



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 15, 2017

Day 33

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

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
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Government Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
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Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
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)
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Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
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Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
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Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
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Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
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Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
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van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
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Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 15, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us each reflect or pray, each in our own way. Hon. members, let us take a moment to find the strength and guidance in the ongoing support received from our families and close friends in all corners of Alberta. May their understanding and patience inspire us to be compassionate and co-operative in working together for the people of our province.

Hon. members, we have an interesting situation today. You're going to lead us, hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we do owe each other a round of applause for that. [some applause] Let us use that as yet another example of how we can work together.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe my guests are here yet, so with your permission I'll wait and see if they arrive. Thank you.

The Speaker: Agreed.

Are there any school groups, hon. members?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on your behalf to introduce to all members of the Assembly Mr. Ahmed Kassem, Mr. Mudhir Mohamed, Mr. Osman Aidarus, and Mr. Mourad Trabelsi. Mr. Kassem is with us today from Shaw TV Medicine Hat *Global Village* centre show, which provides resources and integrated assistance to new Canadians. Mr. Mohamed is the president of the Muslim Community Foundation of Calgary, Mr. Aidarus is a businessman in Edmonton, and Mr. Trabelsi is president of the Brooks Muslims. Mr. Kassem, Mr. Aidarus, Mr. Mohamed, and Mr. Trabelsi are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Team Investigate Tachyons, eight Bishop Carroll high school students who have entered the CERN beamline contest. Just when you thought that the speed of light was the fastest superhero on the block, imaginary mass blessed with a positive charge and attractive gravity makes it onto the scene through the scientific method,

enhanced by a thousand hours of math and pure resolve. I would like to mention all of them by name, and please stand when I say your name: Koi McArthur, team leader grade 12; Tarek El Naggar, grade 12; Urban Pistek, grade 11; Brynna Clarke-Leene, grade 11; Nicholas Betancourt-Lee, grade 11; Kelly Ma, grade 12; Carter Markic, grade 11; Eyoas Negash, grade 10; and my amazing research assistant, if she's still in here, Maureen Gough. One of their mandates is that the universe is like a beautiful painting, and the paint is math. Would you please join me in giving them the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the students of Lycée Louis Pasteur from the beautiful, tremendous, remarkable, and wonderful constituency of Calgary-Elbow. They're here this week attending School at the Legislature. The students are accompanied by their teachers, Nicole Pereversoff and Ryan Taylor. I ask, please, that they rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other guests for introduction today? The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions. First, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly Shuai Wang. Shuai is currently visiting Canada on his fifth trip to North America from China. His trip will include Victoria, Vancouver, and Montreal, and he has come to Edmonton to learn more about our great province. I ask my guest to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Sabir: The second set of guests. It's my pleasure to introduce Stan and his son, Mike Szykowski. Stan and Mike are here in honour of Stan's wife and Mike's mother, Tamara. Tamara recently passed away, but today we honour her as an activist for social justice and for equality. Although we mourn her loss, we remember Tamara as a proud Albertan who made life better for so many Albertans. Stan and Mike are related to my press staff Kate Toogood, as her father-in-law and partner respectively. I ask my guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce Daniel Menjivar. He's a guest pastor at the New Hope church of God, which is in Edmonton-Calder. Since becoming a pastor, Daniel has led three missions to Cuba with a small group of dedicated volunteers, building churches and communities and taking bicycles to southeastern Cuba. He does great work both internationally and right back here in Alberta. If you could rise, please, and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Members' Statements

Environment Lethbridge

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of our government's commitment to the environment, and I'm proud of municipal

governments that are taking action as well. I rise today to talk about a local organization called Environment Lethbridge. It was started in 2014 to inspire Lethbridge residents to take action on sustainability. In April of this year they released the first Lethbridge State of the Environment Report. This report reviewed 32 indicators of environmental sustainability.

Lethbridge and southern Alberta have excellent potential for development of renewable energy sources, and Lethbridge residents use less electricity than both the Alberta and Canadian averages. Lethbridge also has an abundance of green space, with over 38 square kilometres of parks.

1:40

Lethbridge is facing some of the same challenges as the rest of Alberta. Water flow in the Oldman River, a vulnerable watershed, has decreased by 57 per cent since 1912. The local climate is warming, with the growing season in Lethbridge increasing by 23 days since 1950.

The report also contains some key recommendations for the city such as controlling invasive species, supporting native pollinators, reducing the amount of food waste entering the landfill, working with regional partners to improve air quality, encouraging green transportation, and, above all, educating people about water use.

I am very proud of the city of Lethbridge for recognizing the importance of sustainability. As the city approaches 100,000 people, we must be prepared for the impact that climate change and population growth will have on our environment and our lives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Serenity

Mr. Nixon: In November of last year journalist Paula Simons put a face and a name to the subject of an investigation by the Child and Youth Advocate. Four-year-old Serenity was the subject of that report. She died more than two years ago, starved, beaten, and sexually abused. Her life was wiped out before it could even begin. She did not have a chance, Mr. Speaker.

The NDP was not in power when Serenity died, so we thought that the NDP wouldn't have reasons to sweep this under the rug. We asked this government what happened and when criminal charges would be laid. Our questions were stonewalled. It turns out that the RCMP weren't able to proceed with their investigation because they were missing key government documents. The NDP, to cover for their mistakes, put its spin doctors to work and set up a child intervention panel to talk about root causes. We also saw a cabinet shuffle that split the human services ministry in two and a new Minister of Children's Services.

The panel isn't allowed to talk about Serenity despite the minister repeatedly telling this House that it can, and we still haven't received answers from this new minister about what the department is doing to fix things. To make matters worse, we recently learned that there are still children living in the house where Serenity had her life stolen from her. The minister responded by saying that the media and the opposition had their facts wrong but refused to correct the record. She said that the situation is being monitored but won't conduct her own ministry with any sort of transparency. The tragic story, the timeline of events both leading up to Serenity's death and after are mind boggling, Mr. Speaker.

If all of us in this House care about kids, why does it feel like a case of government workers covering up for government workers while Serenity and her family continue to come last? This is not a partisan issue. I implore this government to start working with the opposition and the experts to ensure that we learn from Serenity's death and that this never happens again. Mr. Speaker, Albertans are

sick of this government's lip service and want the NDP to stop sweeping this issue under the rug.

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

Government Policies

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The coat of arms sitting above your chair includes the motto *Fortis et Liber*, which we all know means strong and free. I want to thank the forefathers of this province for giving Alberta this coat of arms and also the pioneers for making this province strong and free.

I am concerned, however, that Alberta today is less strong and less free. When nearly 100,000 people are sitting at home because they cannot find work, we are less strong. When the multinational companies are bailing out of Alberta, when bankruptcies are spiking, and when small businesses four to five generations old are shutting down, we are less strong.

When the government disrespects our proud farmers with Bill 6 and when the vast majority of Albertans reject a carbon tax but have it imposed on them anyway, we are less free. When this government wants to take freedom away from our small businesses and enslave them with their socialist ideology, we are definitely not free. When the Minister of Finance is asked about burgeoning debt load and he simply smiles and when his comrades heckle and call concerned citizens Chicken Little and sewer rats and when Serenity still cannot get justice, we are definitely not strong or free.

With the NDP's ideological governing style this government is not fighting for Alberta families as they always claim. In reality they are hijacking our future, our children's future, and they are killing the proud culture of this province. When free-enterprise Albertans unite, they will annihilate this NDP socialist ideology. In the next election Albertans will take their province back, and once again it will be *fortis et liber*.

The Speaker: I want to caution all of the House again about the need for certain words like "killing" and words of violence. Please consider that.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Calgary-East Constituency Update

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I love spending time in my constituency and not just because we have the best food in Calgary. Talking to my constituents about what matters to them is the most important part of my job. I also like being there because I get to be on the ground to experience real, concrete examples of the work that this government is doing to make life better for people in Calgary-East.

The most obvious example of this is the redesign and addition of bus rapid transit to 17th Avenue S.E. As a result of \$85 million of investment by this government construction has begun to widen the street. This project will make it easier for people to visit the amazing businesses on the avenue, increase access to faster public transit, and will make it possible for people to bike into downtown and Inglewood.

I also had the opportunity to tour the new EvenStart child development centre in Mayland Heights, where \$300,000 of government investment is helping to create 30 new \$25-a-day child care spaces, and the centre will also house EvenStart's existing program for at-risk preschoolers. It's a beautiful facility, complete with indoor play centre, community gardens, and art spaces.

I spent a lunch hour at Holy Family school, one of the first schools to pilot our school nutrition program. Grade 6 students were helping to serve a variety of healthy sandwiches and fruits to

younger students, who were all smiles as they sat on the gym floor enjoying their lunch. The principal noted that parents, teachers, and kids have all noticed benefits from this program already.

I dropped by Common Crown Brewing, the second of three new microbreweries to open in my riding, that makes delicious beer with local ingredients. The owners were pleased with the government support that had been available so far and talked about the camaraderie and collaborative approach that new small brewers in Calgary are taking together.

I was present at the opening of the new NICU at the Peter Lougheed hospital, where folks from east Calgary, including myself, go to have babies. I know this beautiful new space will be appreciated by the 1 in 8 parents who have babies that require some form of intensive care.

These are only some examples, Mr. Speaker, but I think they work to illustrate how our government's choices are focused on tangible actions that make life better for Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Blue Hills Community

Ms Jabbour: I recently had the opportunity to get to know a corner of my constituency that no previous MLA has ever visited, the Blue Hills community school. I was invited to the Tompkins Improvement Board AGM and fundraiser and received a warm welcome on arrival. I toured the school, chatted with families from the area, and learned about community plans and goals.

Blue Hills is a Mennonite farming community, a mix of long-time residents and newcomers. What is perhaps most unique about this community is that unlike many small rural communities that are struggling to remain viable, Blue Hills is flourishing and growing quickly. They already have the lovely new Blue Hills Motel and Plaza, a small convenience store, and fuel station. If the rate of development continues, I wouldn't be surprised to see a new town spring up in the area within a few years.

Blue Hills is about 50 kilometres southwest of La Crête and 20 kilometres from the Tompkins Landing ferry, a key route to access services and markets. There are challenges, though. The ferry and ice bridge are closed several months of the year during freeze and spring breakup. Water levels are often too low for the ferry to operate, and limited ferry capacity can mean long waits. The community would love a new bridge, but they were very pleased to learn that a new, larger capacity ferry is on its way, although they joked that they would like a ferry wide enough to touch both sides of the river.

Education is important to this community. Blue Hills school is K to 9, but they want to expand to grade 12 in order to increase high school completion rates and eliminate the two-hour bus ride. A new gymnasium is needed as the current gym is too small to host tournaments and visiting teams. The old gym would become an industrial arts shop. A covered ice rink to allow games to be played during inclement weather is also planned.

Blue Hills has many other project ideas such as a seed-cleaning plant, a ski hill, expanding the P5 road to Peace River, and value-added agriculture processing not only for grains but for dairy and egg operations. We hope to support these projects through our government's investor and small-business programs.

There is incredible potential in this part of my constituency, and with their hard work, enthusiasm, and dedicated community spirit, I'm confident that Blue Hills will achieve their goals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Serenity and the Child Intervention System

Mr. Nixon: In response to public outrage over the horrific death of Serenity, this government established the child intervention panel. The panel was supposed to recommend changes to the system, but how can we when we actually can't learn anything about what happened to Serenity? The minister tells Albertans that they are giving us panel members all the information we require. That is not accurate, Mr. Speaker. We are given intake windows to put forth requests; the documents we ask for, we never get. Any attempt to ask about Serenity by the panel is blocked by the NDP. Minister, will your government at least stop misleading Albertans about what this panel can actually do?

1:50

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

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The story of Serenity moved every single person in this House, and all of us continue to be heartbroken about it. That is the reason that the panel was put in place, to create meaningful recommendations to strengthen the child intervention system. We want panel members to have the information they need to make recommendations that will lead to real change. As I stated previously, if members feel they require additional information for their work on the panel, I encourage them to work with their caucus representative, and panel members can reach out to the chair to request information . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Nixon: I am the caucus representative.

The public was shocked to learn that children still live in the home where Serenity was likely murdered. Because this defies common sense and we have yet to see evidence of action to prevent a future Serenity, panel members are asking this government to find a way to legally discuss the file with them in private. The government says "trust us" when there is absolutely no reason to trust them. Minister, I ask again – and don't you dare say that this is what is already happening, because it is not – are you willing to explore a way to disclose the details of Serenity's case with panel members in private to assure us that this issue is being handled properly and that steps have been taken to prevent future tragedies, or are you going to continue to mislead the House?

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I will state that absolutely the panel needs to have access to the information that they need to make recommendations that will lead to real change. Again, the government, Children's Services, myself as minister: protecting vulnerable children in care is our key priority. That's why the panel is there. We'll ensure they have the information that they need in order to make real change. This case continues to be under criminal investigation. We don't have all the facts, however. We will continue to provide the panel with the information they need, and I encourage them to continue to work through the process to get that information.

Mr. Nixon: Utter nonsense, Mr. Speaker.

On November 22 the Premier said that she would make public the detailed changes made to the system as a result of what is learned from Serenity's death. We're still waiting. She said that the reviews were under way internally and as that information was assembled, it would become public. This hasn't happened either. We're still waiting for a statutory review for any case, let alone Serenity's case. Premier, how much longer do Albertans have to wait until Serenity's internal reviews are finished, and are you still committed to making this information public, or are you going to continue to allow your minister to keep misleading the Assembly?

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I am very proud of the work that this minister has done to move forward on the many, many important issues that face vulnerable children in Alberta, that face people who are concerned about vulnerable children in Alberta, and that, of course, arise with the particular tragedy around Serenity. There will be legislation that comes forward this spring to deal with the first set of recommendations that the panel made.

Let me say from my own experience that there has never been an opportunity for an all-party committee to engage as deeply and as meaningfully as that all-party committee has, yet they still complain.

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

Calgary LRT Green Line

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, the green line LRT project was supposed to be good news for Calgarians in suburban communities, but this dream is quickly turning into a nightmare for these families, who are now being cut out of green line construction. Many of these families purchased homes on the promise that this project was proceeding as planned. Premier: what do you have to say to these families, who were sold a bogus bill of goods by the city of Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this government is very committed to supporting the transportation needs of all Albertans. It's part of making life better for everyone. That means also supporting our major cities in their transit systems and their LRT systems, which we're prepared to do. We're awaiting a final decision from the city council in Calgary as to the route and costs of this project, and we're going to do our very best to support the transportation needs of the citizens of Calgary.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, to add insult to injury, families in suburban Calgary are facing higher property tax rates caused by the NDP PPA debacle with Enmax and by the carbon tax even though they will never see the benefits of the green line. Since Alberta Transportation will fund \$92 million this year for this revised project, does the minister agree with this antisuburban plan, or is he ready to call this what it really is, a bait and switch on suburban Calgary residents?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Wildrose opposition may be quite content to sit here and make decisions for city council in the city of Calgary, but we respect all

orders of government in this country, including the municipal governments, and the democratic right of citizens to elect a mayor and a council to do the kinds of things that they want to. Obviously, the Wildrose doesn't care about democracy.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, this project is going to have real consequences for real people. The south campus hospital will not be connected, and Centre Street will still be chock full of cars. Construction costs should be dropping as per the minister, but the scaled-back project will cost \$4.65 billion for just 20 kilometres, up from \$4.5 billion for 46 kilometres, a whopping \$233 million for each kilometre. Before committing more money, is the minister ready to demand better from the city's management?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said, this government is committed to helping all Albertans with their transportation needs, including the residents of the city of Calgary. We are not going to be interfering in the work of the city council of the city of Calgary or of any other municipal council. We will carefully consider whatever proposals they put in front of us, and we will see how we can help because we're committed to making life better for all Alberta families.

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

AIMCo Governance

Mr. Fildebrandt: The Alberta Investment Management Corporation manages \$90 billion in Alberta assets. Troubling signs of political interference first appeared when the NDP ceased requiring that AIMCo directors have relevant financial experience, clearing the way for partisan appointments. The Finance minister said that these changes were welcomed by AIMCo, but the AIMCo CEO said that these changes came "as a surprise to us and, frankly, not a welcome surprise." Will the Premier reverse this decision and reinstitute basic financial qualifications as a requirement for serving on AIMCo?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me say that I've got great confidence in the professionals at AIMCo. They make sound investment decisions for Albertans and in the many pension funds and investments that they take on on our behalf. We took some redundant provisions out of the bylaws that AIMCo had and made for an open and transparent process of appointments for people. That means that any Albertan, anybody, can go online and see what boards and commissions are available and put their names in. We've got good people who have come forward, and we're going to have more good people soon with regard to appointments.

Mr. Fildebrandt: This minister's answers are redundant, Mr. Speaker.

This government is falling all over itself trying to explain away its bungling of an AIMCo investment in Calfrac. The government issued a false news release with information that was directly refuted by Calfrac. People in the Premier's office demanded that AIMCo insert itself into this political embarrassment for the government in an attempt to take the heat off them. Can the Premier look me in the eyes and tell me with a straight face that this government is not interfering in AIMCo?

Ms Notley: This government is not interfering in AIMCo. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please, hon. members.

Mr. Fildebrandt: It's not that the Premier is not telling the truth; it's just that what she's saying is just not so. Kevin Libin at the *Financial Post* released documents today, obtained through freedom of information, showing the media talking points that were prepared for AIMCo's CEO after this mess blew up. In it he says that he was personally called with an apology over the snap qualification changes, that he was not consulted on. So who's telling the truth about these changes, the CEO of AIMCo or the Premier?

2:00

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the question. You know, on March 8 the CEO of AIMCo said, "I do want to reinforce that at present our independence in investment decision-making, as I think I reassure you at every quarterly meeting, has not been encumbered in any way." Mr. Speaker, if they won't take the views of the CEO of AIMCo on this, why are they taking the views of a reporter or writer in the *Financial Post* or anywhere else? Listen to the CEO of AIMCo.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Seniors' Prescription Drug Copayments

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Along with our very young, our seniors can be the most vulnerable in society. I have a constituent in an assisted living facility. This individual has 10 prescriptions. When she ordered from home once every three months, the average cost was \$83. The facility orders twice a month, with a \$25 per prescription fee. That's \$500 per month. To the minister of seniors: are you and your department aware of this, and what are you doing to protect seniors against these expensive practices?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much to the member for the question. The drug policy that is in place around prescription refills in terms of seniors' drug benefits does have a \$25 copay piece attached to it. In terms of the timelines those certainly aren't guidelines that are set by the College of Pharmacists or otherwise, so we'll be happy to follow up with regard to this very specific case. Again, under this government we're working to make life more affordable. We're working to make sure we're investing in our seniors, and that includes making sure that we're building long-term care facilities, Mr. Speaker. The last government pushed forward full speed ahead with other facilities where seniors do have to cover things like their own drug coverage. I think we know clearly who's on whose side.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the government is actually making things more expensive, as I pointed out. The senior was ordering every three months at an average cost of \$83 a month, and the government's program is \$500 a month. I don't know how the minister can say that that's making life better for Albertans, so again to the minister: what can you do to make this better? Because, clearly, so far you've made it worse.

Ms Hoffman: Let me clarify that in assisted living facilities you are responsible for your own drug costs, assisted living facilities that moved on en masse under the former government. We are making sure that we have a balance of varieties of places for people to live, including long-term care, where drug coverage is incorporated. But

I have assured the member that I will follow up with regard to this specific case and make sure that we can find out what can be done longer term to prescriptions being filled because you are right that there is a \$25 copay when you fill your prescriptions. If they're filling them once every two weeks, obviously that would be greater than once every three months. I would be happy to look into it for this case, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to hear the minister agree that the one senior was doing a better job of buying her drugs than the whole government was, but I'm also grateful that the minister has acknowledged the problem and has said that she's willing to help. To the minister: if I get you the information on the case, would you take a look at it and get back to the senior to see if you can't help, please?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just to reiterate, the assisted living facility is not a government facility. It is another facility that is operated by another operator. But I would be very, very happy to look into it on behalf of this senior and any others who want to raise these kinds of questions. I encourage the member to look even within his own caucus to ask them for some education around how assisted living facilities work because I know there's expertise on that side of the House, and I think that information could be very helpful to the member opposite. Of course, I'd be very happy to work with him on behalf of this constituent.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Energy Industry Liability Management

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard regularly from constituents concerned about the issue of abandoned oil and gas wells. Many are landowners who feel that the system isn't working for them. Some are concerned about the environmental impact of abandoned wells. They are folks from the oil and gas sector worried about the damage to their reputation and the industry thanks to a few bad actors. To the Minister of Energy: what is the government doing to address these very real concerns?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to report to the House what we are doing. We absolutely all know that this is a critically important issue for Albertans. I myself and many of us who are rural MLAs hear this all the time when we go home. When the oil and gas industry was booming, there wasn't very much attention paid to this matter, and as it fell, we're seeing an uptick in issues. That's not right, and our government is taking a leadership role in this. We're looking to find solutions that protect Albertans, protect our environment, and keep Alberta a competitive place to invest.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Rosendahl: Mr. Speaker, given that a lot of people in this province are very cynical about this issue and given that they've seen previous governments only do one-sided consultations, what is the minister doing to ensure that this does not happen this time?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike members of the opposite side there, who prefer to stay in their echo chamber,

we in fact are out engaging. We believe in thorough engagement and finding common ground for solutions. We're talking to farmers and landowners. We're talking to environmental groups. We're talking to lenders. We're talking to municipalities. They're helping us look at the matter and how we can best manage the situation. We're not just admiring the problem; we're having good conversations and finding solutions.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that previous governments ignored indigenous communities in this province, to the same minister: will First Nations and Métis communities be included in this liability management review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, our government is proud of the work we're doing to renew the relationship with our indigenous peoples. We have a responsibility to have meaningful engagement with First Nations and Métis communities, and I'm pleased to say that we have a parallel engagement going on with these groups that will be beginning very shortly. As well, my department is visiting different parts of the province to ensure that we get a good cross-section of perspectives. This is a critically important matter, not just to rural Albertans but to our indigenous people, and we're getting all perspectives as we continue.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Labour Relations Code Review

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is not being up front with Albertans about its labour law review. We ask legitimate questions about the labour relations portion, and the minister responds with old pop culture references and comments about employment standards, which is a different topic. Issues like union certification and collective bargaining are serious subjects, and this government is avoiding our questions. Minister, leaving the employment standards portion aside for a moment, will you be proposing changes to our Labour Relations Code this session? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud that we've been engaging with Albertans and talking to them about what needs to be updated in our workplace legislation to make sure we have fair and family-friendly workplaces. Albertans have engaged, with nearly 5,000 submissions, multiple round-tables, other submissions, and people working with labour lawyer Andrew Sims. The former government held consultations as well, and what they did with those was that they let them sit on the shelf and gather dust. I'm looking forward to bringing forward workplace legislation reforms that will help build a strong economy.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that any review of our labour laws must be transparent and accountable and given that the major cost of the Labour Relations Code review is our contract with Andrew Sims and given that Albertans are giving tens of thousands of tax dollars in exchange for his guidance throughout this review, to the Minister of Labour: can we expect to see a report from

Andrew Sims on the labour relations portion of this consultation before your government introduces any changes to the Labour Relations Code? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta needs legislation that makes sure that our workplaces are fair, family friendly, and support a strong economy as well as making sure that we have our rights protected in Alberta as they are in other areas. This legislation has not changed since 1988. [interjections] The previous government conducted reviews and then took no steps forward. We are making sure that our workplace legislation is fair and family friendly, and I am looking forward to talking to Albertans further about that.

2:10

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, your volume is getting pretty loud.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that significant changes to our labour laws will likely discourage investment, making it more difficult to create jobs, and given that this ideological government seems more concerned with appeasing their union bosses than with helping get Albertans back to work and given that this government has shaken investor confidence and is destabilizing our economy by bringing in uncertainty, Minister, tell Albertans why you are rushing through changes to our labour laws rather than helping Albertans get back to work.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Particularly during tough economic times Albertans deserve workplace legislation that protects them, protects their families, and supports a strong economy. We have been engaging with Albertans and talking about important issues like job-protected sick leave, like making sure that we have workplace legislation that allows families to balance their work and family responsibilities. These are important topics that have been neglected under previous governments for too long. Making sure that we have fair and family-friendly workplaces is a priority for me and this government. [interjections]

The Speaker: Now I would ask the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View and also the Member for Strathmore-Brooks, under the same rule, to cut it down a little.

Calgary-West.

Investigation into Serenity's Death

Mr. Ellis: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has provided so much conflicting information and lack of information about Serenity that it has lost all credibility. For instance, the *Edmonton Journal* reported on March 22 that the RCMP investigation was concluded and the file was in the Alberta Crown prosecutors' office for review, but in the House last Thursday the minister told us that she could not answer opposition questions because the "investigation is ongoing." Minister, is the investigation finished or not, and do you even know what is happening here?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We were all deeply touched by this particular case. That's why the RCMP is being absolutely very careful to ensure that they do the best job they

can. As is very common in many complex cases, the file has been forwarded to the Crown, and the investigation is still ongoing. Police and Crown often work closely together in this way to see what additional evidence may be necessary in advance of the laying of charges.

Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: Given that last Thursday the minister also said – and this is alarming – that she is unable to provide details about the ongoing criminal investigation because “to do so would put young people involved at risk” and given that the minister and Premier spent last week assuring Albertans that young people are not at risk, Minister, if children are at risk, why are you not acting now to protect them?

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

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely, without doubt, the commitment of myself and my department and this government is to protect the vulnerable children of this province. If there was a child in this province for whom there was evidence of abuse, absolutely they would be apprehended. What I can say is that I will not disclose information in which the disclosure of information would put a child at risk, and I would hope that the member would support me in ensuring the protection of the children of this province.

Mr. Ellis: Given that the minister keeps saying that the media is wrong but she will not correct the information and given that we have heard this before – in November the then minister told the House that a reporter, quote, did not have all the facts, unquote, and he was referring to the date that the RCMP finally received Serenity’s case file, and it was the minister himself who reported the date wrong – and given that the government keeps changing its story and hiding behind privacy laws that they will not identify, Premier, there is only one way to get the facts here. Will you call a public inquiry now?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, all members on all sides of this House and all Albertans take this case incredibly seriously. The Crown and the RCMP have been working very diligently on this case to make sure that they explore every possible avenue because everybody wants to make sure that they get it right in this particular instance. At this time that investigation is ongoing, so it’s not appropriate to comment on what the other further steps will be. As the Minister of Children’s Services has said many times, I think we really need to be focused on moving forward and making the system better.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Data Security in Public Bodies

Mr. Cyr: Over the last year tens of thousands of computers have been affected with a recent wave of cyberattacks which use ransomware to extort individuals and businesses to pay to get their information from these individuals. With 12 international offices the chances of Alberta coming close to contact with cybermalware is high. The risks of infection both at home and abroad are a reality. Just last weekend this attack happened in Saskatchewan. At any point has Alberta become a target of espionage operations for cyberattacks within Alberta?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Status of Women.

Ms McLean: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. Service Alberta takes information security very seriously, so we have a number of best practices that are in place to protect our information and our systems. I can tell you that, certainly, we know that world-wide hackers do target governments. That’s why it’s important to be vigilant, so we are very vigilant. I’m very happy to report to this House and to the member opposite that ransomware has never affected the government such that we’ve ever paid a ransom. Our security systems and vaccinations, as it were, from these viruses are very much in place and are very top of the line. We are not exposed in the way that Saskatchewan was, and I’m proud of our systems.

The Speaker: The first supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in 2016 the University of Calgary’s computer system was cyberattacked by ransomware and a \$20,000 ransom was paid to cyberterrorists, to the Minister of Service Alberta: within the last year has the government paid any other ransoms for government of Alberta departments, agencies, boards, or commissions since the University of Calgary cyberattack, and are they recorded in the blue book?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you again for the question, Mr. Speaker. Service Alberta is responsible for the government of Alberta ministries’ devices, so I can certainly speak to that. We do update our antivirus protection software very rigorously. We also have a rigorous and robust backup and restoration process. So I can certainly tell the member opposite that our efforts are definitely working. Of a total of 860 million e-mails which we received last year, 93.4 per cent were blocked due to detected malicious intent. So we certainly have good systems in place. With respect to ABCs it’s a different . . .

The Speaker: The second supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given this government’s callous disregard towards privacy, freedom, and general concern for its citizens’ information and given that ransoms have been paid by public institutions within the riding of the minister responsible for IT security, to the Premier: if your minister is not able to protect institutions in her own riding, how can we expect her to protect Alberta in our own home?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I’m sure the member opposite does know that agencies, boards, and commissions are arm’s length. There are many things that they’re responsible for, including their own budgeting, including their own operations. The University of Calgary is no different in that respect. When it comes to the government of Alberta, however, and the ministries, we are certainly responsible for that. I can certainly assure the House that we take the most rigorous of steps. If we did what the opposition proposed, which would include millions of cuts from our budget – I can tell you that one of the vulnerabilities is because governments look to IT applications as the very first place to cut.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

2:20 Flood Damage Mitigation in High River

Mr. W. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, in just a few short weeks we’ll be recognizing the four-year anniversary of the High River flood. This epic event had a devastating effect on the people and the economy

of High River. Flood mitigation work is still in progress with only one project left to complete. To the Minister of Infrastructure: have the funds for the High River floodgates been allocated to this project?

Mr. Mason: I'll look into that matter and get back to the member, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. W. Anderson: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's interesting. Given that last year I contacted the ministry and suggested that since the floodgate project was a temporary solution and the raising of the Centre Street Bridge was the only permanent solution and whereas I had suggested that instead of spending taxpayers' dollars on a temporary fix the government ought to allocate the funds to a permanent solution, why did the minister turn down this project?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Certainly, in Environment and Parks we have worked very closely with the town of High River and with the city of Calgary on appropriate flood mitigation in response to the 2013 flood. That is why our government has also committed \$500 million over 10 years to protect homes, businesses, and the economy through the Alberta community resilience program. In 2015 we also committed \$297 million, which will ensure that communities along the Elbow River are protected from a 2013 event. Our work on flood mitigation is ongoing, and we're happy to work with the town of High River to complete the projects that came out of the 2013 disaster.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. W. Anderson: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's really interesting because given that the town of High River council has provided to the minister – which minister, I'm not sure now – a 107-page engineering-approved project, shovel-ready solution along with the offer to fund over half of the project, why is this ministry preventing High River flood mitigation projects from taking place, why are you holding up this vital, potentially life-saving solution, and why is there so much bureaucratic red tape? What's the problem?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, our province has dedicated many hundreds of millions of dollars to flood mitigation in response to the 2013 flood and to ensure that our communities are resilient in the future, both in High River and elsewhere. I would be very pleased to hear from the town of High River on further mitigation that is proposed by them and follow up with the hon. member and the town of High River as we complete the projects that came in the immediate aftermath of the 2013 flood.

Coal Strategy

Mr. Fraser: TransAlta recently announced that it would be speeding up the conversion of some of their coal-fired plants to natural gas. Specifically, some of the Sundance and Keepphills units will be converted or retired up to two years sooner than previously estimated. While this might seem like a win for the NDP, it's certainly not a win for Alberta's coal communities like Parkland county, which is looking at a nearly \$6 million loss from their tax revenue due to the early shutdown. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: what are you doing to offset the loss to Parkland county and the similar losses that all communities can expect?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you . . . [interjection] What? Okay. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I'm short, and sometimes I don't see my colleagues.

Thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, his own leader, Mr. Kenney, voted to phase out 12 of the 16 coal plants, as did the Leader of the Official Opposition, with no plan for what might happen to those communities. Our side of the House has taken a different approach. We are engaging with coal communities. We ensured that we got the right regulatory change with respect to natural gas conversion, and we're going to make sure we invest in those communities whereas they were ignored by the PCs and the Wildrose.

Mr. Fraser: Respectfully, Minister, that \$6 million this year is likely the cut to front-line services for that community.

Given that the minister has spoken about the opportunities for the export of thermal coal to other jurisdictions and given the further opportunity to export Alberta's high-grade metallurgical coal and given that much of the impact on the coal communities will be felt through the loss of good, mortgage-paying mining jobs, to the same minister: will you commit to doing everything in your power to ensure that thermal coal mines in these communities remain open, and will you work to reduce the barriers currently stopping new metallurgical coal mines from opening?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the plan that we put forward so that generators could convert their plants to natural gas and keep investing in communities and workers had to do with the plants and not the thermal coal mines. We went to Ottawa – our side of the House did – with a plan, and we were able to negotiate a 15-year exemption for coal plants that convert to natural gas. That means that Alberta natural gas will be burned in Alberta plants that are run by Alberta workers. We have the best interests of those communities in mind. They were ignored by the PCs and the Wildrose.

Mr. Fraser: Given that in my discussions with the mayors of the various coal communities a common concern has been that the well-being of their communities doesn't seem to be a top priority for this government and given the current environment around the uncertainty and the future of the coal industry, including the early forced shutdown and the intent of the B.C. government to levy an additional tax on the export of thermal coal, to the same minister: respectfully, Minister, these communities have expressed that they've heard more about free light bulbs than their successful transition. Will you demonstrate to these communities that their families, their future are more important than free light bulbs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the best interests of the communities were ignored by the PCs and the Wildrose when both the leader of the Wildrose and the leader of the PCs voted to shut down 12 of those 18 plants. Our approach has been a little bit different. Here's what the CEO of TransAlta, for example, had to say about that: "We have been [very] public about the benefits of these conversions. These are low-cost investments that will lengthen the average life of our coal fleet by up to 15 years." This ensures that we keep our workers working, according to the CEO of TransAlta, and keep those communities strong to be able to provide capacity to the system as we go through decades . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Marijuana Legalization

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we fast approach the legalization of marijuana, my office continues to receive calls from constituents concerned about the effect this will have in Red Deer and across the province. Given that the federal government has committed to setting the minimum age of 18 to buy marijuana, to the Minister of Justice: has this government considered the legal age in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Justice minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very important question. I think all Albertans are concerned about ensuring that we make this transition in a thoughtful way. Some of our main priorities with this process include keeping cannabis out of the hands of children and proceeds out of the hands of criminals. The minimum age is something we'll raise as part of our public consultation, a process we'll be launching in the coming weeks. We want to ensure that the views of Albertans are taken into account in this process.

The Speaker: The first supplemental.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the need to ensure that our roads remain safe and given the concerns surrounding drug-impaired driving, to the same minister: how will we ensure that Albertans are kept safe on the roads after marijuana is legalized?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, this is a concern that is very much on the mind of the government and of all Albertans, I think. Impaired driving, whether by alcohol or drugs, is unacceptable. It is dangerous, and it puts everyone on our roads at risk. The federal government is working to ensure that a reliable roadside saliva test will be available, and we will be watching this process closely. One of the things we're looking to ensure is that law enforcement in Alberta is properly educated so that they're able to proceed on the basis of the impaired charge.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The second supplemental.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the need to educate Albertans on this topic as we move forward, to the same minister: how will public education play a role in how the province responds to the legalization process?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. Educating Albertans about safe consumption is absolutely a high priority. We'll be working to ensure that this happens as we move forward in the process. We will be working very closely with our partners in Health, and we'll have more to say about this as we move forward. It's absolutely critical that Albertans understand both the risks and the benefits.

2:30

Highway 61 Repairs

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, last summer residents of the county of Forty Mile were excited to see construction equipment begin to fix

highway 61 near Etzikom. Sadly, the equipment idled, and the highway repairs stopped. It turns out that some regulation changed in the environment department, and the minister of environment halted the Minister of Transportation's project. Now I'm told by Alberta Transportation that nothing will happen until August. Why is the minister of environment holding up the Department of Transportation on road repairs, promised since 2007, that represent a health and safety issue?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is an unfortunate situation. The project was on the shelf for quite a long time. Our government revitalized it, and as a result there were some changes to the Water Act that require additional permits, and we're in the process of acquiring those permits now.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, this isn't the first critical, unsafe project that has been held up waiting for the NDP's approval. Given that NDP bureaucracy and red tape are holding up repairs on this critical lifeline while we risk losing a second construction season and given that this road is in such a state that even school buses refuse to use it, is the minister of environment trying to shut down rural Alberta by allowing the roads to deteriorate to such a condition that the Transportation minister can't fix them anymore?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. Our government is strongly committed to meeting the transportation needs of all Albertans, including those in rural Alberta. But I can tell you that if the Wildrose formed government and cut \$9 billion from infrastructure, the roads would be one mass of potholes from one end of the province to the other.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that I have asked about the repairs to highway 61 every year since I was elected – in question period, estimates, and Public Accounts – and given that the government of Alberta continues to botch the repairs of this highway for all the residents of southern Alberta, if the government isn't able to get the basics of road repair right, how can we trust them to diversify our economy, create jobs, and get value for taxpayer dollars?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, this government is already producing results in all of those areas. The infrastructure that's being built in this province is going to serve Albertans for generations to come. Jobs are being created. We're getting back on track. It's not going to be highway 61 revisited.

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

Workers' Compensation System

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This NDP government has proven that it is a poor financial manager. That's why business owners are concerned that the WCB has not provided them with their 2016 premium rebates. In a year in which businesses are struggling with the economy, the carbon tax, the minimum wage increase, and top-secret regulation changes, these rebates are particularly critical. Minister, will you promise these business owners that you will not use their premium overpayments to help fund your department? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's absolutely critical that Albertans know that they have a Workers' Compensation Board and system that provides fair compensation and meaningful rehabilitation. Let me be clear that surpluses are not being folded back into government revenue. The WCB manages its own funds, and there has been an internal decision of the WCB for this current year. We look forward to working with the WCB as we receive the report from the panel that has been reviewing WCB to see how we can improve the system going forward.

Mr. Gill: Given that the accounting practice standard is that if employers contributed more in premiums than was needed in a given year, the money is refunded and given that it's unfair to withhold their money when all of the accounting is finished for 2016 and given that it should not matter what the WCB review recommends for the future because we are talking about the last year, to the same minister: is the decision to withhold the premium surplus coming from you or the WCB?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The WCB manages its own funds, and this was an internal decision of the WCB, who has historically responsibly managed and accounted for all of the funds within the WCB system. There has been an ongoing review of the WCB to make sure that the system is working for injured workers and employers. The last comprehensive review of the WCB had happened more than 15 years ago, so this was long overdue. This review is part of our commitment to make sure agencies, boards, and commissions are operating well here in this province.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the WCB review was launched over a year ago and given that the law hinges on this review, including premium overpayments from 2016 that businesses did not expect to have to worry about and potential legislation changes from a government that is a fan of overburdening businesses with regulations, Minister, when will your panel complete its report and provide it publicly for all Albertans, and if you want to say spring, is this the spring of 2017 or 2018?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased that we had a three-person panel, consisting of a neutral chair and representatives from workers and employers, engaged in a fulsome review of the workers' compensation system so that we can make sure there is meaningful rehabilitation and fair compensation as well as to make sure that there is a strong system of workers' compensation. The report is due to me spring of this year. We will be receiving that report, reviewing it, and then coming back to talk to Albertans, the WCB, and all affected by the system about the next steps.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Bow.

Neonatal Health Care

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently this government announced the official opening of the new neonatal intensive care unit at the Peter Lougheed health centre in Calgary. To the Minister of Health: what does this project mean for front-line health teams in the Lougheed NICU and their patients?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Of course, it's important to make sure that we have the very best care environments, which also regularly equate to the very best working environments for the staff who are there to provide this care. Rather than teeny-tiny newborns having to be held in close proximity to each other, they have much better infection control, the space is three times that which it was previously, there are doors that actually close between the different spaces, and it also creates a space for the family to be able to stay and care for their children, which regularly is where you want to be when you have a child who is so ill.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the number of births in the Calgary zone has increased by 8 per cent in the last five years, from almost 18,000 babies in 2011 to nearly 20,000 in 2016, to the same minister: why didn't the new unit increase the number of beds to meet the growing demand?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. I had a chance to meet with some of the families as well as the staff while I was there, and I have to tell you that baby Noah's family was so excited to see the new space. They're more excited to get him home, but if the time continues where they have to be there, they're excited to be able to transition into the new space, where they'll all be welcome. Certainly, that new, dedicated space supports isolation as well for conditions that could be infectious. It's important that we continue to have the right number of beds or, rather, bassinets in this unit, and AHS continues to monitor that and ensure that they're bringing space online when it's most needed.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Calgary isn't the only community facing increasing demands, to the same minister: what else is this government doing to make sure families across Alberta don't experience barriers when a child needs health care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is one of the reasons why I'm so proud to be a part of a government that's putting Alberta families first instead of moving forward with reckless, ideological cuts, as are being proposed by the members opposite. We're investing in parts of the province to ensure that we have the right health care supports. That includes ridings right across this province, from north to south, from east to west. Last year we started covering things outside of acute care, including specialized formula for children who have severe dietary restrictions, and many families have been able to benefit from that. As well, the health care system has had fewer complications because these tiny children aren't getting the kinds of conditions that they could acquire if they . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Legislative Procedures

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, two years ago in June the Wildrose Official Opposition proposed a document to restore trust in

Alberta's democracy, and so far we've heard crickets from this Government House Leader. What I'd like to know is: what has happened in the last two years when he used to believe in openness, transparency, and fairness for the opposition?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to talk about what this government has done to renew democracy over the past two years, starting with Bill 1, banning corporate and union donations, and following that up with changes to our elections financing act to get big money out of politics. We've now introduced whistle-blower legislation that is going to make sure that our public servants are able to come forward and speak about what they're seeing if there is wrongdoing happening within our agencies. We continue to push the boundaries and make sure that Alberta is leading in renewing our democracy. I'm very proud of the work we've done so far and the work we are going to do in the future.

2:40

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that the opposition proposed real changes to this Assembly that would make our democracy more open and more transparent, including reforming question period, including opposition days, and all this government can talk about is their union pals, when will they make real changes that reform our democracy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I would note that when this party, the NDP, was in opposition, we had four seats, sometimes even two seats, and we were far more effective under even far more restrictive rules than this huge Wildrose opposition. So don't blame us because you're lame.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that there is no new legislation on the Order Paper and that this government claims to be effective at governing – yet all we saw last week was this government filibustering their own pieces of legislation, with nothing on the horizon – and that the Minister of Labour is always dodging and weaving about whether or not they're going to ram controversial labour legislation through at the end of session, when are we going to hear whether this will be happening or not?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been advised that my last comment was perhaps disrespectful to the disabled community, and I'd like to apologize now for using that. I can think of five or six other words I could have used equally effectively to describe the opposition.

But I do want to tell the Opposition House Leader that we are going to be introducing two new bills – I'm giving notice this afternoon – just so the opposition is happy, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. members, Members' Statements in 30 seconds.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Electric Power System

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're now two years into an electricity comedy of errors that started as soon as the NDP began their reign of economic tragedy. It's time for a recap. Weeks into the NDP's electoral mandate, without any consultation with industry, the NDP rashly changed the 2007 SGER's carbon pricing. The result: a mass turn-back of power purchase arrangements, which are decade-old power contracts between Alberta generators and the government's arm's-length Balancing Pool. The NDP had six months to undo their rash change to SGERs. The NDP were warned repeatedly that companies would lawfully terminate their contracts unless the short-sighted order in council was reversed, but ideology came before sense and before Albertans. The NDP didn't back down. Instead, they started a smear campaign, evoking the besmirched name of Enron in a failed attempt to divert attention away from their growing comedy of errors.

The Balancing Pool recognized Enmax's right to terminate, which is the last time they decided anything independent of this meddling government. Then came the costly lawsuits and Bill 34, the blank cheque to the Balancing Pool. A few short months ago, when the blank cheque act was passed, the expected cost was \$600 million, but weeks ago costs skyrocketed to over \$4 billion according to the government's own admission. Now the Balancing Pool is being investigated by the MSA for using the money from the blank cheque act as an open-ended subsidy, undermining our competitive power market. Changing SGERs will cost Albertan taxpayers at least \$4.437 billion.

The taxpayer and the ratepayer are still the same person. You are not the heroes protecting Albertans; you are the villains inflicting harm on them.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure and Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pride that I stand here to provide oral notice of two bills to be added to the Order Paper tomorrow. Those bills are Bill 14, An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation, which will be sponsored by the hon. Minister of Energy; and Bill 15, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017, which will be sponsored by the hon. Minister of Finance.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to bring forward five copies of the Edmonton collision statistics as well as some photoradar locations that were provided by FOIP, showing that there's absolutely no correlation between the locations of photoradar and collisions.

The Speaker: The Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a six-pack of Wild Rose beer that I owe the hon. minister of agriculture. I bet him that the Flames would outlast the Oilers in the playoffs. I was wrong, and a Fildebrandt always pays his debts. Unfortunately for me, though, I didn't put any money on the Bandits against Whitecourt. In any case, it's right here for him.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a letter that I received today from Paul Baena of Western Electrical Management Ltd. It's with regard to the labour review, and he claims, "I feel that the NDP government is once again attempting to change our province in order to align the province with the values and belief system of a political party, which is no longer in favor by the people."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today to table five copies of the summary and indicators from the Lethbridge State of the Environment 2017 report by Environment Lethbridge, which I quoted during my member's statement. As noted in the summary, we must be prepared for the impacts of climate change and population growth on our environment and lives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of a post from my Facebook page, where the mayor of Carmangay commented on answers that I got as I questioned the minister of environment about property rights and renewables. The mayor was not impressed that the minister took her comments out of context and used them as supporting arguments to give a non answer to an extremely important question.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the Hon. Mr. S. Anderson, Minister of Municipal Affairs, responses to questions raised by Mr. McIver, hon. leader of the Progressive Conservative opposition; Mr. Clark, hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow; and Mr. Strankman, hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, at the April 12, 2017, Ministry of Municipal Affairs 2017-18 main estimates debate.

2:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we have two points of order today. Is that correct?

An Hon. Member: And a point of privilege.

The Speaker: And a point of privilege as well.
The Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. Would you like to begin with the points of order or the point of privilege? The points of order?

The Speaker: Please.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Ms Ganley: I rise on a point under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), which states that members
will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion,
that Member

- (h) makes allegations against another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member;
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

At about 1:55 p.m. – and I believe this same argument stands for both points of order because it occurred again at about 1:56 – the

Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre asked: will the minister continue to mislead the House?

Mr. Speaker, in recent months you have cautioned many times on the practice of using words like "mislead" or "misleading." Most recently, on April 20 you said, "I want to caution the member and the members. We've had many hours wasted on discussions about what's true, what's not true, misleading, false, et cetera. I want to caution everyone to be careful."

This, of course, is a very context-specific state of affairs. In this particular case the context is that it was a specific allegation against a specific person. We were not talking about an argument or an idea or a group, Mr. Speaker. We were talking about one specific, individual person. In particular, what we were talking about was a topic that is deserving of sensitivity and respect. In this case I think it is clear that the use of "misleading" in this context was absolutely a violation of this rule. It's very sensitive, it's affected all of us very deeply, and I think that really does denote the need for caution.

Mr. Speaker, you have asked members to stand in this House before for saying that a member was misleading the House and to apologize and withdraw. I would ask that the members opposite do the same by withdrawing and apologizing for the remarks made today.

The Speaker: The House leader for the Official Opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to agree in many respects with my colleague. This is an issue that is emotional. From time to time members of the Chamber can become emotional. I know that my colleague has some strong feelings about some of the things that the minister has said both at the panel and here in the House and how there's some discrepancy with those. But I do agree that in this case the context in which it was used was in fact a point of order, and the member has asked me if I would withdraw and apologize on his behalf as he had to step out.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I believe we are now at a point of privilege. The case was made by the House leader of the third party on Thursday, I believe.

The Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Privilege Access to Information

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to the point of privilege raised by the hon. House leader for the third party, I would begin by saying that the test for prima facie breach of privilege is high. The hon. House leader for the PC caucus hasn't even come close to establishing that the privilege of a member has been violated in this instance or that the privileges of the House as a collective have been breached by the Minister of Children's Services in question period. The member is using this matter of privilege and points of order frivolously as a means of extending debate from question period and of relitigating issues that have been closed.

Before refuting his argument, I'd like to briefly outline what it was that occurred. In question period the PC caucus leader asked the Minister of Children's Services questions about child welfare. The minister responded to those questions. The opposition wasn't satisfied with the answers. Mr. Speaker, that happens most days in this place. Following question period the minister provided further information to the public through a media conference, an update she had made reference to earlier that day in question period. Again, there's nothing unusual here. Those are the facts. This doesn't translate to a matter of privilege.

I'd like to now review and refute the accusations of the PC House leader, Mr. Speaker. I'll begin with what I believe to be the substance of the matter, but the argument wandered somewhat, so I will try to touch on as much as possible.

First, he argued that the privileges of a member of this House were breached "by withholding information from members and intending to share that information with the media before members of this House." Mr. Speaker, *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms* is very clear on page 13, paragraph 31(10), that there is absolutely no right of members to receive any or all information before the general public does.

The question has often been raised whether parliamentary privilege imposes on ministers an obligation to deliver ministerial statements and to make announcements and communications to the public through the House of Commons or to make these announcements or statements in the House rather than outside the chamber. The question has been asked whether Hon. Members are entitled, as part of their parliamentary privilege, to receive such information ahead of the general public. I can find no precedent to justify this suggestion.

Parliamentary Privilege in Canada, by Maingot, further states on page 224:

A complaint that a minister of the Crown has made a statement outside the House rather than in the House or that the government provides information only to its supporters in the House may well amount to a grievance against the government, but in the absence of an order in the House forbidding such activity, there is no personal or corporate privilege that has been breached in the doing.

As one of my predecessors as Government House Leader, Mr. Hancock, stated on March 6, 2000: government actually gets elected to govern, and then they come into the House to get approval for legislation and approval for spending; but governments are elected to govern, and they are expected to go out and talk to the public about what they are doing.

Similarly, Speaker Zwodzesky stated on November 7, 2013:

We all know that governments across the greater Commonwealth will make announcements. They will make policy statements, they will make program decisions and other announcements like that, and they will also make funding announcements such as the one we heard today, and they are well within their right to do that. That's what governments are elected to do. They can do it any time they wish provided that some of our conventions, rules, and authorities are observed.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's very clear that sharing information with the public through the media prior to it being provided to this Chamber is not prohibited, and in fact there are a great many occasions on which it is desirable or appropriate.

At the same time, I do wonder whether the hon. member spoke to his caucus leader prior to making this argument. After all, earlier that day in question period the Member for Calgary-Hays said that the minister had refused to provide correct facts to the media. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition went on even further in his first question to say that the minister provided nothing: no details, no explanations, no answers.

Mr. Speaker, it can only be one of the two. Did the minister breach privilege by providing answers to the media, or did she provide nothing? You can't have it both ways. In either event, it's quite clear that ministers have the right to provide information to the public and, in fact, one might argue, even have the duty to do so in many cases.

The next allegation raised by the hon. third-party House leader quotes at length from *Parliamentary Practice* as well as *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* in defining what privilege is. But he doesn't establish that the minister breached privilege. He

quotes *Erskine May* on page 251 in attempting to argue that the minister's conduct in a response in question period was disrespectful in such a way as to have breached the privileges of the Assembly; however, he ought to have continued reading, Mr. Speaker. He would have found that his own dissatisfaction in terms of the answers to questions in question period is most definitely not grounds for a point of privilege.

O'Brien and Bosc at page 510:

Members may not insist on an answer nor may a Member insist that a specific Minister respond to his or her question. A Minister's refusal to answer a question may not be questioned or treated as the subject of a point of order or question of privilege.

It continues, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker ensures that replies adhere to the dictates of order, decorum and parliamentary language. The Speaker, however, is not responsible for the quality or content of replies to questions. In most instances, when a point of order or a question of privilege has been raised in regard to a response to an oral question, the Speaker has ruled that the matter is a disagreement among Members over the facts surrounding the issue. As such, these matters are more a question of debate and do not constitute a breach of the [rule] . . . of privilege.

3:00

There are a couple of other comments, Mr. Speaker. Ministers are not required to provide answers that the members opposite may necessarily like. *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* states at page 223, "The alleged lack or unsatisfactory nature of a reply to an oral or written question is not a question of privilege, because the practice of the House does not compel a reply." I think that the minister has been very clear about the constraints placed on her in this situation, in the context of an ongoing investigation, and I think it is abundantly clear that just because the members opposite don't like the answer, that doesn't mean their privileges have been breached.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the hon. third-party House leader quotes from various books on obstruction. His claim is that he has been impeded in his duty as an MLA seeking information on a matter of importance to himself and the people who elected us to this House. He argues, "The minister was clearly obstructing the members of this House in the discharge of their duties. Every member of this House has a duty to speak out on issues of importance to Albertans." As proof of obstruction he argues that the minister delayed in answering questions or refused to share information. First of all, Mr. Speaker, that's just simply not obstruction. Beginning at page 108 in *O'Brien and Bosc* is a discussion on obstruction and similar matters. To begin with, it's generally a reference to physical obstruction, assault, or molestation, items such as traffic barriers, security cordons, and picket lines that literally impede the ability of a member to access parliament or to discharge their duties.

While members may want particular information related to a policy or program, that does not mean that receiving the information is fundamental to their duties as a member. On that point *O'Brien and Bosc* discuss on page 117 the multiple responsibilities and duties of members, including those related to their constituency work. They point to a ruling from July 15, 1980, when Speaker Sauvé told the Chamber, "Whatever duty a member has to his constituents, before a valid question of privilege arises in respect [to] alleged interference, such interference must relate to the member's parliamentary duties." In other words, just because accessing specific information may be important to the individual, that does not make it a fundamental part of their duties or privileges as a member, Mr. Speaker.

In conclusion, I don't believe that any of the points raised by the hon. House leader for the third party meet the test of privilege, which, again, is quite high. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The House leader for the Official Opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me just begin by reminding folks exactly why we're here and of some of the statements that were made by the minister which have created some significant concern for many members inside this Chamber. It can be found on page 966 of *Hansard*, when she said in response to the question from the Leader of the Opposition, "I want to urge the members again to be aware of spreading inaccurate information . . . I will be sharing more information about this matter this afternoon." Ultimately, how the opposition is able to do our jobs representing the views of Albertans is in question here. The minister is clearly withholding information from the Chamber. Clearly stating that she "will be sharing more information about this matter this afternoon" gives an indication to every member of the Assembly that she had the information available to her at that point.

Mr. Speaker, question period is one of the only opportunities in the day in which the opposition has the opportunity to ask the government questions and, as such, hold the government to account. The very fact that the minister would withhold information from the Leader of the Official Opposition and others and openly acknowledge that she would be providing that information to members of the media and not to this Chamber directly affects the ability of the member to hold the government to account in the line of questioning that he may or may not have chosen to take during question period.

We in effect are told by that minister that they're not going to provide details to the House, but it's okay for them to go to the press and provide them the details, essentially saying: you can all tune in later when I tell Albertans what I wasn't willing to tell you. This clearly shows contempt for the Assembly. I won't go on at length today, Mr. Speaker, about this point of privilege because I think that it is clear that there is a tradition inside the Chamber that we ought to provide information to the Chamber and not to the media in advance of providing that information to the Assembly, particularly when she acknowledged that she had it.

It's significantly different from a funding announcement that the government may engage in, where the government makes a decision that they will be rolling out a policy announcement or otherwise. We were in the Chamber at the time that the Minister of Children's Services said: "No. I'm not going to tell you; I'm going to tell the media later today." That directly and intentionally affected the Leader of the Opposition's ability to execute his duties on that day.

We heard the Minister of Justice, the Acting Deputy House Leader, speak at length about answering questions and what their ability was to do. I'd just like to point to a reference in *Beauchesne's* for you that she neglected to bring up, mostly because it doesn't support her arguments – all the same, it is there and available to you – when it speaks specifically about the government's responsibilities when it comes to answering questions. Mr. Speaker, if you're following along in *Beauchesne's* this afternoon or tomorrow or later today, it can be found on page 25. The heading is Interfering with Members, notation 97.

The Speaker has stated: "While it is correct to say that the government is not required by our rules to answer written or oral questions, it would be bold to suggest that no circumstances . . . like we may have seen the Minister of Justice recommend today

. . . could ever exist for a prima facie question of privilege to be made where there was a deliberate attempt to deny answers to an Hon. Member . . .

which is exactly what we saw from the Minister of Children's Services when she did not answer the question of my colleague, the Leader of the Official Opposition, but said – and I'm paraphrasing here – "I'm not going to answer your question; I will answer that question later in a media conference." What we saw was a deliberate attempt to deny an answer to my colleague, and while I can appreciate that the government is not required, there are certainly references available to you that provide evidence that that limit is not boundless, as the government has suggested.

It's my recommendation, Mr. Speaker, that you do find a prima facie case of privilege and that this issue be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing so that situations like this, where the government is not providing the answers that are rightly deserved, could be heard there.

3:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, upon assuming this responsibility, I was told that in this House points of privilege happen very infrequently. I must tell you that we've had far more than I would have expected in these last two years.

There were some very strong, cogent arguments made with respect to this matter. I will be taking your points under consideration and in due course will report back to the House.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 204 Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017

[Debate adjourned May 8: Mr. Dach speaking]

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my privilege to stand today and speak about Bill 204, Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017. There have been a number of points made by both opposition and my own caucus colleagues, and I just want to kind of start off the conversation pretty broad and then get a little bit more detailed as I go along.

As those that have been aware of work that's gone on in this Legislature for the last 10 years know, we have members that are sitting as ministers now that have been long-time advocates for property rights in Alberta. They have stood up for landowners, and we as members will continue to do so because we do believe in things like property rights, due process, proper notification, and fair compensation. The government has already begun working with stakeholders to try to make these positive changes on important issues, and it's very important that we do this to make Albertans' lives better and ensure the public has access to appropriate protections and avenues for resolution where issues arise involving private property, Madam Speaker.

Last we left off, we were speaking about adverse possession. As was talked about, I'm sure that all of us in this Chamber have had constituents come into our offices to talk about adverse possession,

urging us to make very substantive changes that would protect property rights, and members of this government are very interested in making changes that will satisfy that call. But, of course, any amendments that we see come before this House: they do impact many pieces of legislation often, and it's quite important to the House to consider all of what these necessary policy implications might be.

For example, when I'm looking at the bill, I'm not quite sure how ongoing issues that arise in boundary and occupancy disputes will be addressed and resolved if we were to go ahead and make these changes. Currently section 69 of the Law of Property Act provides the mechanisms needed to resolve disputes where improvements have been made on the wrong piece of land. Sometimes this may have been a result of past survey errors. Sometimes it may have been an unrecorded understanding that happened in early generations between neighbours that can no longer be identified. The fact is, unfortunately, that we know that mistakes can happen.

I do understand that section 69 was originally enacted after a property owner ended up obtaining a house that someone else had actually built, Madam Speaker. There needs to be a way of resolving these situations fairly. The current law might not be the best, but we can't do away with it without a lot of consideration. If we're seeking to protect one landowner who historically owned that land, we shouldn't do it in a way that is entirely unfair to the other landowner who mistakenly could occupy or use it.

I'm concerned that these amendments would potentially hand over one hard-working person's investment to another party without due process that would protect both parties' interests. Many of these situations, after all, aren't about government or industry versus landowners; they can be landowner versus landowner. So we need to make sure that we get this right and be fair to both sides. However, Bill 204 does not seem to outline the impact of section 69, and that's just the tip of the iceberg on this issue. Establishing the necessary facts in such disputes is a difficult process, and even if the facts are established, section 69 may not cover all situations. I would not want to leave these neighbours without a process for addressing these concerns, Madam Speaker.

I would like to shift focus now to the Limitations Act, which sets out claims that would be brought within 10 years for an owner to claim return of possession of land from an adverse possessor, which is someone who occupies land that they do not own and under the doctrine of adverse possession might acquire an interest in that land if certain criteria are not met. The doctrine of adverse possession requires an owner to take timely action to enforce ownership and possession of the land, often through court action if an agreement with the adverse possessor cannot be reached. Bill 204 does not seem to set out a framework that would address disputes that may already be before the courts or claims that existed before the proposed amendments are supposed to take effect. More work absolutely seems to be needed to get this right.

Just as a recap of many of the points that have been made, it doesn't seem that Bill 204 addresses adverse possession in a holistic manner and as drafted would have unintended consequences for the very people that I believe the Legislature is trying to help. I already mentioned section 69 of the Law of Property Act as well as the Limitations Act and also the Land Titles Act, but also the other acts that might be impacted would be the Municipal Government Act, the Irrigation Districts Act, the Public Lands Act, and perhaps other acts. Adverse possession cannot be addressed through a single lens. Eliminating the doctrine of adverse possession is not a straightforward process and needs these careful considerations. It's complex and may open gaps and create unintended consequences for Albertans.

I just want to make a few notes also about the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, that the act is important for doing cumulative effects management and for managing the triple bottom line of the public's interest in social, environmental, and economic outcomes. For too long previous governments failed to manage the environmental and social outcomes of development on a cumulative effects basis, and we do need to do better in the public's interest and for the common good. It's a priority for this government, and regional planning is a cornerstone of this effort.

Bill 204 could bring in significant financial and legal risk for these regional planning efforts like the North Saskatchewan regional plan, for which we have just begun consultations, or for the lower Athabasca regional plan, which came into effect in 2012. Regional plans such as these are crucial to ensuring that all of the interests in a community are considered when planning for the long-term economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, and community well-being in different regions of the province. Also, what's important is developing these wide-ranging engagement tools for community stakeholders. Regional planning is also an important tool for ensuring Albertans have an ability to shape their communities, and that net needs to be preserved.

Bill 204 would create new rights to compensation in legal contexts where property rights were not intended. In fact, we don't even know what the bill would make the public liable for, and because the provision for compensation is so broad, it would require compensation for any losses, including for damages or other financial relief, so really this bill could leave the government and the public liable for compensation for the 86,000 active Crown mineral agreements that might be affected by a regional plan.

I would like to again thank the Member for Livingstone-Macleod. I understand and respect the intent behind his bill. Our government and caucus believe in protecting property rights, including due process, proper notification, fair compensation, and that is why the government has begun to work with stakeholders to make positive changes that would protect Albertans and respect property rights. The government is right now looking at how to better manage historic, current, and future liabilities associated with upstream oil and gas infrastructure, which is often located on private property, Madam Speaker.

To further support managing these liabilities, the government would be working with federal counterparts in securing \$30 million to help address the rising inventory of orphan assets. We are waiting for the details of how that money will be used to benefit Alberta, and we know that this is just the beginning of the work that we need to do to benefit landowners, workers, and the environment.

3:20

We know that there is room for improvement in how property rights issues are addressed, and I would again like to thank the member for bringing forward this bill. Of course, as I've laid out, it leaves many unanswered questions, which is why I am happy to move an amendment in the House on this bill, Madam Speaker, and I have the requisite copies.

The Acting Speaker: If you can just wait one minute until the originals are at the table, please.

Thank you, hon. member. Your amendment will be referred to as RA1.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you. Could I speak to that amendment?

The NDP has always stood up for Alberta landowners, Madam Speaker. We're working to strike the right balance between individual property rights, the public interest, and responsible energy development with industry, which is why we have done so

much to get to two pipeline approvals, because we have been able to get the public on our side. Balancing these very delicate interests is of critical importance, and that's why I'm concerned that the bill does not strike an appropriate balance, which is why I'm tabling this amendment.

As such, I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 204, Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 204, Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the bill does not strike the right balance between individual property owner rights, industry's need for certainty and the public's need to protect Alberta's water and public lands.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment RA1? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yeah, I'm pleased to rise today in support of my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod's private member's bill and against the reasoned motion as it was just presented. You know, I struggle with where to start. Three things run through my mind, and the first of all is the hypocrisy of a government that four and five years ago was absolutely, totally against bills 36, 24, 19, and 50 and claimed, like the Wildrose opposition would at the time, that they would repeal them. I guess you're supporters of property rights only when it's convenient, supporters of property rights only when you don't have the opportunity to make government bigger, larger, have more ability to infringe on individual and property rights.

Certainly, we have the opportunity in this House to just vote against a bill. We have opportunities to make amendments to change it. You know, my question in question period today talked about how for five years I've been asking for the improvements on highway 61. Well, Madam Speaker, it's seven or eight years that I've had constituents from Cypress-Medicine Hat and Forty Mile county come to me with great, great concern about the infringement of property rights.

Again, when both the NDP and the Wildrose were in opposition, in an odd kind of way we seemed like we were allies to protect property rights. Obviously, we know the true NDP government position. Thank goodness the Wildrose position hasn't changed at all. We are here to protect property rights.

Why should we do this? You know, everywhere I go talking to people in the oil and gas business, people in industry, people looking for jobs, they are absolutely appalled at how this government has shattered confidence, confidence in not increasing taxes with the biggest per capita deficit in provincial Canadian history since World War II – I'm afraid they have to go even higher before this government decides to get spending in line – the confidence of an industry that might come here. Madam Speaker, as we all know, we've seen several international companies leave our jurisdiction in the last little while, taking their capital and their jobs with them. Stronger property rights would be a signal to these companies that this is the type of jurisdiction . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, sorry to interrupt.

Members, we are not in Committee of the Whole at the moment. Can you please return to your seats.

Hon. member, please continue.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you. Again, you know, the confidence that we could send to investors, to stockholders, to people to buy shares, to people that want to start small businesses that Alberta is

a jurisdiction where government knows its limits and where government knows that the individuals and companies are happy to pay taxes, are happy to support families and communities, but they need certainty.

So the hypocrisy, the lack of confidence are two of the reasons that I will not be supporting this amendment.

The third reason. What I didn't hear the hon. member who introduced this talk about was what I saw, Madam Speaker, five and six years ago: 300, 400, 500 farmers and ranchers, hundreds of Albertans from the cities come to meetings to express their concern for the fact that these laws could not only take away their covenants that are attached to their titles to land that in some cases great-great-grandfather and great-great-grandmother homesteaded but actually without their full input to courts, to one of the hallmarks of a western democracy. Again, it was, like, 250 to 450 everyday Albertans, hard-working families, men and women who built this province, who felt that the prior government absolutely got the balance wrong. I think the balance was that they were trying to expedite so the government could do what they want quicker without paying the compensation they might need to.

I don't know. Fairness and equity, I think, are hallmarks of every Albertan. Yeah, sometimes things have to be done for the public good, but let's always treat those affected with fairness and equity, and the current status of bills 36 and 24 right now does not do that. My hon. colleague from Livingstone-Macleod is presenting some great solutions.

I mean, many, many people I talk to, Madam Speaker, would prefer just to repeal the bill still and start over and strengthen property rights. I think the hon. member found a way that might appeal to a party that believes in a bigger, more spending government, but obviously we're seeing clearly that the hypocrisy from the NDP, the lack of desire for individual and property rights, is going to continue. I fully expect it to continue through the next two years into the next election, and I fully expect that rural Albertans will once again see that the Wildrose is continuing to stand up on their behalf and continuing to stand up for stronger property rights, which means a stronger Alberta for all of us.

I will ask all of my hon. colleagues to vote against this amendment and return to supporting these excellent changes to the bill as proposed by my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I hadn't spoken to Bill 204 previously, and I didn't because I have some questions and I wanted to have a better understanding of what the bill will actually do. Are there any unexpected consequences which may negatively affect my constituents and Albertans?

3:30

Now, I've had a number of people come into my office – some constituents; some from other constituencies – and they've both supported and not supported the bill, so I'm actually very happy with the amendment. The issue of adverse possession was certainly one of the things that came up. The story that was shared with me was that there was a development under way, and the surveyor came and did the survey lines for each of the pieces of property on this development, and there was – I don't know – I guess a snowstorm or something happened, and a contractor came in with a grader to grade the roads and, in fact, went over a couple of the survey poles, unbeknownst to the person operating the grader.

So the one house got built. The sticks were put back in the ground, the house was built, and then the person on the next

property went to build a house and had their own surveyor come in to check because they felt like the property lines didn't quite align the way they had aligned when they bought the property. Sure enough, they were about two and a half to three feet over the line. But the house was built, a fence was built, and now the second property owner was about to build, and there was a problem. It didn't get resolved very civilly, and it cost both parties a fair amount of money in court arguing about it. I don't want that kind of thing happening to my constituents or to other Albertans. I would like to see those things fixed and, if we're going to have a bill, a bill that's going to address all of the issues.

First of all, I want to thank the Member for Livingstone-Macleod for bringing it up because we're having a discussion and a debate about this issue, and I think that's pretty important. Unfortunately, I'm not able to support your bill – I'm going to support the amendment – but I do think that it gave us the opportunity to discuss it and for us to put something together in future that really addresses all of these fine points in legislation like this. I'm standing up to support the amendment, and I'm sorry that I can't support your bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm just very disappointed. With the opportunity the government had here to simply send this bill to committee if they had concerns, we could have ironed out a lot of these issues that they had at committee before it came back for third reading or sent it to committee for a total rebuild of the legislation.

We've seen concerns over this government's ability to address property rights, you know, specifically to landowners out in the rural parts of the province, farmers' and ranchers' concerns over the green energy legislation. For example, I actually attended a town hall where the Farmers' Advocate and the AUC presented a PowerPoint really, really challenging farmers that before they signed any deals with these unscrupulous landmen – that's pretty much the way they put it – they make sure that they talk to their communities and don't have pitting of neighbour against neighbour or municipalities against landowners. Municipalities, when they're approached with these big green energy or even oil and gas projects, look at the linear assessment that they're going to get, and they can plan ahead for 10 years and bank on all this money coming in, but they don't really look at the rights of the landowners and how it's going to affect them.

Not only that, but when it comes to wind energy as well as oil and gas with the vent tanks, your neighbour may have a gas well or an oil well on his property, and you're living downwind from it, so you're the one that gets the benefit of all the vent gases that come off the tank. It's the same thing when it comes to wind energy. If there are any vibrations or – you know, some people say that they can feel the vibrations from this and it drives them crazy because they're living in close proximity to this. This is what pits neighbours against neighbours and communities against communities when it comes to that linear tax and trying to force this onto the landowners.

The other part that was very concerning about that was that if your neighbour agreed to a wind energy project and he was surrounded by other landowners and there was no access to the grid, they would then – once the agreement was signed, yeah, the property owner has a right to say yes or no to the wind energy program or plan, but the adjacent landowners have no right to block access to infrastructure to tie that wind farm into the grid. We're going to see this pitting neighbour against neighbour, pitting municipalities against their own constituents.

I would really caution members that we have an opportunity here. This amendment basically kills this bill. We've seen it happen before in this House, where a similar amendment was put forward to squash a bill, and the outcry from the province was enough to force them to backtrack and change their minds. We've seen how landowners can get motivated, how farmers can get motivated with Bill 6, and I think this is another one of those where you're going to see a huge backlash from landowners in the province. It extends. You know, this isn't a centralized issue. This is going to cover the entire province, and I think you're going to get a huge backlash over this when it becomes public that you're using this referral amendment to kill this bill rather than take it to committee and fix the issues.

If you have issues with it, that's fine. We can take that and have an open discussion on it and address those issues. You don't just introduce a bill – this puts every bill that's put forward by the opposition at risk of, you know, simply: we throw a referral motion against it, vote against it. Bang. The bill's dead. I think that Albertans are really going to take notice of this, and I think you're making a drastic mistake by voting for this amendment.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today in disappointment at the amendment here to essentially kill this bill. I think the amendment that we should be discussing right now perhaps is a referral to committee, where this bill can be thoroughly debated, discussed, we can bring in experts, whatever type of extra information that you need. I think Albertans are going to be extremely disappointed to hear that after the committee on economic future voted unanimously to put a recommendation forward to this Assembly to reverse the adverse possession, also known as squatter's rights, which this bill would address – and this is yet another example, Madam Speaker, of the government members supporting ideas, recommendations in areas they think are not as public as they actually are and then reversing their opinions in this Assembly, perhaps because they are instructed or told to do so.

I think that's extremely disappointing, Madam Speaker, and I think Albertans will not feel fairly represented when they find out that this government, when now actually asked to make a decision in legislation, is voting against property rights.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Airdrie, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of the private member's public bill to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod to close debate on Bill 204.

3:40

Mr. Stier: Madam Speaker, are we talking about the amendment now, or are we closing debate on the bill?

The Acting Speaker: The reasoned amendment is on the floor, but traditional practice has been to allow you to close debate, and then we will vote on the reasoned amendment. The time is up for the private bill.

Mr. Stier: Okay. Thank you for this opportunity. Certainly, I respect the comments today from the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville and the time she took to expand on and explain the situation.

I must say, as some of my colleagues have said already this afternoon, that we're pretty disappointed, and I am concerned about the backlash in the public for the decision that's being made today on this very important – very important – set of amendments, that we were hoping to get to Bill 36 and all of these other various acts that we were trying to fix up. It was basically a housekeeping bill, we thought, to try to, you know, kick up some of the main problems and clean those up. Anyway, you know, it only sought to restore some of the basic protections that we were looking for.

We've spent lots of time listening to what the government members have said, yet we hear some of the things and we just can't understand if there are any really good reasons why not to proceed with this as is. We could have, as some have said today, gone to a committee on it. We could have invited in special experts. We could have really made this, jointly, one of the best changes for property rights we've ever seen and really turned this situation around.

You know, it's strange that we think about property rights in such a fashion, where we're putting forward things like what the Member for Stony Plain said: "I worry that this bill looks at the issue from only the perspective of compensation for consent holders, missing other important perspectives like environmental protection and orderly development." In other words, Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Stony Plain seems to believe in compensating property owners but not necessarily when property is being taken for environmental protection or development planning purposes. That's a contradictory statement. That's exactly when property rights need to be upheld; namely, the right to fair compensation when the government decides to sacrifice property or livelihood for the sake of everybody else. Every member considering voting against this bill should consider what it is they're telling Albertans.

The same member also expressed concern for private compensation for public good. Clearly, the member is not aware of water licences, as an example. Well, a water licence is basically a document that allows the holder to draw a specified amount of water from a water source. For an individual operating a farm, the ability to draw water is a pretty important aspect to being able to sustain life, and it's fundamental to the business. But currently the government can cancel a water licence and provide whatever compensation the minister wants, including absolutely none. If a farmer can no longer provide water to his herd or irrigate his crops, that's a devastation to his business. Bill 204 does not at all affect the government's ability to take the licence; it just ensures that they will provide fair compensation for sacrificing this person's business. Should the government not have some responsibility to compensate the farmer or businessman for their loss of livelihood, I ask?

I would have hoped that we would have all been able to agree on that fundamental point of ensuring that we can take care of individuals as we pursue some notion of common good, but it doesn't appear that way. A proper referral to a committee motion or amendment would have been something that we would have supported. We could have all met and decided how we could move forward with this and clean this situation up. Instead, what we're faced with today is not the appropriate course of action, in my opinion.

I'm extremely disappointed, Madam Speaker, and I will be voting against the amendment that was presented if that comes up, and I'll be bringing forward some other kind of legislation in the future to correct what has happened today.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment RA1 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:44 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Babcock	Hoffman	McPherson
Carson	Horne	Miranda
Ceci	Jabbour	Nielsen
Connolly	Jansen	Piquette
Coolahan	Kazim	Renaud
Cortes-Vargas	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Dang	Littlewood	Schmidt
Drever	Loyola	Schreiner
Eggen	Luff	Shepherd
Fitzpatrick	Malkinson	Sucha
Ganley	Mason	Turner
Goehring	McKittrick	Westhead
Gray	McLean	Woollard
Hinkley		

4:00

Against the motion:

Aheer	Hanson	Stier
Barnes	Loewen	Strankman
Clark	McIver	Swann
Cooper	Pitt	Taylor
Cyr	Schneider	van Dijken
Fildebrandt	Smith	Yao
Gotfried		

Totals: For – 40 Against – 19

[Motion on amendment RA1 carried]

Bill 205

Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act

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

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to stand and move second reading of Bill 205, Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act.

Establishing an advocate, I believe and many of my caucus members also believe, hopefully all of them, is going to make life better for Albertans and provide much-needed support for people with disabilities and their families in this province.

Madam Speaker, the bill would establish an advocate for persons with disabilities in Alberta with the power to represent the rights, the interests, and the viewpoints of persons with disabilities. This bill proposes a new advocate position that would report to and advise the Minister of Community and Social Services. The bill will support the ongoing work of the Ministry of Community and Social Services as well.

Now, the final report of the persons with developmental disabilities, PDD, safety standards consultation in 2016 identified and recommended that advocacy is critical within the PDD community to ensure that individuals with disabilities are supported to lead more fulfilling lives. In fact, recommendation 10 of that report asked the government of Alberta to investigate the creation of a

formal advocate for persons with disabilities, and Bill 205 aims to do just that.

I'd like to say that my colleague the MLA for St. Albert has been an advocate in this area for a very long time. She took part in the PDD safety standards consultation. Shortly she is going to be speaking to Bill 205, and I can't wait to hear what she has to say because I don't believe there's anyone in this Chamber who has more knowledge and background than the Member for St. Albert. It was truly wonderful to work with her on this. This bill is the culmination as much of her efforts as anyone else's, and I'm absolutely excited and looking forward to hearing what she has to say.

Now, what does the bill do? That's the question. The advocate would have a mandate, and that mandate is to:

- (a) identify and study issues of concern to persons with disabilities . . .
- (b) review programs and policies affecting persons with disabilities;
- (c) participate in processes in which decisions are made [with respect to] persons with disabilities;
- (d) promote the rights, interests and well-being of persons with disabilities through public education;
- (e) provide information and advice to the Government with respect to any matter relating to the rights, interests and well-being of persons with disabilities; [as well as]
- (f) assist individuals who are having difficulty accessing services and related programs for persons with disabilities, including directing them to an appropriate resource, person or organization [that may be able to help them].

Madam Speaker, I began working on this when I was a member of a different caucus and began my consultations back then, and I have been lucky enough to have the opportunity to have conversations with a lot of people about what exactly this advocate should be doing and where the gaps and the holes are. Certainly, I know that many of them are watching today, and I do want to thank them because so many of them really informed the work that I did. When we talk about consultation, it was the consultation that began the quest to get this bill done in the first place. It was consultation all the way through, and the consultation is ongoing. This is a fine example of that.

I also had a lovely conversation with my colleague across the aisle from Chestermere-Rocky View, who, of course, has a lot of knowledge about this area as well, and I certainly took her comments to heart when we were having these discussions. You know, I'm really hoping that this conversation that we have is a postpartisan conversation about how we move this bill forward so that it does what it needs to do for the constituents of all 87 of us in this Chamber.

We know that with an advocate we can help identify barriers to access to information, and we know that this person will be able to provide advice to government on all sorts of issues where that advice is desperately needed. Just as important, the advocate is going to identify issues of concern that come up over and over again, and our ability to take care of those issues, to find really good common-sense solutions comes when we have the ability to sit down and say: we see a pattern here and an opportunity to create some much-needed change.

By having an advocate, Albertans with disabilities will have a point person; for instance, when a teen transitions into adulthood. I heard from so many of the service providers that there are an awful lot of difficulties in areas of transition. We know that when we see a pattern like that forming, if we have the ability to sit down and come up with some good, workable solutions to those problems, we help people over their lifespan, and that is critically important. For

instance, there are people who need help navigating government programs and services, and I hear this.

I met with a number of people in my constituency who worry. Not all people with disabilities have an advocate in their home or in their community, and even for those who do, a lot of those folks often are parents, and at a certain point they're saying to me: I worry about what happens when I'm not around anymore and my child needs an advocate. All the preplanning in the world cannot prepare you for problems that can come up in the future, so that's why this conversation around advocacy becomes so important.

According to the latest Canadian survey of people with disabilities done by Statistics Canada, there are approximately 436,000 adults with disabilities and 31,000 children with disabilities right here in this province. Now, those stats were done in 2012. It'd be interesting to see them updated because, certainly, five years later we believe that those numbers have gone up. Although government staff and contracted service providers are providing ongoing case management supports, including identifying and responding to the changing needs of individuals and families, we do need to do more. We recognize that, and we want to. That's the importance of a bill like this.

This government is collaborating with partners in Health, Education, and Community and Social Services to ensure that the needs of individuals who require supports from more than one ministry get those supports without having to go to individual ministries and do that work piecemeal. Having an advocate is going to help with that task, and it's also going to be a great addition to the system that is striving to make life better for Albertans with disabilities.

The government is prioritizing access to services for individuals with disabilities. There are a number of programs in the province right now to support individuals, including the family support for children with disabilities, the FSCD. There are 13,400 families in that particular group. The persons with developmental disabilities group, PDD, has 11,300 people. The residential access modification program has 570 people. Of course, if this bill is passed, this will establish an advocate that will help make all of the services tailored to Albertans living with disabilities and access to these services easier to manage. The disability community would have a direct ear to turn to for assistance in this province.

4:10

I'm very pleased to bring this forward and look forward to the conversation about this bill and what folks have to say on both sides of the aisle because I do believe that we all have people in our communities with disabilities. When we have a good, fulsome conversation about this and get to a place where we can move the disability community forward and put an advocate in place, we all benefit, the province benefits, and we are better for it.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to stand and speak in support of this important new role, that's obviously been much needed for many years given the history of some of the complaints and concerns not only with respect to PDD but AISH as well. With PDD, in particular, there's been lots of demand for change, access to supports, recognition of the role of family and community, and this would certainly give greater voice, greater attention, greater influence and understanding of what's working and what's not working in the system by someone so directly

involved with these most vulnerable folks. It obviously gives the advocate the power to represent the interests and rights of people with disabilities and to advocate for change where it's needed, not least in individual cases where people are not getting their needs met, where families are not feeling properly listened to and responded to.

Programs and policies, obviously, in some cases need to be changed, but certainly their basic rights and their well-being have to be at the forefront and need strong advocacy. There's no question that the measure of a civilization, the measure of a society is how well we take care of those folks. We have advocates for health, for seniors, for mental health. We have an advocate for children in care. This is another vulnerable population that clearly needs to have some independent leadership and advocacy.

To be sure, I need to comment on not only the role but the resources given to this person. If it's anything like the resources given to the mental health advocate, it's a shame because the mental health advocate has been able to do almost nothing in the last few years because of receiving the same resources they have for the last 25 years. In name we have a mental health advocate, but the mental health advocate has been hamstrung by a lack of resources and ability to formally investigate complaints about the mental health system and in some cases the abuse of people's rights as persons. Whatever we do, let this not be a token, as I feel the mental health advocate has become in this province.

The Health Advocate: also very limited resources except to refer these people to different bodies, including the college of physicians, the college of nursing, various colleges that are supposed to oversee the quality of care, the quality of response to health issues. The Seniors Advocate: similarly. If we're going to provide these advocates' offices, let them be properly resourced, evaluated, and properly increased as the population increases. It's a travesty that in 25 years we see the mental health advocate, for example, still dealing with two staff when the population has increased phenomenally and the number of mental health issues has increased exponentially in the last 25 years. Let's ensure that we get value for money and ensure that the people who are in this position have the resources to do their job.

I also, I guess, have to wonder how much this is an effort to address the Auditor General's stinging criticism of AISH in the past, and rightly so. It looks like an important initiative that is going to address the criticisms of the Auditor General, and I sincerely hope it will be. Again, it depends on finding the right person and staffing appropriately and finding the resources to do this. I think it's an important initiative. It sends the right message to people with a disability and their families. Let's just make sure that it's done with the generosity and the research and the capacity that is needed for this large population.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 205, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act. Now, as MLAs we are elected to represent our constituents and to advocate on their behalf, and that's not always easy as you try to interface with government and the bureaucracy that's there. Often it's very difficult for our constituents to work through and to work with government. I know that nothing gives me more pleasure at the constituency level in this job than to help one of my constituents navigate the maze of government regulations and the red tape and try to access the services that they are indeed needing. I believe that Bill 205 is intended to provide Albertans with disabilities with an advocate to help them access government services and that would

ensure that the government is working for them and not against them.

I rise today to speak in favour of this bill. I believe that Bill 205 will advocate for and help to advocate for and represent the rights and the interests and the viewpoints of persons with disabilities, and we know that that's often a very important thing that needs to happen. It's difficult for someone that is not facing a disability in their life to do this. When you have a variety of disabilities that make that more difficult, it's indeed important to have an advocate in your corner. I believe that in this bill the advocate will be able to identify and study various issues of concern to the person with a disability and to help to recommend appropriate action and a course of action for that individual. They can review programs and policies, they can be a participant in the process with this individual, and they can help to promote the rights and the interests and the well-being of that individual.

As I look at this bill, I see that there are many ways that this advocate can indeed step into the gap, perhaps, that this individual would not be able to deal with. I believe that when we take a look at other portfolios within the government, other areas, we see that there's a Farmers' Advocate, a Child and Youth Advocate, a Seniors Advocate, a Health Advocate, so I can see the benefits of creating an advocate for persons with disabilities. I know that government is hard to navigate, and it's magnified when you are suffering from a disability.

I think of one of the constituents that walked into my office about a year and a half ago or two years ago, and if it wasn't for the fact that his parents were involved in his life, he would have had significant difficulties in navigating through the systems of government that were necessary for him to get the help that he needed. I don't believe this is uncommon, and I believe that it speaks to the necessity of having somebody within the government apparatus that can help these individuals work their way through to receive the help that we want to give them and that they deserve.

I believe the advocate will reduce the demands on time that the programs and the services and the regulations and the policies place on families. It will reduce the time and the demands on families. It will help them to be able to seek the help that is needed for the loved ones that they are concerned about.

4:20

For those that do not have family to advocate on behalf of them, the advocate can assume that role to ensure that they have access to the programs and the services that should be appropriately theirs. You know, an example of this as it's come through my office has been those that are looking to apply for AISH. There are over 55,000 Albertans that count on AISH to help them survive. In 2016 there were over 12,000 applications for the AISH program. In October 2016 the Auditor General released a report on how to improve the AISH program, and I believe that the Auditor General's report is a good example of how Albertans find difficulty in negotiating through the complexities of government, especially with this program, and would be helped by an advocate.

The Auditor General identified several concerns. One of them was the need to improve program accessibility in AISH, that there was a problem with receiving the appropriate information that would allow the AISH program to be accessible and to be user friendly. He identified the need to simplify the AISH application process. I believe that in this case an advocate for persons with disabilities would be able to help them proceed through something like the AISH application process.

The Auditor General came out with a second recommendation. It said that there need to be improvements in the eligibility procedures and guidelines, that AISH did not have the adequate standards to

track and monitor application processing times, and that the staff did not receive sufficient training when assessing applications. Because of that, it's made it more difficult for people to be able to apply and to work through the process. I believe an advocate could help an individual work their way through that.

I believe that AISH is just one example of how there can be internal issues within a bureaucracy of the government that can make it more difficult for Albertans to access and to receive the benefits from a government program that they both need and deserve, so I would speak, Madam Speaker, to this bill and its ability to help Albertans.

Of course, AISH is not the only program; it is just one. We have all sorts of programs. For instance, Community and Social Services offers disability services and supports related to employment for families of people with children with disabilities, for fetal alcohol syndrome disorder, for residential modifications. An advocate will help Albertans and their families cut through the red tape that's necessary to be able to provide the accessibility that they need in a much more timely fashion. So I can see some of the real positives of moving forward with this.

Bill 205 will help Albertans who don't know how to access the information and supports. It will help to address some of the inefficiencies and disorganization that have been identified by the Auditor General. It will help persons with disabilities by aligning with other government advocates who are there to help the vulnerable in Alberta. Perhaps as importantly, it will provide for public education to promote the rights and the interests and the well-being of persons with disabilities.

I guess that if there is one concern – and it's one that I would like the House to consider – it would be that in Bill 205 this is not an independent advocate that we're setting up. I'm wondering if maybe we shouldn't be reconsidering having a little more distance and making this person independent. We've maintained as the Wildrose that the role of an advocate should be independent of government, that this would ensure that issues are dealt with fairly and consistently and with transparency, and that the role of the advocate would be strengthened by this independence.

I believe that we should consider that, that we would continue from this side of the House to voice our concerns over that issue. We would believe that any advocate must report, and I think reasonably so, to the Legislature and have the authority and the autonomy to investigate complaints, the ability to perform system-wide audits and to explore better ways for the delivery of care for these individuals. So it's something that I would suggest to the House we should maybe consider as we move forward.

You know, I think all of us probably at some point in time, as we've gone through life, have had people that have disabilities. I can think of one, and it's the reason that I stand up here today to support this bill. This individual came into my life about 30 years ago. He has a brain injury, and for all of the things that are stacked against this individual . . . [Mr. Smith's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand up. I'd just like to thank the Member for Calgary-North West for this bill. I couldn't be any happier, and I don't think we spend nearly enough time in this House talking about people with disabilities, so thank you. I also think that history is important, so I'm going to refer back a little bit because I think it's where we come from. We learn a lot about ourselves, and I think we learn a lot about charting the right course forward.

Just a few years ago people with disabilities and their allies by the thousands rallied the government on some very key issues around people with disabilities, and that was that they were telling the government to consult. They needed an advocate. They needed someone to speak on their behalf. They desperately wanted somebody to speak on their behalf. As you know, the disability rights movement really began in the '70s and '80s. Deinstitutionalization was fuelled by the powerful voices of people with disabilities, their allies and families. Let's not forget about the time the government wanted to stifle those voices of people with disabilities following Leilani O'Malley Muir's successful battle.

The reality prior to that was segregation, sterilization, rampant abuse, and isolation. Still, we have much ground to cover in order for Canadians with disabilities to experience the same rights and access that Canadians without disabilities enjoy. The opposition gets annoyed when we refer to the actions of the previous government. The reality is that they own many of the complex issues facing people with disabilities today in Alberta. It is important to remember our history. They talk a lot about the Alberta advantage. When I think about the Alberta advantage, I know it was not advantageous for people with disabilities. I seem to remember the PCs trimming about 70,000 people from welfare rolls.

So why do we need an advocate? There are so many reasons. I participated in the PDD safety standards review. We needed a review because of what the previous government introduced without even five minutes of consultation with Albertans with disabilities. In an attempt to keep people with disabilities safe, they introduced standards that set us on a dangerous path. One of the standards required people with disabilities in the community to have fire suppression on the same level as massive institutions. One man in his condo, owned by his dad, living by himself with staff got an estimate of about \$20,000 to renovate his condo to meet these standards. That year the previous government spent over a million dollars on mixing valves for hot water tanks. That was directly related to the safety standard that was brought in without consultation, and there was no one to advocate.

Examples of the previous government: I just want to remind you a little bit. A few years ago, when we all started rallying out here and all across Alberta, it was because the previous government wanted to cut community access. Their solution to that, one of the solutions to that, was to create an employment focus group. That focus group was made up of people from the business community, some experts in disability, but I didn't see anybody with a disability on that committee. The previous government introduced things like the supports intensity scale assessment, the quality-of-life index, and, my favourite, the PDD transformational plan. None of these things were done in consultation with Albertans with disabilities. We need to learn from that because we need to do a lot better.

4:30

I'm going to give you some examples of the times when we needed an advocate, when we desperately needed an advocate. Yeah, I was in the sector for a very long time, and I had the fortune of meeting a lot of people. I'm going to share the stories of some people that are no longer with us, but I think their lives have a lot of meaning, and we can learn a lot from them.

I met Susan W. about 20 years ago. She was a woman who had acquired a serious brain injury. She was married at the time, and due to her acquired disability she was unable to get the support she needed to navigate the justice system. She wanted to divorce her husband – she did remember that part from before the injury – and she wanted to get some control, retain some control of the business and the assets she shared with her husband. She could not. She did not have a family, and she did not have allies at the time. The justice

system is difficult for all of us to manage when it comes time for us to be there. You can imagine someone with an acquired brain injury, with problems with speech and memory and physical mobility. It was almost impossible, so she relied on a paid service provider, whose role isn't necessarily to do that.

Joanne L. was another woman I met. She's a woman that had Down syndrome, and her family was told when she was born that she wouldn't live very long, but she did. When she got to her 50s, she presented with symptoms of dementia and was eventually diagnosed with Alzheimer's. It was extremely difficult to get an appointment to see a specialist and to get her access to the medication that would slow the disease. Why? Because she had a disability. We were actually told by the doctors that, you know, she really did have enough to worry about given that she had a disability. Needless to say, people around her advocated when there wasn't a systemic advocate or advocacy system in place, and we were able to get the support she needed. The result was that she died at home surrounded by people who knew her and cared for her. I think we learned a lot from that. But service providers are not always the best advocates, and families are not always in the best place to do that.

Patrick H. was another man that I met. He was actually a triplet, and there were two of them left. He moved to the city and to a service provider when his elderly parents could no longer care for him. There wasn't any family left. He was new to the city, so a nephew that he hardly knew and had little contact with was assigned to him to be his informal trustee. He was on AISH, of course, so after expenses he was left with approximately \$200 a month. Over the few years that this nephew was his informal trustee, that \$200 that was left over each month dwindled away. His service provider reported and spoke to the people in power at the time, and nothing could be done. So at his age – he was also in his 50s – he had zero savings. He did not have \$20 in his account, and he should have. Eventually we had to get a lawyer to have the informal trustee removed. Now, thankfully, he had a provider that was able to do that; not everybody does. An advocate would have been ideal in that situation.

Paul was another person I met, originally from the Wabasca-Desmarais area, and he had been in a severe accident and was a quadriplegic, had a significant spinal cord injury. He was moved to a supportive living facility where most of the residents were about 30 years older than him. He had no assistance maintaining contact with his family. There was no cultural awareness or attempts to link him with appropriate supports. There was no advocate for him.

Sonny was another fellow. He died in his 20s, actually. He moved to Alberta from Quebec, and he died after being sent home from the hospital twice. He had gone because he was not feeling well. He couldn't express himself properly – he had cerebral palsy; he was tough to understand – and he went by himself or he went with his staff. He did not get the assistance he needed. I'm certainly not blaming the hospital or the staff at the hospital. I'm certain they did their best. He went home. He was by himself. He was weak from illness. He fell into a piece of furniture and died as a result of an internal injury. He was in his 20s. He needed an advocate. He needed an advocate so badly. He had no family here.

Betty Anne Gagnon: I think that if we don't learn a lot from this woman, we don't deserve to be here.

Young men and women who have public or private guardians being told that they can't have relationships because they have guardians: that's why we need an advocate. People in hospital without advocates around them are taken off life support very quickly. I don't think the same discussions are had as when a person without a disability is facing that decision. People with disabilities are unable to get support for a mental illness because they have a

disability. Birth control is often difficult to get or refused because people have a disability.

My brother, who had a significant mental illness and disability, was released from hospital because he was stable a few days after a suicide attempt, only to successfully die by suicide when he was released. I am certainly not blaming providers for that at all. It is a system, and it's a system without strong advocates.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak on Bill 205, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act. In my view, it's an act whose time has come. I would even say that it's overdue by 40 or 50 years, but the second-best time after 40 or 50 years ago is today. I congratulate the member for bringing it forward because this is an act that a lot of Albertans, I believe, if it is put into place correctly, will benefit from, and those are people that in many cases very much need an advocate.

Madam Speaker, just as a small piece of housekeeping and not to panic the author of the bill, if you go on the Assembly website right now to the status of bills, it shows that Bill 205, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act, is defeated on second reading today. Let's make sure that that doesn't come to pass because that's what the website says. I certainly am one who will be in favour of this act.

There are lots of things to like about the act, but one of my favourite things is section 6(1), the review of the act, which says:

Within one year of the Advocate's appointment under section 2(1), the Advocate shall prepare a report evaluating the effectiveness of this Act that includes any amendments and recommendations relating to persons with disabilities that the Advocate considers appropriate.

Of course, that would be submitted to the Speaker of the Legislature, and we'll all get to see it. It's my hope that this will allay some of the fears of my colleague from the Liberal Party, who was concerned about the advocate not having any effect, because when we see that report a year from now, then of course it will all be in front of us. We'll all have the responsibility to take action on it in this place and then out in the world, where, actually, people with disabilities live, who will be needing that help.

I don't want to be misunderstood, so I want to make it very clear that I'm not a fan of reviewing the act in a year because I think it's bad; rather, I'm a fan of reviewing the act within a year because it's important. I'm sure that the act in its current form will cause very much improvement for very many Albertans who have disabilities now and whose voices don't get heard, but I also think that we will learn a lot as we go. I know that we heard in debate today examples of when things have not always been done well in the past, and I think that as we evolve and we learn and we improve, we need to do that.

I am reminded of a time when we were dealing with infrastructure changes at city hall and some of the city-owned buildings when I was on council in Calgary. I and some of my colleagues made some suggestions for improvements. While I felt good about them, a friend of mine who was part of a disabled persons' advocacy group – I think it was disability hall if my memory serves me – invited me to a meeting to talk about that, where, Madam Speaker, they schooled me big time on what I didn't know because nobody can explain what disabled people need better than a group of disabled people that are organized can explain. I can assure you that they did their very best to pry some of that knowledge into my mind, and it made quite an impression upon me.

4:40

I see this bill as an extension of that personal learning experience that I have had, and it will give me an opportunity, along with, I believe, other members of this House, to learn more in the future and to make more changes that will benefit those people in Alberta with disabilities, who very much need and deserve to have those changes put into place.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

A little later on we will have, I believe, Madam Speaker – Mr. Speaker, sorry; we just changed players in the chair there – a couple of minor amendments, ones that I'm hopeful the mover of the bill will agree with. I would assure all members of the House now that those will have the intent of making slight adjustments, we believe, one hundred per cent within the intent of the creator of the bill. We'll bring them forward in the spirit of co-operation. I think somebody from the government side said that this should be a nonpartisan issue, and I believe that they were correct in so saying. For my part, I will be pleased to be supporting this bill because it's one of those opportunities that we get in this House to actually, demonstrably make Alberta better, and because of that, I thank the mover of the bill for bringing it forward.

The Acting Speaker: The chair will recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It really is a pleasure and privilege to speak in favour of Bill 205, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act. I want to very much thank the hon. member for bringing this forward and recognize the work that the Member for St. Albert has done and her strong advocacy and action that she has taken on behalf of people with disabilities. That action, I know, predates her time in this Assembly by a lot. It's very much appreciated. The Member for Calgary-North West bringing this forward as well: I know this is something that you're very passionate about, and I thank you very much for bringing this forward.

But for the vagaries of private members' bill draws – and I think that if I'm to see my private member's bill this session come up, it will probably be the spring of 2023 by the time my bill would be up. I didn't do as well. This is, quite interestingly, one of the ideas that we had talked about with my team as well should we get high enough up in the bill draw. Without question, I absolutely, enthusiastically, of course, will support this bill.

It addresses both issues that people who have disabilities deal with on a daily basis. Those are some of the issues that they will deal with today, right now, on a daily basis, but what I like about the advocate role is that it will address challenges that people with disabilities and their families and loved ones and caregivers deal with on an ongoing basis. They're the kind of thing that, unfortunately, will likely always require someone to advocate for people with disabilities.

I can tell you from the work that we do in my constituency office – and I imagine that all members very likely deal with some of these challenges through their constituency offices and in their work as members – that the various programs and services that are available really are confusing for people with disabilities. They're confusing for people who advocate for those people or who are their friends and family. Anything we can do to have an advocate role similar to the Seniors Advocate's, the mental health advocate's, to parts of the role of the Child and Youth Advocate and others I think can only be a positive thing.

There are a couple of examples that I noted as I prepared for this debate today. There have been many challenges raised to my office

about the transition from services that are available when you're under 18 to the services that are available when you turn 18. The person's needs haven't changed, but the funding sources change, the programs that are available change. Sometimes families and people with disabilities find that they have less in the way of services. An advocate can certainly help not only people who are dealing with the transition to navigate the system as it is now, but they can also help advocate for change from government to ensure that that transition is far smoother, that services are provided in a way that's much more consistent, that better meets the needs of the variety of different people with different needs.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The other example is a constituent of mine who has raised with me the issue of building codes. She's in a wheelchair and has troubles with buildings that are officially built to Alberta's building codes. She finds that doors perhaps will open in the wrong direction in certain buildings, and she'll end up in a vestibule in what she calls squish-me doors. She finds that she can't push the button, wheel out of the way, and then wheel back in and get, actually, through the door. Now, the building meets the building code – no one is breaking any rules – but does she actually have access? Is that building, in fact, accessible to her? The answer in many cases is no.

These are just a couple of examples that I thought of as I reflected on what sorts of things a disability advocate could possibly do. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View, I think rightly, has raised the question of resourcing in ensuring that this is not just a token position, that it's not just there in name only, that in fact they have the tools they need to do the job, the resources they need to do the job, and as has been noted in debate, it's very likely that in giving appropriate resources to a disability advocate, we will actually save money.

It will actually not only improve the lives of people with disabilities, but it will actually save money, and I would hope that as we go through the debate and the discussion here, we can learn a little more about specifically where that can happen and actually what some of that cost-benefit calculation might look like. I think it's likely very compelling. Again, not only will we be helping on a human level, but we're also helping the government save money because we're improving people's quality of life. We're keeping them out of hospital, and we're ensuring that the services that they receive are most efficient and effective.

Enthusiastically, I will support Bill 205. Again I thank the Member for Calgary-North West for bringing it forward, and I look forward to listening to further comments.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm so happy to rise today to speak to this bill. I, again, would really like to thank the Member for Calgary-North West as well as the Member for St. Albert, especially, for her expertise in this. It's greatly appreciated.

I just want to say that because I'm a parent, I have to thank the Member for Calgary-Hays as well because we fundraised for autism for many years together, long before I was here. I've met many of you in just the last two years at so many functions throughout the city and the province advocating on behalf of special needs and our folks with disabilities. I think the ability to be here, the privilege to be in this House, elevates our understanding of the needs of these folks, the families, and everybody who surrounds them. It's a huge

privilege to be here and to be able to speak to this. Thank you so much for bringing this bill forward.

One of the things I'd like to share is that when I was 28, that's when my son was born. He came into the world with curly hair and monster blue eyes. He was a beautiful child. Of course, we all think that of our children. I remember that as he grew, he was just a normal, functioning, you know, happy little baby, and then all of a sudden he disappeared one day. He completely disappeared. He couldn't remember any of the language that he had learned, the "mama" and all of that kind of language that babies learn. He just disappeared into himself completely. We lost him somewhere.

It was one of those days that I won't forget. All of a sudden it started to become apparent that he just wasn't connecting. His eyes wouldn't make eye contact. The one thing that I remember at that point was thinking: how do I find out about this? I'd been really fortunate in my lifetime that I'd worked with special-needs kids for a long, long, long time, so for me it was a matter of getting to the guts of it and finding out. For my husband, it was a completely different journey. He just didn't know how to deal with that.

4:50

One of the things that I noticed right from the beginning was that it was very hard to find people to learn about what to do with this munchkin. He was nine months old at that time, so we intervened very early on. I remember that when we went to the Dr. Gordon Townsend school in Calgary to learn about disabilities and who this little boy was going to be and who he was, a lot of the information that came out initially was extremely negative. And not because the people were negative. I honestly don't believe, Madam Speaker, that it was anything intentional. It's just that they were trying to put as much information together for you as they can. They told me that he may not speak, that he may not be able to walk or swim or do all of these things that his older brother, by 20 months, was doing at that point in time. As a mom you just draw your line in the sand, and you realize at that point that nobody is going to tell you what your kid can and can't do. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View, I believe, saw my son perform this weekend in Youth Singers on stage. I think he can probably attest that he's pretty strong. He's pretty awesome up there.

What happened, though, and probably what was most significant at the time were the parent connections that we made, but they were really difficult to find. The importance of having an advocate stretches so far beyond what we think an advocate needs to be. This advocate isn't only going to be a person that connects the dots and fills the gaps. For all of the facilitators that we've had come into our house – the OT, the PT, the speech paths – I mean, they lived at our house when my children were young. In fact, our speech pathologist is still one of my closest friends to this day. She's the reason, I think, my son can sing a song from end to end.

Those people are heroes in my world, and to have an advocate to be able to help parents – also, we are talking about other people with disabilities, with brain injuries, people who come into disabilities later on for all sorts of reasons. Having those gaps filled is imperative. I believe we had a good discussion about this, Madam Speaker, in estimates as well. We were going through the process of what goes on in the ministries of human services and Health and Education, that all of these ministries have a lot of different options, a lot of different availabilities but that nobody really knows how it all works together. This is a really great opportunity, hopefully, for that advocate to be able to bring that all together.

One of the things I wanted to also talk about a little bit – and this was in our stakeholder outreach, too – was sort of an interesting perspective, and I hope that it helps to ask some questions to strengthen the bill as well. When we're looking at disabilities as a

sector, we are lacking a process for appeals. What I mean by that is that we need that process to respond to the concerns of quality of service and safety as well. That's one of those places, I feel, where those gaps really need to be addressed. That needs to have a mandate, and it needs to have a space.

I was excited when the bill was introduced. It's very exciting. There were some other things, too, that I wanted to ask about, and potentially as we go through debate and discussion over this, this will have some opportunity to be discussed. One of the things about the role, in my opinion – and I believe the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon also brought it up – is that I honestly feel this needs to be an independent person. If at all possible, that advocate needs to be independent so that it's not attached to the ministry and has the ability to avoid conflicts of interest and can make judgments based purely on that family, on the situation, on whatever is going on at that time. The persons with disabilities need to be able to interact in a way that is conducive to making sure that things get better for them.

Part of the problem – I mean, you all know this as well from having worked in this field or having talked to your stakeholders – is that there's such a runaround that ends up happening. I've just come through the process of AISH myself with my son, and it's a tricky situation. The paperwork and the number of people that you talk to – and it's the same discussion over and over again. When my child was young, I used to have to go in and advocate with FSCD and a lot of different associations to get funding for him at that time.

The hardest part of that, Madam Speaker, was that I had to advocate on what he couldn't do, not on what he could do. It really, really just tears at your soul. Having an advocate in order to be able to find out what services are needed and what can be provided for your child, family member, friend, whatever that is, for the allies to be able to advocate, is really, really important, because when you're having to point out all of the things that your child can't do, it's hard on you as a person.

If the advocate falls under one particular ministry, Community and Social Services in this case, then does the advocate work for persons with issues in Health or Seniors and Housing, too? That's just one question. I don't know if that would fill a gap, because it could be construed as a disability as well, depending on that person's situation. I think the member also brought that up as well when she was doing her speech.

We've also heard a few concerns about who the advocate will represent or work for. Are we talking just about developmental disabilities, physical handicaps, any particular stage in life, or all of them? That's quite a broad range, so I think there needs to be some clarity around that.

Also, would the advocate also work with the families of persons with disabilities seeing as some with disabilities aren't able to reach out on their own for help? The family members also have needs, so this is an important aspect. Again, you want to make sure that that person, those people, family, all have the supports to make sure that the people that they love are being supported appropriately.

Also, is the advocate going to be representing also the people working within the disability sector? I bring up the tragic death of Valerie Wolski. On the flip side, we also have people working with folks with disabilities where the person who's working with them, the worker, could also be at risk. I'm just curious if that's part of that mandate as well.

The other thing that's just a little bit concerning – and this just may be something that I think is an easy fix if this is the direction that the government wants to go in – is that in the bill it lists what the advocate may do but not what they must do. The advocate may

- (a) identify and study issues of concern . . .
- (b) review programs and policies . . .

- (c) participate in processes in which decisions are made . . .
- (d) promote the rights, interests and well-being of persons with disabilities through public education;
- (e) provide information and advice . . .
- (f) assist individuals who are having difficulty accessing services and related programs . . .

and, finally,

- (g) perform any other function prescribed in the regulations.

Madam Speaker, the stakeholders have expressed some concern about this. I'm not sure if anybody else has heard this as well.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I recognize we will be coming up against the clock here shortly, but I'll see if I can get a few words in.

Just in regard to what the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View was talking about in terms of making this an independent officer of the Legislature, as the chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I recognize, I guess, everything that's involved in creating a new, independent officer of the Legislature. It's a fairly significant investment of resources. You know, it could be as much as 10 times, in terms of a budget, between somebody having the opportunity to work as an advocate and investing somebody as an officer of the Legislature, so that's certainly something that we need to consider in this.

As well as many of the other things that would be involved in that, I think it could be prudent and reasonable to start with an advocate that works within the ministry, much as the mental health advocate or the Health Advocate. Give them the opportunity to begin to define the role, and from there, then, have the opportunity in the future to consider if it's something that needs to be expanded and could be looked at and moved into a larger presence.

But I can certainly appreciate where folks are coming from because indeed this is an incredibly important bill and, I think, an incredibly valuable position to be creating within the government.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Northern Alberta Development Strategy

506. Ms Jabbour moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to direct the Northern Alberta Development Council to develop a comprehensive northern Alberta development strategy that will identify the government's vision and plan for achieving enhanced social and economic prosperity in the region.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm thrilled to stand here in this House to move Motion 506. Why do we need a northern strategy? As MLA for Peace River and chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council, or NADC, I'm very familiar with the unique challenges we face in northern Alberta: rural, remote, and widely dispersed communities, a large geographic area, sparse population, lack of services, difficulties with labour recruitment and retention, social issues, and much more.

First Nations comprise a significant part of our population, including all 24 Treaty 8 nations and eight of the Treaty 6 nations, all with unique cultures and languages. All of Alberta's Métis settlements are in the north, and we have several francophone communities.

Thirteen of us as MLAs are from northern constituencies. Our region represents 60 per cent of Alberta's land base and only 9 per cent of its population. This means that per capita funding models can severely disadvantage us and leave us lacking in core services. We have unique health needs such as high rates of diabetes and FASD. I was very pleased to see the recent agreement with the PCNs that will fund by medical need rather than per capita, and I'm hopeful this new model will help us manage these concerns.

We have major transportation challenges, including limited road networks, remote communities accessed by plane or winter road only, ferry crossings, ice bridges, and mud roads that can be impassible certain times of the year. Access to rail is problematic. The lack of an east-west route hampers growth. A utility and transportation corridor linking Peace River and Fort McMurray could have significant economic opportunities and could be part of a forward-thinking northern strategy.

We are truly, as the NADC website states, "Canada's outback – a vast area of grandiose lakes, mighty rivers, abundant wildlife and untapped wilderness." We are also a land of incredible opportunities, where anyone with an idea can become anything they want to be.

Alberta's north is filled with creative, hard-working, innovative entrepreneurs, and when it comes to resources, we are truly wealthy. Northern Alberta has 100 per cent of the province's minable oil sands, but that's not all. We have the potential for much, much more. We have high concentrations of lithium, a light metal used for medical, environmental, and electrical applications such as electric car batteries. New technologies allow mining of lithium from oil field waste water, and projects are already under way in Fox Creek and Swan Hills. We have great quantities of iron and vanadium. One large deposit near Fairview is expected to produce activity for years into the future. We have diamonds in the Buffalo Head hills and Birch Mountains, and many, many more such resources are just waiting to be developed.

Geothermal is another area with great growth potential for the north, although it requires a long-term vision to properly develop the resource. Hot spots have been identified in various locations in northern Alberta, including Peace River, Rainbow Lake, Zama, Hinton, and Swan Hills. A Hutterite colony near Manning, in my constituency, is completely powered by geothermal. Not only is geothermal one of the cleanest sources of energy and 100 per cent renewable; it could represent a creative solution to the problem of orphan wells.

Given our many hours of sunshine in the north solar power is another growth industry. Many farms in the La Crête area are already operating with solar. Many First Nations such as Tallcree, Beaver Lake, and Fort Chip have major solar projects, and Grande Prairie will soon be using solar to power a fleet of electric buses. People in the north are excited about possibilities, but maximizing these opportunities requires training, planning, and a forward-thinking strategy.

That's not all. We have 21 per cent of provincial crop production, including a significant portion of all organic produce in Alberta. Northern Alberta's climate is conducive to particular types of agriculture, including a very high quality of flax. NADC recently did workshops to highlight possibilities for industrial hemp and flax. Medical marijuana is another untapped resource some communities are exploring. We also have 10 per cent of provincial livestock and 86 per cent of the province's forests. Of course, our

tourism potential is unlimited. From dinosaurs to history to indigenous culture to outdoor activities, we have it all, and we have the aurora borealis.

But we see what can happen when resource activities proceed too rapidly without a comprehensive, structured growth plan. Fort McMurray experienced some incredible growth pressures as a result of unplanned, unstructured growth. Alberta's north is comprised of an estimated 350,000 people in 150 communities, each with diverse economies that are rich in potential. A strategy is needed to properly manage these resources.

Another area of concern highlighting the need for a strategy is our workforce. We face unique challenges in attracting and retaining a workforce in northern Alberta, that are not experienced in other parts of the province. The long distances, the scarcity of big-city resources, and the need to travel for health services and other activities means that potential teachers, nurses, and other professionals tend to choose to work in the larger centres rather than the north. One solution to this is to educate local youth and support their career development at home, but this will require a long-term vision and strategy.

Northern Albertans are also experiencing social and economic barriers to prosperity that include inadequate local infrastructure to attract investment and to develop economic opportunities, a small market size that limits opportunities, high transport costs for goods and services, a lack of affordable housing and services for the homeless. We have limited public transportation options. The larger northern centres such as Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie have excellent public transit, but that's not the case for most of the rest of northern Alberta. If you don't have access to a vehicle, it can be impossible to get to work and move around the community. Of course, lack of child care is a key factor in preventing many northern women in particular from working.

The fact is that these issues are having a bigger impact on northern Alberta's indigenous communities, so a comprehensive strategy must be inclusive, collaborative, and viewed through a northern lens in order to address the concerns and issues experienced by both indigenous and nonindigenous communities and to ensure northern Alberta is prepared to take advantage of current opportunities to meet future challenges. A strategy can help guide our province in renewing its relationship with indigenous people, one that is based on trust, collaboration, and respectful engagement and that follows the principles and objectives of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

There exists a legal framework under the Northern Alberta Development Council Act which permits the government of Alberta through the NADC to develop and implement regional development plans in Alberta's north. A northern development strategy will align with government's current vision and plan for achieving enhanced social prosperity and economic diversification. Not only would the strategy support the government of Alberta's desire to maximize the value of its natural resources; it would establish the province as an environmental leader and enhance the quality of life of all Albertans by becoming a leader in the areas of health care, education, and skills training as part of its overall mandate.

Rapid development in the north has made Alberta a formidable player on the national and international economic stage, but the volatility of world markets substantially impacts Alberta's growth forecasts, and for northern Alberta communities the realities of a resource-based economy must be managed to ensure long-term sustainability. As Alberta moves toward integrating new technologies and diversifying the economy, the northern region would benefit from a plan to firmly guide development and help the region adapt to future challenges. A northern development strategy will

strengthen all of Alberta. It will ensure a northern perspective, helping northerners build resilient, sustainable economies and enhanced quality of life. It would support economic growth, ensure infrastructure enhancements are in place to support that growth, and it will help define how we address social issues in the north and support a resilient, strong, local workforce that has the necessary expertise to build our economy.

NADC is prepared to champion the creation of a northern development strategy as part of its mandate within the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. With 50 years of experience identifying issues of importance to the north, the NADC and its regional staff are well positioned to facilitate the advancement of a northern development strategy for Alberta. The council's strategic plan identifies key priorities for a strong northern region: a robust, diversified economy; strong, vibrant communities; and a skilled, educated, local workforce. NADC is experienced in working with regional partners, elected officials, and ministry colleagues to advance projects and initiatives with a northern focus. We have council members representing areas across the north who can help bring forward a grassroots perspective. These connections, coupled with a political mandate, would provide the NADC with the key elements necessary to begin the process of building a strategy that will align with overarching government priorities such as economic development, human capital, infrastructure, healthy populations, environmental sustainability, and aboriginal engagement.

In 2009 the government of Canada announced the creation of a northern strategy outlining the federal government's overall direction for Canada's north. Four of Canada's seven provinces with defined northern regions have also developed northern strategies identifying long-term policy objectives and short-term outcomes that will improve the social and economic fabric of their respective jurisdictions.

Northern Alberta communities are resilient, continuing to demonstrate a willingness to work together to foster growth as a region. The time has come for the government of Alberta to support a co-ordinated approach to northern development to maximize the growth potential and enhance the quality of life for northerners.

I urge all members of this Assembly to support this motion. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Motion 506. My colleague from Peace River has brought forward a good motion to discuss matters that I observed on my trip across northern Alberta last fall. But I have to ask a rhetorical question. Why do we need the Legislature to tell the government to tell the Northern Alberta Development Council to do something? The NADC has its own board to report to. Why is the NADC not taking direction from its own board? Why is the board chair running to the Legislature to tell the government to tell the board what to do?

5:10

The NADC has a budget of \$2.4 million. The executive director was moved from Peace River to Edmonton, a move that has bred resentment amongst stakeholders. Somehow I think this motion is a veiled ask for more money and that it sounds like another government make-work project for the bureaucrats. The crats will scurry around and develop this plan. Meanwhile some good plans have already been developed like the comprehensive regional infrastructure sustainability plan, or CRISP, for the Athabasca, Cold Lake, and Peace River oil sands regions. Well, the Peace River one was never finished and released publicly. These CRISPs sit

largely on a shelf, gathering dust, because the government does not have the will or money to implement them, but they are excellent pieces of information to draw resources from for this northern strategy.

It is not the first time that a northern development strategy was attempted. In 1980 Cold Lake had a regional plan drawn up because of the rapidly expanding oil industry. Thirty-seven years, and here we are, coming full circle, Madam Speaker.

Peace River and Cold Lake oil sands deposits have a low steam-oil ratio, which makes these projects very economical. The northern Alberta region is blessed with resources, but the development of in situ projects will be limited by the 100-megatonne cap and also the carbon tax.

There is no use having a plan unless the government actually plans to follow through and commit to the plan and commit the resources to fund the plan. Madam Speaker, I'm told that there is a plan on the shelf to build a highway from Fort McMurray all the way to Peerless Lake so that Peace River and Fort McMurray would be connected directly, saving hours upon hours of travel time across the north. Even residents of communities that would see a drop in traffic are cheering for this road, but, just like all good plans, unless the government commits the money, it will never happen.

We had a plan for SuperNet in this province to all corners of rural Alberta. I understand that the last miles are being completed. Meanwhile I'm told that the SuperNet is too slow in High Prairie, so slow that a First Nations software company could not set up shop and diversify the economy away from lumber. I'm also told that the SuperNet is too expensive, so expensive that a registry office in Falher had to close shop. That is not economic development, Madam Speaker; that is economic destruction.

Speaking of destruction, I've heard all about the sorry state of the postsecondary buildings across the north. It is as if the government wants to close them all down through death by a thousand cuts, Madam Speaker. With schools closed due to poor infrastructure, the province will be forced to bring skilled labour in from foreign countries in order to enable natural resource extraction. It will force amendments to the provincial nominee program.

Northern Alberta appreciates small colleges close to home for skills training. These schools help to keep northern Albertans in their communities, schools like Grande Prairie Regional College, Fairview campus, where our hon. Energy minister used to be a top official before becoming an MLA. I happened to visit there, too. One of the student residences has been condemned. It is not safe to live in anymore. Replacement is not in the capital plan nor on the unfunded list. I guess no one on the government benches looked at this Fairview one seriously.

Then there is Athabasca University, a distance learning institution that will have to close in a year if proper funding is not secured by the government and the information technology is not only modernized and replaced but also backed up, as per the report of the Auditor General. What a blow to Athabasca if this distance learning institution is closed.

You know what else northern Alberta is concerned about? Caribou. It seems the caribou management plan will do things like closing the largest employer in High Level, the Tolko mill. The caribou plan will hurt the timber harvest in addition to the struggling oil and gas industry in that area. Who wants High Level to be a ghost town like Coalspur or Whiskey Gap? At this moment if that lumber mill closes over this caribou plan, High Level will be reduced to a tourism town. Yes. Trips from Yellowknife to High Level for just a feed of Kentucky Fried Chicken is northern tourism, Madam Speaker. That's what they told me when I visited there.

Now, if only the federal government had not botched the First Nations consultation, highway 58 could have been extended by

Ottawa through Wood Buffalo national park, from Garden River to Peace Point and onward to Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, and a real northern driving loop would be established to drive tourism. Maybe our federal dance partners will send some equalization money back and build a highway there.

Meanwhile over in La Crête there is a baby boom under way. La Crête now has the same population as High Level but has no hospital. Residents have to drive one and a half hours to High Level for hospital services, Madam Speaker. That is the equivalent of telling everyone in Red Deer to drive to a hospital in Edmonton.

La Crête is a boom town. The people are really industrious, and one of their big concerns is Crown land release, Madam Speaker. We heard this before in Fort McMurray, perhaps, this concern about Crown land release. Farmers in La Crête want more Crown land sold so they can convert it to productive farmland. This farmland is so fertile, and warmed by the long daylight hours, it grows the highest protein oats and wheat and the highest omega 3 canola in the country and yields premium prices. How is that for an economic competitive advantage?

Sadly, northern Alberta is strangled by geography, the long distance to markets, and poor service provided by CN Rail. No strategy created by this government is going to get a faster, more frequent, or competitive railway up there, nor will any strategy created by the government of Alberta force the hand of CN Rail to run trains from Grande Prairie to Dawson Creek and on to the port of Prince Rupert. No. CN will take everything to Edmonton or Swan Landing first and then send it out to Rupert at additional distance, additional time, and additional cost.

With that, Madam Speaker, as shadow minister for Economic Development and Trade I have summarized a number of issues to go into this strategy: roads, SuperNet, colleges, caribou, hospitals, land releases, railways. In short, I'm willing to support this motion, but that is because I believe that if the NADC does its job properly, they'll give the government good advice on how to improve prosperity, and most of that advice will run counter to this government's ideology. If instead this turns into an exercise where the NADC comes up with a report that explains the government's ideological vision to northern Albertans, then I'll be very disappointed. I look forward to reviewing any strategy the NADC brings forward.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very happy to speak about this motion to direct the Northern Alberta Development Council to develop a comprehensive northern Alberta development strategy. Having lived and worked in northern Alberta for a number of years, I'm very interested. I was really interested in reading the notes and thinking about the development that could and should happen up in the northern area of our province.

5:20

One of the things that's so important is that, as with any other kind of development, people need support. The area needs support. They've got some special issues in northern Alberta that we may not be familiar with. One of them is transportation. Transportation, as the member previously stated, can be very tricky in some areas. You get freeze-up. When the ice goes out – things like that will translate into stops in traffic, stops in trucking.

We do need to be committed to supporting this region of Alberta given that all the municipalities bring strengths. There's energy, agriculture, forestry, mining, tourism. One of the things you find

when you spend much time up in northern Alberta is that there is an enormous variety. Sometimes going north from Edmonton, you think it's going to be nothing but bush, you know, lots of rivers and streams. But you get further north, and there's so much farming, and there are so many different people, different cultures in the different communities.

I had a terrific time with a friend one year just hitting all the small museums we could in northern Alberta. Well, we actually went as far as – where did we go up by? – Great Slave Lake. It was so much fun seeing the different museums.

Dr. Turner: There's a new dinosaur museum up there.

Ms Woollard: Yeah. We haven't even got there yet.

Didn't get to Grande Prairie but all the little ones: Manning and High Level and La Crête – we didn't hit the museum in La Crête – Fort Vermilion, and all the little stops along the way. People, as everywhere else, are treasuring their past, their heritage and showing people what is valuable in the area. All those things were wonderful.

In every place people are welcoming and are just so happy to show you what they have, what they're doing, what their natural resources are, what they're being accessed – you know, not saying: our country, our land is for sale; our resources are for sale. But, as with anybody else, they want to make a living. They want to develop their area. They want it to be a good place for their children to grow up in, and they want opportunities for everyone there.

I wholeheartedly agree that the government should direct the NADC to develop the comprehensive northern Alberta development strategy. I like the phrasing of it: "The mandate of the NADC . . . to 'investigate, monitor, evaluate, plan and promote practical measures to foster and advance general development in northern Alberta and to advise the Government accordingly.'"

With any development anywhere it's really important to make sure that all the local people in the various communities that are part of northern Alberta are consulted, not just consulted but are partners in all the developments. That's so important.

I like the fact that it mentions that we are thinking about – the reality is that being boom-and-bust economies, that we see with our resource development, we need to make sure that the economy is diversified and do long-range planning to ensure that the development is sustainable because it doesn't do anybody any good to have the boom, and then when it goes back, it's like the tide going out. Everybody is left with memories of the good times.

I'm proud to be part of a government that has tried to address the infrastructure deficit through an aggressive capital plan and to be, hopefully, part of a government's vision of having a prosperous province from north to south to north.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We've had a request to revert to introductions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to introduce, I guess, guests actually sitting on both sides of the House here to support this motion. I'd like to introduce Garrett Tomlinson, the reeve of Northern Sunrise county, and Ken Noskey, who is a council member of NADC.

On the other side of the House I'd also like to introduce my daughter Marni and my grandchildren Noah, Reuben, Virgil, and Azula. Please give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Welcome.

Motions Other than Government Motions

Northern Alberta Development Strategy

(continued)

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to talk about Motion 506, which urges the government to

direct the Northern Alberta Development Council to develop a comprehensive northern Alberta development strategy that will identify the government's vision and plan for achieving enhanced social and economic prosperity in the region.

Now, on the NADC website it says:

the Northern Alberta Development Council advances the promise of Alberta's North.

It goes on to say:

NADC's mandate is to help the region's 150 communities and 350,000 people realize their rich potential and strengthen their diverse economies. The Council is made up of a dedicated group of provincial and local leaders and staff tasked with producing quality regional development information, supporting education and skills enhancement programs and building strategic partnerships.

Now, Madam Speaker, I may be confused, but I was under the impression that NADC was intended to act somewhat independently from the provincial government; hence, they were set up independently from the government. It appears that this motion would be setting out direct orders to NADC.

The council was established by the Northern Alberta Development Council Act, which outlines the functions of the council.

To investigate, monitor, evaluate, plan and promote practical measures to foster and advance general development in northern Alberta, and to advise the Government accordingly, and without limiting the generality of the foregoing, the Council may investigate the requirements of the people resident in northern Alberta and make recommendations in that regard in respect of

- (a) social and economic development,
- (b) development of communities and service delivery, and
- (c) development of government services and programs.

Now, it would appear to me that the motion being debated today is somewhat redundant and really unnecessary as the NADC already has the power to go ahead and do these things that this motion is suggesting. But if the member believes it will actually result in the government taking concrete steps to support northern Alberta, then I will happily cast my vote in favour. Now, the mover of the motion, the Member for Peace River, as the chair of NADC really has a great opportunity to get things happening there.

Now, as someone who lives, works, and is raising a family in northern Alberta I understand the power and potential that Alberta's north holds. Northern Alberta represents 60 per cent of Alberta's land mass, contains 100 per cent of the province's oil sands and 86 per cent of the province's forests. Northern Alberta boasts some of the world's greatest fishing and hunting. That's something that I can attest to.

Some of the things that I've heard from my constituents and other people in the north are real, tangible ways this government can help northern Alberta. Some of those things are a common-sense caribou plan that doesn't destroy the industries that so many of the residents

up there rely upon for their livelihood and the counties that rely on that area, too, for a tax base. Another thing is to kill the carbon tax, that exponentially affects residents and businesses in northern Alberta because of the distances we travel and the costs we have to heat our buildings there. Remove the 100-megatonne cap on oil sands emissions, which limits northern Alberta from realizing true benefits from our province's oil sands resource.

Finally, we have the lack of high-speed Internet access, and that's a huge stumbling block to developing the north. Too often I hear stories of local businesses being forced to shutter or move their operations down south because the spotty Internet access or substandard speed simply does not allow these businesses to conduct their business at the speed their clients demand.

There are many more issues unique to the north that need to be dealt with. Transportation is one that just right off the top I think of.

I hope that this government does finally take action to promote and invest in northern Alberta and begins a process by focusing on the areas that I've highlighted. When I travelled up to the northern Peace River region, those were some of the things that the people brought to me when I travelled up there and had meetings.

I hope this isn't just an opportunity for the government to promote itself. There is one phrase in the motion that does cause a little concern. That phrase is: "northern Alberta development strategy that will identify the government's vision." This should be about the people of the north's vision. It shouldn't be about this government. This government has its own business to do here. NADC has a different set of business and a different responsibility, and that's to represent the north.

Now, I've been advocating for northern Alberta since long before I was elected in this House, and I will continue to support northern Alberta long after I leave. I will vote in favour of this motion in support of northern Alberta.

Thank you.

5:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms McKittrick: Madam Speaker, I am delighted to rise and speak in support of the motion by the Member for Peace River on the development of a comprehensive northern Alberta development strategy that will identify the government's vision and plan for achieving enhanced social and economic prosperity in the region. I have not yet had the pleasure to visit the Peace River region but plan on doing so this summer. I have, however, worked with many of the organizations in northern Alberta in supporting community economic development.

The Member for Peace River in her role as chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council has brought leadership to the council in a number of areas. I would like to particularly highlight the work that has been done to promote and educate on the potential of renewable energy. I would also like to support efforts to encourage small-scale agricultural projects such as the development of value-added honey products, market gardens, and products arising out of communities in the north such as the francophone, Hutterite, and Mennonite communities.

The government is currently engaging in consultations to lead to the development of community economic development corporations as announced in Bill 30, Investing in a Diversified Alberta Economy Act. These corporations, which can be incorporated also as co-ops, will help communities access local funds for community economic projects. I think that this will support the development of a comprehensive northern Alberta development strategy by providing a tool for local community investment and encouraging

communities to invest in the provision of local employment and local value-added industry.

Madam Speaker, local community economic development is defined as action by people locally to create economic opportunities that improve social conditions, particularly for those who are the most disadvantaged. CED is an approach that recognizes that economic, environmental, and social challenges are interdependent, complex, and ever-changing. To be effective, solutions must be rooted in local knowledge and led by community members. CED promotes holistic approaches addressing individual community and regional levels, recognizing that those levels are interconnected.

Dr. John Loxley, a professor of community economic development in Manitoba, has written extensively about his work in aboriginal northern communities and economic development. His book *Aboriginal, Northern, and Community Economic Development* provides very useful research on how to work with northern aboriginal communities on economic development. I think that book would be very helpful in the development of a strategic plan for northern Alberta.

In the introduction Professor Loxley writes about the Manitoba northern plan:

First, it suggests there are no simplistic solutions to the problems facing northern and Aboriginal poverty and underdevelopment. Rather, multi-faceted, across-the-board approaches are called for, which are demanding both conceptually and politically. Second, the plan demonstrated that there are numerous possibilities for economic and social development in the small communities of the North, possibilities which become greater with co-operation among communities and with targeted state involvement and support, including subsidies justified by social considerations.

Dr. Loxley's book also discusses how challenging comprehensive northern economic development strategies can be in light of distinct thinking. Dr. Loxley discusses at length the need to work with indigenous communities in the development of the north in Manitoba. It's a good reminder for us in Alberta, and I was pleased to see that the member especially mentioned indigenous communities in her speech.

I would like to encourage anyone interested in supporting this motion to explore the existing literature on the promotion of northern community economic development: what has been successful, what are the challenges, and especially how to incorporate indigenous communities within the strategies.

I am pleased to support this motion because our government is committed to getting the most out of our natural resources while at the same time ensuring that our people and environment are looked after as well. That's why I read that definition of community economic development, because one thing that I really appreciate about our government is that it always puts people first. We know that we have to develop industries, but we also know that it's important for these industries to look after people and our environment. As a government we've made a lot of practical changes.

We also know that the residents of northern Alberta face additional challenges. Some of my colleagues have talked about transportation, access to markets, the way that the population is scattered all over vast numbers of kilometres. We know that there are challenges around rural schools and providing education, especially at the high school levels.

We also know that northern Alberta contains the majority of the province's oil, gas, and forestry resources. But the reality is that a lot of these resources create a boom-and-bust economy, so we need to ensure that we diversify the economy and engage in long-term planning to ensure sustainability. This is why I read from Dr. Loxley's book and introduction, because there are other provinces that have faced the same challenges as this motion speaks to and

have studied the need and how we can create very viable northern community planning in terms of both the economy and social sustainability.

I think, as to what this motion calls for, there is a lot of literature in Canada that we can use and that the Northern Alberta Development Council can use in terms of ensuring that the planning that this motion calls for is done in light of the existing research and existing knowledge.

I'm also very proud to be part of a government that has tried to address the infrastructure deficit through an aggressive capital plan, and I'm thinking especially of the roads and the work that's going on on highway 28 and some of our roads in the north. That's going to allow much safer access for both people and industry.

I've heard the Member for Peace River speak about her work with the Northern Alberta Development Council, and I know that the council is made up of a diversity of people and interests, that it has indigenous communities, that it has local residents. I've had the pleasure of meeting, I think, a former school trustee who is proud of the council. I know that the framework for the motion is in place both through the diversity of the people on the council and the work that the hon. member has done as chair.

I wholeheartedly agree that the government should direct the NADC to develop a comprehensive northern Alberta development strategy that will identify the government's vision and plan for achieving enhanced social and economic prosperity in the region. I actually really like the fact that they're putting the social and the economic together because I think that if we only look towards economic and we don't worry about people and we don't worry about education and access to health, then we can't really have the economic prosperity that we really want. I am confident that the NADC is going to build on the success that it has achieved and that it can play a leading role in achieving a strategic plan for northern Alberta.

Madam Speaker, I will happily support this motion, and I would like to thank the member for her interest in the north, for the way that she has shared her passion for her community not only in her speech this afternoon but also in the interactions that we have with her. I would urge all members of the Assembly to vote in support of this motion.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise on Motion 506, to direct the Northern Alberta Development Council to develop a comprehensive northern Alberta strategy that will identify the government's vision and plan for achieving enhanced social and economic prosperity in the region, and I am happy to be supportive of this motion.

Northern Alberta, like all of rural Alberta, is important to the success of our province. Everybody knows that the wealth of Alberta is almost entirely administered in Edmonton and Calgary, but what we don't think about often enough is that it's almost entirely earned and created outside of Edmonton and Calgary, which means that northern Alberta is an important aspect of that.

So I support the motion. In my view, I think NADC has done a good job for a long time. If they've been slow in the last couple of years, in my view it's largely because the current government has been really slow in appointing people to the board and letting them do their job. This is a sign that the government is going to let them do their job and encourage them instead of holding them back. I couldn't be any happier.

With that, I will sit down, making sure that everybody knows I am supportive of this motion as it is written.

5:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak about Motion 506, made by the hon. Member for Peace River. I would like to start off by saying that any motion that addresses some of the needs that northern Alberta has is a good motion, and I myself will be supporting this motion.

I do have a few concerns with this motion, and I will talk about them throughout the speech here, more or less to see where the member is going with this as the chair of the council. Let's start with that the motion seeks to provide guidance to the Northern Alberta Development Council to develop a strategy to promote prosperity within northern Alberta. Now, I'd like to start off talking about what its current mandate is, as listed on the website.

The mandate of the Council is to investigate, monitor, evaluate, plan and promote practical measures to foster and advance general development in northern Alberta and to advise the Government accordingly, and without limiting the generality of the foregoing, the Council may investigate the requirements of the people resident in northern Alberta and make recommendations in that regard in respect of

- (a) social and economic development,
- (b) development of communities and service delivery, and
- (c) development of government services and programs.

That's quite the mouthful. There's a lot there.

I will read this motion. The Member for Peace River to propose:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to direct the Northern Alberta Development Council to develop a comprehensive northern Alberta development strategy that will identify the government's vision and plan for achieving enhanced social and economic prosperity in the region.

The main difference between these two that I can see is that one is saying that they're going to create a government's vision moving forward, and this one here is saying that the NADC is looking to advise the government on moving forward. Now, I know that's splitting hairs, and I'm looking at this and saying: okay; what's the difference between the government's vision and advice? One of the things that I would say is: is this becoming a tool that the government is using to promote or advertise the north?

I guess that for myself I went through some of the newsletters that were brought forward. Unfortunately, the link for the 2014 newsletters is broken. That happens. You know, I understand that, and I'm not concerned about that. But the 2015 and 2016 newsletters appear to be completely nonpartisan. They appear to be completely nonpartisan. This is important because it looks like this group was actively trying to separate itself from the government, saying, "We are independent, and we're looking to move forward the north's needs," if you will.

But if you look at the 2017 one, that just came out, I see that the Minister of Transportation is in the opening remarks. I see a biography, more or less, of the Minister of Health, and I see the Minister of Education being mentioned there as well. The first page of the newsletter. I see this as us now moving towards a government's vision.

Now, if the member is actively going out and making sure that these ministers are listening to the north, I commend her on that. Absolutely. You know what? Having minister involvement in the north, having the ministers involved with the NADC is absolutely great. This is something that we should be looking forward to, and I want to see that kind of thing. But do we need to be promoting

that through the north? Do we need to have that on the front page? Is this something that we can say: these are the areas that we're working on?

The Member for Calgary-Foothills brought up the highway between Peace River and Fort McMurray. Now, it's important that while we're looking at this newsletter, it's showing that there are clear needs for the north, and it is written in the letter from the Member for Peace River. To focus on those would be something that I would hope to see inside of this motion, something that's substantive that we can move forward. In this one here what we're seeing is "enhanced social and economic prosperity in the region." I would like to have seen something a little bit more precise. Even though I will say that the Fort McMurray to Peace River highway would probably not affect my constituency, I still see it improving all connectivity between all of the north, and that is a good thing. It would have been nice to see something along that line in this motion.

Now, if we look at the formal council, I would like to mention that if you go to the website here – and we're looking at the council itself – it would be nice to see that the council is recognized by being actually put onto the website. I do have the Member for Peace River on there, on the council. I also have the past chair, and I'm very thankful for Mr. Ken Noskey. I hear that he's probably above us here. I'm very thankful for the contributions that he has brought forward to this council. But it would be nice to see the other seven members that are on the council. Right now they don't seem to be on there. Why is this important? Well, it's important that we all kind of understand who exactly is a part of this. Seeing what they do for a living and how they are contributing towards the council would be a great thing.

The fact that we are looking at this motion is – we see that this council is already able to do what this motion provides, so my question is: is the member looking for a clear focus? When I look at what I originally mentioned as the mandate, does this mean that the mandate of the council is going to be focused in a smaller fashion? Are we going to be taking the development of communities and service deliveries and the development of government services and programs out of this? Is that something that no longer is the focus of the council? Because it's not in this specific motion. Are we going to see a mandate change? That means that we're going to possibly see less advocacy because of this.

Now, if that is not the case, then I apologize to the member, because that's not where I'm going here. What I'm trying to do is say that we all need to work together to try to be able to move northern Alberta forward to ensure that prosperity is seen in this province. When the northern part of Alberta prospers, the rest of Alberta seems to feel that impact. Calgary specifically is a city that has felt the fact that we have had low oil prices, and the fact that they've been seeing such high commercial vacancy rates is a real problem there.

If we look at this, I would like to say – and my colleague over there had touched on it – that the emissions cap, the carbon tax, and the caribou plan are all areas that are going to impact northern Alberta. I would have liked to have seen how the council is looking to move beyond this by saying, "How much of an impact is this going to be?" and studying this so that we can know how we can go around this or change it.

5:50

Now, I am concerned that when we look at northern Alberta, we've got significant heavy oil deposits. I know that this isn't shocking. I'm not telling you this to surprise you. What I am saying is that when I discuss these kinds of things about Hanna and other places that use coal, those communities are dying, and we are

actively seeing those communities . . . [Mr. Cyr's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I stand here today as a proud long-time resident of northern Alberta. I have no memory of any place besides northern Alberta. I moved there when I was three years old, so I certainly can speak to both the strengths of northern Alberta and the contributions it makes as well as the challenges. I want to say thank you to the member for bringing forward this motion, which I support in terms of the role that it plays in highlighting the importance of northern Alberta to the province but also the important role that NADC can play in terms of addressing some of that as well.

Certainly, northern Alberta has many unique strengths and challenges compared to the rest of the province. Some of the strengths are an incredibly strong, resilient people. I mean, if we talk about the west being, you know, the final frontier, the north is certainly the frontier for this province in many ways. There are not nearly as many people there in terms of concentration. They're well dispersed across the north. It's not as well connected as it could be in terms of some challenges, Madam Speaker, but it offers so much in terms of the people and in terms of the resources.

The member talked about the industry that's there. We think of the north a lot in terms of oil, but it is also where our forestry industry lies and where there's a lot of agriculture as well. Certainly, the people of the north understand and take great pride in the contributions that they make to this province in terms of managing and harvesting the resources that this great province has to offer.

Madam Speaker, many of the challenges that are faced in the north relate, in particular, to the fact that despite the riches of the north, there's not a whole lot of people that live there in comparison to the rest of the province. There's a lot of work to be done, a lot of importance to the province, but a very wide, disparate area with not as many people. It's always a challenge to provide the quality of services that encourage people to want to be a part of that.

Certainly, I'm thankful for the role of the Northern Alberta Development Council and for their contributions in the past, but I also think very strongly that they could as community members, as people who are engaged in the north, who live there and think in a different way than perhaps government thinks, come up with some thoughts and creative solutions around what needs to be done in order to keep the north healthy and sustainable for the long term, Madam Speaker.

You know, in the meantime, I'm thankful for the recognition of the value, in particular, of the real north that I see by this government. As a member at the cabinet table I'm always happy to represent the north. I know that there are a number of us who do so, and I'm certainly hearing that. For example, some substantial investment in Northern Lakes College recently happened. A new campus in High Prairie really is going to make a difference.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Children's Services, but under Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I'd like to invite the hon. Member for Peace River to close debate on Motion 506.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to all the members of the House for the debate that we've had here today. In particular, I want to say thank you to the Member for Calgary-

Foothills for highlighting in great detail the many, many challenges we face in the north. I simply didn't have enough time in my 10 minutes to go into that great of detail, but we have many challenges. And he's quite right. The north has been neglected for a very long time.

There was a previous attempt to make a strategy, but the previous government did not get very far with that. This is why this has to change, and this is why I brought forward this motion. It's time. I'm proud to be part of a government that is making life better for all Albertans, including the 350,000 of us who live in Alberta's north. It's absolutely critical that we have a development strategy that will identify the government's vision and plan to achieve enhanced social and economic prosperity in northern Alberta, and we have to look at all of our challenges through a northern lens.

We do want to maximize the value of our natural resources, especially in terms of achieving sustainable prosperity for our northern residents and communities. The volatile world markets do impact Alberta as a whole, but the effects of the roller coaster are felt more profoundly in northern Alberta perhaps because it's not only jobs but it's our communities that are directly affected. So we need to work towards a more sustainable model for northern development because the fate of Alberta as a whole is forever intertwined with the fate of northern Alberta.

A northern development strategy informed and guided by a northern perspective will help to bring about this development in a way that recognizes and values the experience and knowledge of northern residents and organizations and builds on the new relationships that we're developing with our First Nations and Métis communities. It would not only support economic growth and infrastructure enhancements, but it will help to define how we manage health, social structures, education, and workforce in the north.

I see the challenges that we face in the north every day in my constituency of Peace River. Residents in the north are resilient and strong, and we know what it takes to live and thrive in these areas. I appreciate the comments of my fellow MLAs from the north because we all share these kinds of things, and we all know what we're up against.

The Northern Alberta Development Council is uniquely positioned to be the champion for our region. They have 50 years of experience working with distinctively northern issues. Their priorities, as identified already by the council, are a robust,

diversified economy; strong, vibrant communities; and a skilled, educated workforce. The NADC knows that it will be necessary to work with regional partners, elected officials, ministry colleagues, and people of the north to achieve those priorities. They have the experience to bring together government and northern Albertans to develop a plan for all of these shared priorities. But to achieve these goals, they need to know that all the rest of Alberta recognizes the importance of the work that they are doing and are ready to support the objectives.

Other jurisdictions across Canada have recognized the importance of a northern strategy. Manitoba, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Quebec have developed strategies that will improve the social and economic fabric of their northern jurisdictions, and we can learn from their strategies as they contain elements such as highlighting regional growth opportunities; challenges to growth; information to guide investment from both government and the private sector; ways to improve infrastructure, education, and health; encouraging collaboration and a co-ordinated approach to development; a focus on sustainability; working respectfully with indigenous and nonindigenous communities; and giving equal weight to those communities and to the principle of equality between men and women.

As I mentioned earlier, in 2009 the government of Canada also established a vision for northern development through the creation of a northern strategy. So it's time for Alberta to step up to the plate and provide the Northern Alberta Development Council with the mandate that will allow it to deliver on the potential of northern Alberta in a way that will truly maximize that potential and provide for the needs of Alberta's families in the north.

I always tell my community that there are not very many of us out there, so we have to be twice as loud. That's why I'm bringing this motion forward. It's time for us to be twice as loud, and I know that our government is going to listen.

Thank you again for participating in this debate. I look forward to your support of Motion 506.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 506 carried]

Ms Ganley: Seeing as we are so close to 6 o'clock, I move that we adjourn and resume tomorrow morning at 10.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:59 p.m.]

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