, the government wants to roll it out across Alberta. But the plan has no foundation. They are going to try this, they're going to try that, and they will see how it all unfolds.

I asked the minister why she settled on \$25 a day. Why not \$20? Why not \$30? Why not \$10? I discovered that \$25 a day is truly just an arbitrary number. They picked something that sounded really good and built an entire program around it. Furthermore, this new program is supposedly aimed to assist families most in need, but clients are not income tested. So how does this government know it's helping those who really, truly will benefit the most out of this?

Another experiment involves, of course, the infamous light bulbs. The NDP proudly pointed out the, quote, we'll change your light bulb program as a success because so many Albertans signed up for it. Of course they did. They're free. Who wouldn't sign up for this? People want some of their money back that the NDP took from them. It only makes sense.

I could go on, but you get the point. Albertans know that the NDP are experimenting with their money. While the government may not see it that way, the budget is just one of the many indications of how out of touch the current government is with the people of Alberta. That's why I will not support this NDP budget.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for this time.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 10? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour to be able to rise today and speak with respect to this budget and some of the concerns that I have and some of the concerns that I'm hearing from my constituents and Albertans on a broad basis.

Madam Chair, it's interesting when we look out there and we talk to Albertans and they tell us that they try and use common sense in their households and they would expect us to use common sense and bring that entrepreneurial spirit and prairie work ethic to the table when we're trying to decide not only what's best for us but also what's best for them, their ability to not only sustain their families today but to look out for the future generations ahead, their children and grandchildren to come, that they are so concerned about and so concerned about the future of this province.

Madam Chair, I'll draw a picture here because when we hear about \$55 billion and \$45 billion and \$10.3 billion, those numbers, that number of zeros, are overwhelming for most people, for most Albertans. It's hard to comprehend and hard for us to grasp that we could drive this province \$10 billion into debt every year.

Let's take a look at a typical Alberta household. Let's just say that we've got a household that owns their own home, a modest home, and have 10 per cent equity in that home. Let's say that it's a \$400,000 single-family home in one of the major cities. They've got 10 per cent equity in that home, about \$40,000, that they've worked hard to save, to invest in that home and to build up over a period of time. It's a young family, say, a family of four. They've got a net household income of around \$45,000, but they've found that to try and sustain their family in a reasonable lifestyle and to provide for their children, they have to spend about \$55,000 a year. Their annual deficit for that household is about \$10,000, Madam Chair, \$10,000 that they're spending that they're not earning every year. Let's add some zeros to that. It kind of sounds like \$10 billion.

It only takes them four years, four short years, to burn through the entire equity that they've got in their household, which means that they have no assets left, no net equity left. Let's say that that goes on for another four years. They now are going into deeper debt just to try to put groceries on the table, perhaps, and keep their kids in sports and various other things.

Madam Chair, those are the kinds of numbers that scare me. If we add all those zeros back on, that's the household we live in. That's this House. We've got \$45 billion in income and \$55 billion, give or take, in expenses and a \$10.3 billion deficit every year, and we're already going into the hole.

11:30

Madam Chair, I like numbers. I look at the numbers, and I try to see the impact and what the implications are on Albertans. We're looking at a \$71 billion debt by 2019-2020 and a population projection of about 4.4 million people. That works out to about \$16,000 of debt per person. For a family of four that's about \$65,000 worth of net debt that they own on behalf of this province, on behalf of this government. These numbers are a little bit frightening when I start doing some extrapolations on them. For that \$65,000 the family of four would have to pay about \$378 a month to pay that off. Guess for how long? For the next 25 years. That's \$378 a month for 25 years. That's paying back the \$65,000. There's another \$48,000 in interest that they're going to pay over that period of time, for a total of \$113,000 that it's going to cost them for irresponsible spending today. That means that their children born today will be 25 years old. That may limit their ability to do some other things like put money into an RESP for those children, like pay off debt.

Now, Madam Chair, I did some numbers on this. If they took that same \$378 a month and put it into long-term savings for their retirement, for their family at a nominal interest rate – let's say that

they're very lucky in the investment marketplace with their RRSPs and they get a 5 per cent annualized compound return on investment – they would have \$227,000 of savings at the end of that 25 years instead of having paid \$113,000 to pay off that debt that they took irresponsibly in year 1.

Madam Chair, these numbers – when we again look at a household, we look at common sense. We look at the way, I think, that Albertans expect us to live, the way that they would live, the way that they would live in their households so that they can sustain their family today, so that they can invest in their family for tomorrow and they can know that the future of their children and grandchildren is something they can count on without being buried in debt.

I was just at the Calgary Counselling Centre. We know that debt is having a huge impact on people in terms of their mental health, their physical health, and the crises that they're facing in terms of losing their homes and other things.

Madam Chair, we need to be more responsible in this province. This budget: last year \$10.8 billion, this year \$10.3 billion. This keeps on mounting and with no plan to repay any debt. When you take on a mortgage, you start paying it the next day so that you make sure you're being responsible with that asset. I've got no problem with us investing in good assets for Albertans, but we need to have a plan to pay them off, and we need to start that plan today. We need to be responsible with those dollars.

I'm worried on behalf of this House, on behalf of this government, on behalf of Albertans that we've got a shovel – and it's a big one – and we don't know when to throw it away. That hole keeps getting bigger and deeper, and we just don't seem to have that common sense to know when to throw that shovel away or to maybe get some people around us with some more shovels and fill that hole back in the way Albertans expect us to.

So, Madam Chair, I will not be supporting this budget because I believe it's an irresponsible attack on Albertans today and into the future. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to talk about this appropriation bill that's before us and specifically to the issues regarding the fiscal plan and carbon taxation. I've read through this fiscal plan. I see a lot of mention of the climate leadership action plan that this government has brought upon Alberta. There are projections within this fiscal plan that indicate an increase in carbon tax revenue over the years, but it's based on the premise that our industries are going to somehow magically rebound and that we're going to see this huge increase in economic activity and, therefore, an increase in revenue through carbon taxation.

But I want to talk a little bit about something this government doesn't like to look at, and that is trade exposure and carbon leakage. I see this line item for carbon tax, and I see it collecting revenue as it's already been enacted, yet this government still hasn't clarified who is going to receive the industry-wide best-in-class benchmarks and thus be exempted from this tax. We were told in the climate action plan that the best in class across industries would be exempted from paying the carbon tax. It was boasted about extensively as a way to reward efficiencies, the idea being that the very efficient, the most efficient in an industry sector would become the benchmark, and then any companies who were manufacturing or emitting pollution to a level that was worse than that would be subject to carbon taxation. Those companies that were best in class would be the benchmark, and they would be exempted.

But we've never seen such a list, and I have had industry coming to me asking: where is this; how do we know; where is the analysis?

They've asked the government, too, and they get no answers. Every time I speak with industry, they still do not know who will be exempt and who won't be and where these benchmarks are.

Now, as an Alberta MLA and the MLA for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake I am deeply worried about the impact this is going to have in my province and specifically in my community. I'm worried about the jobs. I'm also worried about our legacy of clean air and water, and I know that carbon leakage is a very real threat to our legacy. It is a threat that pushes jobs to other jurisdictions. It pushes wealth to other jurisdictions. But it also pushes pollution to other jurisdictions that do not have the responsible environmental legacy that we here in Alberta have had for decades. Yes, decades. Because contrary to the NDP's world view, our people, everyday Albertans, have been actively environmentally responsible for decades.

I want to speak about three such responsible industries that were part of Alberta's diversification drive a generation or so ago. Again, contrary to the NDP's world view, Alberta was diversifying, has been doing it for a long time. One of the industries I want to talk about is the cement industry. Here in our province we have only two cement producers, and they are major employers. They give back to their local communities, supporting all kinds of projects and community activities. They pay significant amounts in taxes. They significantly diversify our economy. They bring millions of export dollars into our province. They are significantly trade exposed. The two producers also happen to be two of the most energy-efficient cement producers in Canada, and because they operate in Alberta, we know that their reclamation standards go above and beyond what is done in most other jurisdictions and that their concern for things like water safety and usage are paramount to them.

Now, these two companies export something in the order of half of everything they produce. A lot of it goes to British Columbia for now – for now – and across the border into our neighbouring U.S. The reason they export to B.C., by the way – that's at the moment, at least – is because B.C. had introduced a carbon tax and Alberta hadn't. That effectively doubled the cost of natural gas to B.C.'s cement producers. It resulted in an almost instantaneous 40 per cent increase in imported cement from Asia and other jurisdictions, and these B.C. producers became very disadvantaged. That is carbon leakage at work, and there is a direct relation between the introduction of a carbon tax in B.C. and the loss of business to B.C.'s cement producers. Here we are going down the very same path.

Look, this is an industry that relies heavily on coal and natural gas, and like all industries in Alberta, they need power and a lot of it. To give you an idea of how much, the Exshaw plant alone consumes as much electricity as the entire city of Red Deer. Coal has a dual use for them. Along with the heat that it produces, it also produces fly ash, which is a significant contribution to the cement recipe.

11:40

Now, the United States isn't going to be implementing a carbon tax, and the United States happens to be a huge market and without a carbon tax. Now our Alberta companies are not going to be competitive. Given the amount of export that these companies are involved in, this is a significant threat. It's a threat to jobs. It's a threat to even the amount of money that they can give locally to community functions. It's also a threat to the taxation this government expects to be raising from our heavy industries. The thing about this carbon tax is that because it's not implemented evenly across all jurisdictions, our government, by imposing it, is giving the competitive advantage to everyone outside of Alberta. This carbon tax is sending away jobs, it's sending away wealth, and it's sending away pollution.

There'll be no global reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. This government might be able to wave some kind of a green flag in here and say: look, we've reduced greenhouse gas emissions here in the province of Alberta. Meanwhile every jurisdiction where we've sent jobs and wealth and economic activity that doesn't have the environmental responsibility we do: those jurisdictions' pollution is going to increase. So there's no net benefit of this carbon tax globally. That's why places like Australia and France are ditching it. Our own government might as well be providing a subsidy to American cement producers and Asian cement producers because that's what this tax is doing. You're penalizing Alberta companies, which then gives an economic benefit to companies outside of this province to send their products here.

Now, let's talk about global greenhouse emissions a little bit more. We're going to be actually increasing them while we're harming Alberta's economy. How intelligent is that? Does anyone on that other side over there have any sense of how globally counterproductive this carbon tax is on pollution and how locally counterproductive this carbon tax is on jobs and economic activity?

Within this government's fiscal plan we see revenue from the carbon levy, as they call it. I'm going to call it a carbon tax because it's a tax. If you look at that carbon tax, this government is estimating it to increase every year. This government has failed to meet every projection they have made since coming to office. I have no reason to suspect that there's going to be the economic recovery that this government is hoping and praying for. This government is counterproductive. It is no longer a business-friendly environment in this province. We've seen billions, tens of billions, of investment dollars flee. We've seen hundreds and hundreds of thousands of Albertans out of work now, and this government continues to blame low oil prices, but again, repeatedly, we look around the globe at jurisdictions that are paying the same commodity prices we are, that are getting the same commodity prices for oil that we are, and guess what? They're busy. They have economic activity that we do not have.

What we're going to do with this very counterproductive carbon tax is that we're going to move production to jurisdictions that do not care about their water like we do. They don't care about abatement technologies that clean their air like we do. They're going to be in jurisdictions that care less about site reclamation than we do. It's not even just GHGs, Madam Chair. You're just going to move production, and we don't want to talk about these particular industries. So it's okay to ship those industries someplace else and let them pollute someplace else. That's okay to do so that you can wave your flag here in Alberta about the great job you're doing here. Look, less-developed nations that don't have our historical environmental heritage are happy about us having this carbon tax. It's going to be providing them lots of jobs and wealth. The developing world is not a dumping ground for industries that are energy intensive, that you don't like and that you don't understand.

Let me make this really clear to this Assembly. Alberta does heavy industry better, cleaner, and more responsibly than anywhere else in the world, right here in this province, and this government has put the whole thing at risk for nothing more than ideological blindness. Blindness. You don't get it. This government does not understand basic economic activity.

Now, the cement industry is just one of a number, and it needs certainty. It needs to know who is going to be exempted. They need to know what the benchmark is going to be because the fact of the matter is that they can import cement into this province. The price of cement coming out of Asian countries to the North American market is already lower than what it can be produced for here. There's already a competitive threat. We're making it worse by having this carbon tax in this province. This government really

needs to ask itself a question: is refusing to provide a full exemption to Alberta's cement industry really the best thing for the global environment? Do you really grasp the concept of carbon leakage? I don't see any evidence of this in this bill, this fiscal plan, or in your policies.

Let me talk about another industry, the fiberglass industry. I don't know if this government realizes it, but about 60 per cent of the glass consumed by the fiberglass manufacturing plant that we have in this province is recycled glass, and that recycled glass is spun into glass wool and used to make insulation, which is an energy efficiency measure in all of our houses here. So here we have an industry that is part of the recycle, reuse system within this province, which is great. We've got somewhere for our glass to go to be turned into something very useful, insulation for our homes. What a great thing that is. Yet this company, this industry is being penalized because they use huge amounts of natural gas in the process of creating fiberglass wool.

I didn't see any impact assessment from this government ever on this carbon tax. I didn't see any indication whatsoever that this government took the time to look at all of the consequences of carbon taxation on our industries, our industries that were already contributing to diversification, to greenhouse gas reduction, to waste avoidance to our dumps, taking all that glass and making something good out of it. Well, here's an impact on an industry that is a significant contributor to economic diversification and a significant contributor to our recycling industry in our province. Sixty per cent is recycled glass bottles. It reduces, it reuses, it recycles. It's the mantra we teach our children, yet here we are with a government policy that hurts this industry and risks its closure. It takes huge amounts of natural gas to make this fiberglass. They're also very trade exposed domestically. They're a multinational corporation that could take their technology and go anywhere with it.

Let me take just a second to talk about net book value. Some of these industries that we have in this province that have been here for a full generation, they have depreciated away the capital expense to build them. They're approaching zero on their books for the value of that plant. So now the corporate head office, wherever it may be located, is looking at a plant here in Alberta and saying: hmm, well, it's going to take \$100 million to refurbish that plant, but is that worth doing? And when they do the analysis, they will do a comparative risk analysis. They'll compare the risk of doing that investment here or doing it at another plant in another jurisdiction, and the risk analysis is going to include competitive advantage or disadvantage.

Mr. Orr: Political risk.

11:50

Mr. MacIntyre: Yes, political risk is part of that formula. Thank you.

They will look at that, and right now we're not faring so well in this province because of this government's policies, because of this government's attitude toward heavy industries and this government's carbon taxation. So these companies that need huge amounts of energy, whether it be natural gas or electricity, and are hugely trade exposed are at risk. Alberta jobs are at risk. If we have a few more of these closures, that's all it's going to take and this government's projections aren't worth the paper they're written on.

Carbon taxation is never going to be homogeneous across Canada, and as a result of that, Alberta is going to be put at a very significant trade disadvantage, and we will lose industries as multinational corporations look at Alberta and say: we may as well locate in Wyoming, or maybe we need to upgrade that plant in

Buffalo, or maybe we need to upgrade that plant in Saskatchewan instead. They're just going to leave. They don't have to stay here. There's nothing forcing them to remain here. They go where there is the best economic advantage, and at one time Alberta had that advantage. It was right here in this province.

Let's talk about another diversified industry. We have in this province a manufacturing plant that takes grains and converts it into pet food. It's a multinational corporation and, of course, a great value-add to our agricultural sector. But they also use huge amounts of natural gas for dehydration, for baking, and for processing to create dry pet food. Just like Johns Manville, they too are a multinational, and they don't need to be here. They don't need to stay here. There's nothing we can do to force them to stay here. They will stay here or not based on the best economics.

Again, we have a factory whose net book value is probably approaching zero. It's been here for a generation now. So the decision is going to be made in Europe whether or not to remain here, refurbish, rebuild, upgrade, or simply move production to another existing factory somewhere else in Canada or the United States. A comparative risk analysis is done. They look at the taxation situation, the policy and regulation situation, and they take a look at the whole risk involved in that, whatever hundreds of millions of dollars it's going to be to invest, and they do what is best economically for them. They don't do what is best economically for us. We have to create the environment that is business friendly, and we had that at one time. That's why you saw so much diversification happening in this province.

If we don't have things produced here, we become subject to other jurisdictions. For example, we had a tainted dog food scandal that affected pet owners right across North America because of Chinese tainted grains. That should tell you everything you need to know about the globalization of the pet food industry, and with globalization comes the very real risk of carbon leakage.

We've got to understand that there's nothing whatsoever forcing these companies to operate here in Alberta. It is very simple for them to just leave, especially when the net book value of these factories is approaching zero. It means that the longer they have been here, the more integrated they are into Alberta communities, the less likely they are to stay because the value of the plant has diminished over its lifetime. They don't have to be here.

I put forward a couple of amendments – multiple amendments, actually – to shield sectors of our economy that this government hadn't thought about. While they rejected those amendments en masse on the floor here, it appears that in some sectors at least you've come to your senses, especially when we saw the partial greenhouse exemption.

The Chair: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee will now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Woollard: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 10.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We've discharged our duties for this morning, so I will move that we call it 12 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:56 a.m.]

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