



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 2, 2017

Day 26

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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

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

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

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Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
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Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND),
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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
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Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
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Government Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W)
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
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Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)
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Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (ND)
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Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)

Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
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Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
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Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W),
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Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
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Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
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Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
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Babcock	McKitrick
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Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 2, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks and minister responsible for the climate change office.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House members of the Cement Association of Canada. They are led, of course, by Michael McSweeney, their director. Representatives of the Cement Association of Canada have been meeting with MLAs to discuss environmental sustainability and the leadership of their members. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to introduce to you and through you a wonderful school that is within my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake. This school is incredibly large. We have over 90 children here today. It's great to see such a large showing from a school within my riding. I would like to ask the teachers to stand as I name them: Vonda, Kelly, Dustin, and Travis. I'd also like to ask the chaperones to stand as well: Karla, Krystal, Kathie-Lee, Mandy, Kerri, Mark, and Tracy. I'd also like all of the students to stand now as well. I thank them and encourage them to come back and see us again, and please enjoy this wonderful place.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups today? Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the family of Noreen Walker. Here today is her daughter Katherine Walker, grandchildren Matilda and Maizie Walker, sons Ken and Richard Walker, and daughter Sharlene Van Etten. Noreen was a founding member of the Alberta Association of Midwives and was instrumental in having midwifery recognized and regulated here in Alberta. Katherine is following in Noreen's footsteps and continuing her mother's practice, Passages Midwifery, in Stony Plain. I would ask that they now receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests from the constituency of Vermilion-Lloydminster who are joining us today. They are good friends of mine. They have been tireless advocates on behalf of social justice causes for many, many years in rural Alberta, and it's indeed my privilege to have them here and to introduce them today. Would you please extend a warm welcome to Grant Bergman and Peggy Smith, seated in the gallery.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Midwife Noreen Walker

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Friday is the International Day of the Midwife, and I rise today to pay tribute to a woman from my constituency who literally touched the lives of thousands of Albertans over the span of her career, Noreen Walker. Noreen was a heroine to many and a pioneer that helped shape maternal care in this province and will be missed by friends and family and the almost 4,000 families that she served.

Noreen's career as a midwife spanned more than 40 years. She was one of the founders of the Alberta Association of Midwives in 1986 and operated Passages Midwifery in Stony Plain. The profession itself was not formally recognized and regulated in Alberta until 1991, and it was Noreen's charge in 1990 of practising medicine without a licence, of which she was acquitted in 1991, that contributed to this recognition. A September 1991 article in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* speaks to Noreen's dedication to her profession, reporting that "she felt 'honoured to be the last midwife in Alberta to be prosecuted' under the Medical Profession Act."

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that the birth of a child and what that looks like is so very important, with each soon-to-be mother having their own deeply personal vision. I am profoundly grateful that here in Alberta we have options as a result of the hard work and advocacy of pioneers like Noreen Walker and other midwives. It is women like Noreen that make a difference and improve the lives of everyone they touch, and this is clear from the words of those she served. "You provided such beautiful care to the mothers in labour, you became a part of their family, you loved their kids as if they were your own," and "She gave us the gift of beauty and calm on the most special days of our lives." She was "so brave, so honourable, and loved" according to her patients.

Mr. Speaker, the loss of Noreen has left many saddened, and I offer my condolences to her friends, family, and the birthing community. I invite the members of this House to join me in honouring her and the legacy she leaves behind.

Thank you.

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

Education System

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Education Week gives us the opportunity to reflect on the history of our education system to assess where we are today and to look to the future. The backbone of our education system is the amazing professionals who devote countless hours to empower our students and prepare them for life – the teachers, the aides in the education system, the countless other individuals behind the scenes – who see the value and potential of each and every student and who want to see them grow and flourish to the best of their abilities.

Of course, no child stops learning when the bell rings to mark the end of the school day. The moms and dads, the grandparents, and guardians across the province who were their child's first teachers and who are there with their children every step of the way are a key to a child's success.

What sets our school system apart from others is the array of choice that we enjoy. No two students are the same, and different education models work best for different students. Choice in

education empowers parents to find the schools that work best for their child.

We are at a crossroads in our education system with the current curriculum review, and if we don't get it right, it could hurt generations of Albertans. Changes made for change's sake do not serve our students, nor does treating them like guinea pigs with the latest educational fads. For parents across this province numeracy and literacy have to be a focus for our curriculum review, and we must ensure that the curricula provide a solid foundation and a meaningful foundation of basic skills – the standard algorithms, how to add and subtract, how to multiply and divide – and lay the foundation for students' success.

We have a real opportunity here to return Alberta to the top of the country and indeed the world when it comes to our education system. It is imperative that we trust and engage our parents, our teachers, and our students, and that is how we will get there.

Thank you.

29th Legislature Midterm Reflections

Mr. Clark: As the halfway point of this Legislature approaches, I've been reflecting on what it means to be an MLA. I think about the tone of the Assembly and about whether private members, both opposition and government, really have a say in how our province is governed. Mr. Speaker, I think I might be having a mid-term crisis.

In my optimistic moments I'm encouraged. Just today I sat down with a minister who reached out to me to offer me 20 minutes of her time to replace the time I missed in estimates when I was out sick. The first phase of the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention was very effective, with MLAs from all parties freely discussing an urgent issue by bringing their own ideas and experiences, not just talking points. And in this House we've unanimously passed private members' bills and opposition amendments to government legislation.

Unfortunately, those examples are far too rare. Most days the opposition will ask rhetorical questions designed to look good on YouTube, and the government will respond with rhetoric and accusations of their own. Then the yelling will begin, and the schoolchildren will wonder if this is how adults really are supposed to act.

1:40

If you think I'm only talking about other opposition parties, I'm not. At times I have stepped over the line, and in the second half of this term I will try to do better. Now, that isn't to say that I will agree with the government on everything because I absolutely won't, and there will be times when I get angry because I believe their choices are hurting Albertans. But I will never assume that this government doesn't want the best for Alberta even when I disagree with their policies. I will never assume that the opposition doesn't want the best for Alberta even when I disagree with their approach.

My hope is that this House can return to being what it is supposed to be, a place where private members are elected to represent the interests of their constituents and their province in equal measure and where we have a government that genuinely listens to their input while charting a course for our province through difficult times. We've proven it's possible. We've seen it in this House. Now we just need to do it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids Lunch Program

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids lunch program works with 210 schools, impacting 3,200 kids a day who would go hungry without it. Since 1990 volunteers have formed the backbone of this organization. Today I am honoured to highlight the contribution made by volunteers from Harbours of Newport Retirement Residence in Calgary-Northern Hills.

Since 2011 residents have gathered twice a week to make lunches for hungry kids in Calgary. I recently dropped by to see the current Harbours of Newport team at work. They can put together 100 lunches in half an hour. Tanya Koshowski, executive director of Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids, explained that lunches include each of the four food groups recommended by Canada's food guide. Whole wheat bread is made into sandwiches containing protein. Raw carrots, orange slices, and yogurt tubes, with the appropriate *Star Wars* and *Finding Dory* themes, complete the lunches, which are packed into bins and delivered to six area schools by Marie-Pier Fortin, lifestyle and program manager.

Anne Janke, 94, has been helping since the program began at the residence six years ago. She does a lot of volunteering and says that it's another way to be helpful. Ann Bradshaw has been volunteering for three years now, saying that packing lunches is a good way to help out, that it's something to do, and that it's constructive. Rose Seranillo, Mary Dueck, Isabel Michie, and Pat Stack complete the team. Also volunteering that morning were Communications and Special Projects Co-ordinator Jessica Zutz and Community Co-ordinator Jill Birch.

Mr. Speaker, by participating in the Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids lunch program, seniors at Harbours of Newport have forged a strong bond with the community's schools and its kids. Former marketing and communications manager Stacey Senger set up this volunteer opportunity saying, "When you mention children in need to seniors, the desire to help is instant." Feeding hungry kids is now their passion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

March for Science

Ms Renaud: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. In 500 cities on seven continents scientists and their supporters gathered to march for science. People marched because there is no planet B. Failure to expend political capital to address the catastrophic implications of climate change will result in massive damages to property, infrastructure, lost productivity, and mass migration.

Some of the March for Science signs said it best. Here are a few: The Good Thing about Science Is That It's True Whether or Not You Believe in It; At the Start of Every Disaster Movie There's a Scientist Being Ignored; Without Data You're Just Another Person with an Opinion.

I know it's tough for the Wildrose and PCs, or whatever they're called, to accept this, but global warming is settled science and denial is the hoax. More carbon dioxide equals more warming. The permafrost is melting. As one of the March for Science signs read: Ice Has No Agenda; It Just Melts. Storm intensity is growing. There is and will continue to be negative impacts on our lives. Negatively impacted agricultural productivity is but one example.

On April 22, just outside this House, I stood with hundreds of scientists, one of which is my son, as they mused and discussed the sad reality we now find ourselves facing, the need to march for science. Also heard at this march: "You know it's bad when nerdy,

introverted scientists demonstrate publicly,” “I’m not a mad scientist; I’m absolutely furious,” and “I evolved; have you?”

All joking aside, the one sign and message I most want to highlight today is that science is evidence based, peer reviewed, and it’s fact. Climate change is real. It threatens our economy, well-being, and future. Funding denial films isn’t supporting free speech; it’s denying true challenges that are facing us, and it’s playing cheap politics that will have a hefty price.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I’ve had a request for unanimous consent to introduce a guest who has just arrived.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent of mine, Bernice Hoi. In 2005 Bernice moved to Canada from Hong Kong with her daughters, Kylie and Yani. She settled in St. Albert while her husband stayed in Hong Kong to work. Bernice is a project leader for an IT company. As the mother of our head page, Kylie Kwok, Bernice is in the Speaker’s gallery today to watch Kylie in her role as page, a position she’s held since 2003. I’m sorry. Since 2013. I don’t think you were even born then. I would ask her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members’ Statements

(continued)

Prescription Drug Coverage for Rare Diseases

Mr. W. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, on several occasions in the past two years various members of my caucus and myself, including the Leader of the Official Opposition, have questioned this government about Haley Chisholm, a young teenager in Highwood whose extremely rare kidney condition, called C3 glomerulopathy, requires treatment with the rare drug Soliris. This drug is currently unavailable to her because of its cost and its off-label status.

When I questioned the minister in March, I brought to light that the previous government waived the rules for a similar case and made sure funding was available through the specialized high-cost drug program, and I asked the government to do the same. To date I’ve heard absolutely nothing. The girl and her family are suffering.

The minister stated previously that she wanted to work with medical professionals for the best outcome. Well, the medical professionals have spoken, and they say that Soliris is a treatment recommended for patients like Haley. In March the Health minister stated that manufacturers are putting impediments in place, but that they may be able to increase access. Well, guess what? I’ve contacted my federal counterpart in Highwood, and he assured me that he’ll be speaking with the federal Minister of Health to open the door to have a conversation with our provincial Health minister because, as I’ve stated before, the precedent has been set where if both ministers create an open dialogue with the drug manufacturer, a compromise can be made. By working with the manufacturer, critical barriers may be mitigated. Adjustments based on population and need in Canada can and should be made for this drug to make it affordable and available through a specialized high-cost drug program.

I’m once again requesting that this government follow up and do the right thing for a young girl who’s suffering and call the federal Health minister to get the ball rolling so that Haley and her family can once again return to a pain-free and normal life.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Bill 11

Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to rise today and introduce Bill 11, the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017.

This bill will help ensure government accountability, ethics, and transparency in Alberta. It will do this by helping to increase the chances of wrongdoing being both reported and addressed. I’m proud to say that the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee reviewed the existing legislation and put forward a number of recommendations, all of which we seriously considered, and I’d like to thank the committee for their work. I’m confident our proposed legislation will be among the strongest in Canada.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Oil Sands Advisory Group Co-chair

Mr. Jean: We know the Premier has helped the B.C. NDP in a past life. We know she’s stood hand in hand with Thomas Mulcair. We know that most of her staff, including her chief of staff, have helped build up the NDP in B.C. for decades. It was good politics to ask her staff not to help out on the B.C. election campaign, given the antipipeline crusade her former close colleagues are on, but now her chief oil sands appointee, Tzaporah Berman, is campaigning for the B.C. NDP. Will she stick to her promise and fire her?

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the member opposite is really reaching for straws. Do you know who else is on the oil sands advisory committee? Dave Collyer, former head of CAPP. Do you know who else is on the oil sands advisory committee? The VP of CNRL. Do you know who else? A VP of Suncor. You know what? In none of those cases would I purport to suggest that I can tell those people what to do in their free time, political or otherwise. It is ridiculous. The members opposite are really, really reaching.

Mr. Jean: The Premier broke her promise. Albertans are not going to tolerate this anymore. The Premier has literally put the fox in charge of the henhouse. There’s no way these antipipeline extremists should be anywhere near our oil sands or making decisions, but the Premier and her government continue to defend them. The environment minister seems to think that agreeing on the importance of reducing emissions in the oil sands makes Berman somehow qualified. That’s absolute nonsense, and everyone over there should be ashamed of themselves. People’s livelihoods, their jobs, their quality of life are at stake. Why won’t the Premier listen to Albertans and fire Berman?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. All of the members of the oil sands advisory group are working on the issue of how we responsibly distribute the space underneath the 100-megatonne cap, and the reason they're doing that is because that's part of our climate leadership plan, the very climate leadership plan that the federal government cited when they approved Kinder Morgan, a pipeline that would never have seen the light of day under the leadership, so-called, of the members opposite.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, that's not even the worst of it. Berman and other antipipeline extremists sitting on the oil sands advisory group are being paid – listen for it – \$600 a day for every single meeting, with full expenses on top of that. It's sickening to think that rig workers right now, who have seen their hours cut or have been laid off, are paying even a penny to these people. But the NDP are more interested in impressing Leap Manifesto authors than regular working people in Alberta. If the Premier won't fire her, will she tell Albertans right now how much money out of their taxpayer dollars these people are getting?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe the member opposite just cited what the advisory panel members are receiving to be on the panel. They are working very hard on a critical component of our climate leadership plan, which is in and of itself a critical component to our goal, which we are very close to meeting, of repositioning Alberta's energy industry so that we are more successful at diversifying our markets and getting our product to the Asia Pacific, something that will be good for all Albertans as we move this province forward.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Trade with the United States

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, Edmonton Oilers fans did more for Canada-U.S. relations by singing the American national anthem this week than anything that's ever been done by this NDP government. The fact is that under the Premier's watch, her cabinet has been largely silent on the pressing issues related to NAFTA under President Trump. These are serious issues. As a major player in trade, with exports of energy, agriculture, petrochemicals, and lumber to the United States, having our voice heard is absolutely crucial. Why, then, is the Premier dropping the ball and allowing other jurisdictions to dominate the trade conversations with our closest ally?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was very pleased, actually, to be the first Premier to go to Washington under the new administration to make the case on behalf of our energy industry, our forestry industry, our manufacturing industry, our agricultural industry, understanding how important it is to maintain those important trade relationships.

At the same time, what we need to do is diversify our markets. That's why I'm so proud to have been to China with our minister of economic development, who led the largest ever delegation to Asia in the history of this government, because when we say that we're going to diversify, Mr. Speaker, that's what we do. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
First supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I know she went to Washington. I was there a week before, meeting with pretty much exactly the same people.

Our neighbouring provinces and Canada's federal government understand the significance of Canada-U.S. relations and the threat of NAFTA being tweaked or withdrawn. It's why B.C. Premier Christy Clark has vowed to fight for the forestry industry over the renewed softwood lumber dispute and is using every single tool at her disposal to do so. I wish the NDP government right here across from us would do the same thing, but instead they have been largely silent on the topic. Why does the Premier refuse to stand up for Alberta's interests and jobs and be an effective voice for . . .

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

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by saying that I reject categorically the assertions that the member opposite has said about what our government has done on the softwood lumber agreement as well as how it compares to what's been going on in other jurisdictions. One of the key things that we need to do, of course, is to diversify our lumber markets. That's what we were just working on doing as this matter came to a head, something that we, of course, knew was going to happen. We're working with the Forest Products Association. We're funding Canada Wood to help them grow their market in Japan. We're meeting with investors in Japan and China to grow our market to help our industry through this difficult time.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: The facts speak for themselves, Mr. Speaker, and our economy is suffering under this NDP government.

It's absolutely crazy to think that Alberta can ignore our trading relationship with the United States by focusing on other trade partners. China isn't investing in our oil sands right now, and 90 per cent – 90 per cent – of our energy exports today head stateside. The Premier treats Keystone like it's a dirty word, and all we've got from this NDP government is a \$45,000 taxpayer-funded trip to get second-rate meetings in DC. When will the Premier realize that economic prosperity in Alberta depends on a strong relationship with the United States and that she should work on it? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's not that it's actually true that the member opposite met with all the people that I did, but it is interesting that he just referred to the people he met with as second rate. I'm sure that's going to go a long way to building relationships with our important trade partners. Thankfully, he's not in charge of it; we are. We're working very hard on it, and we will stand up for Alberta jobs.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Provincial Credit Rating

Mr. Jean: Speaking of whoppers, Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister delivered a few more whoppers yesterday on the state of Alberta's finances. He said that he had heard no concerns about further downgrades from credit agencies. In fall 2015 he said the same thing, with only four downgrades to follow. Maybe he should try reading their press releases. According to Moody's his budget puts, quote, significant pressure, end quote, on Alberta's rating.

DBRS has said that “Alberta’s debt may exceed levels acceptable for the current ratings.” How can the Premier seriously believe that no credit downgrades are coming to Alberta?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I know the member opposite’s favourite pastime is to cheer for the failure of Albertans. There’s no question that that’s what he really loves to do. Nonetheless, what our government is doing is having the backs of Albertans in tough economic times. We made a choice. We made a choice to invest in jobs, to invest in schools, to invest in health care, to invest in infrastructure because we would stand with Albertans. We would not tear them down during this time. I still believe that choice is the right one, and more and more we are seeing evidence that things are turning around because we did make the right choice.

Mr. Jean: Here’s another whopper from the Finance minister, Mr. Speaker. He said that while a downgrade would be disappointing, Alberta’s balance sheets are still in rosy shape. Here’s a wake-up call. Despite being debt free not just so long ago, Alberta will soon have more debt than the province of British Columbia. Alberta will soon be spending \$2.3 billion in interest payments each and every year to big banks instead of on services or tax cuts in Alberta. A credit downgrade will only make life worse for every single Albertan. Why doesn’t anyone over there, including the Premier, understand this?

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, as I said, it’s all about making choices. Now, the member opposite wants to compare us to British Columbia. In British Columbia, if you are disabled, you earn slightly less than two-thirds of what you do in Alberta. You would get about \$400 a month less. So my question to the member opposite is: as he focuses on this path to getting us through these difficult times, which disabled Albertans is he going to cut by 30 to 40 per cent? Which ones?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, fewer jobs, higher taxes, higher interest payments, and higher spending ultimately are going to be extremely bad for the people of Alberta, all the people of Alberta. This is the NDP record. More credit downgrades and higher interest payments mean less money for hospitals, for schools, for teachers and nurses for the long run so that the NDP can binge on billions for things like new light bulbs or a carbon tax ad, maybe, and killing jobs in our coal industry. That’s all they’re doing. Promising to maybe balance the budget in a decade if oil prices skyrocket isn’t a plan; it’s a fantasy. It’s a game of Russian roulette with our finances. Why does the Premier continue to refuse to make any real cuts?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I’ve said before, we are focused on making life better for Albertans by making it more affordable, by creating jobs, and by investing in those important public services that Albertans need more than ever. We will not cut AISH by one-third. The members opposite may think that that’s the plan to follow, but it is not the way we will go. We will not close half the libraries in this province. We will not roll back Advanced Education by 8 per cent. We won’t do that because in the long run Albertans pay, and that debt doesn’t go away. We have a moderate, managed plan to get to balance. It is the responsible way to go and . . .

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

Teachers’ Working Time

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, someone has leaked the new teachers’ agreement to the *Edmonton Journal*. It’s reported that instructional hours have been capped in the agreement. We understand a zero per cent increase means our hard-working teachers are not gaining anything in extra pay or benefits. As a result, school boards will now have less flexibility in how they deploy teachers to get the best results for our kids. To the Education minister: as a result of agreeing to a cap on assigned time, which includes instructional hours, how many more teachers will you now need to hire to do the work done today by the teachers already in the system?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the collective agreement has not been ratified yet. We still have a few weeks for the teachers and for the school boards to ratify it, but I can say that we’re very proud that, at least on paper, so far we have negotiated two zeros for the next negotiating period for salaries. Teachers recognize that they will make improvements to the classroom and classroom conditions for children their top priority for our government and for themselves as well. School boards recognize this, and I think that we have the makings of a very sound deal.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, the *Journal* reports that there will be a cap on instructional hours for teachers in Alberta. I will table the *Journal* column today. I know teachers are committed to students and want to make students as successful as possible. I wonder if those teachers who often work long hours to assist kids in need of extra help will now be prevented from doing so as they bump up against the cap. To the minister: is there any chance under the cap that teachers will be told they cannot give extra help to kids when they need it after they get past their maximum assigned hours?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the agreement, as I said, has not been ratified yet, so I don’t want to discuss too many of the details save to say that the hours that have been negotiated that are in the agreement are very sound, and we’ve seen very positive reaction from the school boards and from the teachers as well. We know as well that we have to be very fiscally responsible during these times, so potentially I’m very excited about this teachers’ agreement because – you know what? – it shows that when the chips are down, teachers and parents and school boards are there to make life better for students.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that teachers and kids won’t benefit from the cap on assignable hours. If a parent calls a teacher outside of assigned hours, we don’t know whether the teacher will be allowed to take the call. Now, we know that teachers, kids, and parents all lose as a result of this agreement. The obvious question is: who gains? Certainly, the union will collect more dues for educating the same number of kids. To the minister: since you’re putting your union-boss friends ahead of kids, parents, and teachers in the education system, are there any benefits for Alberta kids with capping assigned time?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Education has already said, this is a matter that is still being considered for ratification, so we’re not going to get into the details of it. But we’re quite proud, and we look forward to being able to talk about it.

One thing I can say, Mr. Speaker, is that kids would have had less access to their teachers if they'd been fired. You know what else? They would have had less access to education if their special-needs assistants had been fired, and that is exactly what the outcome would have been under the budget proposed by the third party across the way. So it's a little rich right now. Nonetheless, we are very proud of our record on education. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On November 21, 2016, the Minister of Advanced Education committed in this House to provide "predictable, sustainable funding for every university and college in this province." That sounds pretty good. But during estimates he admitted that although backfill funding was provided for the first two years of the tuition freeze, a third year of backfill funding is nowhere in sight. Now, this has left Alberta's postsecondary institutions in a bind. To the minister: will you provide backfill funding to ensure stability for postsecondary institutions?

The Speaker: The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a government we believe that investing in learning is one of the most important investments we can make in the future of our province, the future of our students, and that is why we are providing stable funding to Alberta colleges and universities, with a 2 per cent annual increase to their base operating grants. We have taken a number of steps that will help students. We are working with our partners, university partners and student bodies, to make sure that students have every opportunity to learn and be successful in this province.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about the tuition freeze. It's interesting that neither student groups nor the institutions themselves ever asked for a tuition freeze. That's because they didn't want to sacrifice quality due to budget constraints. Students are concerned that when the freeze ends, they will be faced with a massive tuition hike. Now, there's a simple solution: legislate a tuition cap that increases by no more than inflation. To the same minister: will you take the advice of postsecondary stakeholder groups, cap tuition increases, and move the tuition regulation back under the Post-secondary Learning Act?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we are committed to working with student groups, universities, and, in particular, those 250,000 students who are benefiting from that tuition freeze. We are working to make life better for Albertans, and these are 250,000 students who are benefiting from this freeze, and we are proud of our work that we are doing to make life better for Albertans.

Mr. Clark: Well, let's try again. I'm going to talk about mental health this time. Mental health is one of the most urgent issues across campuses in Alberta, but funding is allocated haphazardly, with some institutions receiving more than others and some getting none at all. The Alberta Students' Executive Council recommends that mental health funding be based on a per-student model. At \$25 a student it would cost only \$6.7 million, and that would include the

115,000 students who currently do not receive any support. Again to the Minister of Advanced Education: why have you not committed to stable, predictable, and sufficient funding for postsecondary mental health?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:10

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we are working to make life better by protecting the things that make a difference, and that includes mental health supports. In Budget 2017 we have \$3.6 million in funding to support the mental health supports, and we are also working with the Minister of Health on this issue. That's a priority for us, to provide the supports that Albertans need to be successful, and certainly we are doing just that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mountain Pine Beetle Control

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past winter was fairly warm with no sustained periods of cold. This has led to a spread of pine beetles in the Hinton area, which poses a serious threat to the area's pine forest. Given that if left unmanaged the infestation could spread to surrounding areas in West Yellowhead, to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: what is the state of pine beetle infestation in Hinton, and what areas in my constituency are currently infected?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Mountain pine beetle remains a substantial and imminent threat to the health of Alberta's forests. Infestations threaten Alberta's social, economic, and environmental resources, which is why we take this issue so seriously. The infestation is affecting a quarter of Alberta's pine forests, with the most severe concentrations being in the west-central pine belt. This does include areas within the member's constituency, the Hinton area being of the greatest concern. We are working closely with our stakeholders and are taking a number of focused approaches to managing the spread.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the spread of pine beetle threatens the livelihoods of many of my hard-working constituents in the forestry sector, to the same minister: what has this government done to address this additional spread?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, we take this issue very seriously, which is why this year my department has allocated substantial resources to manage the infestation and minimize the impacts caused by mountain pine beetle. Priority objectives are to minimize the spread of beetles north and south along the eastern slopes and prevent beetles from spreading further east in the boreal forest. Other objectives include rehabilitating stands with significant tree mortality and the protection of endangered tree species and critical habitat. Removing infested trees is our most effective tool to control the spread of pine beetles in our forests. Another principal tool is industry harvest of pine stands to decrease the spread of infestation.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this unforeseen pine beetle spread was a result of inaction within Jasper national park, to the same minister: how is this government working with Jasper national park to ensure proper mitigation strategies are in place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're working closely with all of our stakeholders, including park officials and the federal government, on how to effectively control the spread. In recent years my department has built a strong working relationship with Parks Canada, identifying and assessing the impact and spread of mountain pine beetle. Through this co-operation and monitoring we have been able to strategically act based on that data. We support the implementation of Jasper national park's mountain pine beetle management strategy, specifically the goal to slow or limit the spread of mountain pine beetle through Jasper national park. We will continue to engage our federal counterparts to ensure that everyone is doing their part to protect our forests.

Job Creation and Retention

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that one of the largest property development companies in Alberta for 35 years, the Walton International Group, has received creditor protection. Investors in Calgary and Edmonton are worried they're about to receive pennies on the dollar invested. Walton laid off 370 people. How does the Premier think her piddling job programs will help investors about to lose their pensions and retirement savings?

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. I mean, first of all, let me begin by saying that it's always disappointing to hear of job losses. We know that this has a significant impact on families, on everyday Albertans. In these tough times families need a government that has their backs and that is working to make life better, and that's exactly why we've been focusing on economic diversification and job creation. I want to point out that the approval of two new pipelines means the creation of up to 22,000 new jobs in western Canada and will provide increased market access.

In addition, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given the current recession having a direct impact on the Alberta real estate market, the steep drop in new home permits and starts, fewer people moving to Alberta, and high unemployment and given that Alberta's GDP contracted 3.8 per cent in 2016, the second year in a row and not seen even since the NEP era, how do the Premier's reckless policies – the high taxes, debt-financed operations, and corporate welfare – actually get Albertans back to work?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to point out a couple of other things. Last month alone, Alberta created more than 20,000 full-time jobs, leading the country. I can tell you that rig drilling is up a hundred per cent from last year, to over 210. Despite what the opposition may say, in 2016 we led the country in private capital investment at \$53.8 billion. We know that Alberta continues to remain the best place in the world to invest, and this is why investment continues to be attracted to our province.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that the approvals are in place for expansion projects in the oil sands like CNRL Kirby North, Suncor Meadow Creek, Cenovus Grand Rapids and given these three companies are the Premier's new BFFs, singing the carbon tax *Kumbaya*, and are taking the lead in consolidating the oil sands assets, is the Premier going to beg these companies to get the projects started, or will the Premier continue her job-killing reign of economic terrorism?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I'll attempt to respond to the member's question. Again, first of all, drilling forecasts for our province are up to 2,700 wells from the original estimate. Husky Energy raised its production forecast to 320,000 barrels per day and increased its capital expenditures to \$2.7 billion. CNRL reported that they're committing \$1.35 billion to restart the Kirby North SAGD project, which will produce 40,000 barrels a day. Cenovus is boosting their capital spending by 24 per cent. Baytex is increasing their capital spending by 70 per cent. Companies are . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Government House Leader, was there a point of order?

Mr. Mason: There sure was.

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

Oil Sands Advisory Group Co-chair (continued)

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When Tzeborah Berman was appointed co-chair of the NDP's oil sands advisory panel, the Premier defended her decision by insisting that despite Ms Berman's past as a vocal anti oil sands, antipipeline advocate, her voice would add value to this discussion. Now Ms Berman is once again actively campaigning against Alberta's interests by campaigning for the B.C. NDP, a party that has vowed to do everything in its power to permanently cripple Alberta's economy. To the Premier: do you still think it's appropriate for Ms Berman, a B.C. resident, to serve on your oil sands advisory panel?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we believe that a strong economy and a clean environment go hand in hand. That's how we secured two pipelines. New pipelines mean a brighter future for our oil and gas industry, with 22,000 jobs associated with those projects, and opportunities for tens of thousands of working families, billions in new investment. That's what happens when you have a government on this side of the House that understands that climate change is real, for starters, wants to work with the oil and gas industry, the oil sands operators, that also sit on the oil sands advisory group, and find a way to reduce the carbon in the barrel, and that's what we're doing.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it's no secret that Ms Berman is no fan of the Alberta oil sands, disparaging our industry at every possible opportunity, and given that these views are in direct contradiction to what you say your government wants when it comes to the future of the oil sands, again to the Premier: what possible benefit does her presence on the panel serve since she continues to demonstrate she's not receptive to other points of view?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we have an oil sands advisory group, that is comprised of First Nations. Indigenous representation: something that the PCs don't seem to care is also there. We have an oil sands advisory group that has municipal representation: again, not listening to those communities in 44 years of government over there. We have Cenovus, Suncor, CNRL, other oil sands companies on that oil sands advisory group. They have told us they want to reduce the carbon in the barrel. We want to work with them. That government did nothing.

Mrs. Aheer: Where's the report?

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that just a few weeks ago the Premier issued a directive that banned NDP MLAs and staff from participating in the B.C. election campaign and given that the Premier gave the direction because she knew that having NDP staffers support the election of a party that has vowed to block any pipeline carrying Alberta oil to the west coast would destroy her credibility when she claims she supports our oil and gas industry, again to the Premier: will you prove that your government has not been misleading Albertans from the start and fire Ms Berman from the oil sands advisory panel today?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's not at all surprising that the PC caucus does not want Alberta to succeed in this matter. Of course, they did not get pipelines approved, and this government did. It's also not surprising that they don't want to take action on climate change. After all, their new leader questions the science of climate change, and over here we have a caucus where, you know, we have many, many opinions on climate change. Their leader for now tends to condone them. We'll see about the future. We never know. These are the same people who spent over a decade shouting down those with different views. We're not . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Police Disclosure of Homicide Victims' Names

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the RCMP in Alberta has become increasingly transparent in releasing the names of homicide victims, some police services have begun to withhold more and more names. As a result, this information is being released inconsistently. Almost half of the victims of homicides in Edmonton in 2017 have had their names withheld. At its core this is an issue of transparency. Does the Minister of Justice believe that this is a troubling trend, and are changes being made?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Police services do make operational decisions independent of the ministry. I do know that they consider very carefully a number of different factors, including transparency but also including the fact that in some instances where there is no danger to the public, the family and particularly the children of the victim may be negatively impacted by releasing the names. This is obviously a complex issue, that's

very difficult for both families and for the public, and we understand that the service takes their responsibility very seriously.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When families choose, that's one thing; when the police choose to not release the names, that's another.

Given that withholding information from the public can pose a significant threat to Alberta's communities and even limit the investigative efforts of the police and considering that, as Sergeant Jack Poitras with the RCMP K Division says, "the community wants to know what's going on, we try to get those names out there. It's a concern for the citizens when heinous crimes occur that they are informed," does the minister believe that transparency and openness should be the default, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, as I've said, police make these decisions considering several factors. Transparency is absolutely one of those factors. Additional factors include the safety of the public. When there's an issue of safety, obviously the name needs to be released. But one of those factors is, in fact, the victims and the families of the victims, and their needs need to be taken into account as well. You know, they have a very difficult decision to make, and I think they take their obligations very seriously in making those choices.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that it's really no secret that Alberta Justice is the worst department when it comes to withholding information and that Albertans need to have confidence that critical information is being appropriately reported and given that section 32 of FOIP states that a public body must not keep secret any information "the disclosure of which is, for any . . . reason, clearly in the public interest" and given that Albertans have the right to expect consistency for critical issues like this one but that there is some confusion here, Minister, this is your opportunity. Show some leadership; provide clarity. Albertans want transparency on this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said twice before, these are very challenging cases. These are very difficult decisions for police to make. They do absolutely consider the interest in transparency. They do absolutely consider the interest in public safety. But in an instance where the perpetrator is already known, as in an instance of two people in the same family where the children may ultimately be harmed or other family members may ultimately be harmed by the release of that information, sometimes they make a difficult choice.

The Speaker: Lacombe-Ponoka.

Minimum Wage Increase and Nonprofit Organizations

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This one is tragic. We warned that raising the minimum wage would hurt charities. We begged the government to do an economic impact study before going ahead with their ideological plan. Now we have charities telling us that children, seniors, and those with disabilities will suffer from this minimum wage increase unless something is done. Helping families out of poverty is critically important, but hurting charities is the absolute wrong way to do it. Will the minister continue to raise the

minimum wage on the backs of nonprofits since it actually hurts children, seniors, and disabled people?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. All hard-working Albertans deserve to make enough money to support themselves and their families. Research tells us that we have 300,000 Albertans who are earning less than \$15 an hour. The majority of them are adults; 100,000 of them have children. The majority of them are women. These are hard-working Albertans who go to work full-time and sometimes need to stop at the food bank on their way home because their minimum wage does not allow them to take care of their families. We are committed to a \$15 minimum wage.

Thank you.

Mr. Orr: Well, there's no compassion there for the disabled.

The Lacombe action group compiled the data to show how much more the minimum wage will cost their group to take care of adults and children with disabilities. Given that they've already been subsidizing staff wages from their own administrative budget, now they'll have no other option because they will soon be over \$120,000 a year in the hole. Given that they are going to have to reduce services for those with disabilities, will the minister allow this to happen by continuing with the minimum wage increase?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to work with businesses throughout Alberta to make sure that we are supporting them by decreasing small-business taxes, by making sure that there are grants available. At the same time, we need to make sure that we are taking care of the lowest earning Albertans in our province. Many business owners have said that they're in support of the increase in minimum wage for various reasons, including improved employee retention and making sure that their employees do not have to stop at the food bank on their way home from work.

Mr. Orr: I'm ashamed and the minister should also be ashamed that it's come to this.

Given that these are the services that the Lacombe action group will not be able to fully fund in the years to come – personal care aides, domestic child care, extraordinary child care, behavioural care, and specialized care for the disabled – and given that the unsustainable raise in minimum wage means that the Lacombe action group cannot fund all of these programs, will the minister tell them which program is the least important so they know which program to cut?

2:30

Mr. Sabir: As a government we are absolutely . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mr. Sabir: . . . committed to making sure that persons with disabilities get the support they need, and that's why we have increased funding for the AISH program, for the PDD program. Under their plan they would have cut \$2.6 billion. Under their plan everyone would have suffered, including persons with disabilities. We are proud of the work we have done in this sector.

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

School Trustee Election Campaign Finance

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the NDP removed large union and corporate donations from provincial politics and the Justice minister claimed that they had put the power back in the hands of Alberta citizens rather than those with the deepest pockets, our caucus voted for that bill, and I would hope that the government will support this cause at all levels of government. Now, previously when I asked the minister about unions funding trustee elections, there was no answer, so let's try this a different way. To the Minister of Education: will you ensure that the same laws introduced in Bill 1 in June 2015 will be applied to the upcoming trustee elections?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we know that the municipal level of government, including trustees, is a very important part of our democratic process, and we know that it is a level of governance and so forth that has very modest campaign money that is attached to it, so the procedure for this level of government at this time remains the same as the last election.

Mr. Rodney: Wow.

Now, given the degree to which large financial donations can alter elections is amplified at the school board trustee level due to the relatively small number of voters in these elections and given that even trustees who have received large union donations in the past have signed a petition banning union donations for trustees as put forward by Kids Come First and the Calgary Association of Parents and School Councils, again to the minister: if trustees who took large union donations are supporting the intentions of this petition, why won't you commit to doing the exact same thing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government has been proud to take action on democratic reform on critical issues like taking big money out of politics and making real change within this system. In many cases legislation that impacts our democratic system had not been updated in decades, much like workplace legislation, much like legislation throughout this government. We will continue to work with Albertans to make sure that our democratic institutions and systems are as strong as they can be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mr. Rodney: Given that the bill, which abolished large donations for provincial parties, was introduced two years ago and given that the Minister of Municipal Affairs' spokesperson has stated that it was too close to election time to implement the requested donation limit changes for trustee elections and given that the NDP should have acted much sooner if they truly did not agree with large donations in elections because they impair democracy and concentrate power in the hands of those with money to spare, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why did you or your predecessor not address these concerns in the past two years, and will you act now, before it's too late?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We believe that Albertans should decide elections, and that is why we introduced the Fair Elections Financing Act. That is why we are taking real action. The previous party benefited from a pay-to-play system for

44 years without lifting a finger to make important democratic changes to give the power back to everyday Albertans. PC entitlement was in play for decades. We are taking action to make changes to our democratic system and to return power through legislation like the public interest disclosure act amendments introduced today.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Fort McMurray Wildfire Recovery

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time last year a fire was burning that would devastate the hard-working communities of Fort McMurray and the rest of Wood Buffalo. Given that families there are still re-establishing their lives after the loss of their homes, being displaced, sometimes for months, and still dealing with the struggle of rebuilding and given that every penny goes a long way, especially when your life has been so entirely disrupted, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what is the government doing to support the recovery of families who had their homes destroyed during the wildfire?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. When Fort McMurray was in need, this province banded together to support those families. Our commitment to the people of Wood Buffalo is unwavering. This week we announced an additional \$7.1 million in education property tax relief for both 2016 and '17. Recovery is never a short road, and our government and the people of Alberta are committed to the people of Wood Buffalo to ensure that they get the support they need every step of the way.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms McPherson: Thank you. Given that stressful circumstances like losing your home make navigating complicated systems more challenging, prolonging the amount of time to rebuild and feel settled, to the same minister: how will the residents of Wood Buffalo know if they are eligible, and how will the monies be dispersed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. One of our goals in the recovery effort is to ensure that we support the people of Wood Buffalo in the rebuild of their community, and therefore the tax relief will be given to residents who are still in the process of rebuilding their home and have yet to receive their occupancy permit. The Wood Buffalo council will set the criteria for administering the compensation to residents. The relief is just one of the ways that our government is standing with them in the recovery, and to date our government has allocated \$743 million in disaster assistance for Wood Buffalo.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms McPherson: Thank you. Given that for any support program to work, it needs to actually reach the people who are eligible, again to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how is the government ensuring that residents are aware of the support so that they can take advantage of the program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I was in Fort McMurray yesterday, where I made this funding announcement. This funding was requested by the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo and will be distributed on the ground by the municipality. Yesterday I was on the ground, and it was hard not to be proud. I saw homes being rebuilt, stores getting back to business, and kids heading off to school. It's that resilience that makes us proud as Albertans, and our government will continue to support this community going forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Union Certification and Strike Voting Procedures

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2012 Ontario's Tim Hudak unveiled the labour reform package calling for the implementation of secret ballots when organizations vote whether to unionize or not, to which Ontario's minister of agriculture responded: what a joke. The secret ballot prevents intimidation and thuggery against employees that disagree with unionization. Does our esteemed Minister of Labour also agree that secret ballots in union certification are a joke?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been very proud to engage with Albertans about our outdated workplace legislation, which has not been updated since 1988. We've received nearly 5,000 submissions, we've had people participate in round-table discussions, and I'm currently reviewing the views of Albertans. I look forward to bringing forward more ideas and discussion to this House after I've had an opportunity to review what Albertans have had to say.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given what we have seen in Ontario and given that multiple cases such as Graham Brothers Construction Ltd. versus Labourers' International Union of North America clearly show unions bullying people into voting in favour of unionization and given that this is just one case in dozens where this intimidation and bullying by unions has occurred, will the minister do the right thing and protect Alberta workers from this form of bullying and thuggery by assuring us that she is not going to do away with the secret ballot?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. After engaging with Albertans on the topics around labour legislation, employment standards, making sure that Albertans have access to job-protected sick leave, and key issues, I'm now reviewing the feedback that we've received from Albertans to make sure that we can have fair and balanced workplace legislation, legislation that offers improvements and effective workplaces for all Albertans, something that works for employers and employees. I look forward to discussing this further.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given that Alberta NDP's BFFs in Ontario believe that a secret ballot for elections and strike votes is regressive and given that these fellow NDP world viewers also think that a secret ballot is part of a race to the bottom, is it the current minister's labour plan to stop the bottom feeding in Alberta

and embrace a hug-a-thug union world view in order to eliminate the right to a secret ballot? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given the member asking the question's BFFs did study after study and never changed workplace legislation, I have to know if it's the member's hope that we never change anything in this province. We need to make sure that we have up-to-date, fair, and balanced workplace legislation, that we make sure that we can support a strong economy and fairness for our workers. This is important to our government. We have Albertans' backs. I will review the feedback we've received and be happy to move forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Oh, I'm glad that's over. I can hardly wait for tomorrow.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds we will continue with other business.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. member, go ahead.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today, letters. One letter is addressed to the Premier with regard to the consultation on the Labour Relations Code from McSween, Nelson Martin, CET, the operations manager of McSween Custom Fabricating, asking for extended and enhanced consultation on the Labour Relations Code.

My second tabling is addressed to the Minister of Labour. It comes from Willbros Canada, Jeremy Kinch, asking again for the Labour minister to consider an extension on the labour code review.

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

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Mr. Speaker, I've got two tablings. The first is a letter from the *Calgary Herald* complaining about an NDP Holocaust speech at a synagogue where the 6 million Jewish victims were not mentioned.

The second one is the newspaper article from the *Journal* that I made reference to in my question today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a letter to table that I wrote to the hon. Government House Leader on the 9th of March, 2017. This is my 14th day of fabulous tablings. It says, "I think these professionals are being utilized for clear partisan political benefit of the government . . . particularly in the areas of electricity . . . gas prices, education." That sounds pretty familiar, doesn't it? This is for the benefit of the Government House Leader.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a document written by the Alberta Students' Executive Council entitled Post-Secondary That Works for Students. It advocates for a stable, predictable tuition funding model – not a tuition freeze – funding for mental health, postsecondary education governance changes amongst many other things.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a cover letter from the executive director of the Lacombe action centre which basically ends by saying that unless the issues around minimum wage are resolved, services to individuals will need to be cut.

The second is a spreadsheet detailing the hourly rates for various positions as it applies to the years 2016, '17, and '18 and which, by the time we get to '18, shows a \$120,000-a-year deficit.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies to table of constituents' letters regarding changes to the Labour Relations Code.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four letters here addressed to the Premier from Rob Wierenga, Neeralta Manufacturing Inc.; Barry Robertson, senior VP and COO, Synergy Products Ltd.; Nancy Bach-Hansen, Slimdor Contracting Ltd.; and Darryl Wiebe, president and CE, Kerr Interior Systems.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe there was one point of order today. If I could clarify with the Government House Leader, if the point of order was made with respect to a comment made by the Member for Calgary-Foothills concerning economic terrorism, I've received an apology from the member.

Mr. Mason: I would like to make my point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Very briefly, then.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, at about 2:16 the Member for Calgary-Foothills used words to the effect: would the Premier continue her reign of economic terrorism? So I'm rising under 23(h), (i), and (j), and I want to just read you the definition, very briefly, of terrorism in the *Oxford* dictionary: "The unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims." I think that we can agree that terrorism is a heinous criminal act, and for one hon. member to suggest that another hon. member, in this case the Premier, is engaged in terrorism is far beyond the pale, and I ask you to rule so.

The Speaker: Member for Calgary-Foothills, I believe you have a statement to make.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, my question was about job-killing policies, and I was talking about the extreme economic pain faced by the residents of Calgary-Foothills. In that context I was asking the Premier if she could use her good offices to talk to those companies that she claims every day to be her supporters. I said: would you please request those companies to bring those projects back so we can have jobs? In that context I said that word, but I meant to say: extreme economic pain. If my word is unparliamentary, I withdraw that, and I apologize unconditionally.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 8

An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government

[Adjourned debate May 1: Mr. Jean]

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity today to rise to speak to Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. You know, certainly, the opportunity for partnership and collaboration with municipal governments across this province is one of the most important opportunities and indeed responsibilities that we have as a provincial government. There is so much, I have found for myself, of course, being the representative of Edmonton-Centre, which is right here in the heart of the city and home to Edmonton's city council and city hall, in having the opportunity to work very closely with my municipal colleague. I've certainly seen the value of those opportunities in how we're able to co-ordinate so many things together.

2:50

Certainly, I've heard many good things from our city council here in the city, both from the mayor and many members of council, about the good work we've been able to do as a government in building a more collaborative relationship with municipalities across the province. Indeed, I'll note that Lisa Holmes, the president of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, stated that "collaboration ensures strong communities and increased quality of life for Albertans."

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to note that just today Edmonton city council passed a motion and approved writing a letter of support for safe injection sites here in the city of Edmonton, something that's going to go forward along with the work we've been doing as a province and that the Edmonton Police Service and many others have stepped forward to support. That's just another example of how collaboration between municipal and provincial government can indeed make life better for many Albertans. I think that's an important step forward, and I'm very proud to be part of that.

In much the same way, Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy and very proud to be supporting Bill 8, which continues the good work that our ministers of Municipal Affairs have done. Indeed, Mr. Ken Kobly of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce called the MGA review "the gold standard for government consultation." I'm very proud that our government has been so thorough and worked so hard on this and that indeed we have the opportunity now to bring forward yet another piece of legislation which will continue to improve on that work, reflect what we heard back from Albertans, from our stakeholders in municipalities, and make some further changes which are going to continue to improve that opportunity for relationships and collaboration that we have with our municipal partners, at the same time providing them with additional tools which they can use to do the work that they do in service of Albertans in many jurisdictions across our province. Again, very happy, very proud to have the opportunity to take part in supporting this bill.

Indeed, one part of this bill, Mr. Speaker, that I was looking at and was happy to see was the intermunicipal off-site levies. Now, I know that the city of Edmonton and the surrounding municipalities have been very forward thinking in working through the Capital

Region Board and trying to build that collaboration, indeed building those relationships as an economic voice for our communities, and in finding ways that we can work together as municipalities to benefit everybody. Currently municipalities may collect off-site levies from new developments that are within their municipal boundaries in order to pay for land facilities that are related to things like water service or sanitary sewage or storm sewage drains or municipal roads or some of these important services.

Now with the MMGA, with this new piece of legislation and indeed some of the amendments that come forward here in Bill 8, we're expanding that list to include off-site infrastructure like libraries and police stations, fire halls and community recreation facilities. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I know we do share many of those things in common, and I know that we have many in our communities around Edmonton who come in to work in our city and take the opportunity to participate in many of the great activities. Indeed, some of this key infrastructure benefits more than just one community.

It also implements mandatory regional planning mechanisms that allow for land-use planning. That requires municipalities, then, to work together to figure out the best way to provide these services and to share the costs. Mr. Speaker, I think that's an important step forward, again, as I spoke about, with us being able as a provincial government to be better partners and collaborators with local municipalities. Indeed, it's great to see these steps, moving forward, to help municipalities be able to collaborate with each other.

I am also very happy, Mr. Speaker, to see the pieces of this legislation which are enabling joint-use and planning agreements for schools. Currently the MGA provides the flexibility for municipalities to be able to enter into joint-use agreements with school boards, but they aren't mandatory. Those agreements, then, outline how the different pieces of land that they're working with will be allocated between the municipality and each school board within the boundaries, but in the absence of a joint-use agreement, the subdivision authority then has to determine both the needs of the municipality and the school board. Instead, now moving forward with mandatory joint-use and planning agreements will allow school boards and municipalities to be able to work together more effectively. It establishes a process by which they can discuss some of the matters that are involved with planning and developing, making use of school sites on municipal reserves, school reserves, and the municipal and school reserves in each municipality. It allows for the transfer of municipal reserves, school reserves, and municipal and school reserves within a municipality.

It allows for easier disposal of school sites. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I know that here in downtown Edmonton we have a former school site which has been able to be moved on. We're now having opportunities within the Oliver community, and the Oliver Community League and others are involved and having discussions about redeveloping that now as a housing site, possibly particularly as an affordable housing site. These are incredible opportunities that come forward when we provide and make it easier for school boards to collaborate with municipalities to dispose of former school lands.

This also provides, then, for the servicing of school sites on municipal reserves, school reserves, and municipal and school reserves in the municipality as well as for the use of school facilities and municipal facilities, the use of playing fields on municipal reserves, and it includes matters related to the maintenance of the facilities and the fields and the payment of fees. It outlines how the municipalities and the school boards can work together collaboratively as well as a process for resolving disputes. It also provides a time frame for them to have regular review of these

agreements as well as any other provisions that they consider being necessary.

It's wonderful, Mr. Speaker, to see that both the AUMA and the AAMD and C, both the cities of Calgary and Edmonton, the Alberta School Boards Association, and developers that we spoke with were all supportive of this piece of legislation.

I look forward to the opportunities that are going to come forward with this. You know, Mr. Speaker, I've heard members in this House who have spoken of the opportunities for collaboration between schools and municipalities; for example, building a new school and having a public library as part of that school. That's something, then, that benefits the community, gives people from the community more connection with their local school, more opportunities to make use of that space, and saves money for both school boards and for the municipality.

There are many opportunities. Indeed, public health clinics in our local schools could be very beneficial as well, Mr. Speaker, particularly in areas where we may have families that are lower income who may have difficulty with transportation or being able to get to many of these other locations. Having municipal services consolidated in a site where their children are also going to school can be greatly beneficial for these families.

Mr. Speaker, again, I'm very happy to see the changes that are coming forward through this act. I greatly appreciate the work that the new Minister of Municipal Affairs has done in getting up to speed on these issues. I think he's done yeoman's work in learning the issues, working on these files, and, indeed, getting out and speaking with stakeholders in the community to ensure that when he brought forward this piece of legislation, in fact it was what was being asked for.

Lastly, I'd just like to talk about another great thing that's coming forward in this bill, that being provisions for parental leave. Now, we've talked quite a bit in this Legislature about trying to make our Legislature more family friendly and trying to provide more opportunities for members to be able to look after their children. Indeed, we've had the pleasure of having some of those children here in this House, and I look forward to seeing many more because, as you've noted previously, Mr. Speaker, that may in fact help sometimes with the tone. Nothing calms a room down like a young child, well, depending on the mood of that child, I suppose.

That said, Mr. Speaker, currently municipal councils have the authority to permit extended councillor absences without disqualification on a case-by-case basis, but they don't have the clear authority to actually just establish an ongoing standard that would provide for extended parental leave on a system-wide basis. Right now they can decide it on a case-by-case basis, but they don't have the ability, actually, to just create a new rule, much like we've done through some of our committees here in the Legislature.

We've heard from stakeholders that they're, in fact, interested in opening up this discussion and giving that opportunity. Municipal councillors are interested. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, as we are coming up on municipal elections, I know that many members on both sides of this aisle are working to see increased diversity in our public life. There are some great campaigns that are happening right now in this province to encourage more women, of all political stripes, to get involved in the process to help increase the diversity of our province. I'm very proud that with the election of this current Legislature we saw a great increase in the number of women here. Of course, we're still only at about one-third in this Legislature, so I look forward to that diversity continuing to increase in the future until it reaches gender parity perhaps, much like our current cabinet. We almost reach it on this side of the House.

Indeed, the opportunities for more women to be involved in politics – not to say that women are the only ones who would be

taking parental leave, but certainly this is something that provides more of a barrier, I think, traditionally for women than men. This opportunity now in Bill 8 provides municipalities with the opportunity to be enabled to provide for extended parental leave for councillors by bylaw. This means that municipalities now will actually be able to enact specific policies and indeed pass a bylaw which would provide for extended parental leave. We're making the move now to amend that, therefore allowing local councils to have more opportunity to locally determine their parental leave process, addressing any concerns that might come up about extended absences.

3:00

This was something that was requested indeed by the city of Edmonton, and it's been supported by the AUMA, the AAMDC, and also by the city of Calgary. Once again, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to say thank you to the minister for his work on this. Thank you to those who have served in that position previously for their work in moving this act forward. I look forward to seeing this bill passed in this House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, under 29(2)(a) for the Member for Edmonton-Centre?

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising on Bill 8, the changes to the Municipal Government Act. I think, as I said earlier in the House, the act on balance is worth supporting, but it would be good to remind the government of some of the shortfalls in the bill, not as . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm advised that, in fact, you have already spoken to this bill, and I therefore need to rule you out of order.

Mr. McIver: I'll wait for another reading, Mr. Speaker. There is so much to say.

The Speaker: I'm sure there is.

Are there any other members? The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is it still possible to speak under 29(2)(a)?

The Speaker: No. You're to speak to the motion now.

Mr. Dach: All right. Then I would certainly be glad to speak to the bill itself, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the opportunity to rise today and talk about An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. Our government is delivering on its promise to modernize the Municipal Government Act in time for municipal elections this fall. We're making the MGA a responsive and forward-looking piece of legislation that gives municipalities practical tools and resources to support strong and sustainable communities.

One of the things that I'm really quite pleased about is the forward-looking effort at collaboration between ourselves and municipalities and indigenous reserves, that formerly were really disregarded when it came to expansion of municipalities into adjacent lands neighbouring reserves or when there were developments on reserves that required tying into municipal services that ended up in protracted negotiations which really had no framework to lead the discussion. What comes to mind is the negotiations that took place between the Enoch reserve and the city

of Edmonton with respect to providing water when the hotel and casino were built a number of years ago. There still is, I think, an ongoing debate over the road that is bordering the northern portion there. Hopefully, that'll be settled through negotiations, which will be made much easier by the collaborative effort and framework that's provided by the legislation that the minister has brought forward.

I truly believe that this recognition is long overdue. I think that it's being welcomed by the indigenous communities. The ones that I'm most familiar with, of course, are close to the west Edmonton border, where my riding is proximate to. I know of the difficulty that has been experienced over the years, the long time it's taken for development to actually occur after very difficult, tense negotiations which really didn't go anywhere for a long time.

The act itself is definitely a result of lots of consultation and respectful talks and discussions with indigenous communities throughout the province. To their dismay, I think, they are finally being respectfully recognized in legislation as equal partners in negotiations when it comes to municipalities looking to interact with them on developments which have effect over their lands when municipal developments encroach on their borders. It gives economic opportunities that wouldn't have been available to the municipalities and the indigenous body, that they wouldn't have had opportunities to proceed with because the mechanisms weren't there. The respectful channels of communication weren't open. Now this opens up a lot of opportunity for a lot of economic development that would have been stalled because the communication lines weren't there.

It really gives me great pleasure to know that a lot of the projects that people have wanted, both municipalities and indigenous groups, for many, many years will now bear some fruit. I don't know how many millions and millions of dollars of economic activity this change will result in, but I venture to say that it will be a very healthy amount of economic activity and benefit for the province that is going to happen as a result of this change to the MGA and this invitation for municipalities and indigenous groups to work together in a respectful way that benefits them, the province, and the indigenous groups in terms of employment, economic development, social improvements, and infrastructure improvements, I would say, for both the nonindigenous and indigenous communities on either side of the lands that are affected. That's one element of this piece of legislation that I'm most impressed with, and I really think it's going to go a long way to improve the relationship between indigenous peoples in this province and the municipal level of government as well as our province.

I would leave it there for now. I may comment on other elements of the legislation later on, but I was particularly impressed with this piece of the legislation. I think it's something we should be very, very proud of.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)(a) for the Member for Edmonton-McClung?

Seeing and hearing none, hon. members, are there any other members that would like to speak to second reading of Bill 8? The Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up and speak on Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. You know, we made many changes a year ago, actually, in the form of 40 additional amendments to modernize the Municipal Government Act last fall as it was passed unanimously in December 2016. Today is about the rest of what we

heard from the municipalities, from municipal leaders, from families, from young people, school boards, indigenous communities, small business, and industry, which includes new ideas for how the MGA can support sustainable and collaborative communities. We took those ideas back to all municipalities, school boards, and indigenous communities last fall, and we've heard strong support for nearly every policy proposal. With this bill we are delivering on those ideas that we have heard from Albertans.

Now, one of those new amendments, Mr. Speaker, relates to indigenous communities. A key focus of the MGA modernization is the municipal collaboration that we believe all Albertans benefit from when municipalities are good neighbours working together to provide services and strengthen the economy, including with our indigenous neighbours. The amendments tabled today would require that municipalities give First Nations and Métis settlements the same notification and opportunity to comment on statutory plans that is provided to all other adjacent municipalities. These changes would set a Canadian precedent to build a stronger relationship between municipalities and First Nations and Métis settlements and just mean that municipalities are being good neighbours. It also is a small but significant step to strengthen relationships between indigenous communities and municipalities and further implement the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Another amendment, Madam Speaker, is that we are also aiming to make political life more accessible for women and Albertans with young families by making amendments that would enable councils to make parental leave bylaws for councillors. Our elected councils need to better reflect the communities they serve, which include young people, new families, and women, which is why in QP today we heard from Calgary-Lougheed, for example. He essentially asked questions in QP today to the effect of: why haven't you fixed all our problems that we ignored for 44 years? While he was looking in the past for all that he and his party didn't do over the last 44 years, we were looking forward when it comes to new families and women.

Our budget supports women, families, young men and women who are starting their new lives. We're doing things like \$25-a-day daycare, new schools, reducing school fees. All the while the opposition talks about why they didn't fix municipal elections, something which I'm sure would be addressed at some point in the future. Again, they look at the past, about why they didn't take action in the last 44 years. We're looking forward.

3:10

The opposition again speaks against our oil industries. Cypress-Medicine Hat finances climate change denial films, and just today Innisfail-Sylvan Lake spoke about how denying climate change is somehow not going to hurt our oil industry, asking to stay behind and to be run over instead of leading. Well, Madam Speaker, one of those ways we are leading is with this Municipal Government Act because we believe that our municipal councils should have parental leave. Half of Alberta's population is women, but right now in Alberta women only make up 26 per cent of municipal councillors, and 23 per cent of municipalities in this province do not have a single woman on them.

Policies that this government brings into the House it seems like every day of the week – again, the opposition wants to look to the past or to deny climate change or to talk down our oil industries, wanting us to get run over by the future instead of boldly leading into it. That comes from having a diverse background on this bench.

That is what we want to encourage through this Municipal Government Act.

One of the other new amendments is schools. Our government, of course, is committed to building schools to serve our young and growing province and to protecting and improving education for Alberta students. Again, just today, when we were debating our budget earlier, we heard from the opposition doom and gloom, about how we must instantly cut back, about how a temporary deficit to act as a shock absorber in this downturn, which keeps men and women of this province working, is somehow a bad thing.

The cutbacks that would be required would hurt teachers. It almost seems to me, Madam Speaker, like the opposition's solution to every problem is a fiscal one, and it relates to: if it's a downturn, the solution is to lay off your neighbour just because they happen to work in the public service or happen to teach your children. That's shameful, which is why, again, I'm so happy to speak in support of this bill. The education of our children is incredibly important to the well-being of our communities and our schools and is at the heart of our neighbourhoods.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, if I could have your attention. We're not in committee, and each member is expected to be in their own seat.

Please continue, hon. member.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We heard from municipalities and school boards that we can do better in how school sites are planned and serviced for our communities. This bill proposes joint-use planning arrangements to work together on integrated, long-term planning for school sites and facilities. This would benefit students, families, and all communities, and again it's a small part about how this government is working to make life better for all Alberta families.

An Hon. Member: It got left to charities.

Mr. Malkinson: In conclusion, while the opposition beaks off about our \$15 minimum wage, it is raising the quality of life for those Albertans who are working at minimum wage, who now will no longer have to go to the food bank when they come home from their job and, hopefully, will not have to use the charities that that minister is talking about because they are getting paid a fair wage. They can have the dignity to work for themselves and to raise their family or do other activities that they choose to do as dignified individuals. We are doing real change here in Alberta.

These amendments and the rest of An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government are designed to make life better for Albertans no matter where they live. Albertans can go online and see these amendments and how they reflect the ideas we heard, and I encourage them to follow this debate as we move forward as well as all debate in this House. I believe Albertans will see quite a contrast in how we approach governing in this province.

With that, Madam Speaker, I encourage all members to support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinstuber: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government, at second reading. Our government is delivering on its promise to modernize the Municipal Government Act in time for the municipal elections this fall.

The changes in this bill come directly from Albertans. We consulted, and we consulted, despite what the opposition contends. I would suspect that is why Ken Kobly, the president and CEO of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce said that the MGA review is the gold standard for government consultation. The changes in this bill come directly from Albertans. We're making changes to improve things based on the feedback and ideas we have heard. Last summer our government held 21 sessions across the province. Years of hard work have brought us to this third and final round of legislative amendments. Madam Speaker, Bill 8 is about what we have heard from municipal leaders, young people, families, school boards, indigenous communities, small businesses, and industries. There were also new ideas on how the MGA can support sustainable and collaborative communities.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to now take a moment to discuss some concerns I heard from the Calgary school boards last summer. As the MLA for Calgary-Northern Hills I heard less than favourable comments about some of the existing school sites and the design of neighbourhoods when the communities were built. This is related to the current joint-use and planning agreements for schools. The MGA currently provides flexibility for municipalities to enter into joint-use agreements with school boards, but they are not mandatory. In the absence of a joint-use agreement, the subdivision authority determines the needs of the municipality and the school boards. We heard from municipalities and school boards that we can do better in how these sites are planned and communities serviced. Albertans also agreed. This proposal received 72 per cent support in our survey.

In this bill mandatory joint-use and planning agreements would be required between municipalities and school boards through amendments to the MGA and the School Act. This change would require all municipalities to have joint-use and planning agreements with school boards operating within their borders. This would result in integrated, long-term planning for school sites and facilities. Madam Speaker, this is what school boards and trustees asked for in Calgary, and I'm confident that this will benefit students, families, and all communities.

I know that schools represent the central networking hubs of the community. They provide after-hours programming, after-hours child care in some cases, sports opportunities, neighbourhood cultural performances, among others. It's important that these school sites are planned in prominent locations in future neighbourhoods. Current issues with school sites in Calgary-Northern Hills could be adequate street parking, slope, topography considerations, and how close these sites get to neighbouring houses.

To sum things up, Madam Speaker, these amendments and the rest of the act will strengthen municipal governments. They're designed to make life better for Albertans, whether they are lucky enough to live in Calgary-Northern Hills or elsewhere in the province. Of course, I will be supporting this bill, and I encourage others to do the same.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs to close debate.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the members who stood today to speak on some of the most pressing issues that are in this bill that we are trying to address. I appreciate that one of the most important ones for me was the collaboration with indigenous communities. To me, you know, it's 2017. These

are our friends, our family, and our neighbours, and it's about time that we give them the dignity and respect that they deserve. You know, I've had a lot of conversations with First Nations and Métis around the province, and I've had some really good feedback. It's been really quite a positive experience for me.

3:20

I just want to say thank you again to everybody that's been involved with this. My staff have worked tirelessly. It's been quite the process. I mean, it's ongoing. It's the second-largest piece of legislation in Alberta. The biggest is insurance, which is quite boring compared to the MGA. I'm slightly biased, I would say, but there is a lot going on in the MGA. It's quite comprehensive. I'm proud of everything that's gone on with the consultation. I know that there's a lot of work to be done going forward, and I know that we will have lots more to say in Committee of the Whole.

With that, I will end debate and call the vote.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:21 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hanson	Nielsen
Anderson, W.	Hinkley	Payne
Babcock	Hoffman	Phillips
Carson	Horne	Piquette
Connolly	Hunter	Renaud
Coolahan	Jansen	Rosendahl
Cyr	Kleinstauber	Sabir
Dach	Larivee	Schreiner
Dang	Littlewood	Shepherd
Drever	Loewen	Sigurdson
Eggen	Malkinson	Starke
Feehan	Mason	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McKittrick	Turner
Fraser	McPherson	Westhead
Ganley	Miranda	Woollard
Totals:	For – 45	Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 8 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

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

Bill 8

An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government

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

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. The Municipal Government Act, or MGA, is the second-largest piece of legislation in the province, and it touches the daily lives of every Albertan. It ensures that our children have a place to borrow books and play hockey, that our communities are protected by police

officers and firefighters. It ensures that local governments are responsive to the needs of their citizens. The government believes this bill will give municipalities and businesses the additional tools they need to maintain and build strong and sustainable communities.

As members of this committee have heard and will hear, modernizing the MGA has been a journey. It came to a crescendo in the summer of 2016 when the department, led by my predecessor, the former minister, toured the province to ask Albertans for their input on Bill 21, the Modernized Municipal Government Act. They had heard a lot, but a lot of what the team heard fell outside the scope of that bill, so the team composed a discussion guidebook called *Continuing the Conversation*. This book was a compilation of ideas that they heard directly from Albertans, and the department posted it online for feedback back in November. Well, Municipal Affairs received more than 1,100 responses and 35 official submissions. Those responses are detailed in the What We Heard summary that can be found on the MGA review website.

3:40

We heard strong support for many of the amendments in Bill 8. Strong support for these ideas came from Albertans. The result of this consultation informed the basis for Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. I present it here for your discussion, and I'm looking forward to a lively debate.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak on Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. One key area of this bill I would like to talk about is the changes to the assessment and taxation that this bill proposes. The exemption from taxation for provincial bodies is a sore point for our rural areas and our cities. Currently, as the MGA is worded, any property interest held by a provincial agency is exempt from taxation. Yet, of course, these provincial offices or agencies still use the municipalities' services for things like sewage, garbage collection and so on and so forth, imposing a service burden on those municipalities in which they reside.

While the province currently provides a grant in place of taxes to municipalities, the province can decide on a whim that it simply does not wish to continue funding the grant. We have seen this very thing happen by this government when they, with total disregard for their municipal partners, ended the grants in lieu of taxes program on provincial housing and seniors' facilities. This bill purports to improve this a little bit by stating that properties owned, leased, and held by provincial agencies, as defined by the Financial Administration Act, are now taxable. While this is an improvement, it doesn't go far enough as AHS buildings, housing management bodies, schools, colleges, universities are still exempt.

As I mentioned, there is a grant program that exists to offset some of these costs, but the real issue is that there remains today the issue of stable, predictable funding for municipalities, and without that, municipalities are at the whim of the province. So you're left with the situation where, for example, a seniors' facility utilizes municipal services, yet the province shirks its responsibility and refuses to pay its fair share. The average homeowner, however, is forced to take on more of the burden, resulting in higher property taxes for everyone else. This is just another example of this government making life more difficult for Albertans.

A better proposal would be to establish a funding model that provides stable, predictable funding for municipalities. This would

go a long way in showing that this government is finally taking responsibility to fund its fair share of the costs of municipal services. This would have the effect of giving our municipalities more certainty and ensuring that our municipalities will thrive into the future. Anything we can do to improve certainty for our municipalities during this low oil downturn is worth while, Madam Chair.

One other change that I wanted to talk about, Madam Chair, is the access to designated industrial assessment information. The MGA as written currently does not allow municipalities to access information regarding how designated industrial assessment is prepared. The new changes will allow a municipality to request information regarding the assessments of designated industrial property. In this case a provincial assessor would have to comply with this request except when there is an active complaint on a property by the municipality.

As the legislation is written, the municipalities can ask for all DIPs except where a complaint is registered. Therefore, they can ask for most assessments, and I assume they intend to. The provincial assessor cannot say no to these requests, so this begs the question: what is the purpose of asking this person to provide this information if they can't say no? That being said, this is an improvement over the current system, where the municipalities do not get this information in any manner.

Thank you for listening to my concerns regarding this bill.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 8 in Committee of the Whole today. I have a couple of things I'd like to mention, and I'd also like to talk a little bit about the municipalities in my constituency.

Municipalities like Canmore and Banff are on the leading edge of green initiatives, and I'm really proud of the activities that they've undertaken to take their responsibility for the environment seriously. A couple of examples of things that they've done are investing in public transit. There's a regional public transit system that travels between Canmore and Banff. Banff also has a transit system that runs within the town's boundaries, and the town of Canmore has just recently brought in a transit system within the town. This is not only a unique way to save money for transit, but also it helps to connect these two towns.

The mayors of Canmore and Banff are quite friendly with one another, and it's great to see them collaborate. They say: it's two towns but one community. There are a lot of people that live in one town like Canmore and they work in Banff or vice versa. People travel back and forth all the time. Folks that have made the trip before know it's maybe about a 20-minute trip or something like that, so having the transit system go between the two municipalities, where people travel back and forth quite a lot, is really handy.

The town of Canmore did a pretty unique thing that I applaud them for. When they first brought in the transit system, they had free fares for at least a month, maybe two months, because they wanted to get people used to trying the transit out and, you know, seeing how it works, to make sure that people understand where the routes go and sort of get them used to travelling on transit. That seemed to be pretty successful, and they've done quite well with that.

I'm really proud that our government gave them, the Bow Valley corridor from about Exshaw to Lake Louise, about \$14 million in GreenTRIP funding, Madam Chair. This is a pretty significant investment in green initiatives. It takes cars off the road.

Another big thing: it really helps with tourism. We all know that this summer the entry fee for Parks Canada is free, and the town of Banff is really anticipating a huge influx of visitors, and they're really quite concerned with how they're going to manage all that traffic.

As people know, the experience a visitor has is partly dependent on the municipality and the work that they do. A municipality is charged with wayfinding, signage in town, and the costs that it undertakes to show visitors where to go. Banff has a unique challenge in that they get a lot of international visitors that may not speak English, so they have a challenge in terms of – you know, you have to have signage that's understandable for visitors that may not speak English or French to find their way around and to make sure that that's visible to visitors. There's a balancing act because you can't have massive signs everywhere – it's sort of unsightly – but you also have to be able to show visitors where to go.

Banff also has some restrictions in terms of the design criteria. Because they're in the national park, there are design and architectural requirements that they're required to abide by, so this is another added expense for municipalities and another level of planning complexity that they have to consider when they have their deliberations at municipal council.

3:50

The town of Banff has done a remarkable job in terms of making the visitor experience the best they possibly can. I'm really proud, too, that they've worked very collaboratively with Parks Canada to ensure that the visitors that are expected to come this summer have the best possible experience.

We know that last summer, even when the park entry fee was in effect, tourists were actually getting turned away at Lake Louise. Could you imagine if you came from anywhere, really, in Canada or around the world, if you had taken your whole family and said, "We are going to go see Lake Louise. Finally, our dream vacation: we're going to go visit Lake Louise. We've always wanted to do this," and then you get there, and they say, "Sorry. We're full. You're going to have to turn around"? It's a daylong thing. You know, people park in the morning, and then they go hiking, might have lunch there, and they spend pretty much the entire day in the town. Once the town is full first thing in the morning, nobody else can come in. So it's quite frustrating for visitors because they spend a lot of money to get here, and they want to have a good experience when they're visiting.

You know, municipalities, especially tourism municipalities, are tasked with – the mayor of Banff has a saying. She says: we flush toilets for 40,000 people on a tax base of 9,000 people. They have a significant challenge. They have to have more frequent garbage collection, a higher capacity for drinking water and waste water, and these are things that they have to take into consideration. I was really interested to learn, talking to the CAO of the town of Banff, Robert Earl – he told me that they actually have a 100-year capital plan for the town. They think so far ahead that they've costed out all their capital requirements and all that kind of thing well into the future. It's that kind of planning that keeps municipalities vibrant and really sets a good example, too. I know that in the town of Canmore they're quite an innovate group as well.

Affordable housing is a huge issue in the Bow Valley in particular, and I was really pleased just last week, actually, that the Minister of Seniors and Housing was visiting Canmore and Banff. We made two significant announcements, that I'm quite proud of, that really helped the municipalities out. First of all, in Banff we broke ground on a 132-unit affordable housing project called Deer Lane. It was fantastic because this is something that the mayor and the council have been working on for many, many years. In

particular, this situation was a collaboration between all three levels of government. Parks Canada chipped in. They gave the land to the municipality at a very reduced cost. The provincial government contributed nearly \$12 million, as did the town of Banff. This is a significant milestone in the history of the town of Banff. They've typically had about a zero per cent vacancy rate.

It's an interesting paradox because sometimes people say that the Alberta economy isn't doing all that great, but, you know, we're set to lead the country in growth this year thanks to the hard work of our government. The tourism industry in particular, especially in the Bow Valley, is booming, particularly because of the low Canadian dollar. This is good news in a way, but the problem is that the employers, the hotel and food and beverage industries, have a challenge getting workers to come and stay. The pay is decent, but it's not that great. You know, I'm glad that we're committed to the \$15 minimum wage. That's going to help people out there for sure, although they tend to get paid more than minimum wage just because you have to in the Bow Valley in order to afford housing.

What I'm getting at is that the difficulty for the employers there is that they need housekeepers, they need servers, and in order for those folks to be attracted – a lot of the time it's their dream job to work in Banff. They don't care what job they do. They could be doing anything. They just want to live in Banff. The problem is that they can't find a place to live. This creates some difficulties in terms of potential social problems as well and health and mental health. People sometimes live in their cars because the draw and attraction of living in this spectacular mountain paradise is so strong that people are willing to wait it out and live in their car while they're waiting for housing. What I'm really proud of is that this government has worked so closely with the municipalities that we're helping them address these significant issues.

The town of Banff exists within the national park for the sole reason of tourism. That is everybody's focus in Banff. You know, certainly, there are ancillary services, but everyone there is dedicated to supporting the tourism sector. We have a role to play in that as well: diversify our economy. We have to support these types of towns so that they can do the work that they need to do.

Just last week I was also mentioning another project in Canmore that the Minister of Seniors and Housing was there to announce. At the Bow River seniors' lodge we are providing funding for a second phase. They're just about finished the renovations on phase 1, but phase 2 funding was just announced last week. Thank you to the Minister of Seniors and Housing for that commitment. Sixty new long-term care spaces at the dementia care standards are going to be built in Canmore, and this is a significant investment in this municipality.

You know, there's kind of a misconception sometimes that people that live in Canmore and Banff are all wealthy. If you tour around the town, you see these beautiful, beautiful homes. The downtown and the town look really, really nice, so there's sometimes a misconception that everybody is well-to-do and that we don't need to direct provincial funding to these types of municipalities because – like, the former government didn't invest in these communities. They said: "Ah, they can afford it. They don't need our help. They've got a big tax base. They can figure it out on their own." Well, you know what, Madam Chair? That's just not true because in the Bow Valley, like I said, a lot of people work in the service industry, and those jobs don't pay all that well. Those people have got families to feed, and the rents are astronomical. If you can imagine having such a low vacancy rate, you know, sometimes landlords can charge almost whatever they want, and people are lining up to pay for it.

I'm really proud of our Minister of Municipal Affairs, that has worked so closely with these municipalities to support them. It's a

broad array of supports that have been provided: you know, public transit, affordable housing. I know that last summer we provided funding for Canmore's waste-water facility and upgrading that to meet future demands.

You know what? Another thing. I like to talk about Canmore and Banff a lot because not only are they beautiful towns, but they've got some very innovative policies there, too. Actually, in Canmore and Banff the mayors of those two towns were validators and endorsed our climate leadership plan. They were actually on the press release, Madam Chair. I'm really proud that they stood up and they said: look; we're proud of taking action on the environment. They don't have any misconceptions or misapprehensions of whether climate change is real; they know that it is. When visitors come from abroad to places like that, they want to know that not only the municipalities but also the businesses take their responsibility for the environment seriously.

People like to shop for Alberta products, locally raised food. For businesses to be able to market themselves as being locally driven is a huge draw for tourists. They come in, and they say: "I want to try Alberta beef. I've heard that Alberta beef is the best beef in the world." It is, and they have a great chance to try that out.

4:00

The towns of Banff and Canmore have also created initiatives in terms of solar panels. Those two municipalities also provide incentives for folks to put solar panels on their homes, and those programs have been oversubscribed. They're so popular, just like the programs that the minister of environment has proposed. Albertans are very excited about these, very similarly to the way the citizens of Banff and Canmore are about those local initiatives.

In the municipal district of Bighorn, which is neighbouring Canmore, the Stoney Nakoda reserve as well as the town of Cochrane, a local councillor there – I can't think of his name right now, but it'll come to me – is the chairperson for what's called the Southern Alberta Energy from Waste Association project. The acronym is SAEWA. This is a collaboration between many municipalities in southern Alberta as an innovative way to deal with their waste stream. They're in discussions. It's a partnership, like I said, between municipalities in terms of: what do we do with our solid waste? If you bury the solid waste, it can create methane emissions, which we know is a very potent greenhouse gas that's even more powerful than CO₂.

One of the ways that they've thought of to innovatively deal with their waste is to incinerate the waste and generate energy from that. It's interesting in this example because a lot of times there's this "not in my backyard" approach to dealing with solid waste. Most municipalities say, "Well, we don't want that. People don't want that in their backyard," but the SAEWA project is actually quite the inverse of that. A lot of the municipalities are vying to have this facility located in their municipal district. The reasons are manifold. Of course, they pay taxes on their property, but also it actually generates a lot of economic activity. You know, you're burning the waste to generate electricity, so that's good news.

There's also waste heat that's generated through the incineration of garbage, of course. What they can do with that waste heat and the CO₂, for that matter: one of the things they're proposing is to have greenhouses next to or located relatively close to the – I don't think incineration is maybe the right technical term, but that's what comes to mind. Anyway, with the waste heat and CO₂ from the plant, they can ship that over to the greenhouse, and they've got free heat, and the CO₂ helps the plants grow faster.

You see, municipalities are clamouring for this project to be put in their municipality because there's a lot of economic activity that's generated through that. I'm pretty happy about the leadership

that's demonstrated in the municipal district of Bighorn. Paul Ryan is the councillor's name. It just came to me. He is a very dedicated individual. I meet with him on a regular basis. It's great to see the enthusiasm and how municipalities from across southern Alberta are coming together to support this initiative.

You know, to talk about collaboration a bit, I'd like to talk about FCSS services and how they relate to municipalities. Most people know that FCSS is kind of a three-way collaboration between the province, the municipality, and the FCSS entities themselves. I'm really proud that for the first time in many, many years our government increased the funding to FCSS. It's an essential service to the towns that have this, and what I find particularly interesting is that it's all locally driven. Each FCSS is different from the next because they make decisions based on what's best for the municipality that they're located in.

I'm really fortunate. Actually, the FCSS directors are having a provincial meeting in Canmore on Thursday this week. They're all getting together to learn from one another about things that they've noticed in other parts of the province and learn from one another and share best practices. FCSS is a really unique way that municipalities can have boots on the ground, and they stimulate volunteer activity. They provide food hampers.

A really interesting thing in Banff and Canmore is that there's a very young population there. Unfortunately, that also means there's a lot of sexual activity amongst these young individuals, and sexually transmitted infections are a serious problem that has to be dealt with. FCSS and the primary care networks in the Bow Valley have a really important role to play in providing community health teaching and providing condoms for folks. It's a really neat program.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm incredibly happy to get up again, well, to get up for the first time during Committee of the Whole, to speak to Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government, and certainly to speak in support of this bill. I'll begin by saying two initial things. The first is to give my heartfelt congratulations to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and his staff for the incredible work they've done on this act. Thank you. The second is to say that I am so pleased with the amount of consultation that has occurred and how the amendments are based on feedback received from Albertans and stakeholders through the discussion paper *Continuing the Conversation*.

Now to my comments. First, a huge municipal issue in Lethbridge. We have been entertained during the current WHL hockey season, and I offer my hearty congratulations to the players and management of the Lethbridge Hurricanes for this incredible season, a season which gave so much energy and delight to the citizens of Lethbridge and surrounding communities. Thank you.

Now to another area of the bill, parental leave. As you probably know, I have been an activist on women's issues for a large chunk of my life. I heard throughout my life that women have equal access to any job for which they are interested and have the qualifications; however, my life experience did not show this to be true. Those experiences were one of the reasons why I had not considered political life until 2014, when my family was grown and I was so ticked off with the state of affairs in our province at the time. I have advocated for almost 30 years now for equal pay for work of equal value. I have advocated for women to have equal access to participate in political life. Political life should be more accessible for women as well as Albertans with young families. We are aiming to make that political life more accessible through this amendment

as it would enable councils to make parental leave bylaws for councillors. Right now 23 per cent of municipalities in this province do not have a single woman on them. This amendment will open the doors to many more women who are of child-bearing age. One more barrier has been removed.

One of the questions that came to me about parental leave was: why should people who choose to run for office be able to opt out of their work for a long period of time? Other working Albertans are entitled to unpaid leaves for the birth of a child or to care for the newly born or adopted child, as laid out in the existing Alberta employment standards legislation. This proposal enables municipalities to create a policy that gives elected representatives more flexibility, and I say: about time.

4:10

The next item I'll speak about is the incredible collaboration that occurs in my community and Lethbridge county and, in fact, all of the municipalities of southern Alberta. On the first Friday of every month in the morning there is a meeting of all the communities along highway 3. The purpose of this committee is to eventually twin the highway. This committee has been in existence for 25 years. As I said, this meeting happens in the morning at the city hall in Lethbridge. In the afternoon most of the people who attended that morning meeting stay for the meeting of the mayors and reeves of southern Alberta, again a collaboration of all the municipalities, to discuss issues common to all, to suggest some solutions, to take action. Fabulous collaboration. I go to as many of those meetings as I can, so I know how collaborative they are.

I will reiterate what I said in the second reading of this bill. There are several specific examples I'd like to point out to you. Lethbridge and Lethbridge county have already collaborated to develop a new intermunicipal development plan, and they are collaborating on an airport master plan. If we're going to grow, it's important that we do that so we have an airport that will sustain the economy that we want to have. Lethbridge also provides various other services to the county from time to time as they are needed. I am really delighted to see this bill as it affirms collaboration that is already happening between our municipalities.

Another piece on the collaboration spectrum is a requirement for municipalities to have joint-use agreements with school divisions regarding allocation and use of school grounds and fields. As I said before, during the second reading of this bill, I believe Lethbridge has been a leader, and I say that because there has been a well-established practice in Lethbridge since 1959, long before many people in this room were born. That collaboration continues so that we have joint-use agreements.

The next piece that I'll speak to is that Lethbridge has already begun engaging with our neighbours in the Blackfoot Confederacy on our new municipal planning that's under way. This fits with the new requirement to notify adjacent indigenous communities when proposing new municipal development plans or area structure plans. What a great step between the Blackfoot Confederacy and my city.

Now I'll sit down, but I may get up again if something else comes up that I want to speak to. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak? The hon. Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Madam Chair. I, too, am rising to speak in favour of this bill. I'm standing partly to talk a little bit more about the issue of parental leave for elected representatives. I have the distinct honour of being the second sitting MLA in the history of

the province of Alberta to give birth while in office, and I have to say that the first happened six months before me.

You know, when I was making the decision to run for election in 2015, nearly two years ago – wow. Time is flying. When I was making that choice, my husband and I had actually been planning to expand our family. I think that sometimes people have a misperception that a person wouldn't possibly want to have a baby while they're in office. I'm here to say that maybe I'm just that crazy. But the fact of the matter is that people decide to expand their families at all stages of their lives. Frankly, the decision about whether or not to run for office really shouldn't be made based on whether or not you're going to be able to provide care for your child should you be successful in your election bid.

By allowing municipalities to set their own parental leave policies, this act is going to enable municipalities to set up bylaws that make sense for their community and bylaws that are going to be able to provide that little bit of clarity for potential and would-be city councillors or town councillors that I didn't have when I was making the decision to run. You know, like, when we were talking this over as a family, there wasn't – no one had ever done this before in the province of Alberta. There was no model. There was no discussion in the standing orders for the Legislature about: what do we do with children? What happens if an MLA has a baby and needs to perhaps nurse their baby while they're sitting in the House? What happens if that baby needs a diaper change? All of these little pieces. Or what happens after giving birth in those first couple of weeks when that bonding is so important?

By enabling municipalities to make these decisions and set policies that are right for their communities based on their own individual municipality, it's making political life that little bit more accessible to all Albertans. I think that, you know, Madam Chair, that also helps to make life better for Albertans. I truly believe that governments do better when they're more reflective of the people they represent, and I'm really proud to be part of a caucus that looks a lot like the people of Alberta. We've got that range of ages, from our friends who were just in the middle of their university degrees when they came here to folks who are towards the end of their careers. We have that diversity of experience, from different incomes and different employment sectors that we all came from. You know, we also have that gender diversity and sexual identity piece, things like that, that I think help us as a caucus and as a government to better represent those people whom we're serving.

Madam Chair, I have to tell you that it's a little disconcerting for me to hear that only 26 per cent of the city councillors, municipal councillors, across our province are women when more than half of the people in our province are women. I actually have to say that as an Alberta woman I found it even more concerning that 23 per cent of municipalities have no women representatives at all. I think that there are some systemic barriers that exist there, and I think that by doing things like enabling maternity and parental leave policies, we're able to encourage more people to take that bold step of putting their name on a ballot, of stepping forward to serve their communities.

Madam Chair, I know that every person in this Assembly and every elected representative across our province gives up time with our families to do these roles because we believe so strongly in making life better for Albertans. We know that, you know, we're not going to see our kids, our grandkids, our spouses, or, in some cases, our cats and dogs quite as much as we used to, but we do that because we believe in our communities. We believe that it's important to serve. Frankly, I think that anything that we can do to help enable that and to help enable that for people no matter what phase of their life they're at is so much more important. You know, our conversations here in the Legislature are better informed when

we have people who are currently trying to figure out how to make child care payments, who are figuring out how to balance young children and working full-time. That is the reality of Albertans across this province.

Madam Chair, I remember, you know, right before Cassidy was born talking to some people who were like: wow; how are you going to make it work? Ultimately, I'm not that different from many other mothers across our province. Mothers across Alberta go back to work shortly after the birth of their children, maybe taking a couple weeks off to heal from some of the medical aspects of their childbirth. Mothers across this province are breadwinners. Mothers across this province are working, some of them struggling with more than one full-time job, trying to make ends meet. That's why I'm also proud of a government that has decided to address the issue of minimum wage and bring it closer in line to the living wage.

Madam Chair, I've heard some people, some people in this House even, saying things like "If you're going to run for office, you shouldn't have kids," or "If you're going to run for office, you should wait till your kids are older," and I categorically reject those statements. I think that's telling Albertans that, you know, some people who aren't them know better than they do about what their life choices should be. It's like saying that – you know what? – if you're a woman of child-bearing age or maybe a dad who wants to be involved in your kid's life and you have young children, you have no right in these halls, and that is not true. This is our government, and it belongs to all of the people in Alberta, and there is a spot for everyone at this table.

4:20

Now, Madam Chair, there are some logistical questions, of course, that come along with having a baby when you are an elected representative, and let me tell you that over the last nine and a bit months I've learned a lot about that process. Certainly, one of the questions that might come up is: how are constituents represented when an elected representative is on their parental leave? And I have to say that I think, again, that's why it's great that these policies are going to be determined at the local level.

I mean, here in the House we have the rules around missing only a set number of sitting days. We've also done simple things to help expand access and ensure that parents with young kids are able to still be part of it and still represent their constituents. We have things like, you know, mobile devices. We have our phones, our tablets, and these have been really great in terms of being able to keep that representation going.

It's also things like allowing infants into our Chamber and making it so that a parent with a young child that they're caring for is still able to be a part of the debate and the discussion here in the House whilst simultaneously looking after their little one. Now, I have to say that around nine months mine has kind of reached the age where she'd probably be crawling all over the place, so she does a little bit better when she's not hanging out in here. That said, I think it's a really important thing to consider, and there are these little tweaks that can be made.

Another piece that we've done, of course, is limiting evening sittings as well as bringing the hours of our sessions in line and more consistent with regular business hours, which then enables elected representatives with young children the opportunity to use traditional child care options and not just limiting choices to maybe family members or friends or private nannies.

The other thing that I certainly benefited from – and I'd like to take this moment to publicly acknowledge them – is the support of my colleagues. I think, you know, we have an incredibly supportive government around this and, certainly, members of my caucus. I've had so many offers for babysitting from this caucus. They're all

wonderful. I've even had members across the way saying that they'd be happy to look after kiddo for me, so I have to take this moment to say thank you. I also wanted to extend a very special thanks to two members of my caucus in particular, who in the early days after my daughter was born did a really great job supporting my constituents in co-ordination with my constituency office and my really fantastic team there. I'd like to take a moment to thank the Member for Calgary-Shaw and the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, two neighbouring constituencies, for all the support that they were able to offer my constituents.

Madam Chair, I think there are a lot of really fantastic things in this bill, and I think my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs has done an excellent job putting together a bill that has some really great pieces that are going to really help make life better for Albertans. I just really want to say that this piece in particular is fantastic, and I really hope that should this bill be passed, other municipalities and other levels of government will move forward with creating parental leave policies.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to open up by saying that I proudly call myself a feminist, and I say this in a very self-interested sort of way because being a feminist has empowered me as a father to be more involved in my children's lives than the previous generation before me. Credit to all those who paved the way and stood up, especially all the women, for equality because, at the end of the day, it gave me more opportunity as a man than I would have had 20 or 30 years ago.

Now, as has been alluded to by a couple of members before me who have spoken in relation to the issue within the MGA related to parental leave, I've alluded many times in this House that when I ran in 2015, I was actually on parental leave. It was a decision that was made with the scales of economy in mind and with the fact that I wanted to be involved in my daughter's life early on in that part, but everything changed full stop and was turned around on May 5. It's easy for one to campaign and carry a stroller or carry a little one with you, and it's easy for you to be at those announcements with a baby in your arms. Unfortunately, for a lot of our city councils at the time of my election and in this Chamber I had to stop being that full-time dad because there was just no system in place to allow us to raise our children, to be that involved parent.

I heard the Associate Minister of Health thank me for the supports that I provided in her constituency, and it was my thrill because she and the Minister of Service Alberta have paved the way so that what happened when I became an MLA doesn't have to happen to any other father moving forward. I'll admit that it was a very huge struggle and it was very lonely and it was very depressing right after the election because you go from seeing your child every single day, seeing these milestones, being involved with her life to literally seeing her maybe just on weekends and not knowing if it's appropriate for you to bring your kids to events and being worried about being stigmatized as a father in doing so.

It's been remarkable because in the last year I have seen so many members involve their kids in this job in a very positive light. I've seen the Member for Calgary-East bring her children to many great events, expose them to many great things, that in the last few months I felt it's okay, and I've had the opportunity to share this part of my life, this remarkable privilege that I have had of being the Member for Calgary-Shaw, with my kids' lives and have had them meet and interact with some amazing people and allow the community to get to know me as an individual MLA a lot better as well.

With that being said, unfortunately, the system that we have in place has not translated yet to the municipal governments until now. You know, I was on Twitter a little bit earlier, and I saw that I think his name is Nate Erskine-Smith, who's a Liberal MP, brought his child into the Chamber for votes. I wish that I had had the opportunity to be that involved parent when we initially started this process together because I think it would have made the transition a lot easier and a lot smoother. Don't get me wrong. I have no regrets in relation to this process, but as many newer parents can attribute to, it is very tough to transition into an already very intense role when you're having to leave your family behind and when there are many situations where you can't bring them with you.

I think that it's important that we take these next steps to move forward with all levels of government. The federal government has already taken steps, the provincial governments have already taken steps, and we have now allowed our municipal governments to take steps to empower them to be progressive and to have a full range of voices throughout communities. There are so many stigmas that exist out there that prevent people from either getting involved in the system or being involved parents, and there's no reason why those two can't go hand in hand and can't go in tangent. At the end of the day, it makes our system a lot stronger moving forward.

Now I want to touch base on a couple of other items that have been brought forth, specifically some of the concerns that we've heard in relation to the school boards through the MGA process. Going back to the process, I thought it was pretty remarkable to see how it unfolded. Fortunately, I had an opportunity to be part of the consultations. When the deliberations of consultations were moving through the province, the Minister of Municipal Affairs had the full intent of being heavily involved. Unfortunately, the wildfires in Fort McMurray prevented her from being able to attend all of the meetings, so she relied on many of us to carry some of the load and to go out.

I had the opportunity to head out to Hanna and to talk to many of the people within the counties there. It was remarkable because there were certain elements – and I've talked about this before. Whether it be with the agriculture or the parks or the energy sectors, it was remarkable to learn about some of the challenges that smaller municipalities face, things that we in the urban centres take for granted. You know, when we were at the AUMA meetings, we heard about how crucial provincial support is for water and bridges whereas in a large city these things just kind of happen. In cities like Calgary and Edmonton they just figure it out.

4:30

You know, as we move forward, it's great to see that our government is fully in support of the water for life program and our infrastructure funding. That's going to allow us to get really caught up with a lot of our bridges. The Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater and the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville will always allude to how great and how overdue these projects really were. In a city like Calgary these projects probably would have happened because there's the huge tax base and there's the huge support to move forward with them right away. But I digress. I've sort of gone off on a tangent in relation to it.

Going back to the consultation hearings, there were so many elements that were brought up on issues in relation to brownfields, but one of the crucial things was that we heard from a lot of our school board stakeholders. It was one thing going into this process that I was taken aback by. I didn't know the implications that the MGA had for school boards and the way that we could really, really improve some of the collaborations.

I want to really take this opportunity to give praise and thanks to my Catholic school board trustee, with whom I've had a great

opportunity to build a two-years-strong working relationship with, Mary Martin, who had the opportunity to take on the position as president of the ASBA just recently. She, credit to her, came to me very early on. She's always done her due diligence to make sure that she reads any legislation that will impact her, and in return, if there's any legislation that's going to impact any of our 61 school boards, I make sure that I forward it to her.

She commented just recently:

We appreciated working closely with [the Ministry of] Municipal Affairs on this legislation. The government has heard our concerns and acted on them – in particular, introducing mandatory joint use and planning agreements. It benefits Alberta families and communities when municipalities and school boards work together on integrated long-term planning for school sites and facilities. Further clarifying exemptions for off-site levies is also good news for schools boards, because it means more dollars remain in our classrooms.

The Calgary Catholic board is a pretty unique one, and it's similar to many other boards that you see, for example the Palliser boards, because they don't cover just one county and they don't just cover one municipality. They actually go outside of other jurisdictions. You see them specifically within the Foothills region, in municipalities like Airdrie and Chestermere, and then also covering the greater Calgary area. It's important that we really provide some of these clarifications because it's so difficult for them to negotiate with both the city of Calgary and then, on the other hand, trying to keep caught up with some of their school builds, with individual counties.

To try to create a situation in which they can have long-term planning is very difficult when they have to consistently deal with different regulations and different rules and different ways that things are being done, not to mention that we always have to deal with changes in government and the challenges that come in relation to building new relationships with different partners altogether, not to mention multiple different partners. You know, at the end of the day, it's really great for us to make sure that we're moving forward with a joint-use partnership agreement to really ensure that everyone is coming to the table in this discussion and that they're working collaboratively to do what is best for our kids, ultimately.

You know, at the end of the day, one of the things that's really remarkable – and this is something that we've dealt with heavily within the city of Calgary – is that as we see new developments, there are commitments made in relation to new schools. The thing is that "commitment" is a very loose term. We've heard where in some developments it is said: come move to this community because there's going to be a new school here. In reality, there's allotted land from a developer, that has to be allotted because of the MGA, for a school to be built on that site. Now, the challenge is that there are so many other parameters that could delay a school from being built there, prevent a school from being built there, or even ultimately create a lot of challenges in relation to them moving forward. Having a strong joint-use partnership between a municipality and a school board can ensure that as we move forward with some of the developments of these sites, we can ensure that these schools are being built effectively and efficiently and on time.

Also, in relation to off-site levies, this has been a huge discussion that's moved forward, and as we develop new areas and new communities, especially small municipalities that tend to grow really, really fast like your Cochranes, your High Rivers, your Chestermeres, your Okotoks – I only say them because they're really close to where I am – they're crucial for ensuring that

municipal infrastructure can move forward and that we can stay caught up in relation to it. Because in sprawling cities like this – and I include Calgary – it's very easy for you to fall behind on these developments.

With that being said, the exemptions to schools are, I think, a very crucial thing to make sure that we're moving forward on and that we're allowing a lot of the capital to stay within the classrooms and stay with the students. I appreciate the support that has come from the AUMA in relation to moving forward with this.

You know, speaking in relation to this, I think that it's great that we're moving forward, that we're strengthening this, that we've come back to the table with a second set of feedback and amendments to the MGA to make sure that we continue to strengthen it. I think it's very relevant that we ensure that we're coming forward with new ideas in relation to some of our legislation. The way we do things, the way communities are built, technology, the way we educate our students, even how individuals are working changes over time, and cultures change over time. So it's important that we always ensure that these legislations are happening.

Now, before I take my seat, I want to comment in relation to the Member for Lethbridge-East on her WHL team. I think it's great that they've moved forward. I like the H because there's another WHL team that starts with H that is phenomenal and that's probably going to do a lot better next year.

Thank you, all, very much. I'm glad to support this bill.

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll be speaking today on Bill 8 in my role as shadow minister for Indigenous Relations. That being said, I'd like to recognize that we are standing on Treaty 6 territory today. Very happy to be here.

An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government is a massive bill that suggests changes to many aspects of the Municipal Government Act, and it will have quite an impact on communities in my area of Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills and all across the province. The bill brings forward many different changes to the MGA, and I will highlight the changes being made specifically in regard to Indigenous Relations.

Last year's Bill 21 sought to increase collaboration amongst adjacent municipalities by having municipalities create co-operation agreements. This bill further sets that goal of collaboration by asking municipalities to voluntarily work towards similar agreements – and that is taking place throughout my area quite regularly – but also with neighbouring indigenous communities. Some areas of the province are quite successful at that, and others are just kind of starting to get on to that. But it is worth noting that it is voluntary due to the fact that the province really doesn't have any jurisdiction over First Nations or to enforce this collaboration. While this could result in improved communication and dialogue between municipalities and indigenous communities, it's crucial that we ensure that all the communications are respectful of their customs and traditions.

The changes encourage, for example, municipalities to voluntarily work with First Nations reserves or Métis settlements on their borders. The only mandatory step is a notification requirement that mandates municipalities to notify indigenous communities of any statutory plan changes to communities within their jurisdiction that are bordering on indigenous communities. That includes infrastructure plans, waterlines, that kind of thing. It would be a surprise to me if a lot of these municipalities aren't already doing that kind of a notification. It makes it more of an aspirational goal of sorts.

4:40

It's important that we recognize that many municipalities already have excellent working relationships with their neighbouring indigenous communities. Many of them are already surpassing the requirements laid out within this act. I would like to offer my appreciation to those municipalities, and I hope that they offer their advice and insight to municipalities that are seeking to strengthen their relationships with neighbouring indigenous communities. I know that the county of St. Paul and the town of St. Paul are trying to work collaboratively with Saddle Lake and Goodfish Lake First Nations on some joint initiatives that may be of benefit to all the people in all the communities.

There is a need for further clarification to define neighbouring community and adjacent. This could potentially add complexity as to which indigenous communities are to be included and if this also applies to traditional indigenous lands. Furthermore, there will need to be appropriate dispute resolution processes available to ensure the development of fulsome relationships between indigenous and nonindigenous communities. Again I have to stress the respect for the unique communities that are our First Nations. More nations are not actually considered in the same right as a municipality.

This change could encourage municipalities and indigenous communities to work collaboratively to find and improve efficiencies in the delivery of services to both indigenous and nonindigenous communities. I think that is a common goal that everybody can work together on if it's done respectfully. In Alberta there are 140 reserves, 45 First Nations, eight Métis settlements spread across three treaty areas. These groups are not homogeneous. We know that just from interactions we've had with First Nations up in the north and, for instance, Siksika down in the south. Their demographics, their conditions, their treaty lands, their native lands are totally different, and they need to be treated that way and with respect as well.

The bill fails to recognize that Métis settlements and First Nation reserves are not simply an extension of municipalities. They are distinct in nature, and they need to be respected as such. Again, I'm going to stress that we need to make sure that we're communicating to our municipalities that they're not just dealing with another county that's adjacent to their borders, that this is actually a nation in its own right and that it has to be treated with that respect and is due that respect.

I would argue that indigenous awareness training would be a good step towards helping develop respectful communications between indigenous and nonindigenous communities. I was a little troubled by seeing that that is something that has been taken out of this act. Respect and understanding are paramount when it comes to building and developing relationships, and this is particularly true for relationships between indigenous and nonindigenous communities. I would hope that the government communicates to municipal governments, both urban and rural, that any interactions they are having or expect to have with First Nations are done very respectfully and through the proper channels, and that would ensure their chances of success.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you. Just a couple of points I'd like to touch on from the member there. I really appreciate the words that you brought up, especially as you spoke about the indigenous peoples and Métis. We are working closely with Indigenous Relations because they are their own nations. You are completely right. It's a different way. You know, we need to make sure we respect their traditions and the way that they want to do things, for

sure. The conversations I had, which were very good, were positive, and they understood that it's a first step, just saying: "You know what? We need to respect you guys. You guys are our neighbours, our friends, our family. It's about time that we treat you how you should be treated, which is just like one of us, because you are."

As for the education part of it, you're exactly right. That's something that we had discussed, but once we started kind of sussing out the information with some of the nations, we knew that we wouldn't have time to institute it before the municipal elections, so it is something that we are going to be working with Indigenous Relations on. It's extremely important because we need to make sure we get the nations and the Métis involved to make sure from their side. I mean, we don't want to come from the top down. We want to make sure that it's a collaborative effort and that education is there, because it's sorely needed and a lot of people want it, for sure, on all sides of the spectrum. Yeah, that's a huge one for us, and I appreciate you bringing that up because it's very important to me as well.

I'm looking forward to those discussions. I think they're going to be really good. As well, what we're doing here with the MGA as far as making sure that we inform First Nations and Métis peoples, just like we would any other municipality, hasn't been done in Canada yet, so we're leading the way again. Alberta is leading the way, which is fantastic. I am very excited about that, and I know it's something, as you said, that across the board we can all get on the same page on. I think it's a very positive turn of events, and I'm looking forward to the work ahead.

You know, there's a lot of hard work to be done, but I never shy away from hard work. I tell people that it's a lot of fun to do this, and sometimes they look at me a little different, but I'll tell you that it is a lot of fun. Municipal Affairs is quite the amazing ministry to be involved in because it touches every Albertan out there every day. So, yeah, we have a lot of work to do, and there's a lot more to go through this session, and I'd like to hear discussion from a lot of other members.

Thanks for your feedback.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Chair, and good afternoon, everyone. I have a matter that is of significance on Bill 8 that I think many people on the government side may or may not be aware of, but it is a fairly important issue. As we talk about a lot of the topics we have in Municipal Affairs, of course there are so many topics that affect so many lives and so many people in different ways. It's a huge, huge ministry, and I compliment the minister for his work on the ministry so far. It's a great undertaking, and it's a fabulous ministry to be involved with. I've enjoyed it for many years as a long-time municipal councillor and appeal board member and all the other committees I've served on. It's probably been the best experience of my life.

With the Bill 8 segment that I'm going to be speaking on today there is a certain amount of difficulty that can be involved when government decides to change the manner in which they tax or have their municipalities decide how they tax. Of course, it's probably one of the most sensitive areas for taxpayers. In this regard I'm speaking about one particular issue, and that is the proposed changes to the difference between the residential taxes – the mill rates, in other words – and the nonresidential taxes, the mill rates for those. In the previous bill last fall the government raised this issue and decided that they should set a limit on the difference of the rates from those two types of developments. Once again, I'm comparing residential to nonresidential. In Bill 21, that we reviewed

last fall, the government said that they would like to see all municipalities conform to a new maximum rate, a ratio of, in fact, 5 to 1. In other words, no taxes and tax rates – mill rates, in other words – should be set at a ratio of more than five times what the residential rate would be.

This is problematic because around Alberta there are all kinds of different industrial improvements to a lot of lands. There are all kinds of commercial improvements. There are all kinds of huge, huge manufacturing and oil and gas processing facilities, and these kinds of operations can cause a municipality an awful lot of added work and maintenance and costs to have them within their district, so taxing these kinds of facilities in the appropriate manner helps to offset some of the burdens that they bring.

Anyway, to get into a few points that we've got on this, it's not a new topic, Madam Chair. Before the current Municipal Government Act, or the MGA, was enacted in '95, actually, the municipal act then mandated that residential property taxes – and I say: residential – could not be less than 75 per cent of the nonresidential property taxes. That's the way they did it then.

4:50

But they removed it in '95, and nonresidential and residential property tax rates have remained unlinked since that time. It was left up to the municipalities with the new MGA in the mid-90s, when I first got involved, to look at how they could set their levels with respect to the various classifications they had in their districts. But that changed, as I said earlier, this past fall when Bill 21, the modernized act, came along and proposed this cap of five times the lowest residential rate in that municipality.

When you looked at the existing ratios of most municipalities at the time this was introduced, actually, there were a large number of municipalities that were compliant. In fact, although I don't have the exact number, I believe it was only around 19 municipalities that had nonresidential rates, or industrial, let's call it, or commercial, that exceeded five times their lowest residential. These municipalities that we're talking about, though, have been overwhelmingly involved in large oil and gas resources and facilities within their boundaries and all other kinds of different industries. While every municipality is different and unique, one of the underlying issues, again, that has caused so many problems is that there are a lot of different things that occurred during the boom of the past few decades, and it's put a huge strain on a lot of municipalities with regard to infrastructure: their roads, their water, their waste water, all the other kinds of services they have to provide.

They were ultimately, you know, faced with an issue where there was an awful lot of stuff that had to be upgraded and expanded or replaced, but they could not necessarily do that on the backs of everyday Albertans, who even in the boom times could not afford a five-digit property tax requisition. In order to balance the personal and financial well-being of its citizens with the need for critical infrastructure and services, municipalities were left with virtually no choice but to place the burden on the nonresidential tax base; in other words, the commercial and industrial sectors.

This would seem fair. If a large amount of industry comes into a municipality, just like any other developer, when you're developing land for whatever purpose, normally speaking, the municipality seeks to have the developer or the developer's investors provide some sort of support in the nature of local road improvements, local utility improvements, et cetera, et cetera, depending on the complexity of the development.

With that being the case, though, and the current climate we're in businesswise, it can be something of a bit of an issue. We understand, you know, that one of the major pillars of what once

was the Alberta advantage was that Alberta at one time had a competitive tax environment. The property tax rate, though, in some municipalities has begun to impact their ability to attract and retain investment now with the changes in the new government and the new government's intentions on tax rates.

We need to ensure, though, that after all this is said and done, we figure out a way to remain attractive to companies and businesses that are considering doing business here. Now, how do we do that? Well, Bill 21, which was, as I said, passed last fall, proposed this limit of 5 to 1. In that bill, actually, I think they did some good in that respect because they said that those communities that exceeded that ratio were going to be called nonconforming municipalities. Now, for those of you unfamiliar with the term, we have in the Municipal Government Act a lot of different sections that use those kinds of bits of language: nonconforming buildings, various other kinds of nonconforming improvements. That means that when it was approved many years ago, although the new laws might have changed, that building, because it was approved prior to the change in the law, would be deemed to be nonconforming.

Normally those are thought of as something that can carry on for an indefinite period of time because they were built or improved upon or developed prior to that law change that I mentioned. In this case the government with Bill 21 said that nonconforming municipalities, then, would not be required – would not be required – to meet the ratio of 5 to 1. That meant that they were going to be grandfathered. We call that a grandfathering clause. They did stipulate, however, that they could not increase their ratio any higher than what it was, and if the ratio was ever lowered, that would establish a new cap, set at whatever the lower ratio eventually would be, whether it was 17 to 1, or 7 to 1, or 6 to 1. In the case of a huge, huge industrial area like Fort McMurray, they're actually at 18 to 1.

Now, with what has taken place, McMurray was extremely concerned. As a lot of people are probably aware, they've had some difficulties in the past year, of course. We're on the anniversary week of the famous fire, the horrible, horrible fire. Now the government has decided to come along and change the bill that they just passed in the fall. They have more or less thrown out the grandfathering clause. They have said, in fact, then, that they are going to require that these municipalities become compliant to the 5 to 1 ratio. They've also included that the minister is to become the sole decision-maker of when a nonconforming municipality would have to become compliant.

There's no actual definite time set in the bill for this change. The bill says here under section (31)(b)(3.1) of Bill 8, and it's referring to section 358.1 of the MGA:

If in any year after 2016 a non-conforming municipality has a tax ratio that is greater than 5:1, the non-conforming municipality shall reduce its tax ratio for subsequent years in accordance with the regulations.

I do say, in all fairness, that they say that they will have to do that in subsequent years with regulations.

They go on to say in section (31)(d)(8):

The Lieutenant Governor in Council may, for the purposes of subsection (3.1), make regulations establishing one or more ranges of tax ratios that must be reduced to 5:1 within a specified period.

At least they're talking about some sort of specified period, but we don't know when, and they're talking about doing it by regulation, not in this bill. So we don't have any clear, definite time frame for those municipalities affected – and probably the most affected would be Fort McMurray – for the council and the administration to plan for how they're going to work with this new requirement.

We're not opposed to the idea of moving to 5 to 1. Wildrose is not opposed to that. But we do think that there must be a delicate balance, and we must first and foremost look out for Albertans. Rushing a noncompliant municipality into complying with the 5 to 1 ratio could possibly have devastating effects on families and communities. One is that, some might say, if a noncompliant municipality has got a much higher tax ratio and they have to reduce the higher tax ratio, which is the industrial type of development, then the other types of classifications will be negatively impacted by having to face the burden of paying more. In other words, we could have in some of these places – and let's use McMurray because it's probably one of the biggest ones that we can talk about that will be affected the most. If the tax ratio is going to move eventually to 5 to 1, homeowners are going to have to pay much higher taxes: three, four, five times over. Who knows what it would be?

It's an extremely difficult thing to imagine, with all of the things that Fort McMurray has gone through, that we're going to put into place, possibly, if this bill passes as written without amendments, a huge, huge tax increase to residential owners in that municipality. I think this would be a disaster for the Alberta families that live there. They're already struggling with their economy. How are they going to possibly be able to even sell, if they wanted to get out from underneath their property, if it is known that they're going to be faced with a huge, huge tax increase like that? That's where the problem arises for us with this.

5:00

As I've stated earlier, each municipality is unique, and there are unique reasons for why their property tax rates are where they are. The underlying issues that need to be addressed are not things that can easily be fixed in only one, two, or even five years when you have situations like this. Just imagine that you're in your own home and the municipality sent you a note that said: "Oh, by the way, just to let you know, the government has imposed a new rule in terms of tax. We now have to charge you at least three to four times more for your taxes because the government has decided to change the ratio." Some municipalities will not be burdened so much by it, but a lot of them will be. How do they address this? That's the key. And it's going to take some time.

We would have liked to have seen some kind of date set so that there could have been some certainty and some predictability in this legislation. If this has to be done – and we don't disagree that perhaps it is the right way to go – I think it would have been much better if they had set some sort of dates, some sort of method to phase this in over a certain amount of time so that those municipalities that have to do three-year plans, five-year plans have, when they're doing their financial plans, some way of understanding where their targets are going to have to be in terms of revenues and how they're going to get those revenues when they have to alter their mill rate so drastically.

How do you provide that certainty? You know, to the minister: five years may be enough time for some. But I think it would be appreciated here, Minister, if you could address what the purpose was of changing the bill this way just so recently after the last bill was passed. I might remind you, Minister, that your predecessor had sent a letter to the people in Fort McMurray and the local media that said: "Not to worry. This is not going to apply to you. You're going to be grandfathered. This is something that you don't have to worry about for a long period of time."

Perhaps the minister could provide a little clarity on how long a timeline you're thinking of here, how that's going to work, and

what happened with regard to the grandfathering clause. If that could be addressed, Minister, I'd really appreciate it.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you. For sure. You know, I knew this was something that was going to be brought up. I was well aware of that. Just to make it clear, there are no changes from this bill. This is simply a regulation enabling the ability to do this going forward. So when we talk about timelines, what we are looking for in this bill is the flexibility to create this regulation in consultation with the RMWB among the, I think, 22 municipalities that are above the 5 to 1 ratio.

What's happening here is that we want to take the time to get this done right. That's the whole point. I've had very good discussions with the RMWB. I was there yesterday, spoke with them. I spoke with the chamber of commerce there. I spoke with many people about it when I was at the AAMD and C conference. We want to make sure that we do this right and that we find a balance and have something that's sustainable, obviously. We know that when the energy industry does well, Fort Mac does well, Canada does well. We want to make sure that we have a plan going forward in conjunction with the RMWB, who is basically the benchmark because they're at the highest right now, to see what that's going to look like.

Right now this regulation – there's no time frame on it because we want to make sure that it gets done right. We've been in discussions, as I said, with RMWB. We aren't going to have this in place by the municipal election this fall. We knew that. If it takes six months to get this regulation done right, it takes six. If it takes a year, it takes a year. We're waiting for feedback this spring from these municipalities, once these regulations are posted, to hear what they say, to see what kind of time frames they have. I don't want to sit here and mandate because there are unique circumstances all across the province. RMWB is the big one, but there are other unique circumstances as well.

We want to make sure that we have something that's accountable, sustainable, that isn't going to hurt the local residents, obviously. That's a big concern of ours. We know that it's going to take some time, and we know that, you know, there are certain ways that we can look at things – the capital plan, for example, or assessment growth, things like that – in these municipalities. But, as I said, nothing is changing right now. There's nothing to worry about in that sense. I know there was some concern, but I did alleviate those fears yesterday when I was in the RMWB. We want to make sure that during the economic downturn that we've gone through, and especially in RMWB, we are aware of residents' concerns.

So we haven't set that timeline because we're waiting to hear that feedback from them, what they say. I know the member had mentioned something about five years. While that might work for one jurisdiction, it might not work for another. We'll see what we hear. As I said, there are 22 municipalities above that ratio. There's going to be a lot more feedback coming in. We've received, you know, a fair amount already, but we are anticipating a lot more once the regulations get posted here, and then we'll go from there.

Yeah. Any time I can clarify, or if there are any other questions in that respect, I'd always be willing to do so and get some information back to any of the members that are looking for it.

So that's where we're at right now. Nothing is set in stone in that respect for the timelines. We've got to make sure that we listen to the people. The MGA has been like that all along – right? – and I'm not going to change that. I want to make sure that the consultation is done right and that we hear from everybody who's involved and

make sure that we get a balanced, sustainable decision going forward.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Yes. Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister, for that great response. I appreciate your frankness in the response you gave to us. I'd just like to explore a little further if I could. You know, there are a lot of things going on with Fort McMurray. And you're quite correct that there are other municipalities that are affected by this. One of the problems with having no set kind of timeline or no set kind of knowledge of what the regulations might look like and so on and so forth is that the speculation market starts going crazy, and people with uncertainty and unpredictability can be negatively impacted by that.

Typically, this time of year is your construction season, when people throw their house up for sale. All kinds of different things happen. With this kind of a cloud that, frankly, has been promoted and distributed a lot by the media, of course locally, it puts a different perspective on the situation, I might suggest, sir.

I would also like to take into account some of the comments from the two large associations we have, the AUMA and the AAMD and C. Perhaps you're aware of what they have said, but I'd just like for the rest of the people that are listening here this afternoon to perhaps be aware of that. I'd like to start with the AUMA. The AUMA has suggested that although they have been advocating for the removal of this 5 to 1 ratio – they have not been happy with it, in other words, they're saying – they are supportive of this amendment in some respects “as it will reduce the potential for inconsistencies across the province.” Certainly, that could be true if you have 22 municipalities that are significantly different than the rest. That would make sense. But they also suggest that there should be an allowance for the minister to set a schedule to account for the lowering of that tax ratio, with local needs taken into perspective and a timeline for that. They also suggest that the minister should be provided “with the authority to exempt a municipality indefinitely from the 5:1 ratio as this would allow for specialized municipalities,” and they use the example of Jasper, “to be accommodated under the framework.”

So they are talking about a timeline. They're talking about what kinds of different things could be done. They're not fully supportive of this move, but they see where you're going. But they again, as I have said, are indicating that a timeline would be appropriate. I've seen timelines used in the act in other areas where some kinds of changes are being considered, but this one at this point is not.

5:10

I'd like to move on to the AAMD and C comments, where they, too, say here in their submission – and this is their most recent document, April 2017 – that they support “the ability for municipalities to be exempt [from] the 5:1 ratio where [deemed] appropriate.” Where deemed appropriate. “The AAMD will look to be involved in the development of this regulation.” They're offering to assist with the regulation change. They're also saying that “the previous iteration of the proposed legislation found in the Continuing the Conversation document,” that was distributed earlier, “included the option for the Minister to exempt” and that they will be looking for that same exemption to be in the regulation.

So my point to the group here today and to the minister and to you, Madam Chair, is that my statements in this regard are not the only statements. They're supported by the two major associations, the AAMD and C and the AUMA. I would urge you to take this back to your department and give this proper consideration.

We will be bringing forward, by the way, Madam Chair – I believe this is up again tomorrow at a certain time – a couple of amendments to this particular section of this bill, and we will look forward to hearing comments after we have put these amendments forward.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: All right. Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak in support of Bill 8. As I've mentioned before, this is a bill that – well, I mean, in its different formulations I've been privileged to be the cosponsor with, well, at least one minister. I'm very proud to be associated with this bill because I think that – and this is something that's been reiterated by organizations such as the Alberta Chambers of Commerce and municipalities – this is going to be the gold standard for consultation and how to get good legislation passed.

I mean, part of that is, you know, that when you propose something, there are always going to be some unanticipated consequences. Sometimes you can't put a timeline on things because it's just simply the matter that to do so would be to artificially foreclose options and inadvertently cause discomfort to the stakeholders you're working with. I think that throughout this entire process our minister and the ministry that he represents have taken a wise tack in that.

Now, what I wanted to talk about more specifically in my comments today is that, first, I wanted to just maybe touch on a little bit about centralized industrial assessment because I know that's something that has caused a little bit of confusion in some municipalities, not so much because of the – and I say not so much, but I'd say that it's not because of the messaging coming out of Municipal Affairs. I mean, in an ideal world, of course, everybody would understand every single aspect of the Municipal Government Act, exciting as it is, you know, the scintillating reading that there has been. But, unfortunately, not everybody has a full and accurate grasp of the entire bill, and I think that would actually include some assessors who are out there. As well, sometimes you might have journalists that might get things confused; say, for example, linear assessment and centralized assessment.

For the record and to make this a hundred per cent clear, when it comes to linear assessment, there is no intention whatsoever to be pooling those revenues provincially. If there is anyone out there, you know, who thinks that's what is afoot, please rest assured that there is no intention of this happening, so just to be very, very clear. I know our minister has made that point many times. I know other members have. But there are still situations that I've come across where that confusion kind of still exists. People can rest assured that that's not going to happen.

Now, when it comes to centralized assessments, just to be clear, there is no pooling or anything like that involved with that as well. We're just talking about working on the very, you know, basic requirements for industrial development, for continuing industrial development, that there is a level playing field for industry where, well, to put it one way, you don't have essentially exactly the same industrial equipment being assessed one way in one municipality and another way in another municipality. That's really what this is about.

I think that as it proceeds, we'll see that there is no agenda whatsoever with that and that, in fact, this is something that's going to be to the benefit of municipalities. That's, of course, because industry has stepped up and said that they're going to be paying for these assessments. This is something that they've asked for, so I

think this is actually a positive development for municipalities and for the continued prosperity of the province as a whole.

Now, just moving on from that, recently we were fortunate to have Doug Griffiths come and do a presentation in Boyle. Now, I'm sure that many members of the Assembly have had Mr. Griffiths come out, and the presentation he does is 13 Ways to Kill Your Community. Of course, he's not really giving advice on how to kill your community – it's a way to get attention – but how he's framed it is really as how to avoid killing your community. Of course, Mr. Griffiths was a previous Minister of Municipal Affairs, you know. Plus, growing up in Coronation, he has, I think, some insight into it.

You know, I was happy to attend the presentation, had a good chat with Mr. Griffiths. I'm not sure if I agreed with him on everything, but I think that he made some really valid points, that were in accord with my understanding and experience. What made me reflect on that and bring it up today is that a lot of the points that he makes in his presentation are indeed points that I think the MGA amendments speak directly to and help to facilitate communities making the kind of changes that have been recommended.

Bear with me for a moment. I'm just going to go through those 13 points. Now, the number one that he talks about is water quality, saying that if you want to kill a community, one of the best ways of doing it is to not pay attention to your water quality, right? Bad water: people don't move in; people move out.

Now, how does this speak directly to the type of changes that we're making? Well, I mean, I think that by putting forward the ICFs and associated tools for encouraging collaboration, we're making it easier for communities to be able to co-operate with their neighbours to get high-quality drinking water. There are successful water commissions around the province that are run by joint municipalities, but you don't see co-operation in other areas where it might be needed. In particular, you don't necessarily see that co-operation with adjacent indigenous communities. With the concentration on collaboration and indeed the requirement to sit down and talk to your neighbours and work out any issues that might be in the way, I think that that's going to help more communities improve their water systems.

I think that also speaks to, of course, some of the big bills that many of our smaller municipalities are going to be facing in the upcoming years to renew their sewer systems. I mean, you have some systems out there that have wooden pipes. You have other systems that are, you know, 30 or 40 years beyond their date, and you have communities that might not have the tax base to be able to afford to rebuild those systems. That's definitely something that's a strike against sustainability.

With the whole ICF framework, I think that there's a better chance that some sort of equitable sharing arrangements can be worked out between municipalities to be able to help address some of these along with, of course, the provincial programs – you know, the water for life program – the federal government, and MSI funding. But a more equitable sharing, with agreement, of revenue for municipalities at their own discretion, facilitated by the types of change we made in the MGA, I think could be something that can help bring that forward.

5:20

The second point that Doug Griffiths makes about killing communities is: don't attract new businesses; you know, don't facilitate new businesses. Now, we don't have to go over there, but we do have increased flexibility for municipalities in how they attract new businesses and how they work in new areas. I think that kind of speaks directly to that.

Youth involvement. Basically, one way to make a town die is: don't provide space for younger residents to participate. This is where – and I think I mentioned this at second reading – I think the parental leave facilitation, where municipal councils will now have the ability to put in provisions for parental leave, will facilitate the inclusion of more younger residents directly in decision-making. For communities that are trying to attract and retain young residents, it's really hard to do that when you don't have any direct insight into how they think and feel about things. You don't have that direct insight potentially because you don't have any younger members actually on these councils. Part of that reason could well be because, you know, they have young families that they need to work with, or they're planning to have more children, and this is seen as an impediment. Anything that can be done to facilitate having younger families involved in municipal governance is something that I think is going to really help with having greater youth retention.

The next one is basically failing to assess what your community needs are and what your assets are. As we've gone through sort of a process – and this is something that has been controversial at points, basically due to, I think, a lack of understanding of it: the necessity for even smaller communities to do, you know, these municipal development plans. This is something, I think, that is critical for a community regardless of its size because if you don't know what you have and you don't know where you're going, chances are that you're really not going to get there, right? If you're at a stage where, I mean, you're not even together enough to be able to make those basic determinations, that doesn't speak well to the long-term viability of your community. This is something that I think is great, and I'm very happy to see that with the amendments coming forward, these aspects have been retained.

Now, the other ones are maybe not quite as relevant. It would have been nice if it had gone through the same 13. I'm not sure if it speaks directly to shopping locally or not. It would be nice if we could put something in there on that, but that's something that we can't really do.

Since this is Committee of the Whole, I guess I can, you know, maybe stop right there for the moment. Actually, it looks like we might have a bit of time. I might be happy to contribute again in a little bit.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that when the committee next rises and reports, it report progress on Bill 8.

[Motion carried]

Bill 10 Appropriation Act, 2017

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It is my pleasure to get up and actually speak to Bill 10, our appropriations bill. You know, it was actually very interesting. In the debate we just had on Bill 8, I actually had a chance to talk a little bit about the work our government is doing on the budget. We've heard a lot from the opposition, that they are not wanting to support this budget, and I wanted to respectfully disagree with them and talk a little bit about the good that our budget is indeed doing.

As many of the opposition would know, this is now the third time I am standing up in support of another NDP budget. I've debated

our last three NDP budgets very proudly in this House, against the opposition's different view of how the province should go forward, because this is a budget that makes life better for Albertans, for the residents of Calgary-Currie. It focuses on jobs, affordability, protecting the services that families depend on. These are the priorities of Albertans, and these are the priorities of this government.

Over the constituency break, Madam Chair, I had a chance to knock on doors and visit several local businesses. When knocking on those doors, you know, I heard about the good that our government is doing there, things like the almost \$1.3 million invested in Calgary-Currie alone for housing and seniors. This means that in Calgary-Currie people are able to have a home, that seniors are able to live in dignity. That \$1.3 million is just one small part of a much larger budget that is possible because of this. It means that seniors are getting new windows in their facilities. There are new boilers and other much-needed maintenance for affordable housing and seniors' housing in Calgary-Currie and across the province.

The reason why we are having to step up and do that is because it is the right thing to do for our seniors and those low-income individuals who need housing. It is also something we need to do because the previous government for so long had neglected our seniors and those who need housing by failing to invest in and maintain that much-needed infrastructure.

It was very interesting. In question period earlier we, you know, heard a lot of talk about how their government did so well. It was interesting to hear that because it was almost as if in question period the questions they were asking us about our budget and about the work we're doing were asking us how come we haven't fixed the things they hadn't bothered to fix. I know that the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek likes to bring up that point on a rather regular basis as well.

Going around my routes, let's see some of the other stuff that's happening in my riding. This budget is reducing school fees for young families in Calgary-Currie. That is something we talked about on the campaign trail. That is something every member on this side of the House talked about on the campaign trail and something I talked about when I had not one, not two, but three all-candidate leadership debates. When it came election time, the constituents of Calgary-Currie decided that they wanted to go in a new direction, one where a government actually keeps their promises and focuses spending on the need to make life better for Albertans as opposed to just building a budget by waiting for, you know, oil to rescue them, spending haphazardly with the rise and fall of the price of oil. That's not the way to run a province, Madam Chair.

5:30

Another thing I'm very happy about is that our government is now completing the southwest section of the Calgary ring road. I was very happy to be at a job fair there, where there will be at a minimum, at least in its first wave of hiring, 200 jobs as a direct result of that project and as a direct result of the infrastructure spending that is in this budget, Madam Chair.

It's something we hear the opposition speak against on a regular basis. How many times have we been in this House during question period where a member of the opposition, particularly the Official Opposition, gets up and says: "Why are you spending money? We want you to magically spend less, yet we want a hospital in our riding. We want schools. We want you to magically roll back wages of the public sector until the deficit has been solved." What they are actually saying is a fantasy. You can't do that. When I go to the doors and talk to people on the doorstep, they understand that

because they can see the direct benefit that this budget is providing to them, everyday Albertans.

Now, I know the opposition, of course, really likes to talk about debt. In particular, the previous party, of course, likes to talk about it as well, which is always quite ironic because they were the government that couldn't balance the budget at \$100 oil.

Mrs. Littlewood: They couldn't what?

Mr. Malkinson: They couldn't balance the budget at \$100 oil.

Mrs. Littlewood: That's shocking.

Mr. Malkinson: It is most definitely so.

Connolly: That's kind of staggering, isn't it?

Mr. Malkinson: It's quite staggering. [interjections] I would say that that wasn't the best example to follow. You know it's good when their Wildrose friends are agreeing with me on that one.

Mr. Hanson: How many hospitals are you going to build with \$2 billion in debt servicing?

Mr. Malkinson: Talking about that debt, you know, we have been able to bring forward a plan that focuses, again, on Albertans, and we have a plan to go back to balance prudently, Madam Chair. It involves no fee or tax increases. There are no fee or tax increases in this budget.

You know, we often hear the opposition talk about the tax advantage. I remember last year they talked often about how they loved Brad Wall, especially the Wildrose opposition, how we should follow Brad Wall's example. Well, Brad Wall's example seems to involve a 5 per cent cut across the board: cutting libraries; cutting transportation, that's much needed by their rural constituents to go to medical appointments; cutting teachers. And not only do they have a PST in Saskatchewan; they most recently raised it.

Mrs. Littlewood: And they're raising taxes on children.

Mr. Malkinson: Raising taxes. That's something the Wildrose supports, it would seem.

You know, one of my favourite pages in this budget, Madam Chair, is in the fiscal plan on page 93. There's an excellent graph in there, and it talks about Alberta's tax advantage. [interjections] On that page, if you're all following along, it shows our tax advantage relative to all of the other provinces, and what it shows is that we have an \$8.7 billion tax advantage.

Mr. Westhead: How much?

Mr. Malkinson: An \$8.7 billion tax advantage over our provincial friends. [interjections]

Of course, as we speak, you know, there's lots of beaking from the previous party, that, again, couldn't balance the budget at \$110 oil, couldn't on \$110 oil. Not only could they not balance the budget at \$110-a-barrel oil; they couldn't invest in schools, Madam Chair. They couldn't properly fund all the students that were entering into the public school system. They could not do that. The former party over there, again, continues to beak about how great they were, yet there they sit.

Let's talk about another part of our budget. While we are spending on much-needed infrastructure and services that make life better for Albertans, we are also restraining spending, Madam Chair. We are holding spending at a rate that is under inflation plus

population growth because that is a prudent fiscal thing to do. [interjections] As I say this, the former governing party is again beaking off and laughing, yet they couldn't do it. There were increases sometimes of up to 8 per cent a year as they rolled with the royalty roller coaster. Shame. We have clear, restrained spending, spending on things that matter to Albertans.

You know what? We are starting to see green shoots in the economy. When I was out in Calgary-Currie, I visited many local businesses, Madam Chair, and the questions I asked them: "How's business going? How are things going?" Well, what I am hearing from everywhere, from the pizza place to the machine shop to my former employers in the oil and gas industry, is that things are picking up again.

I'm going to give you just one example. I visited my local machine shop. This is a sole proprietor, a single owner that has always been a sole proprietor of this particular shop. This particular person specializes in machining components and doing custom work that other shops can't do. As you can imagine, this is the type of shop where business flows with the economy. A couple of months ago I was there, and that particular shop had work, but he was saying: you know, it's a little bit slow. But I was there just last week, and I was asking him: how's it going? He's like: well, you know what, Brian – I apologize, Madam Chair. I'm naming myself, which I realize is against convention. He's like: "You know what? I am busy. I was working last Saturday, and in the last couple of months my business has increased. My shop is full. Things are looking up for me."

Although, of course, that one particular shop is not an indicator of the overall economy, it is a sign that I see throughout my riding that business is picking up, green shoots are sprouting, and I believe that Alberta is beginning to lead the way from a recession that was caused by the unprecedented drop in the price of oil and only by the unprecedented drop in the price of oil. This government through previous budgets has put in the things we need in order to lead, Madam Chair, lead on climate change as we come out of this recession, on getting our oil products to market. Let's not forget that we got not one but two pipelines.

Mrs. Littlewood: Three. Keystone.

Mr. Malkinson: Sorry. I forgot about Keystone, Madam Chair. How could I forget about Keystone? Three pipelines. [interjections]

You know, again we hear lots of beaking from the opposition, and they ask the question of: well, how many barrels are going out of those pipelines? Well, Madam Chair, because we've been working co-operatively with our neighbours to get a pipeline built, something that that opposition did not do, we got approval for pipelines. We got approval for our pipelines.

5:40

What that means, Madam Chair, is that as we move into the building season – I expect by the time our election happens that those pipelines will be under construction, providing valuable jobs for all Albertans, providing valuable jobs for my constituents in Calgary-Currie. When that happens, I hope that all the members of this House, including those of the opposition, will most definitely be singing our praises at that point. I hear some pounding of desks of the opposition. I really do appreciate their support on that particular matter.

Madam Chair, I believe I've said enough on our budget for the moment, and I'm going to sit down. I will of course pop up later should the need arise, but at this point I'd love to hear from other members of the House on what their views are on our budget.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The clauses of Bill 10 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that we rise and report on Bill 10 and rise and report progress on Bill 8.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Hinkley: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 10. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 8.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Seeing the time and the progress we've made today, I would move that we call it 6 o'clock and rise until tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:43 p.m.]

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