



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 29, 2017

Day 40

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)	MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)	Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND), Government House Leader
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND), Deputy Government House Leader	McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret, Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
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Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)	McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
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Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)	Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)	Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
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Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)	Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
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Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC)	Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)	Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)	Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
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Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W), Leader of the Official Opposition	Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
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Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)	Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND), Deputy Government Whip
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)	Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	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 29, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us each reflect or pray, each in our own way. Friday, May 26, marked the month of Ramadan. During this time Albertans who are Muslims, our fellow Muslims world-wide fast to remind themselves of the suffering of those less fortunate. This month also focuses on spiritual discipline, deep contemplation, and increased generosity towards others. Regardless of our own faith and beliefs, this key message of Ramadan is something we should all reflect upon.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.
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: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly students from Landing Trail intermediate school. I had the pleasure of visiting with them not too long ago. Excellent questions: I have to say that they'd give us a run for our money although they were a bit more polite than we tend to be. They are joined by their teacher, Mrs. Laura Pope, and their chaperone, Mrs. Barbara Nicholl. If the class, teacher, and chaperone could please rise and receive the customary – oh, I'm looking at the wrong group. All right. Okay. Well, I guess you guys know what to do.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. member, you're correct. I know that each one of you has much to learn from these children about how to be nice to each other.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. M. le Président, c'est avec fierté que je me lève à ce Chambre aujourd'hui pour introduire les étudiants qui viennent de l'école Father Jan. The students are accompanied by their teacher, Natalie Jurick, and their chaperones, Sarah Macsymic, Heidi Pisani, and David Fisher. I would ask that – oh, they've risen already. Please join me in welcoming this group to the Chamber.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other school groups today, hon. members?

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on your behalf to introduce to all members of the Assembly 10 recipients of the sovereign's medal for volunteers. This Canadian honour recognizes the exceptional achievement of volunteers from across the country in a wide range of fields. This inspirational group of Albertans demonstrates selfless dedication of time, passion, and energy to a variety of causes and communities across the province. The recipients and their guests are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask them to please rise as I call their names: Mr. James Bourgoin, Ms Christine McCourt-Reid, Captain Barbara Sand, Ms Barbara Furuness, Captain Sidney Furuness, Cadet Sergeant Avery Nham, Mr. Harold Lefebvre, Warrant Officer Kristopher Porlier, Mr. George Lucki, and the hon. Lieutenant Colonel Gordon Steinke. If we can all please give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're joined here today by recipients of the Ernest Manning innovation award. Since 1982 the Ernest Manning innovation awards have recognized Canadians whose pioneering technologies have helped grow their local economies, protect the environment, and save lives. The awards honour scientists, businesspeople, and community activists who aspire to do good for the common good. Leaders do not only develop creative products but also improve the standard of living for all Canadians. Today I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly seven distinguished Albertans nominated by the northern Alberta chapter of the 2017 Ernest Manning awards. I'll ask that they rise as I call their names: Sophia Fairweather, James Keirstead, Jim Qualie, Gordon Molnar, Dr. Jianhua Zhu, Tim Battle, Des Quinn. I'd also like to welcome Sol Rolinger, chair of the northern Alberta chapter, who is accompanying the nominees. I want to thank them for their hard work and wish them the best of luck in the innovation awards this fall. Please join me in giving them the traditional welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two constituents of Edmonton-Centre and former pages in this Assembly, Mr. Myles Chykerda and Mr. Edward Davies. Myles joined the House as a page from his home constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka in early 2000 and then moved to Edmonton-Centre to begin studies at the University of Alberta. He went on to become a government documents page in the Legislature Library and a historical researcher before leaving the Assembly to pursue graduate studies at the U of A. In 2011 he moved to Los Angeles, where he has been pursuing a doctorate in archeology, University of California in Los Angeles, where he remains proud of his Alberta heritage and education and is happy to return here this summer to focus on his dissertation.

Edward joined the House as a page in 2008 and has continued that work during his undergraduate studies at the University of Alberta until the conclusion of the spring session in 2010. He received his bachelor of arts with distinction from the University of Alberta in 2013, where he studied political science and music, and went on to earn his juris doctor from the University of Ottawa in 2016. He recently returned home to Alberta to accept a position with the Edmonton law firm McAllister LLP, where he is currently rounding out his articles and will be continuing as an associate.

I would ask both Edward and Myles to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. Minister of Education, I understand you have two groups.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature some pretty amazing people from the city of Red Deer. First, here are two incredibly brave students from Lindsay Thurber high school, Ursella Khan and Thomas Gower. These two students stood up to racism last week, when a group of people gathered outside Lindsay Thurber high school in Red Deer to hold an anti-immigration protest. Ursella and Thomas sent a clear message to the protestors and to all Albertans about the importance of making our schools welcome and safe and treating people with respect. I would also like to introduce Dan Lower, the principal of Lindsay Thurber high school; superintendent Stu Henry; and board chair Bev Manning. I want to thank all of you for the role that you played in standing up against hatred and standing up for love and understanding. Please, let's rise and give them a very traditional warm welcome. [Standing ovation]

1:40

Not to be outdone by that by any means, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce the members of my family that are here today, though you don't have to give them a standing ovation. I have my mom here, Marion Eggen. I have my daughter Ava Eggen, my son Jonathan Wales, and my niece Madeleine Elkins. If they could stand and get a warm, you know, subdued greeting.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health. The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I was so taken by the last two sets of introductions. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you five Alberta paramedics, who are seated in our members' gallery today. This week is dedicated to paramedic services to celebrate the vital services performed by our front-line professionals to ensure that Albertans are provided with the very best care. I ask that they rise as I call their names: Andrew Scobbie, advanced care paramedic from Calgary with 28 years of service; Holly Howard, primary care paramedic from Edmonton with three years of service; Stu Snowdon, advanced care paramedic from Edmonton with 12 years of service; Melanie Howard, advanced care paramedic from Calgary with seven years of service; and Alex Campbell, public education officer from Edmonton with 15 years of service. Please join me in extending the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly to our guests.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of 10 employees from various areas within Alberta Justice and Solicitor General. I'd like to thank them for the hard work they do every day on behalf of all Albertans. I would now ask that they rise, and I would ask that the members join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other introductions today, hon. members?

Members' Statements

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

Decorum and Civility in the Assembly

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms citizens of this country are provided the right of freedom to believe in whatever they wish to believe. Under section 2 it specifically states, "Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms." Subsection (b) specifically states that everyone has "freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression." This is absolutely necessary in a democracy.

However, the opposition in this House consistently ridicules those who do not share their point of view. Just last week I was the subject of racially focused, discriminatory remarks in this very House during Committee of the Whole. How can we expect better for our society and our children if in this House members are the subject of such personal attacks?

Our children deserve better. Albertans want a governing body that will focus on the issues, that will develop policy in their best interests, and a government and an opposition that are willing to debate and, at the end of the day, work together towards that end. However, Mr. Speaker, what they get instead is an opposition that bullies its way through sitting after sitting, hurling insults and racist remarks at members of this House for their beliefs rather than focusing on policy.

A few months ago, after a visit from Meyokumin school, an elementary school in my riding, a student reached out to me and asked a couple of questions, and I quote:

When the assembly is in their meeting and someone is talking, why do members of other parties start to be rude to them? I noticed . . . today when someone from the NDP was talking, members from the opposition were laughing. Why do they do that?

Mr. Speaker, I have also heard from other constituents that are tired of the fact that we act worse than schoolchildren in this House. You have mentioned it repeatedly yourself.

Albertans are tired, and this behaviour must end, if not for our sake then at least for the sake of our children and future generations. As we all know, children learn by example. Let us do our best to be the good example they aspire us to be and, once and for all, put an end to personal attacks in this House.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

PDD Service Eligibility

Mr. W. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I sent the minister of human services a letter back in March of this year outlining a particular problem Bruce Bolton, one of my constituents, is having receiving PDD benefits for his autistic son. In the letter I outlined how Mr. Bolton has applied twice, appealed once, and has been denied based on a current blanket ban on services for any person having an IQ higher than 70.

Travis Bolton, Mr. Bolton's son, has autism, which impairs his executive functioning. It means he has very poor problem-solving skills, lacks impulse control, does not read social cues appropriately, and has significant other issues. If something were to happen to Travis's parents today, Travis would not be able to take care of himself. Period. As outlined in my letter, Travis is an individual that needs the support that only PDD funding can provide.

On May 26, 2016, we brought forward certain individuals who were experiencing problems with eligibility requirements and were unable to receive PDD benefits. Over a year has passed since the minister at the time made a promise to this House and to Albertans that he would "work with the sector, work with the individuals, and work with the advocates to make sure that Albertans get the supports they need." He also stated that same day that "usually a

detailed response and follow-up is provided by the staff, and that will be the case in this particular instance as well.” However, no one has contacted either Mr. Bolton or my office regarding this matter.

I need the minister to carry out his promise and have his staff contact my staff to formulate a plan that involves making sure Travis Bolton has the necessary PDD funding in place.

Thank you.

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

Grande Prairie Diversity Award

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city of Grande Prairie recently received the peace and friendship diversity award. This award is given out annually by the indigenous community to Albertans who promote diversity and inclusion through community work, volunteerism, relationship development, shared programs, and consistent efforts to support, build, and maintain good relations with indigenous communities.

The city of Grande Prairie received the 2017 peace and friendship diversity award for their ceremonial smudging policy, which has been created to honour sacred smudging and the burning of sacred medicines as a traditional practice of the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people. Smudging rituals are an important part of FNMI culture. The smoke is used to heal, bless, and cleanse. The city’s policy permits smudging rituals in certain city facilities such as the Grande Prairie museum and Revolution Place. The city of Grande Prairie is the first western Canadian municipality to develop a policy of this nature.

There are many other examples of Grande Prairie pulling together to build community relationships. In January 2017 the Grande Prairie Regional College signed its indigenous education protocol with the Circle of Indigenous Students. The Rotary clubs in Grande Prairie work closely with the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre to build community relationships and to serve community members in need. They are continually working to better relationships with FNMI communities and recognize them for their historic and continuing role in the development of the Grande Prairie area.

As Albertans we have work to do to further develop collaborative relationships with our FNMI communities, and I’m proud to see policies such as this being developed in my great constituency of Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Thank you.

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

NDP and Conservative Policies

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 18 the Leader of the Opposition and Jason Kenney announced the formation of the united conservative party. As usual, Jason Kenney made sure he repeated the same old tired lines he’s always used about the NDP.

We hear the same from the Kenney foot soldiers in the Chamber. It’s like they’re auditioning. Remember when the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek compared the NDP to the Chinese Communists? Remember when the Member for Strathmore-Brooks tried to slap us with a bizarre Thatcher quote on International Women’s Day? The Wildrose and PCs are good at throwing names across the aisle and making speeches about why they’re entitled to run Alberta, they’re entitled to power.

NDP governments have initiated a lot of what makes Canada the place we know and love today. Universal access to health care, employment insurance, workers’ compensation, old age pension: all things that are NDP initiatives. Publicly funded education for all

students, even those who want GSAs: definitely NDP. Working with Alberta’s private energy sector to increase market access: NDP.

1:50

Back to Mr. Kenney for a moment. When he was in cabinet, the Conservative government set the record for the highest per capita spending in Canadian history. Don’t believe me? Ask the Fraser Institute.

Wildrose and PCs will both tell you they want a balanced budget, but they will not tell you what their plan is. They have no plan. It’s just an excuse for attacking public health, education, and social services. The members opposite will theatrically complain about the deficit spending that will put our children into indentured servitude and then, in the next breath, demand more capital spending in their constituencies for hospitals, schools, and seniors. The science of economics tells us that deficit spending pulls economies out of recession faster, and that’s why we’re recovering, but they reject the science just like they reject the science of climate change.

With the UCP we can expect more of the same. Repeal everything: repeal all the growth, repeal a disability services advocate, repeal minimum wages, repeal reduced school fees. Mr. Speaker, to quote Jason Kenney, that’s catastrophic.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Statement by the Speaker

Use of Electronic Devices in the Chamber

The Speaker: On April 12, 2017, I shared the following reminder with this House.

Hon. members . . . I just want to, as a courtesy to all, remind members of the memo that was distributed to everyone . . . on February 13. Just to refresh your memory, “Members may use their mobile devices during Oral Question Period but must only use them as reading devices and not for streaming, sending or receiving messages.”

I want to remind each and every member of this. As hon. members I’m sure you will not incur this practice, that I’ve outlined on several occasions to you.

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Credit Rating

Mr. Jean: Last election the Premier promised balanced budgets. What did Albertans get instead? Well, they got record levels of debt, endless multibillion-dollar deficits, a massive expansion in the size of government, the biggest tax hike in our history, and now our fifth credit downgrade. That’s more than just an accounting error; it’s gross negligence. It shows a pattern of waste and excess across government while ordinary, everyday Albertans are struggling to pay their bills. How many more hits to our province’s credit rating will this Premier tolerate until she realizes her plan is failing and changes Alberta’s course?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, just this morning the Conference Board of Canada upgraded Alberta’s economic growth forecast to 3.3 per cent, the fastest growth in the country. Now, the Wildrose would like to kill that recovery with brutal cuts, putting people out of work and hurting the middle class, all to satisfy one rating agency. You know what? We’re not going to do that. We’re going to continue on the path. We’ve got Albertans’ backs. The

economy is going to continue growing, and we are going to make life better for all Albertans.

Mr. Jean: Albertans' backs, Mr. Speaker? Well, Standard & Poor's says this about your attempt to get Albertans' backs. It has the provincial debt set to skyrocket to \$94 billion by 2020. What does that mean for 1.5 million or so households in Alberta? Well, it means about \$63,000 in extra debt that ultimately they'll be responsible to pay for and pay interest payments on. That doesn't even touch the billions and billions of dollars the government will pay on interest payments every year rather than on hospitals, schools, nurses, teachers, all those things that are so important to Albertans. It's time the NDP stopped living in a fantasy world. When will they admit that five credit downgrades in less than two years . . .

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

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, this particular rating agency is using a brand new criterion that decides to discount a whole bunch of revenue, so whatever. But this particular agency would have us earn their support by cutting \$3.5 billion out of our operating or raising taxes by that much. That is almost half the Education budget, \$3.5 billion. To the member opposite: what will he do? Will he cut \$3.5 billion or raise that much in taxes? Tell Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Schmidt: You guys love transparency. Be open to Albertans.

The Speaker: Please don't speak, hon. minister, while I'm standing. Thank you.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the Finance minister's response to the downgrade has been to pretend that billions in new spending are actually helping Albertans. Let's look at the NDP record so far: 60,000 full-time jobs have vanished under their watch, they've brought in a \$5 billion carbon tax, they put a cap on our oil sands, and they've spent billions to kill off our industries just because they don't like them. All we get in return is – you know it – free light bulbs. It's an absolutely appalling record of incompetence. Not a single dollar of NDP spending has created one net new job, not even close. How can the NDP or the Premier possibly justify their record?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, when our government came into office, we inherited the biggest recession that this province has seen in over 50 years. But since then jobs are up, drilling is up, manufacturing is up, housing starts are up, exports are up, and all the Wildrose wants to do is cut. I appreciate that good economic news is bad political news for them, but it is time they start putting Albertans' economic interests before their political ones.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Mr. Jean: Yes, it's up, Mr. Speaker. Debt is up, deficit is up, and unemployment is up.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Jean: Alberta now shares a credit rating with Ontario, a jurisdiction with the highest level of subnational debt in the world, Mr. Speaker – it's disgraceful – and the Premier's only plan is to

cross her fingers and hope that oil will soon be roaring back at \$100 a barrel. The Finance minister can't just fly to Toronto and New York and hope that smiling at credit agencies will work. They expect to see a real plan. We haven't seen one from this NDP government, not even close. When can Albertans ever hope to see a plan that isn't just borrowing billions of dollars off the backs of future generations of Albertans?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm still waiting for the member opposite to answer: is he going to cut \$3.5 billion or raise taxes by \$3.5 billion? In the meantime Albertans do have an answer from us. They have a plan that is focused on making life better for Albertans. Increasing jobs, increasing investment, important public sector, and making life more affordable: these things together are the foundation of a growing and renewing economy, exactly what we are seeing now.

Mr. Jean: Ideas, Mr. Speaker? Suggestions? Well, the NDP wouldn't know how to hit low-hanging fruit if it was staring them in the face. Here are a few ideas that maybe would help them: end the tens of millions spent on budget and carbon tax ads, stop the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on shoring up government-run linen services, and save more by thinning out layers of managers that are currently managing managers that manage managers. Just some of these things would be a good idea. Stop the billions of dollars wasted on free light bulb programs and stop killing coal jobs. There are some ideas. Maybe they should think about those. Why not just implement one of those ideas to start saving some money?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that hitting low-hanging fruit is actually a way to save money, so I'm not going to go with that.

What I am going to do, however, is to not stop the very plan that got us a pipeline, a pipeline where on Friday a final investment decision was made that is worth \$7 billion dollars for Albertans. Just on Friday. No celebrating: I hear no celebrating from the members opposite. To be clear, that decision was made by the federal government because of our climate leadership plan. Mr. Speaker, we are not going to back down on that.

Mr. Jean: Here's the big picture, Mr. Speaker. The NDP is more interested in serving their own world view, an antipipeline view, I might add, than doing what is right by the people of Alberta. They are driving our province nearly \$100 billion in debt, without one net new job to show for it, and an endless series of credit downgrades. In the meantime they've ripped billions of dollars out of the economy through higher taxes, and they've sent billions more away with their reckless policies. How does the Premier ever expect anyone, especially Albertans, to trust her again with this disastrous record?

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the alt-facts machine is blowing quite a lot of smoke over there in the Official Opposition office. That was quite a list.

Mr. Speaker, what I will say is that we will continue on the plan that we've put into place. We made a choice. We will have Albertans' backs. We will support those important public services. We will support our schools and our hospitals. We will finally invest in infrastructure. We will create jobs, and we will not apologize for making life more affordable for Albertans, because that is the way you rebuild an economy, that's the way you support Albertans when things are down, and that's why we got elected.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Economic Conditions in Calgary

Mr. Jean: More affordable for Albertans? Well, on Friday new StatsCan data was released that shows that the median income in Calgary plunged more than 15 per cent, the second-worst decline on record for this city. Couple that with the current unemployment rate, and it's no surprise that Calgarians are having a tough time right now with this NDP government. Instead of doing no further harm, the NDP government continues to plunge ahead with policies damaging to our economy. Will the Premier just admit the truth, that her government doesn't have the backs of the people of Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know, of course, that people across Alberta are suffering as a result of the drop in the price of oil, and of course we know that that is the case in Calgary even though we still have the lowest overall taxes in the country. That's why we will not jack up their tuition rates. We will cut their school fees. We will protect them from skyrocketing electricity rates. Those are the things you do when people are already struggling. You don't pile on \$3.5 billion worth of cuts.

Mr. Jean: Fearmongering will not make what this NDP government says true, Mr. Speaker. The accusations are ridiculous. Here's how the NDP is actually helping Calgary: a carbon tax that is raising the price of groceries, gas, and too many other items to count; an increase in business taxes that is causing investments to flee downtown and all over Calgary and southern Alberta; and a lawsuit, of course, against Enmax over the NDP's lack of understanding about PPAs. And you guessed it, Mr. Speaker. It's against the people of Calgary. No wonder Calgarians feel ignored by this Premier and this NDP government. Why won't the Premier back down from her reckless policies, that are only hurting Calgarians when they can least afford it?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, what our government is doing is working with Calgary to help their economy renew. As we've said, the Conference Board of Canada is projecting that Calgary's economy will grow by 2.3 per cent this year, adding 9,000 jobs this year and 10,000 new jobs next year. We've been working with Calgary Economic Development to attract even more jobs to Calgary. Seventeen of the world's 20 largest investment banks have offices in Calgary. Calgary is home to the highest concentration of international headquarters in Canada. We are investing in infrastructure in Calgary each and every day, including a cancer hospital that those fellows over there couldn't make . . .

The Speaker: Hon. Premier, thank you. [interjections] Order, please.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, could the Premier please walk downtown in Calgary and see the people, see the devastation, see the 30 per cent vacancy? The NDP just doesn't get it. So many of their actions send direct signals to investors that Alberta is simply not open for business. Maybe if the Premier spent a bit of time in Calgary, she'd hear the same stories that I do of businesses that are barely getting by or that have had to close up shop because of the downturn. When

will the Premier realize that her government's policies are the straw that broke the camel's back when oil prices are low?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, when will the member opposite quit cheering for Albertans to fail? That's what he's doing right now. Over and over and over again we are seeing indications that things are slowly getting better. Is it better? No, Mr. Speaker. Do we have more to do? Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Do we have the lowest overall tax rate in the country still? Yes, Mr. Speaker. Have we brought in tax credits, both investment tax credits and capital tax credits, that will help business? Yes, Mr. Speaker. Is our member working every day with Calgary Economic Development to grow the economy in Calgary? Yes, Mr. Speaker, and we'll keep doing it. So stop with the exaggeration and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Provincial Credit Rating

(continued)

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. NDP government policy hasn't satisfied any credit-rating agency. They've taken us from a surplus and a triple-A credit rating down to a single-A plus as ranked by Standard & Poor's. We're now halfway from double-A, which is the highest investment grade, to speculative grade, which is sometimes referred to as junk bond status. This government's direction is clearly wrong and headed for worse. To the Premier: how can you and your Finance minister claim to have the backs of Albertans when you are on the path to a third-world credit rating?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, how can the member opposite care about the backs of Albertans while walking around throwing around statements like "third-world credit rating"? That's the kind of thing that scares away investment, not the good policies that this government is bringing into place, with 3.3 per cent growth this year. Now, I appreciate that that member opposite also doesn't want to engage in any kind of celebration of the green shoots that are going forward, but could he please refrain from the rhetorical name-calling of business leaders and the business climate here in Alberta?

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is the problem; businesspeople are the solution. She should learn that.

Alberta will run deficits of 26 per cent after capital expenditures according to Standard & Poor's. That's like a family with a \$60,000 income raising their credit card debt by over \$15,000. By 2020 the debt in the province will be \$94 billion, 180 per cent of operating. When I was on city council, the province made us stop our debt at 150 per cent of revenue. Is it possible the Premier could take the government's own advice and control the amount of debt which the government acknowledges through legislation . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, our government has taken a very clear approach to how we will help Albertans and Alberta businesses and Alberta citizens through these difficult economic times. Again, the same question that I gave to the member opposite also applies to his kissing cousins or whatever they are in the third party. What would they do? Would they cut \$3.5 billion in services – that's \$3.5 billion,

about 40 per cent of the Education budget – or would they raise taxes by \$3.5 billion? That's how we get out of the so-called junk bond rating that the member so callously threw out there. Which would he do? Come clean.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. News flash for the Premier: people with jobs pay more taxes and require less social services. That's how you do it, Premier. It's not that difficult. I just said that I'd help people get jobs. Standard & Poor's said that this has not happened. Standard & Poor's says that there's still a downside risk. We have to stop maxing out the credit card. Premier, will you direct your Finance minister to take a remedial course in budgeting so that you can get off this roller coaster, which is leading to third-world status, and will you do it now? Albertans need those jobs. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A clear little economics lesson here. When you raise taxes by \$3.5 billion and pull it out of the economy or when you cut services by \$3.5 billion, you know what doesn't happen? Jobs. That's what doesn't happen when you make those kinds of cuts. You know what does create jobs? Investing in infrastructure long overdue for many, many years, supporting important public services, and making life more affordable so people have more money in their pocket. This is what creates jobs. That is what is creating jobs, and that's why we're leading . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier. [interjection]
Hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, keep your volume down, please.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Auditor General Recommendations on Health Care

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Auditor General released a groundbreaking report on Alberta's health care system, including a recommendation that funding should be linked to outcomes. He argues for the use of market mechanisms within a public health care system, and I couldn't agree more. Let me be very clear. I believe passionately in public health care, and this report says nothing about privatization, but we know we need to set aspirational goals to deliver better care to more people for the same amount of money. To the Minister of Health: do you accept this recommendation, and if so, when are you going to link funding to outcomes?

2:10

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Auditor General for his report. His ideas support our push to make life better for Albertans by improving access to team-based care, integrated care in their communities. That's why we're better integrating doctors and supporting better care for patients through our new AMA agreement. This work is well under way. I'm very proud of it. Instead of pushing for rash, ideological cuts, as both conservative parties, three conservative parties, one conservative party want to push for on the other side, we're making life better and working with front-line workers to do that. I'm so proud of our progress.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I'm over here, and I'm not part of any of those parties, and I never will be, so I'd appreciate an answer to my question.

The Auditor General called for bold action, for taking a quantum leap rather than incremental changes, but I've seen no evidence that this government is up to the task. Albertans pay more for health care here than anywhere else in Canada, and we need leadership to ensure that we get what we pay for. Again to the Minister of Health. Your changes to date are just nibbling around the edges. Will you commit to making the fundamental transformational changes that the Auditor General called for?

Ms Hoffman: If the member opposite wants to pretend he's not united with the other folks, maybe he should look at his own voting record, Mr. Speaker.

I have to say that we deserve better integration, and we're proud to move forward on that, Mr. Speaker. That's why we're investing \$400 million to better integrate and share information across the health care system, improving access to accountability within primary care networks. We have been working and making very significant progress in partnership. We're working with health professionals, not doing things to them. I'm so proud of the paramedics who are in our audience, who are doing work around the Health Professions Act. They're expanding their scope of practice as well, making health care better for every Albertan.

Mr. Clark: I'll put my voting record up against theirs and yours because Albertans know there's a middle way and a better way, Mr. Speaker.

The Auditor General also found significant overlap between Alberta Health and AHS. This is something we've known for a long time, and it's certainly a legacy of the previous government. But they're not in charge anymore, Mr. Speaker. This government is, so it's time to stop making excuses. Again to the Minister of Health: what specifically are you doing to eliminate duplication between Alberta Health and AHS, and what metrics are you using to track your progress?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I am so proud of the work we're doing, the fact that we are working together as many different parts to make health care better instead of having infighting between two different organizations. We've been very effective in moving things forward. There isn't a parallel management function between the two organizations but, rather, a close working relationship that determines how policies will be reflected and the services delivered for Albertans. Alberta Health sets the policies. AHS carries them out on the front lines through front-line health care providers, including the paramedics who are here today. For example, AHS sets continuing care standards. AH sets them; AHS implements them. That's the right division of power.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Economic Recovery

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the low price of oil, the last two years have been hard on Alberta families and Alberta businesses. In Calgary-Currie we are now seeing signs that Alberta is emerging from one of the worst recessions in a generation. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: what are the latest economic indicators saying about the provincial economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for being a very strong advocate for the business community. I'm happy to share that full-time employment rose for the third straight month, reaching the highest level in the past year. Last year we led the country in private-sector investment and are on track to lead the country again this year. Rig drilling is up a hundred per cent. Our exports are up 68 per cent over the same time last year. Manufacturing was up in March and reached \$5.8 billion. Housing starts are up. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business reported that small-business confidence is up, at its highest level since 2014.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that my constituents and Albertans across the province are anxious about the recovery of the economy and the creation of jobs, to the same minister: what are you hearing from economic forecasters about the provincial economy going forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's economy will be the fastest growing this year. The Conference Board of Canada increased its projection of GDP growth to 3.3 per cent, the highest in the country. I can tell you that they said that nonconventional oil production in the province will see a big increase this year thanks to new capacity. Energy investment is expected to make a comeback this year and next year. Outside of the energy sector Alberta is benefiting from improvements in labour markets, consumer demand, and the housing sector, and I can tell you that the manufacturing sector has also been bolstered significantly by the new . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans have been on a resource roller coaster due to the previous government's inability to diversify the economy, to the same minister: what industries outside of the energy sector are facilitating Alberta's economic recovery?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? I'm proud of the work our government is doing to diversify the economy. We've got the Official Opposition, who doesn't believe in diversification, and the third party, that failed to diversify the economy. I can tell you that in manufacturing, Ford is opening a new parts and distribution warehouse in Leduc. Champion Petfoods is building a 37,000-square-foot facility in Parkland county. In tourism our market monitor shows the province's national parks are experiencing record visitation, and Edmonton will host the first-ever international Cities and Climate Change Science Conference, that will welcome up to a thousand representatives. I encourage the opposition . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister

Auditor General Recommendations on Health Care (continued)

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, last week the Auditor General released a report about how the health care system is still failing patients. The

AG was clear when he said that putting more money into the system is not the answer. This government thinks that spending millions on government-run linen services is a priority. For two years the NDP has shown no will to get costs under control, and they've attacked the opposition for proposing good ideas that would not affect the front lines. Does this NDP government finally understand that they can't simply keep throwing money at the problem?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You mean, like, not firing teachers? He says that that's throwing money at the problem. You mean not firing nurses, protecting front-line services? I'm proud to do that. While his dance partners saw increases in health expenditure in excess of 6 per cent regularly, we've gotten them down to 3 and a half per cent. So if you want to talk about who's got better control of making sure we're making life better for Albertans and spending on important services that Albertans care about, it's the NDP government.

Mr. Yao: It's easy to spend somebody else's money, Mr. Speaker.

Here's another quote from the AG. "Albertans [deserve] the best. Why would they not [expect] the best?" Given that Health is one of the biggest line items in our budget and given that the AG has said that our weakness has many organizational weaknesses in areas as far-reaching as from information management to the integration of allied health services, is the minister planning on implementing the AG's recommendations which seek to empower patients and front-line workers? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's one of the reasons why we're proud to be investing in the very skills and services that the OAG recommends. That's why we're spending \$400 million to ensure that Albertans can have access to better integration of their own patient information through the clinical information system. We're so proud of that. Members opposite want to push for deep, ideological cuts. We're actually moving forward with reasonable investments to make sure that patients can be partners in their care and have better care tomorrow than they did yesterday. I'll tell you that the members opposite say that they are doing nothing that would compromise front-line care, for the rich. They want to move forward with two-tiered, privatized health care, and we won't stand for that.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, this government does promote and support private health care. Let's be clear.

The AG makes it crystal clear that these recommendations are necessary and long overdue. Given that the NDP said that they were going to implement changes in the health care system but quickly adopted the status quo of inefficient centralized health care and given that the Auditor said that change will not be possible until health care shifts its weight from the bureaucracy, how is the minister going to fix our health care system when she barely admits that there's a problem, and what's her timeline?

Ms Hoffman: Every day, Mr. Speaker, I talk to Albertans, and when I see them, I say: how do you feel about the health care services you're getting? The vast, vast majority are very proud. They're proud to have a public health care system. Is there room for improvement? Yes. Do they want us to cut billions of dollars from health care? No way. They want to see strategic, smart investment that will enable them to get better public health care tomorrow than they had

yesterday, and that's exactly what they're getting from this government instead of deep, ideological cuts from the opposition.

2:20 Provincial Credit Rating
(continued)

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, last week I quoted Polonius' advice to Laertes from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Now, among other things Polonius advised his son:

Neither a borrower nor a lender be,
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.

To the Finance minister. I understand you played Laertes in school. Now, you've borrowed a lot, and Standard & Poor's clearly stated that all that borrowing has dulled the edge of your husbandry. Minister, when are you going to sharpen up?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed my high school years. I also played Tybalt in I think it was *Romeo and Juliet*.

With regard to the debt and the deficit I have said many times in this House that we will thoughtfully and prudently bring down our deficit. It's going to be a third reduced from where it is today at the end of our fiscal plan. That's the fiscal plan we have before us right now. We know that Albertans want us to control that. We are controlling our spending. We're looking to the future. The economy is coming back, and the Conference Board of Canada said that it's going to grow 3.3 per cent . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister is now playing that role.

Given that the Fraser Forum has shown that the increase in this government's spending over the last two years is the highest of any Canadian province, at 10.99 per cent, and given this government's refusal to even attempt to rein in its spending, which is cited by Standard & Poor's as a major consideration in its credit downgrade, to the minister. You've brushed off this two-step downgrade and the messages it is sending you. When do you intend to give up the position you've earned as the most profligate of Canada's finance ministers?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great opportunity to talk about some of the things we have done that will get us back to balance. We are finding savings by cutting CEOs' salaries, something that side left in place for far too long. We are cutting salaries and services by 2 per cent. We saved \$121 million by doing that. We froze management's salaries, cabinet ministers', MLAs', political staff's. We have amalgamated or dissolved public agencies, something that side left in place for far too long. We're making lives better for Albertans. They would make it worse.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, given that this credit rating has real consequences as Alberta sinks ever deeper into this government's pit of debt and given that each credit downgrade makes it harder and more expensive for our government to debt finance both capital and, thanks to this government, operational spending, to the minister. Here's your chance to show the world how firm a handle you have on things. You must know this, so tell Albertans: what is the estimated increase in the cost of borrowing caused by this latest credit downgrade?

Mr. Ceci: You know, Mr. Speaker, I've said it before. I'll say it in this House: \$3.4 million is a cost that we will have to bear, but I think that is far better than cutting billions of dollars out of the budget, billions of dollars that would make life more difficult for

Albertans, billions of dollars that would probably come from raising taxes or cutting services. That's not what Albertans want. We've got the lowest tax structure. We're going to keep it there. We're growing faster than any other province.

2014 Commercial Fishery Closures

Mr. Loewen: Commercial fishing across Alberta was shut down in 2014. At that time the minister committed to fair compensation. Now this government has changed from compensation to goodwill payments, which are only about a third of the previous compensation discussed. This government is giving billions of dollars to coal generators to shut down. Do you feel what you're doing is fair to commercial fishers?

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

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, our government took swift action to protect our fish population from whirling disease. The day after whirling disease was detected in Banff national park by the federal government, we signed a ministerial order outlining our three-point action plan to educate Albertans. In order to expedite communication with key stakeholders, including commercial fishery operations, we formed a whirling disease committee. That had been disbanded by the Wildrose's new dance partner. We are investing, and we will have more to say about commercial fisheries in the supplementals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Loewen: Given that I'm talking about the 2014 commercial fisheries shutdown, not the 2017 . . .

The Speaker: No preamble on this question.

Mr. Loewen: . . . whirling disease issue, and given that much of the commercial fishing is conducted by indigenous and Métis individuals and companies and since these communities need jobs and it is an important employment income source for many indigenous families, not to mention that it helps to diversify the economy, something this government talks about all the time, and given that government is at least giving lip service to communities that are affected by the coal phase-out, what has this government done to help these families and communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, with the commercial fisheries we have discussed the ex gratia payments, and I'm advised by the Minister of Indigenous Relations that indigenous communities support these ex gratia payments. Those arrangements are now concluded. We have worked hard with those communities to ensure that that structure is relevant and fair to all parties involved.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Loewen: Given that to this day the Minister of Environment and Parks has not met with the commercial fishers and since this is not surprising based on this government's record with consultation, will the minister extend the deadline for commercial fishers to accept payouts beyond the June 15 deadline and commit today to meet with an industry that is clearly under her mandate and deeply affected by government policy? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the decision to close the commercial fishery came as a result of decisions made by the PC environment minister, so the member may want to bring

this matter up at the next Unite the Right meeting. However, we will take the matter under advisement, and we will ensure that all parties are treated fairly through the ex gratia payment process and through subsequent processes for rural economic development in our province.

Thank you.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, it was in November of 2015 when this government first introduced their flawed Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act. This labour bill under the guise of a farm safety bill was rolled out with notoriously little consultation, sadly, a theme that Albertans would become all too familiar with. The uproar and resentment that this bill created still resonates today. What I would like to know from the Minister of Labour is: if this bill was about safety, then why were the safety aspects of the bill not the priority yet the labour portions of the bill were?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. This government, as do most Albertans, realizes that basic workers' rights are important for all Albertans. As far as farm and ranch workers, they now, finally, enjoy rights that most Albertans enjoy, that all farmers across Canada enjoy, and for that we are extremely proud. We're glad of the work that we're doing, making all Albertans' lives better, including farm and ranch workers.

Mr. Schneider: Congratulations to the minister on his promotion to Labour.

Given that a year and a half after the outrageous way that Bill 6 was dumped on farmers and ranchers the only safety aspect provided to us currently consists of OH and S being responsible for accident investigations and workers being allowed to refuse unsafe work and given that it appears that an OH and S bureaucrat could show up in a farmer's yard one morning and start writing tickets, Minister, do you have an update on the OH and S round-tables? Will the forthcoming regulations consist of purely punitive penalties, or will there actually be an educational component for these farmers and ranchers?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. There are aspects of the occupational health and safety that are continuing to be worked on. It's not a stagnant thing. We do not all of a sudden reach a point where things don't change. Agriculture, as any industry, changes continuously. Those conversations with the agriculture community will continue; for instance, making sure that we define more clearly what constitutes dangerous work for youth workers. We're going to ensure that this legislation and other legislation will ensure that all of our workers, especially our youth workers, are protected while they learn and experience agriculture.

Mr. Schneider: Given that the Supreme Court ruled on the right of collective bargaining and the right to strike and given that there is still a great deal of rural distrust with this government and getting to be more by the day, actually, will the same minister please clarify who determines what constitutes a public emergency sufficient enough to stop the compassionate care of livestock or irreversible damage to crops? Do farmers and ranchers get to do that, I wonder,

or will it be some bureaucrat that's charged with that responsibility, you know, to make lives better for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

2:30

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Yes, we do make life better for Albertans, and we'll continue to do so. It's the belief of this government and most Albertans, most Canadians that workers should have basic human rights, and that includes labour legislation. I would encourage the member opposite to look perhaps even to our cousins to the east, where they've had labour legislation that allows workers to unionize for decades – decades – and now we have something that exists here in Alberta. If you looked again to our friends to the east, you'd realize that very little unionization goes on.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

School Fees

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the government introduced Bill 1, they stood in this House and claimed that they were going to make life better for Albertans. Well, Albertans, apparently, didn't get the memo. I attended a meeting last Thursday where concerned parents of school-aged children talked about how the school boards' reaction to Bill 1, including changing bell times and a move to more city transit for alternative programs, would actually cost them more money and force their children to take longer, more dangerous commutes. To the Minister of Education: why are you making life harder for these families?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, you know, it's a good reminder that Bill 1 is An Act to Reduce School Fees. Almost 600,000 families across the province will see a reduction in their school fees in Alberta, particularly in the city of Calgary, too. We're working closely with boards to maintain and to make sure that we look for other ways by which we can reduce school fees. With the co-operation of parents and schools and boards I know that we can achieve that goal.

Mr. Fraser: Given the number of families that elect to have their children educated in alternative programs that emphasize cultural or second-language learning and given that this diversity in education both reflects and strengthens the cultural diversity of this province and given that Bill 1 is causing costs associated with these programs such as transportation to rise, to the same minister: was the decision to exclude certain programs from fee reductions designed to discourage participation in alternative programs, or is it the result of insufficient consultation with school boards and parents?

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we hear the members opposite talking about credit ratings and cuts and so forth, the main reason that we were working with Bill 1 as An Act to Reduce School Fees and not eliminate them is because we have fiscal realities to deal with. So, yes, we are reducing school fees in different areas, and we will expand that as we get an opportunity to do so. You can't talk out of both sides of your mouth. You know, you talk about making massive cuts and then wanting more programming to reduce school fees. We at least have a coherent plan to reduce school fees here in the province.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, the minister should focus on children, education, and families, not the other things.

Given that this government has increased spending by billions of dollars on your priorities, including subsidized light bulb installation, and given the relatively minuscule cost of extending fee reductions to important alternative education programs and given that this government has consistently claimed that education and making life more affordable for Albertans are some of their top priorities, to the same minister: if you're willing to spend billions on your priorities and unwilling to spend a few million to make alternative programs affordable, are you saying that these families simply aren't a priority?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, when building Bill 1, part of it was to make sure that the landscape that was created by the previous government, where it was the Wild West of school fees all over the place – we're bringing them in, we're lassoing them in, and making sure that we make life affordable for Alberta families, particularly in September. We will see literally 600,000 people with a reduced school fee bill in September as opposed to the many years when the member opposite and his government were in office.

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

Adult Literacy

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that roughly 1 in 5 Albertans has a low literacy rate and this impedes their progress and chances of getting good jobs. To the Minister of Advanced Education: given that adult learning is a crucial tool for improving literacy and other essential skills, what is our government doing to support adult learning programs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that important question. We know that literacy is absolutely fundamental to making Albertans' lives better, and that's why it's a key priority for our government. Through the community adult learning program more than 125 organizations deliver adult learning to over 600 communities in Alberta. Earlier this month in Calgary I was proud to announce our government's Budget 2017 commitment of \$18 million to these programs, an increase of \$900,000 from the previous year. This increase means that our partner organizations will have more tools to reach more Albertans who struggle with literacy, and this will help ensure that Albertans have the literacy and skills they need to succeed and get a good job.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like the rest of the province, Calgarians deserve to have the best chance at success, and this includes helping those in our cities struggling with literacy. Again to the Minister of Advanced Education: how is your ministry specifically supporting Calgary in this area?

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for advocating for foundational learning needs in Calgary. Recently I had the pleasure of helping recognize outstanding Albertans at the life of learning awards in Calgary, organized by one of our partners, called Calgary Learns. My ministry recently provided an additional \$500,000 to Calgary Learns so that they can meet higher demands for literacy and other essential skills in the Calgary region. In the

previous year Calgary Learns served over 2,000 people looking to improve their literacy. We're also proud to support other providers like Bow Valley College, Immigrant Services Calgary in the important work they do, important work that they wouldn't be able to do with the \$600 million . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The second supplemental.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how does our government's support for community and adult learning make life better for Albertans in my city and across the province?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, community adult learning programs open doors for Albertans that the opposition wants to shut. These programs ensure that Albertans have not only the skills to make their lives better but also the encouragement and support to persevere because it can be overwhelming to take the first step to overcoming literacy barriers on your own. At the life of learning awards I had the honour of meeting several outstanding Calgarians with stories of bravery in the face of learning deficiencies. One young woman, who had a serious brain injury, came forward and got the help that she needed from Calgary Learns and is now enrolled in a program at college which will help her find meaningful work and success. These programs are crucial to making Albertans' lives better.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

British Columbia Provincial Election

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, in just a few minutes from now the NDP in British Columbia and the Green Party are set to announce that they are about to cut a deal to form government. It's clear that this will not be good for the interests of Alberta. Both parties said that they oppose Kinder Morgan. Both oppose LNG exports. To the Premier: what is your government going to do to ensure that your friends out west don't hurt Albertans here at home?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Again, we extend our congratulations to all three parties on their electoral success in the last election. We are proud to work with whoever is in the Premier's office and their cabinet. But do you know who we're going to be working for? We're going to be working for Albertans. We've done that every day. That's why we brought in a leadership plan that got us two pipeline approvals. We've been continuing to speak with the federal government and with others, and those pipelines: we're committed to seeing them forward. That's why we got intervenor status, because we are standing up for Alberta jobs and Alberta pipelines.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that we just heard the Alberta NDP has sought intervenor status and so has the British Columbia NDP and Green Party, my question to the Deputy Premier is: where exactly are her oil sands advisors going to come down in the courtroom, with Albertans or with the British Columbia NDP?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, unlike the members opposite, I am proud of our energy industry. Our government on this side of the House was proud when Kinder Morgan stood up on Friday, with not a peep from the other side of the House, when they made their final investment decision. That's \$7 billion of new investment that's going to move our energy industry forward. Instead of getting out their

pompoms and cheerleading for Alberta's demise, stand up for this province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what we're doing. We're standing up for Albertans right here, right now because the British Columbia NDP and British Columbia Greens are anti-oil and antipipeline approval, and the folks on that side of the House have all been there at one point in time. My question to the Deputy Premier is: what exactly is she going to do to ensure that Alberta interests are heard while her friends and colleagues are working every day against Alberta?

2:40

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am so proud to have a government and a Premier that has been respectful and has engaged in real, meaningful action, and as a result we got two federal approvals. That's significant. The proof is in the pipelines. We're going to keep moving forward, standing up for Alberta jobs, Alberta pipelines, and making sure we get the very best opportunities for not just Alberta's economy but Canada's economy to succeed. This can be done while protecting the environment, and we've proven just that.

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

Child and Youth Advocate Death Review

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Child and Youth Advocate plays a vitally important role in our province because he's the voice for children who either cannot speak or whose voices are not heard. Last week the advocate released a report on Levi, whose voice was muted at best, ignored at worst. In response to the advocate's report the minister says that her government, quote, accepts these important recommendations, unquote. Minister: what is the exact procedure in your office when the Child and Youth Advocate releases a report?

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

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I want to say that it is absolutely heartbreaking that Levi did not get the support that he needed, and our thoughts continue to be with his family and with his community. Again, these recommendations are important and need to be acted on closely. Certainly, my staff within Children's Services will work closely with the Child and Youth Advocate to talk about what the best way is to move forward to implement those recommendations. It is completely unacceptable what happened to Levi, and that should never happen again. We're committed to moving forward and making the system better for the vulnerable children in this province.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in his report on Levi's lonely suicide, which was the end result of lifelong neglect, the advocate recommends that the department pay serious attention to a child's needs and given that these recommendations have been made numerous times and this government has had two years and two ministers to address them, Minister: what have you done, personally, since becoming a minister to ensure that the system never again loses track of neglected children like Levi or Serenity?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud of the record that this government has in advocating for vulnerable children in this province before we became government and, certainly, as government. We've invested in the child intervention system. We've invested in families in the province with the Alberta child benefit. We have moved forward with the most open review of the child intervention system with the ministerial panel to talk about moving forward. We moved from recommendations on the child death review, just a month ago received, to introducing . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gill: Given that the advocate is critical of a system that pays more heed to the needs and the wants of parents than that of children and given that the United Nations convention on the rights of the child states that every child has the right to participate in the decisions that affect them and to have their opinion seriously considered and given that this convention should inform every decision made by every staff member, minister: since your business plan makes no mention of this powerful international convention, does this mean it is of no consequence to your ministry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely, the best interests of the vulnerable youth and children in this province are the primary focus of this ministry. It is very clear that when it comes to Levi, the ministry did not do everything possible to support that young man. Again, that is completely unacceptable. When a young person asks for help, as Levi did, we must do whatever we can to support them. Yes, we will work with the Child and Youth Advocate to make sure that the vulnerable youth and children of this province have the voice that they have deserved for so long in a system that was neglected for . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. members, we will proceed with Members' Statements in 30 seconds.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Tourism Week

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is the start of Tourism Week in Canada, and we couldn't be more proud of our dynamic and resilient tourism industry. That's because Alberta's reputation as a world-class tourist destination continues to grow. Publications like *National Geographic*, *Lonely Planet*, the *New York Times*, *TripAdvisor*, and many more have put Alberta on the top of their list of best places to visit in 2017.

And why not? Because whether it's digging for dinosaurs in the Canadian badlands or canoeing in paradise in our provincial parks, going ice fishing with bannock in the bag, following the northern lights like a few nights ago in Elk Island, driving the scenic highways in the breathtaking Rockies, attending the Stampede in Calgary, walking through our mixed-woods forests, gazing at the wind farms of Pincher Creek, or exploring the centuries-old heritage of indigenous peoples right here in Alberta, our province has it all, Mr. Speaker. Some of my personal favourites include the pysanka in Vegreville, the perogy in Glendon, and, of course, our *Star Trek* landing pad in Vulcan along with their themed hotel and museum.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the fact that the government of Alberta is investing in indigenous tourism and providing the Aboriginal Tourism Association of Canada with a \$100,000 grant to help establish a provincial indigenous tourism organization to grow tourism-related businesses across this province. The economic impact of tourism is huge. Tourism in Alberta is an \$8 billion industry, supporting more than 19,000 businesses and 127,000 jobs. That's why growing Alberta's tourism industry is a key priority for our government. It creates jobs, it diversifies our economy, and it makes lives better for Albertans.

I encourage everyone this week to participate in Tourism Week. This week provides an opportunity for organizations, regions, cities, towns, and everyday Albertans to collaborate and to promote Alberta as a tourism destination for the world and as a fantastic place to live. Mr. Speaker, when tourism works, we all work.

Dave Kirschner
Fort McMurray Continuing Care Facility

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, Dave Kirschner was a tireless advocate for my community, and he dedicated his life to making Fort McMurray a better place. In 1978 he moved to Fort McMurray with his loving wife, Iris, to start a trucking company. They made Fort McMurray home and started a family. They helped found the food bank in Fort McMurray as well as our first homeless shelter. Throughout the years Dave devoted so much of his time, talent, and treasure to charitable organizations throughout our community. He even served a term on council.

He spent years advocating for a continuing care facility in town, many years before it was even known that he himself would need this. Sadly, when Dave was diagnosed in 2011 with multiple systems atrophy, a rare neurological disorder, they had to leave their home, their family, and their friends in Fort McMurray in order to get the care that Dave needed. The Kirschners were keen to return to Fort McMurray upon the completion of the continuing care facility.

Arguments have been made that Fort McMurray doesn't need a facility as seniors don't want to retire in Fort McMurray; however, this is not the case. They don't stay because there is no place for them, from the indigenous community that have lived here for generations to those that followed their children, that live and work in Fort McMurray, to be closer to their grandkids or those that simply call Fort McMurray home. Willow Square, our continuing care facility, still has not been built. In fact, there aren't even shovels in the ground, and this is despite countless announcements by almost as many governments and Premiers. This lack of a continuing care facility hurts our community and forces many to leave town to get the care they need.

Sadly, Dave passed away yesterday before getting a chance to see Willow Square completed, as is, sadly, the case for far too many of our seniors. Rest in peace, Dave, and God bless.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table three petitions, all with the appropriate number of copies, sponsored by some of my constituents in Edmonton-Decore. The first petition urges the government of Alberta to "introduce legislation to amend the Labour Relations Code to prohibit the practice" of what's known in some industries as "double-breasting."

The second petition that I would also like to table is sponsored again by some of my constituents. This petition urges the government of Alberta to

- (1) construct a memorial on public land adjacent to Highway 63 near Fort McMurray to honour the skilled trade workers who have been injured or killed . . . on oil sands projects and to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the production of the first barrel of oil from Alberta's oil sands on September 30, 2017; and
- (2) introduce legislation to recognize May 1st in Alberta as an annual statutory holiday known as "International Workers' Day".

Third, a petition to urge the government of Alberta to

- (1) repeal sections 34(1)(e) and 38(2) of the Labour Relations Code, to remove the prohibition on certifying a trade union as a bargaining agent when engaged in certain types of picketing;
- (2) end the practice of grouping trade unions by repealing section 172 of the Labour Relations Code, and making any necessary consequential amendments to the legislation; and
- (3) repeal amendments to the Labour Relations Code contained in the Labour Relations Amendment Act, 2008.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. One is the legal definition of a junk bond. The other one is the definition of a junk bond.

The next one, which I shared with the Finance minister today, is Standard & Poor's Ratings Services Guide to Credit Rating Essentials: What Are Credit Ratings and How Do They Work?

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

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a report from the Fraser Forum entitled Alberta Leads the Country in Spending Growth.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 206

**Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption
Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017**

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, good afternoon. It is my absolute pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill 206.

This bill amends the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act to change the restriction on advertising for prospective adoptive parents here in Alberta. Up until now in Alberta parents hoping to adopt a child have not been able to advertise a profile online. In Ontario, Yukon, and British Columbia prospective adoptive parents create profiles for expectant parents to look at.

We know that how we communicate has changed, dramatically actually. Most people are now more comfortable learning, researching, and interacting online, and because of this, both adoption agencies and government provide in-depth information about the adoption process on websites. Many agencies provide text lines so

that expectant parents can reach out to them by text as well as by phone or e-mail.

It's really important that it's as easy and as accessible as possible for people who need the support and information to be able to access it. Hopefully, they're able to use whatever means necessary, that they're most comfortable with, so that when considering adoption, it can be a process that – right now I think for anybody who's been through this process, it's an extremely stressful and overwhelming time, so if there's some way that we can help to reduce some of that stress and have the ability to bring families together. We know that it would be easier also for the expecting parents to look at profiles online and do this at their own pace and participate even more so in the process.

Many of those who work to make adoptions possible have said that the restrictions need to change. There is even concern that birth parents, expectant moms, and parents in Alberta are finding parents from other provinces because prospective parents in Alberta just simply are not able to post their profiles online and connect with them as easily. For example, the website Canada Adopts, which posts the profiles of parents, has been in operation since 2001. I really hope that Alberta families can soon be eligible to use that service.

There is also an inconsistency that needs to be corrected. For a long time now – and I found this very interesting – it's been possible for Alberta children who are waiting for adoption to be profiled online. You may have seen certain things like *Wednesday's Child* on the website or on TV, but adoptive parents have not been able to post their profiles. This is part of the law in Alberta that doesn't seem to make a whole lot of sense, and I believe that that needs to change.

This bill, if passed, doesn't allow prospective parents to post a profile without some guidelines. Obviously, we need to make sure that we're protecting these precious children and make sure that all of the necessary guidelines are there to make sure we protect all of the families and children that are involved, especially the expectant families. But it's important to make sure that prospective parents have the ability and are able to take the required steps by the province to be eligible for adoption and that they have worked with the adoption agencies before they publicly share their profile.

I would especially like to thank the NDP MLA for Calgary-East for introducing the private member's motion addressing the issue of prospective adoptive families being able to post information online. Thank you so much for doing that. Advocates for open adoptions have been saying this for some time in Alberta, and the government needs to update this little-known publication ban.

They say that it's putting local adoptive parents at a disadvantage when it comes to matching new babies with parents. Under the current legislation, Mr. Speaker, Alberta couples are not allowed to create public profiles of themselves on websites such as canadaadopts.com. This site helps match prospective adopters with birth parents and expectant moms and families from across the country. Many, many families are extremely frustrated. They're stressed and trying desperately to complete their families, and they've waited for many years to do this. To bring these families together, expecting moms and families looking to place these precious babies for adoption deserve to have access to a system that helps them advocate on behalf of their unborn child and helps to reduce the stigma around adoption.

There are so many reasons why expecting moms and parents may create an adoption plan, and it's imperative that we look at making the system as fluid and as open as possible. These expecting moms are heroes to many families who are looking to adopt, and this gives the expecting moms a chance to take a look as well. Being able to look at the profiles really, really engages them in being part of the

process. We want to give everyone who is part of this process acknowledgement and to acknowledge the struggles and the sacrifice it takes to entrust a child with new parents. I can't even imagine all that I've been able to experience from my perspective of seeing friends and family that I just adore who have gone through this process and have been able to complete their families through adoption. I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that it's just a miracle when you see these families come together.

This is really about embracing the future and providing different options, offering chances to adopting parents. This legislation will bring us one step closer to the goal of an expecting mom finding a forever home for her baby. The decision to adopt, the decision to place a child up for adoption is a journey that is emotional, and it tests a family to its very core. Many families looking to adopt have gone through many, many unsuccessful cycles of fertility, drugs, testing, and years and years of waiting. This process to adopt is stressful, and the process takes a long time. We need to open the doors so that these families can begin their lives together, and this legislation certainly helps that.

It's time to bring this legislation into the 21st century and allow parents to advertise their profiles online. This is about providing all the information to prospective expecting moms and to the adoptive families. This normalizes the process and, again, removes stigmas and is a beautiful option for an expecting family willing to consider putting their child up for adoption. This lack of access is heart-breaking for so many families who are looking to adopt and for those expecting families looking to place their child into the system for adoption. Expecting parents are giving the greatest, most precious gift possible to these waiting families. Adoption is an expression of complete love on both sides.

3:00

Bill 206 allows “the publication of an advertisement by a licensed adoption agency publicizing the profiles of prospective adoptive parents that meets the requirements prescribed in the regulations.” This bill is meant to change the act and begin the conversation with the government, with Alberta's adoption agencies, and with prospective adoptive parents so that we can develop the best possible guidelines and rules. It is time to update the law, Mr. Speaker, here in Alberta to keep up with the times, and we need to be sure, we need to be absolutely certain that we do it right. I am looking extremely forward to the debate and to the feedback from all parties and stakeholders, who I know will have an immense number of suggestions and thoughtful common sense for how to make these changes.

I ask that all members of this House support this legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have risen in the House before to discuss this very important topic, to discuss issues that are addressing potential adoptive families. Adoption is really a wonderful thing, and we should be as supportive as we can of both birth families and adoptive families who choose this option here in Alberta. I would like to thank the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View for bringing forward this bill, for continuing some of the work that I started last session, and for bringing it forward in bill form. I appreciate that this is an issue that I think we agree on. We share a common interest in modernizing a regulation that's out of date, and through doing this we can help to give a little bit more hope to families who are looking to adopt here in Alberta.

I do have some questions surrounding this bill, and I think the member explained it a little bit more to me in the course of her

speech, about looking to flesh this out, perhaps, a little bit more in the regulations and talking to adoption agencies. As it reads right now, to me, anyway, it says that it would allow “the publication of an advertisement by a licensed adoption agency publicizing the profiles of prospective adoptive parents that meets the requirements prescribed in the regulations.”

My question, I suppose, is: does this mean that the only people who can publish a profile are private adoption agencies? If so, would they be using a website such as Canada Adopts? Most of the folks who came to me who had concerns were upset about not being able to publish a profile on Canada Adopts. These were people who were often registered with, you know, the government of Alberta who were looking to adopt potential children out of care in Alberta. They were people who had looked at private agencies and had found them to be very expensive. They saw Canada Adopts as an option to help them be able to connect with somebody outside of using a fully private agency.

I do know it's very important that we get this right. It's very important that we protect potential adoptive children. It's very important that, you know, the regulations are in place to make sure that no one is offering money in exchange for potential adoptive children, so it is something that we have to look at very closely. Those were just some questions that I had, and potentially we will be able to look at them going forward in Committee of the Whole.

It was disappointing that, you know, when you start talking about this, you start hearing stories from parents all over the province who have had issues with this. I've heard from parents who have been actively discouraged in seeking another child for their family because they're told that they're too old – right? – or I've had parents who have been actively discouraged because agencies thought that they didn't have a high enough income to support an adoptive child, and that can be just really crushing to families who are really looking to open their hearts and open their homes to love another child. So looking at those issues, what can we do to work at reducing stigma, reducing discrimination based on certain factors for people who could really provide wonderful, loving homes for children in Alberta?

I do just want to take this opportunity to speak a little bit more about my story because I think it's really indicative of how adoption can come together and be a fantastic example of how a family can work. It occurred to me when I was speaking to my motion that I talked about myself being adopted, but I hadn't mentioned my brother at all. A typical first child, I just, you know, forgot that he existed. I think it really is an additional bit of the story that is worth telling.

My family adopted me locally, obviously, out of British Columbia through the public adoption system in British Columbia in the '80s, but my brother is an international adoption, so he's actually from Bolivia. The way that that happened was – so when I was about three years old, my family had a Rotary exchange student from Bolivia. My dad was a lawyer at the time. She had come and spent a year with us and was lovely. We're friends on Facebook now.

When she went back to Bolivia – her dad was a doctor who worked at a hospital in Bolivia. It just so happened that he was present at the delivery of a baby boy whose parents couldn't care for him and left him at the hospital. We got a call in Canada, my mom and dad did, that said: “Hey, we have a baby. Are you interested in potentially coming to get him?” You know, it was the '80s. Regulations were maybe a little lax back then, but my parents, you know, talked about it and thought about it and were, like: “Yeah, we can do this.” They flew down to Bolivia to pick up my little brother.

It did take a while, so they had to spend – and I don't remember because I was four, but it was a longish period of time. It was maybe four or five months that I was staying with my grandparents while my parents were going through the legal work and paperwork and everything that had to be done in Bolivia to bring home this baby.

Anyway, they finally did. They managed to, you know, get all the paperwork done, and they brought home this baby. I remember being very excited, and, you know, I saw my mom come through the doors at the airport in Vancouver, and I ran to greet her. They let me in behind the little partition because she had to wait because she had this baby who was from out of the country. I got my first look at him, and he was just skinny and covered in this rash. He had this really awful rash, and I was, like, “Uh, Mom, can we, like, send him back?” and she was, like: “No, we can't. We have to keep him.”

That was my little brother, Pete. Over the course of growing up together we were siblings like any other siblings are, but we look quite different. I could easily pass. If my family had only ever adopted me, we could have easily passed as any other regular family. In fact, quite often when I was a child and we were in grocery stores, people would go, “Oh, you look so much like your mom,” and I, being a child, would go, “No, I don't; I'm adopted,” because my parents did a really excellent job of making me feel special and letting me know that being adopted was a result of being loved so much by so many people. I was proud and happy to tell people that.

My brother, on the other hand – growing up, we would play with each other, and it really opened my eyes to the challenges of adoption because he did look different from us. Unfortunately, there was a lot of racism in my small town growing up. I remember just playing in the school yard with him and having boys pick on him and say, like, “You don't look like us; where are you from?” and having to stand up for him and being, like, “That's my brother. You leave him alone. He's from Bolivia,” and just having to deal with bullies.

He once, while he was in school, had a teacher straight up tell him that he was lying when he said that he was from Bolivia. He was, like, “I'm from Bolivia; I'm adopted,” and a teacher told him “No, you're not,” – right? – because he looks a lot like many of the First Nations people who live in my town. They thought that he was making up a story. There are issues of racism and feeling different when you do go through international adoptions. That's always something that's important to consider when that's something the families are looking at.

The other things were just the challenges like: he didn't get a Canadian passport until he was six years old, I think. It took six years to get him his Canadian passport, and when that happened, my grandparents took us all on a trip to Disneyland because he could finally leave the country. It was wonderful for all of us that we got to celebrate my brother finally fully being Canadian, but that was another challenge that existed with adoption as well.

3:10

The third thing is that it's expensive. Adoption can be very expensive. It can be very taxing on a family's finances. When my parents went through this in the '80s, it was during, you know, the early 1980s, which was when interest rates were skyrocketing. There were a bunch of compounding factors, but shortly after we adopted my brother, we lost our house, and we had to move in with my grandparents.

There were a lot of things happening at the time, but, you know, we've come through it. We are absolutely a family like any other family, and it's really opened my eyes at the same time to experiences of what it's like to be different. I thought it was a story that was worth telling. Adoptive families really can face so many

challenges, so really whatever we can do in this House through legislation to make that process easier for people, to give them a little bit more hope, if it is just a simple change, something like allowing the posting of a profile, that's something that can give families a little bit of extra hope, a little bit of extra encouragement, and they can see the stories of other families who've had success. I know right now a lot of people tell me: I like to go on Canada Adopts and look at the profiles, but I also don't like to look at the profiles because it's something that I am not able to do as a prospective adoptive parent here in Alberta.

You know, I think I've mentioned that there are some questions that I have, and we have to be very careful moving forward in terms of making sure that everyone is safe and that we're not unduly publishing any information anyone wouldn't want published, but I look forward to more discussion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, if you would allow me. The challenges in this House are many, but a sincere privilege it is to hear the stories that each of you tell. We can learn so much more from each other when we listen to the stories.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a privilege to rise and speak to Bill 206, Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017. I want to thank the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View for bringing this to the House. You know, this bill amends the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, and it's going to change some of the restrictions on advertising for prospective and adoptive parents.

I don't think that there are too many people in this House that would disagree that whatever we can do in our society to create strong families and strong communities, we should take those steps. Indeed, the future of Alberta and of our society, I believe, is integrally connected to strong families and to strong communities, and I believe that this Bill 206 will help us do that.

You know, the adoption system, I think we all would agree, needs to adapt and to change in order to meet the challenges of our modern society. Obviously, the current advertising legislation is well over 30 years old, and it's out of sync with the modern technologies. I only have to think back to when I was starting my teaching career and to the Gestetner machine that was there and how we used to stand there and crank that Gestetner to try to get – yeah. I'm that old. I am that old. If we were trying to run our school system on that same kind of technology today, people would give their heads a shake and wonder why we were still trapped in that era, in that time. I think that it's about time that we had the opportunity to take a look at the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and to update it, especially on an issue that's as important as adoption, to make the system of adoption more responsive to the modern needs of, I think, all of the parties that are involved here, whether it's the kids or whether it's the families that are looking to adopt, so I would speak in favour wholeheartedly of this bill.

You know, I don't think that it takes any of us very long to reflect on the people that are in our lives that are important to see that adoption intersects all of our lives at some point in time. As I was growing up, my Uncle Dale and Auntie Sandy adopted three kids. They were just our cousins. One of them was born full-blooded Hawaiian. Two were First Nations. It never even crossed our mind; they were just family. Didn't matter that they were adopted. Didn't matter how they came into the family. They were just family. Perhaps my best friend – I had the pleasure of introducing him to the House here one day: adopted, he and his sister. Three families in our church that I can think of off the top of my head have children

that they've brought into their lives. I can't think of a single instance where this has been negative, where adoption has been nothing but a positive for not only the children involved but for the parents that were involved, and anything that we can do that would allow children to be placed into loving families is something that we should pursue. So I speak in favour. I believe that this is truly a good thing that we can do in this Legislature when we support Bill 206.

I was kind of surprised when this came forward. I guess I had just always believed that parents could advertise, that they could help to increase that communication between prospective parents who are looking to give their children up for adoption and those that are choosing to find children that they can love, that we communicate in a whole wide range of ways in our society today.

I know that as a teacher I sometimes wondered what was the big deal about having a cellphone until I realized once I got one that it was the best way of opening up communication with my kids. They could listen to announcements and ignore announcements forever, but when I texted them, they had to answer, it seems. It was almost physically impossible for them not to answer that text. My kids, when I started off as a teacher, going to the library and getting out, yes, something called an encyclopedia or having to go through the card catalogue and trying to research: how limited they were to the resources that they had in that square room we call the library. Today our children in our schools literally have the world at their fingertips, and I wonder why we can't have that as a part of the adoption process.

You know, most people are comfortable today learning and researching and interacting online, and I believe that it's time in the 21st century that we have that possibility for people that are looking to increase their understanding and in-depth knowledge and pursue the process of adoption. I believe it's important for expectant parents to be able to reach out, for parents that are looking for how to get involved in that adoption process to be able to use all of the means of communication that we have available to us today, whatever that method may be. For expectant parents to be able to look at profiles online, to be able to do it at their own pace, to be able to consider, to think, perhaps to pray as they move forward in that whole process is a very important thing.

The goal here is to make sure that the families that have pursued adoption all are in favour and feel comfortable and agree and will pursue and be able to put the love that they need to into these children. Birth parents in Alberta need to be able to find the people and the families that they feel comfortable with, that they know will provide the firm foundation, the love, the guidance that these children will need. I believe that Bill 206 will help to do that.

3:20

I'd never heard of Canada Adopts before I started looking at this bill. So I went on it, and I started to look and to read through some of the profiles. I don't think that it takes a person very long to see how valuable that exercise could be. The profiles of these prospective families are varied, but in all of them, in every single one that I read through – and I must have read through dozens of them – I think that it would help a parent feel more comfortable with the decisions that they were making. At the end of the day, this is about the children. Potential parents looking to invest their lives in raising one or more children through adoption need to be able to have that infrastructure that allows them to communicate. I don't know if there could be anything more important than allowing prospective parents to be able to connect and begin to process their feelings and their emotions so that they can find that perfect adoption, that perfect family.

You know, children who are waiting to be adopted sometimes will have their own profiles placed on . . . [Mr. Smith's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I didn't know there was anyone else in the House old enough to remember a Gestetner. I remember because it was at the time that the pen replaced the quill. That's why it sticks in my mind.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise on Bill 206, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017. I want to thank the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View for bringing this forward and also members from all sides of the House for their thoughtful comments and questions today. I think this bill is one of those things that probably will bring us together, unlike a lot of other things in this House. I think this is important because when someone is considering adoption or when someone is making a decision on whether they can keep a child that's on the way, in my view in all cases it's a very emotional, a very tough time and a time when people are under a great deal of stress.

The ability for those people to express their desire to adopt or their need to give up a child or their need to express that they are considering giving up a child for adoption: all of those situations really require the birth parents or the adoptive parents to have more information, to have communication, to know that they're not alone, to know other people have gone through this before, and to know that other people will go through this again. Limitations on advertising amount to a limitation on communication, communication which can not only help people to find a child to adopt but birth parents to find a couple to look after their child. Also, it's the lack of ability to maybe understand some of the feelings that they may have, some of the stresses, some of the societal pressures that they may feel and to be able to find other people in the same circumstance, to be able to talk to them, to be able to express how important it is to be either a receiving or a giving partner in the adoption process. I can only imagine how helpful that could be.

Obviously, one of the most wonderful expressions of love is when a couple can have a child, and I'm sure one of the most stressful, troubling, and worrying situations occurs when a couple wants to have a child and they cannot. Of course, there are many, many avenues previous to adoption that can be explored: in vitro fertilization, different medical procedures, different tests, and one thing and another. But the fact is that when a couple comes to the place in their life where they realize that adoption is perhaps the only path left to them for them to be parents, I cannot imagine just how lonely that could be if they can't actually talk about it with people that have the experience, and I can't imagine how wonderful it would be for people that want to adopt to be able to talk to other parents that have adopted, to be in touch with other parents that are in the same situation as them, and even to talk to potential birth parents that are trying to make a very difficult decision.

So I'm in support of this. I'm grateful that this is forward. It's one of these things that as society evolves some of these things can't be done – well, I guess they can all be done sooner, but if it should have been done sooner, like all things that should have been done sooner, the second-best day is today. On that basis I'm happy to express my support for Bill 206. I'm grateful for the commentary, again, from all sides of the House, and I look forward to the remaining part of the debate, and I look forward to voting in favour of Bill 206.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Adoption often starts with the pain of infertility, and the pain of infertility is terrible. People marry and, as the Member for Calgary-Hays just mentioned, the most wonderful thing about getting married is having a child. Even though marriage has really changed over many years and birthing a child may look different for different couples, the pain of infertility is terrible. Month after month you think that this time, this month, you may be pregnant, and you are not pregnant. I think we have to remember that it's a very emotional, just a terrible time for couples when they are trying to have children.

It's also painful for birth parents, for the mother, the decisions that they consider through the months of pregnancy, after the birth of the child. I've worked with single mothers, and I admire their ability to always think of their child first. I want to acknowledge, as we're talking about this bill, the pain of both infertile couples, as my husband and I went through, and the pain of birth mothers and birth fathers as they seek to make the best decision for the child.

I also want to talk about the language of adoption. I never thought that the birth mothers of my children gave up something. They actually gave something to their child, and when I talk to my children about their adoption story, I always talk about their birth parents as people who knew that they wanted to give the child an opportunity. I would like to encourage us in the House to really think carefully about the language that we use when talking about adoption. On this matter I personally get so angry every year at Christmas when we talk about adopting a family at Christmastime, because for my children, for our families, and for many, many families adoption is a permanent, committed relationship with a child. It is not a one-time thing that one does at Christmastime, so I would like to encourage all of us to carefully think about how we use the word "adoption" and how we refer to children whose parents lovingly gave them an opportunity for life.

I think we also have to be reminded that adoption is increasingly open, with birth parents involved, so the birth parents may stay in the life of their children and depending on the arrangements may actually be part of the extended family. I know many families who have chosen this, and it's been wonderful to see. Unfortunately, it is not the opportunity for my children as we cannot find their birth parents.

3:30

What happens to a family when, after many months or very often many years of trying to have a child, they find out that they are infertile and cannot conceive naturally? Very often the first step is medical procedures. These medical procedures, as many of us know, can be very costly, very invasive, and the pain continues month after month because the procedures haven't worked for you.

In the case of myself and my husband, we decided not to go through the medical procedures for a number of reasons. Part of the reason was that I had worked overseas for many, many years, and I realized that in some countries some people did not have access to basic health care. We decided not to burden our health care system and not to spend a lot of money on medical procedures.

The other thing that happens when you're considering adoption is the reality – and I think this is one of the issues that we should really be straight up about in the House as we're talking about this bill – that there are very few babies available. We have done a wonderful job in Canada in terms of accepting the fact that babies are born to single mothers, to couples, be it same-sex couples, that having a child, in whatever way you have a child, is acceptable. We provide amazing support in our communities for these moms who raise their children even if they don't have the support of their

partner. I think we need to acknowledge this. I wanted to thank the government of Alberta for the work that it's doing in ensuring that children are provided with a safe environment to grow and for empowering mothers who give birth to have those supports.

I think that's part of the challenge around the adoption story when parents consider adoption after they've gone through the pain of infertility, that we all want to have a baby in our hands. We all want to have a baby because this is something that we are kind of raised with, that having a child is having a baby. Parents want to have a baby, but there aren't that many babies available.

In my own life, through the adoption and fertility journey that we took on, we became convinced that our adoption story should really be of adopting children where adoption was the only option. We also felt that children were not a commodity. One of the issues that I have with the bill a little bit is that by parents advertising, mostly linked to a private agency, it really seems like what we're talking about is a market-driven approach to finding the right family for a child, and I just have some concern around that.

In our own story we went through the government, then we went through a private agency, and then we were actually even approached by a lawyer on behalf of a birth mother. You know how it is. When you start telling people that you're considering adoption, people approach you. But because we had decided to move overseas and I was going to work overseas, we decided that what we would do was that we would adopt through the Thai government because we were living there. Even though we were offered babies by a local hospital as we lived in a small rural town – people said, “Oh, these foreigners are going to be adopting through the government, but maybe they might like to have a baby” – we always said, “No, we don't want a baby because we know there are children in Thailand that are in an orphanage and whose families have decided that they cannot take care of the child, and we will be going through the government.”

We adopted two boys. They were about two years of age. In Thailand, before a child is adopted, the government wants to make sure that the birth parents cannot take care of the child and are not looking for the child again. We really, really appreciated it. We let the government choose our boys. It was kind of really interesting because they told us that they chose boys that looked like us. Well, of course, my boys don't look like me. But, you know, from the first time that I saw my first son, Sam – he was just about two years of age – it was love at first sight. I can still remember that time. Our second son, Isaac, was about 18 months when we got to take him home. It's a wonderful story.

I feel that I have to tell you a story about each of my boys because I want to emphasize that it doesn't really matter at what age you have a child, that it doesn't really matter if they look like you or not. Adoption is not about all that stuff. Adoption is really about a permanent relationship between a child and parents who are going to take care of them, and in some cases it might involve their birth parents.

A few weeks ago we were in the market for buying a car. My son loves cars. He's very good; he actually works in the business. So we took him car shopping with us, and we told the car salesman that he was my boy, that he was our son, right? Of course, you can well imagine that the car salesperson did not believe that he was our boy. He thought that we had hired someone to help us buy a car. It strikes me all the time because I keep forgetting that my boys are adopted.

Then I want to tell a story about Isaac. Isaac was teaching in Egypt. This son, Isaac, is a fantastic teacher. He spent two years teaching in Egypt and is just finishing three years teaching in China. Actually, Isaac looks very much Chinese because his birth father was Chinese, and his birth mother was Thai.

So we were in Egypt. We had just arrived in Egypt, and we went to see Isaac in his school. He was teaching in an international school . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm very disappointed that we aren't able to hear the last part of that story, but I hope that maybe it might happen in the future.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 206, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017. We're here today to update this legislation.

Shortly after I was elected, I was invited to attend a meeting in Okotoks, with my hon. colleague from that area, to meet with a couple who were advocating at that time to have these adoption rules updated in the legislation. They had adopted one child, and they were looking to adopt another. They were frustrated, and they wanted to help other couples who were going through the adoption process, to help make it easier for them. They also shared a really unique view of birth moms, and this was in an effort to reduce any barriers that a birth mom might face when choosing adoption.

When families like this family that I met with are sitting and waiting on an adoption list, there's not much they can do. They came with this beautiful book. It was their family book. It had pictures of the child that they had adopted previously and the wonderful things that they did together as a family. It was a family book, just like any of us here would have of our families. It was wonderful, and they were able to share it. It catered towards a potential adoptive family, but the only way that they could get this book into a birth mother's hands was if that mother contacted the adoption agency and went through that process and was able to find families that way.

Nowadays everybody just goes on the Internet for everything. Certainly, I think that for anybody looking to adopt, this might help them to make a choice by finding a family online and saying: hey, look, I choose adoption. I mean, it's because I have been inspired by the families looking to adopt children online. That family really, really touched me that day, and I'm glad to see that we're here today talking about the very thing that they were advocating for. That's really special, I think, for any of us in this role as an MLA, to be able to make a difference in someone's life because they've been advocating for it.

3:40

I personally don't have a lot of instances where I've been touched by adoption or in that realm of life, and it's not a hot-button issue in the constituency of Airdrie, but I can guarantee you there are families that are impacted by this, and I'd certainly support this amendment to the act.

I'm very grateful to hear the stories here today in this Legislature. I agree with you, Mr. Speaker. It's quite a good day to be on House duty, a Monday afternoon for private members' business, because of some of the great things that we're able to do here in this Legislature.

I'm really excited to be able to support this bill in updating this act and also in taking that further step, along with the MLA for Calgary-East, on the motion that we debated here not too long ago. I'm in support of that, absolutely.

Just one more thing I wanted to mention before I do sit down. I think it's commendable at this time to recognize birth mothers and the choice that they are faced with in being able to give to another family. I agree that it's not something that someone always gives up. In some cases I think it is, absolutely, but I think that when

you're able to give, especially something so precious as a child to another family, we should do whatever we can to be able to support those people in those roles. These are all emotional times for everyone, with a range of emotions that, you know, we see from birth mom to new mom. It's a wonderful, beautiful, special time.

I know my colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills has two children that he's been through the adoption process with, and it's just been such a special time for him and his family to be able to bring those children into his home and welcome them as his own. You know, we see them all the time in this Legislature. They're going to be very well-adapted children to the political world thanks to their upbringing. I mean, they're just wonderful, happy, beautiful children that belong so much in my hon. colleague's family. We're so touched that we as his colleagues in the office get to see this family operate just as any other family. They've been given the gift of children, and that's exactly where they're supposed to be.

There are children who have yet to be born that this legislation would affect, but there are also, you know, children in care that may also find forever homes because of the updating of this legislation. I think that's the goal here, to find children forever homes, where mom and dad are forever, just like for any of us.

I'm so honoured to be able to speak to this amendment to the legislation and to vote in favour of it, and I support all of my hon. colleagues in this House to do the same.

That is all I have to say, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

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

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you can just give me a moment here.

As other MLAs have said in this discussion, I really want to express my appreciation to the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View for bringing this forward. I also want to commend my colleague from Calgary-East for leading the way in discussing this in the last session. I also want to express my appreciation, as the Speaker has, for the profound effect of these speeches on me.

It isn't only that I've learned a lot about a very important subject, but it's also shown a humanity in this place that we don't often get to see, unfortunately. I mean, like, bills have been brought forward before, many of them as private members' bills, but when good ideas come forward like the daylight saving time legislation or the disability advocate legislation or the cyberbullying act – these are all good ideas – we can work together on these and really improve the lives of Albertans.

I don't have a lot of personal experience with adoption – I feel in some ways very fortunate about that – but I do have constituents that have brought to me this very issue, and it's been one that I have sort of struggled with in terms of responding to my constituents because it doesn't really make sense to me that a prospective parent couple couldn't let it be known that they are available.

Along with that, though, I would also mention that I really hope that this sort of legislation can be expanded to the prospective adoptee, the *Wednesday's Child*, the single mother, the woman who's single and perhaps still in high school or in university that wants to be able to ensure an appropriate placement for her offspring. There's a lot in terms of this advertising that we still need to work on.

I did make inquiries with the ministry of child and social services. Is it children? It's CSS – right? – or CCS? Anyways, you know, the Minister of Children's Services did respond to me and actually commended me on my advocacy for adoptive families and expectant parents in Alberta and agreed with me that there should be more options available for families and parents participating in the adoption process.

Each province and territory in Canada has its own legislation regarding adoption advertising and disclosure of personal information. British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, and the Yukon are the only jurisdictions that allow the posting of adoptive family profiles online, and there are families in those jurisdictions that do use that facility. There will be an opportunity to consider the publication of information related to the adoption of a child, including the posting of prospective parents' profiles online, when Alberta's Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, the legislation governing adoption in this province, is reviewed. The ministry does plan on having a fulsome review of this. I'm going to be encouraging my constituents to participate in that review so that Alberta's laws can be brought up to at least a similar level as in those four other provinces.

You know, our government and, I'm sure, the opposition do share a deep concern for this issue, and we're always looking for ways to improve core supports and programs for all sorts of social activities, including adoption. I think that this is one of the main points that I want to get across today, that while this is a significant issue for Albertans who are infertile or who want to go through the adoption process, there is a whole panoply of other, related issues that we need to consider. This government is committed to providing a loving, nurturing home to all children who need care because every child does deserve to grow up in a healthy, loving environment that supports healthy development and prepares them for a bright future. So we need a good education system, we need a good health care system, and we need a system that protects the identity of the adoptee as well as the prospective adoption family. There are many other things that we need to work at comprehensively, and I'm hoping to discuss this more when we get into Committee of the Whole.

3:50

As a physician one of the times that I've gotten into consideration of this part of our legislation is when persons who may have been adopted actually are concerned about their genetic background. This is a significant concern for persons who might have cancer because there are identifiable genetic risk factors for particular kinds of cancers. I think the one that my colleagues might be most aware of is a genetic condition called BRCA 1 and 2. This is a very important contributor to the genetic cause of breast cancer as well as other cancers such as ovarian cancer and even gastrointestinal cancer. Similarly, prostate cancer patients often are concerned that they may have inherited a predisposition to this condition.

The current situation in Alberta in particular but in Canada in general and, I think, even in the United States is that it's often very difficult for the adoption records to be accessed in a credible way that allows persons to get that information. Now, this does have a double edge to the sword in that that same information can be misused by insurance companies, for instance, if it's found out, so we have to have protections in place. But this idea of being able to have a registry where information about the families can be accessed under the appropriate safeguards, I think, is a really important adjunct to what's being talked about in this bill.

You know, some of the other provinces in this country have legislation in this regard. My native province of Manitoba is one that has excellent legislation in this regard, and I think that if I were to make some suggestions to the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, it would be to take a look at the Manitoba legislation as to how this might transpire.

You know, in the previous session we did support a motion by the Member for Calgary-East on this issue, and I think that – again, I mentioned this before – this is an issue that all of us can stand behind. The work that the Member for Calgary-East did on this was

really exemplary, and I think we should be trying to combine those two.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to commend the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View for bringing this bill forward. There are few acts more generous and compassionate than the adoption of a child. Adoptive parents are taking on an incredible responsibility to care for that child that would otherwise not benefit by being raised by loving parents.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

I believe that given all the good that is derived from the adoption of children, we should do what we can, within reason and with the safety of the child foremost, to make that process easier. I believe that the amendment proposed in this private member's bill will make it that much easier for prospective adoptive parents to move forward in the adoption process. I hope the discussion of adoption in this House encourages more Albertans to consider adopting a child. Therefore, Madam Speaker, I will be supporting this bill, and I encourage all members of this House to do the same.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have the pleasure of speaking on Bill 206, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017. This is something that I actually spoke on before, not this specific bill but the motion that was brought forward by Calgary-East. At that time I had some encouraging words for the motion that the member had brought forward because, in the end, I think that we all want to see children inside happy families. A happy family unit will be better for everybody. That includes Albertans, the children.

I'd like to just say that when you look at the motion that was brought forward by the Member for Calgary-East, this is the next step. The first step is to draft a motion that says: let's make sure the government moves in a certain direction. This motion said:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to review section 85(1) of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and section 25(2)(d)(iii) of adoption regulation AR 187/2004 with a view to removing the prohibition on prospective adoptive parents that currently prevents them from advertising and publishing a profile.

So we're urging the government to move this forward.

Now, this was done, I believe, in December, so we've had a little bit of time to have this moved forward by the government. Actually, if you look at it, we're near the end of the session. Usually what happens is that the government would look at this, and they move it forward. What happens is that they would come out with a government bill. Having not seen that, I have to say that the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View saw this as a good piece of legislation to bring forward. The government didn't do it; the Wildrose Party did.

I have to commend the member because she is actually moving forward legislation that is going to help people within my constituency. That is actually very important because when I had talked on that motion about this adoption being a real problem and hampered by the fact that we can't advertise – this is an actual, real-life concern for somebody within my constituency. Actually, it was my local bank manager for the commercial lending arm. It's people in everyday life that you don't realize are going through this

struggle right now. That's the thing. It's really a problem that seems to be hidden because what happens is that in order to get a child, you want to be going through the process.

I'm going to start reading, and I did read some of this into *Hansard* on December 5, 2016.

My wife and I are . . . going through the process of adopting a child in Alberta. We are working with Adoption Options and we are now on the waiting list for a child. The wait for a child is approximately 2 – 3 years and the wait is completely out of . . . control as we have to await a birth parent [or parents] to select us.

He's saying that the process right now takes two to three years to be able to move through it. You know what? That is something that could have been really moved forward, and I again have to commend my colleague because, really, what she's trying to do is to reduce this waiting time on these lists. We need to make sure that parents that are wanting to give a safe place to a child are able to get that child in a reasonable, timely manner and, again, safely.

But what happens here is that we aren't competitive here in Alberta, where there are different, competing avenues for other provinces. If we were competing at the same level as other provinces for these children, we would be sitting here going: well, how can we reduce it? But right now what it is is that we need to be addressing the fact that social media is an important part of this process whether we like it or not.

4:00

Now, to go into this:

Something that surprised my wife and I when we were going through the approval process is that we found out that waiting adoptive parents are not allowed to make it known on social media that we are looking to adopt a child nor are we allowed to announce that we are on the "approved list." This to us seemed archaic, and runs counter to other provinces/territories (namely BC, Ontario and Yukon) in Canada where these provinces/territories allow adoptive parents to make such announcements on social media. This puts potential adoptive parents in Alberta at a disadvantage to other prospective adoptive parents in other parts of the country. Often birth parents in Alberta will end up connecting with prospective adoptive parents in other provinces simply because they have online profiles.

It seems that we have an imbalance, if you will. We have different parts of the country – all reside in Canada, and if we've got parents here in Alberta wanting to raise children in Alberta, why would we not put the priority on those children to stay here? We need to make sure that we give every opportunity to parents that are able to do that, especially when it comes to being local.

It's clear that online profiles in this case – this letter that my constituent had sent to me is clearly laying out that we need to address this promptly. Now we are into May, and we haven't seen any legislation put forward by the government. Again, it's nice to see that our member of the Wildrose is saying that this is important. It's something that we are going to take to the next step, and we need the government to move this piece of legislation along with us because it's important. It was important because it was passed unanimously by this entire House through a government motion, so it was important to the government. It's important to us. How could this not flow through the House unanimously?

Now, I do understand that when we have pieces of legislation, we always need to be looking at how to make it better. So I encourage the government that if there are concerns when it comes to this piece of legislation, this bill, they reach out to our member here, the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, and bring those amendments forward so that we can make this the best and then fix this clear imbalance within the system. What happens here is that we are hearing that this is not a problem that has just been identified in

my local constituency. So what we've got here is that we've had adoptive parents reaching out to a lot of our constituency offices saying that this needs to be fixed.

I believe that when it came to this government motion, we moved the motion. Then the next step would have been a government act coming forward. I would love to hear, when it comes to Committee of the Whole, where the government was in the process of moving this forward because of their own motion and, if they are going to be moving this forward, what kind of amendments they would consider. I think this is a great piece of legislation. I think the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View has done a great job on it. But, again, it all comes down to co-ordinating and co-operating with each other to make the best legislation going forward.

Now, with Bill 202 we did that. We went out and said that distribution of nonconsensual images is something that is important to this entire House. I think we can find a middle ground on Bill 206 that says the exact same thing. We can say that we need to put children first. Let's do that as a group. I think this is something that we can actually move forward unanimously because I think every person in this House believes that children should be put first.

When looking at this, we see that we've got parents reaching out to MLAs. The next part is that we've got MLAs creating motions saying that this is important to us. The next step is to create a bill that corrects this. The last step... [Mr. Cyr's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I feel compelled to speak to Bill 206, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017. I'll start by thanking the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View for bringing this important issue to the House and also my colleague from Calgary-East for her motion when she brought that forward.

When I first heard that this bill was coming forward, I had a little knot in my stomach. I am a mom. I'm a stepmom, and I am also a birth mom to my son, who I reluctantly relinquished to social services for adoption. I knew that I was not in a position to care for him in the way that I wished. A number of people who knew that I was pregnant and would be in a position where I would have to surrender my child for adoption offered to become parents. They cited that they could provide everything that my son could possibly need if they were to become parents. The decision to relinquish my son was probably the most difficult decision I made in my life, and it's certainly impacted the rest of my life ever since.

I have to respond to two comments that were made by members opposite with respect to loving families. They talked about a child being adopted so that they would have a loving family. I relinquished my son. I loved him, and I would have provided a loving family for my son had that option been available to Matthew and myself. So I was not happy with those two comments that were made.

When I found out that I was pregnant, I was in my early years at university, and I did not have support to keep my son. But I had time to think about what I wanted to do and how I would do it so that he would have the best possible home that he could have. I spoke with social services on a number of occasions. I did all the things that you have to do, all the blood work, all the physical stuff that you have to do. I signed the papers.

The social worker came to see me the day I was to leave the hospital. Now, initially when I had him, I thought: I can't even see him because I don't know if I can go through with this decision if I

see him. But after he was born, I had no choice but to see him. I held him. I changed his diapers. I counted his fingers and his toes. I checked the medical reports on him to make sure that he was all right. The day I left the hospital, I went to the nursery and looked at him for the last time. I didn't think that I'd even be able to walk out of the hospital.

The social worker came, and she said: in six months you have to sign the final paperwork. Well, I couldn't because I was in Montreal when I gave birth to him, and I was going back to Newfoundland, so I had to sign those papers then. For the next six months I don't think there was a night that I didn't go to bed and cry because I didn't want that to be finalized. I didn't know how I would be able to change it, but I begged for some option to be able to take back that final signature that I gave. Needless to say, I wasn't able to change that decision, and sometimes those decisions are the best decisions one can make.

4:10

When my son turned 18, I started to search for him because up to that point I didn't think that I had a moral or ethical right to disturb his life or to disturb the lives of the parents who chose to bring him into their family. I searched for him from the time he was 18 until he was 24, when I was able to reunite with him. I was able to meet his family. I was able to share many of the experiences that he had growing up because his family had kept an album for me, had kept report cards, had kept all kinds of things to share with me.

I know that this is a difficult decision. My son was not chattel. My son was not a commodity to barter. He was my son. He is a human being, and he's a wonderful, wonderful man. I've now had the opportunity to have a relationship with him for almost 24 years. I don't get to see him as often as I'd like, but I do get to see him, and I do get to talk to him on the phone and through e-mails.

I don't know that I'm going to be able to support this bill as it is. I think there are some things that need to be done differently. The concern, the gnaw that I have in my stomach, is that he was not a commodity. Social services found incredible parents for him, and I thank them every day that they provided him with a home that was a loving home. They didn't have any other children when they adopted him. Joan told me that they were trying for about 10 years to have a child. When they adopted Matthew, she then became pregnant, and they had three sons of their own. So he had three brothers, and he had two sisters because I had two other children.

Certainly, if I was advocating for anything, it would be for open adoptions. I'm going to have to think about this some more in terms of some kind of an amendment. But I don't know that anybody else in here was a birth mother that gave a child up for adoption, so I really felt compelled that I had to stand and tell you about my experience. Even though I have contact with Matthew, I still go to bed at night and when I say a few prayers and ask God to protect my kids, he's certainly there and I ask for protection for him, too. I ask that all of my kids have a decent life and that good things come to them. But I know that life has ups and downs, and all of my kids have had ups and downs. So whether he was with me or with his family, he had ups and downs, and I know that everybody did what they could to make life for him the best that it could be.

Even though I think that this is certainly a good issue to bring forward and to have that discussion on – and I certainly understand how many people who have not been able to have children of their own want to be able to adopt – my instincts tell me that if we're going to do anything, then maybe we need a stronger, more robust social services entity that is able to look after that.

I'm going to sit down, and I'd like everybody to think about what kind of options will make a bill like this the best bill that can go forward. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 206. I'd like to first begin by thanking my colleague from Lethbridge-East for her comments and all those who've spoken in the House this afternoon on this very important issue of adoption. I, too, have an adoption story to tell, which is much different than some others as each adoption story is different and each adoption story is unique. I would like to thank the Member for Lethbridge-East for sharing her story and her bravery in that.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I think it's important that the purpose in many respects – and I had the privilege and honour of working very closely with my colleague from Chestermere on this piece of legislation. This legislation was never intended to be all-encompassing. This piece of legislation was never intended to fix every challenge within the context of the adoption system or in the child and family services system. Mr. Speaker, you'll know that you've heard me say in this House on numerous occasions, even within the context of having two adopted children myself, that I wished we lived in a world where there was no need for adoption at all, where every situation was perfect. Unfortunately, we don't live in that scenario, so there is a need for this adoption story amongst many folks.

I think I'd just like to point out that in Bill 206 – I'll come back around to that – much of the purpose was to provide the opportunity to speak about this important issue and to speak about the important issue not just around advertising, which Bill 206 does, but around the very, very important issue of ensuring that we talk about adoption and some of the challenges around that and that we have the opportunity to speak about some of the stigmas that are associated with adoption, that we have the opportunity to speak and champion both birth parents and adoptive parents, that adoption is not possible without both of those folks.

Sometimes we see situations where a prospective birth parent wilfully makes that decision, and then we also see adoptions take place where those children, for whatever reason – something very traumatic has happened in their lives – have become a ward or a permanent guardianship of the government and the government is then making decisions on behalf of those children when it comes to adoption. Adoption covers such a broad, wide spectrum.

Bill 206 allowed us this afternoon and my colleague from across the way, when we had the opportunity to speak about a motion around a very similar topic, to really speak about this very, very important issue. It's not always in the House that we have the opportunity to speak about these sorts of issues, but today is one of those days. Equally as important as the piece of legislation is our opportunity to speak about the impact of adoption because adoption has such – such – an impact on the lives of everyone that's involved, whether it's the biological parents, who've made that conscious decision to put their child up for adoption, whether it's the biological mom, who has gone through a decision-making process to arrive at that case.

4:20

It's my sense that Bill 206 will actually promote more open adoptions, which is one of the challenges or concerns that we heard from our colleague from Lethbridge-East, because this reduces barriers to connecting prospective birth parents to adoptive parents. So there is a very likely opportunity that more open adoptions will take place because of it, because when the birth parent is involved in the decision-making process of the prospective adoptive parent, almost exclusively those result in open adoptions.

Now, in my situation, Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of working through the department of child and family services, and our adoptions weren't open. The government, at the time of permanent guardianship, had made a decision that that would be the best case moving forward, and there is no communication between our children and their biological parents. Now, that may change at some point in time in the future, but currently it is not an option. Not exclusively but often when a child has been placed in care and subsequently a permanent guardianship order granted and then into permanent adoption, often inside the context of child and family services, those adoptions wind up remaining closed for significant periods of time and perhaps never opened. Now, that's not to say that we aren't open with our children about adoption, but it is that there's no ongoing context.

There is this wide swath of adoption stories, and each one of them is so critically important. In our case we, Mr. Speaker, as you know, had the opportunity, the fortune, the blessing to have our first child. His name is Porter. We were fortunate to have him biologically through a fairly tumultuous time of a pregnancy and wound up with just a tiny, tiny, tiny, little wee one – “No bigger than a ham sandwich, really,” we used to joke about him – a tiny shade over four pounds and six weeks early. Lots of excitement in our home, as you can imagine. Then we went on to suffer significant losses in our lives and multiple, multiple pregnancies that were not carried to term.

We had always felt like we would have a family with lots of short people in our lives and weren't always sure how that was going to happen but had always assumed that it would be a traditional way. But that didn't prove to be the case for our family, so we started to walk down this path of adoption and have known many folks who have also walked down that path. At the end of the day, we had an opportunity to bring a child into our home, and what an incredible miracle that is. In many ways adoption, just like childbirth, I think, really is a miracle because it takes so many complex factors to come together.

In this case, you know, in an open adoption situation like we're primarily speaking about today, with removing the barriers to advertising, the biological parents or birth mother will make the choice of where that child goes. But in our case it is the government that makes the best available decision, based on that child, to choose – so it's not like you have input into any of those scenarios.

But I remember so clearly the day that our social worker called. I was at my office in northeast Calgary, and the actual question that the social worker asked was: what is your definition of complex medical needs? In the situation of our second child, Paxton had some significant medical needs, so the social worker was reaching out to us . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, let me say again how unfortunate it is that we can't finish many of these stories. They are so interesting.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. An important bill to be sure, Bill 206, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017. I appreciate all of the comments of those in the House who have had personal experience with it. While I have not had personal experience in that sense, I certainly, through my two daughters, have had two international adoptions, one from east Africa, Uganda, which I participated in very actively, and the other through my other daughter, who adopted two from Haiti: certainly, lengthy processes and challenging to deal with the other governments on these issues.

I think, like others who have spoken, that there's a tremendous need for more openness and access not only for the birth parents to

feel like they can connect with the adoptive parents but also for the adoptive parents to be able to be more public about their desire to connect with the birth parents. This bill proposes to amend the act to allow licensed adoption agencies in Alberta to publicize the profiles of prospective adoptive parents, bringing Alberta in line with B.C., Ontario, and the Yukon.

Presently Alberta couples seeking open adoptions are not allowed to create public profiles of themselves on websites such as canadaadopts.com. Conversely, profiles of children that are up for adoption are featured on television and Alberta human services' website, leading critics to charge that there is an inconsistency in the law. I think that's part of what this worthy bill is trying to amend. I won't take a long time to comment on it, but under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act there is an inconsistency that needs to be addressed. There's really no reason why prospective adoptive parents should not be permitted to advertise online as long as proper safeguards are in place.

In this context, I guess, my daughter has advised me – and she's head of Christian Adoption in Canada – that without going through an agency, there is a risk of misrepresentation of adoptive parents, a need to ensure that they not have access directly to the birth parents. A lot of birth parents considering putting a child up for adoption are doing their research and communications online today – and that's fine; it makes sense – but without a home visit and without proper counselling for the birth parent, it's really open to abuse. Those are the concerns, I'm sure, that we are all wanting to see addressed. There's a reason why there are so many regulations and oversights, and there's a reason why birth parents get counselling to be clear on the full implications of what they're doing, the emotional as well as the legal implications of what they're doing. It behooves us to do this carefully, to make sure that we are protecting the interests, particularly, of the child and the birth parents.

I mentioned counselling for the birth parent or parents to make sure they're clear and have some ability to go through a grieving process in a mature and responsible way, ensuring that there's no money or other incentives being exchanged for the placement of a child, ensuring that a proper home study is done so that the adoptive parents are found to be legitimate, capable, that the setting is appropriate and healthy, and that, by all means, information is shared through a reputable agency. The birth parent then can work through the agency to get the full contact information. I guess the concern is that there need to be appropriate checks and balances, and I think we'll be dealing with those perhaps and some suggested amendments, then, as we get through to other stages of the bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

4:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start by thanking the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View as well as the Member for Calgary-East for her motion. I think that talking about adoption and ways that we can reduce barriers to both birth families and adoptive families is so important. I know that as a young mom having an unplanned pregnancy, having to consider my options was something that I dealt with, and in looking at my peer group at the time, I was surrounded by other young moms who were also facing similar circumstances.

One of my very best friends chose to place her son for adoption. Being with her – the late nights, the crying, the indecisiveness, being unsure of what was going to be the future for her son – was something that was so incredibly powerful and so emotional, to be on that side of it, to hear the birth mother's perspective. At that time

there weren't a lot of options for her as a birth mom. She didn't have a lot of access to information about who these potential other family members were going to be, who would raise her son when she wasn't able to. What she did at the time was that she explored other young moms who perhaps had placed their children in other homes and got to know their stories and talked to social services and talked to some of the adoption agencies at the time just to determine what her options were as a mom who wasn't able to raise her son at that time in her life.

In just thinking about reducing some of these barriers, allowing the birth parents to access information online would open so many more doors to give them a little bit more of a connection to what their options are when they're choosing this incredibly difficult option for their child.

As a social worker I've worked with families on both sides. I've worked with parents who were at the point where they were looking at adoption as an option as well as with young families and all different types of families about wanting to add to their family for whatever reasons, whether it was infertility or just a time in their life where they were not wanting to perhaps carry a pregnancy but wanting to add to their family, just the different available things that were open to them at the time. I think that having the ability to advertise approved adoptive families would be in the best interests of birth families and adoptive families.

I know that we've had people reach out to my office, families that are seeking adoption, grandparents whose children are looking at adoption, and they've identified some of the barriers. They talked about, you know, being on a wait-list for over a year and being told by the agency that perhaps it could be another three years before there's a potential match for their home, the incredible cost of the infertility medicine, sometimes upwards of \$20,000, in their attempts to try and have a family. I think that eliminating some of these barriers that are faced by our adoptive parents is a huge step in the right direction. I think that having Alberta come forward to this like some of our other provinces have done is an incredible first step.

Being a worker with Children's Services, knowing the importance of having the parents able to identify online as wanting to adopt a child – they need to be approved, and I think that that's such an important part of this so that it's not just anybody that can come forward and say that they're interested in adopting a child. It needs to be families that have gone through the process of vetting and making sure that their home would be appropriate and suitable for a potential child to be placed with them.

I think that this is just an incredible opportunity for Alberta, to be able to move this legislation forward. Just in hearing the stories in the House about how many people are impacted, I'm sure every one of us has had constituents reach out to us advocating for better laws in Alberta to allow those opportunities for birth families to be able to look online and for adoptive families to be able to advertise that way should they choose.

I would also like to thank the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East for sharing her incredible story and just acknowledging the strength that it takes to be able to stand up and talk about such a personal moment and to be able to advocate for this legislation to be the absolute best that it can be. Yeah, I just wanted to say that it's such an honour to be able to stand up here and advocate for something that I think is well overdue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other members who would like to speak to Bill 206, Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017?

Seeing none, I will allow the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View to close debate.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to reiterate how amazing it's been hearing some of the other stories in the House. It's incredible when you have the opportunity to speak about something like this and when you hear the contributions of people, what they've been through. You learn a little bit more about all of the people that are in this House and about the diversity of people that we have in here and how they've been impacted from all sides of this.

One of the things that inspired me at the very beginning of this was the story of my friend from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. Many of you have probably seen his beautiful children around in this area and coming in to see their dad debate and speak and do introductions and his beautiful wife and their incredible family. Quite often when they've been up in my office, my shoes are usually distributed across the floor because they go and try on all my shoes in there. They're just a beautiful family. Seeing how this family came together and what they've been through and the struggles, on both sides, again, I can't imagine what it must be like to be in that position, where you are even considering an option of putting your child forward into adoption.

Like I said in my earlier speeches, for the families who have found that this is the way for them to complete their families, these expectant moms and families are heroes to these families who've been through cycles of fertility and have tried so many options and have looked for various ways. I mean, it's just an absolute miracle for them. Again, from the bottom of my heart, there is just nothing more miraculous than seeing a birth mom, an expectant mom, an expectant family make the decision to take this precious human being and place it into the hands of a family with complete trust, also, as the Member for Lethbridge-East said, putting your faith in a system that is going to raise your child, and then potentially even at some point in time having a relationship with that child.

There are so many things. It's extremely complex. This legislation starts off with the most simple pieces, giving these expectant families an opportunity to actually look at the families that are available. It will get rid of certain stigmas, like the Member for Calgary-East was speaking about, with regard to socioeconomic or race, religion, all of these kinds of things. When a family is able to put themselves into and be able to publicly show that they're interested in participating in an adoption, the expectant moms and families will have the opportunity to really look at that and imagine that this gift that they have will be raised in a family that they can relate to or understand.

If it is an open adoption or whatever version of adoption it is, like the member had said, there are some regulations and things that we need to look at to make sure that all pieces are protected, because the last thing we want to see happen is predators also being able to participate and get involved in this. So there are things that we need to look at very closely. I think we can do some crossjurisdictional checks to see what's working and what's not. Also, the stakeholder outreach has to continue on. I'm not sure about the government, but I know that, for myself, we've had a ton of feedback from families.

4:40

I can say, without a shadow of a doubt, that this is definitely positive legislation, that it will lead to seeing more adoptions happen. At the end of the day, that's what we're looking for – isn't it? – to complete these families and to give options to expectant moms and families that are in situations where they are going to be part of the adoption process.

I'd also like to say that the amount of courage it takes on both sides of this is just massive, isn't it? When you hear about the situations of unplanned pregnancies – of course, when we're looking at adoption, there are all different age groups and reasons and all sorts of things that determine why an expectant family would be putting their child into adoption. I think what goes without saying – but it's worth reiterating – is the courage that it takes for a family to make the decision to adopt and, especially from the expectant family side, to go through that process, like the member was saying, to cry and just go through that over and over again.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:42 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Goehring	Pitt
Babcock	Hinkley	Renaud
Barnes	Horne	Rosendahl
Bilous	Hunter	Sabir
Carlier	Jansen	Schneider
Carson	Kazim	Schreiner
Ceci	Kleinsteuber	Shepherd
Connolly	Larivee	Smith
Coolahan	Littlewood	Stier
Cooper	Luff	Strankman
Cortes-Vargas	Mason	Sucha
Cyr	McKittrick	Swann
Dang	Miller	Sweet
Drever	Miranda	Turner
Feehan	Nielsen	Westhead
Fildebrandt	Payne	Woollard
Fitzpatrick	Piquette	Yao
Fraser		

Totals: For – 52 Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 206 read a second time]

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, seeing that we are one minute away from 5 o'clock, I'd ask for unanimous consent of the House to call it 5 o'clock and move to Motions Other than Government Motions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Accessibility Legislation Review Committee

507. Mr. Fraser moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish a special committee to review accessibility legislation and consider potential amendments to legislation, including but not limited to the Safety Codes Act and the elevating devices codes regulation, Alta. reg. 192/2015, with the intent to ensure accessibility for Albertans that exceeds the base requirements of the Alberta Building Code 2014.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very happy to move a motion that calls for the creation of a special select committee, a

committee that will look at possible amendments to several pieces of legislation that impact accessibility to public buildings. I know that people who are in charge of updating these codes do great work, and I don't mean this motion to be a criticism to them as they do great work on a day-to-day basis. My motion is in response to Albertans that I've met in my work as an MLA who have expressed to me a desire not just to increase access to public buildings but also that they be more involved in the process.

5:00

Accessibility is an important issue for many Albertans, and we are a stronger province when we make a deliberate effort to make our public spaces more available. My hope is that by establishing this committee to examine the issue, we can solicit feedback from affected members of the province and all stakeholders. A greater understanding of what barriers are being faced with respect to accessibility will help us as legislators to ensure that future changes to building codes are done with the best possible information.

No member of this House can be an expert in every area, so we must take advantage of opportunities to further educate ourselves on important issues to our constituents. I believe that this motion and this committee will give us a chance to do that. It's my hope that this motion will receive broad support in this House and that we can move forward with examining this very important issue.

It's very difficult if we do not put ourselves in a position to try to understand somebody with a disability, perhaps a physical disability, a mental disability, how hard it is for them on a day-to-day basis to access just very simple, basic things, Mr. Speaker, but this motion also goes beyond that. Consider folks that are suffering from a broken leg or a back injury or some other form of injury, somebody who is in the early stages or late stages of multiple sclerosis. What this does is it allows this government, allows the opposition, allows the members, and allows the people that do the day-to-day work in this Legislature to show what's best about what we do. It's to create a committee to come together to talk about issues that are facing Albertans today, issues that faced Albertans yesterday, and issues that will face Albertans in the future.

Mr. Speaker, my hope is that collectively we can show Albertans that we all care about this issue and that we want to do what's right and what's in the very best interest of these folks. It is truly about making the best decisions as legislators to improve the quality of life for all Albertans. So I would urge all members to support this motion, and I look forward to listening to the feedback.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, anyone wishing to speak to Motion 507? The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member bringing forth this private motion to address accessibility and, essentially, the rights of persons with varying abilities.

I'll begin by saying that our government is committed to working with the community and with people with varying abilities to support their safety and inclusion in whatever way possible. In addition to our work already taking place to address these problems around elevator accessibility and supports and promoting barrier-free access, it is worth mentioning that we have taken a number of steps to promote accessibility not just in terms of removing barriers to physical structures but bureaucratic or organizational as well. We have acted to repeal PDD safety standards regulations, stopped using the supports intensity scale, and have changed service dog regulations.

Albertans told us that safety is important but that the PDD safety standards regulation was not the right solution. That's why we acted

to repeal the regulation after phase 1 of the consultation last year. In June of 2016 I announced that our government stopped using the supports intensity scale and committed to using policies that are respectful in engaging the supports that people with developmental disabilities need. Finally, the service dog regulation changes will increase the capacity to train and test qualified service dogs in Alberta, maintain high training standards, align them with ADI, and ensure public safety. Increased capacity to train and test qualified service dogs supports inclusion and accessibility for persons with disabilities in their communities.

We do all of this because we believe that everyone deserves to live safely, with dignity and with the supports they need to reach their full potential. Our government is protecting and improving the things that matter and ensuring that Albertans with all abilities are supported to be included in their communities.

On that note, I will ask all of my colleagues to support the motion brought forward by the member. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Good afternoon and thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to the hon. member's private member's motion, Motion 507, today. I think it's a very important suggestion. I will be supporting the motion, and I encourage all of my colleagues in the House to support the motion as well.

Mr. Speaker, the building code is an incredibly complex, technical, and exhaustive regulation that establishes how buildings in Alberta are to be built. During Municipal Affairs estimates this spring, my hon. colleague from Calgary-Elbow asked the minister a number of questions relating to the building code. Through answers to his questions, we learned that the building code is developed on a five-year cycle. Basically, as soon as they issue the latest version, the process of developing the next version begins.

According to what we learned in estimates, it starts with consultations at the national level first. While the consultation starts at the federal level, it ends up back at the province, and consideration is always brought back to the Safety Codes Council here in Alberta. According to the Safety Codes Council website:

Established by the Government of Alberta in 1993, the Safety Codes Council is responsible to the Minister of Municipal Affairs to administer portions of the safety system, including accrediting the municipalities, corporations, and agencies that sell permits and inspect the work carried out under these permits, certifying and training safety codes officers who do the inspections, administering the Alberta Master Electrician Program, and working with industry through our sub-councils to recommend codes and standards.

The elevating devices code regulation is another one. It covers elevating devices such as elevators, industrial lifts, dumb waiters, et cetera, and established the Alberta Elevating Devices and Amusement Rides Safety Association, which – I am summarizing from the website – is a delegated regulatory authority that oversees the installation and ongoing safety compliance of elevating devices, amusement rides, and passenger ropeways in the province.

I think we can all agree that the Safety Codes Council, the Alberta Elevating Devices and Amusement Rides Safety Association, and the current building codes approval processes have been working pretty well for most Albertans. But that doesn't seem to be the case for every Albertan, specifically those with physical limitations. We did some research, and according to government data 15.8 per cent of the population are persons with disabilities. In 2006, when this was reported, that equalled 410,600 people in Alberta, actually. If the rate stayed the same, in 2017 that would mean that there are possibly over 650,000 people with disabilities in the province right now. Just imagine. That's a substantial figure.

Many of you may have heard the saying: if it ain't broke, don't fix it. It's an important thing to remember that concept and, in fact, something this government would be well placed to remember. However, there is also another equally important saying: if better is possible, is good just good enough? Now, the only way to really determine which of these is true is that you've got to consult and research and investigate. It's entirely possible that the Safety Codes Act and the elevating devices codes act are perfect, but that's not necessarily the case. We don't think that really is the case. I don't think that they are perfect, but the only way to really determine that would be to bring in the experts and persons with disabilities who have a much better understanding.

I like the committee idea proposed by my hon. colleague, Mr. Speaker. I think it hits the right balance. That is why I'll be supporting this motion. Again, I encourage all members of the Assembly to do so as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for St. Albert.

5:10

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Motion 507. I'd like to thank the member for proposing this motion. As I've said before, I think that any time we stand up in this House and talk about issues that are related to people with disabilities, people with mobility challenges, it's a great discussion. For a very long time it hasn't been a topic always on the top of our minds or front and centre. We're starting to speak about this community more, and I'm eternally grateful for that.

Before I begin, because we're considering this motion – it's actually a very complex system, as I'm sure you know – I think it's worth while to discuss some of the existing systems for reviewing and developing building codes for accessibility. Currently our provincial code review and update system to support barrier-free access is well established and highly consulted. The Alberta code changes for accessibility in buildings are reviewed by Municipal Affairs and the Safety Codes Council. The review is undertaken by expert safety officials, construction design stakeholders, and representatives from disability and seniors' organizations among many other stakeholders.

Alberta currently has a committee to review and make recommendations on the accessibility of buildings, and it's called the Barrier Free Sub-Council of the Safety Codes Council. The Barrier Free Sub-Council is comprised of a range of stakeholders, including a ministerial representative that makes recommendations to the Minister of Municipal Affairs on barrier-free standards. The subcouncil is also comprised of representatives, some of which are people with disabilities, municipal officials who enforce the building code, and members of industry who must comply with the code's requirements. Several disability organizations are also represented. Industry includes the rental industry, hotels, building managers, commercial construction, home builders, and architects. The council ensures that a wide range of experiences of persons with mobility and sensory disabilities are considered. Our provincial code review system is well established, and as you can imagine, there are many layers to it.

Originally, when I read the motion, I did have some concerns about, you know, maybe just the wording, and I'll explain a little bit why that is. Many of you will remember the PDD safety standards. These standards were introduced under the previous government. As I've said before in this House, they were done – they were certainly well meaning; they were not meant to harm anybody – in an effort to keep people safe, but the steps that were missed were the important consultation pieces. Because this

legislation is so complex and has so many moving pieces, what was missed is that by just including all people with disabilities or all people with mobility needs under these standards, they were inadvertently triggering some activity that was not necessarily conducive to community living.

For example, you would have maybe a person or two with a label of developmental disability; whether or not they had a mobility challenge was up in the air. These folks living in the community would be subject to these standards that would require inspections under the safety codes, under Health, and that would trigger fire inspection. What was happening is that people just trying to live in their community, live a normal life, were faced with a number of inspections, and then the resulting recommendations were very expensive. In many cases people had to leave their homes or find other places to rent with things like fire suppression, that they didn't necessarily need. You had people with developmental disabilities or mobility issues living in the community, and standards were being applied to them, standards similar to detention centres or hospitals or sort of long-term care facilities.

That being said, I know the member and I had a chance to chat earlier today. Of course, the intent of this motion is absolutely to do the best thing for Albertans and to make barrier-free access in Alberta, you know, the most important goal, and that's what I believe this motion does.

The Speaker: Hon. member, if I might, I'd like to intervene. Respectfully, I've been advised that there has been an error made between what's on the Order Paper and the signed motion. I respectfully suggest that the House consider an adjournment at this juncture.

The motion that is on the Order Paper references “urge the government,” whereas the motion that was signed does not make reference to the government. Therefore, you are debating an issue which has not had the correct processes followed leading up to this. I'm advised that it would be in the best interests of the motion as well as the House that the House adjourn at this juncture. It would then, I think, come back with the necessary corrections.

I'll just read this. The motion that was signed is as follows.

Mr. Cooper: Are we talking about the amendment, not the motion?

The Speaker: I haven't accepted an amendment here yet. We're talking about the original motion.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly establish a special committee to review accessibility legislation and consider potential amendments to legislation, including but not limited to the Safety Codes Act and the elevating devices codes regulation, Alta. reg. 192/2015, with the intent to ensure accessibility for Albertans that exceeds the base requirements of the Alberta Building Code 2014.

The motion as presented on the Order Paper – I think you have copies of this – reads as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish a special committee to review accessibility legislation and consider potential amendments to legislation, including but not limited to the Safety Codes Act and the elevating devices codes regulation, Alta. reg. 192/2015, with the intent to ensure accessibility for Albertans that exceeds the base requirements of the Alberta Building Code 2014.

The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am just curious to know – and perhaps it may not be possible – if this could be addressed through unanimous consent of the House for us to be able to continue, that we might be able to ask for a motion for unanimous

consent of the House to have the document read as such, making a correction to the document through a motion. The table officers would then have the ability to correct the document on a go-forward basis. That would allow us to continue debate this evening and, by the sounds of things, see a successful conclusion to the motion.

The Speaker: For clarification, would it be the one that's signed?

Mr. Cooper: Correct.

Cortes-Vargas: Just to verify, we would be debating the motion that he read earlier on – correct? – not the one on the Order Paper.

The Speaker: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps I'll effort to provide some clarification. The original document, the motion that was initially signed by the hon. member and then turned in to the bills and *Journals* clerk, failed to have the word "government" in that motion. As such, there was an error because in most motions that are debated in this Chamber, it says "urge the government." There was a discrepancy between the original document, that was signed by the member, and the motion that we have on the Order Paper before us.

It would be my recommendation that through unanimous consent of the House we provide a correction to that document through a motion. Then they will be the same, we will be debating it appropriately, and we can all proceed with the debate.

The Speaker: To be clear, hon. member, I'm confused as to which motion we would be following. Would it be the intent of the House that it would be the wording which is on the Order Paper, which uses the phrase "urge the government"? It's the other one, I'm being advised, that would be debated. Is there agreement that we would urge the government? Is that your proposal, hon. member?

Mr. Cooper: Yes.

5:20

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-South East, it's your motion. I'll give you the opportunity to speak to the matter.

Mr. Fraser: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Sorry; I apologize to this House if there is this mix-up. However, this is what we were presented with, exactly what I've read from the Order Paper. If the House would agree, I'd love to continue.

The Speaker: Hon. member, might I clarify, then, again? Your intent would be that the motion that you would task the House with is the one that's on the Order Paper, not the one which you signed. Is that correct?

Let me read it again. This would be with the assumption that this is what would be moved. The motion would now read: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish a special committee to review accessibility legislation," et cetera, et cetera. Is that the mover's intent?

Mr. Fraser: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and I'd ask for unanimous consent for us to continue.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've been advised – and it certainly was my understanding as well and I think shared by the House – that the time that we have just used with respect to this correction has not been counted and that you will get the adequate time for the motion as agreed to under standing orders.

Hon. Member for St. Albert, accordingly, you would have approximately five minutes left to speak. Please proceed.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Thank you. I'd like to propose this amendment to Motion 507, (a) striking out "consider" and substituting "conduct a thorough consultation regarding" and (b) striking out all of the words that follow "Albertans."

The member and I had a chance to chat briefly earlier today. The reason that I'm asking for this amendment is that it's been the experience of the community of people with disabilities and their allies that, I think, well-meaning legislation and well-meaning activities don't always turn out that way.

I think the original wording was "to ensure accessibility for Albertans that exceeds the base requirements of the Alberta Building Code," when, in fact, this community of people, people with disabilities, doesn't necessarily want to be excluded or doesn't want any more. So while barrier-free is certainly the goal for all Canadians, all Albertans, people with disabilities don't necessarily want to be singled out. For example, labour legislation: I think there was a suggestion the other day about the issue that people with disabilities be pulled out and dealt with separately. That's a really good example of that. People with disabilities want to be included in schools, in work, in legislation.

So this amendment proposes to slightly change the wording. I think, though, that the intent of the motion is still there. I think the member is talking about aligning some legislation, working together, strengthening things so that barrier-free and access are the focus, not just people with disabilities going over and above what is there in legislation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, an amendment has been proposed, which you will have a copy of, which will be identified as A1.

The Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I'd just like to thank the member for her comments. Absolutely, one of the things that I think we can learn as Albertans, certainly – at least, what I've learned is that when you talk to people with disability or different challenges from our challenges, what I find is that more often than not, some of us that have everything at our fingertips get stuck in a fixed mindset where we're always considering our failures and we're always considering our barriers. However, what we see with people with disabilities is that they have a different mindset. It's a growth mindset. They don't always see a barrier; what they see is an opportunity. They see things completely differently, and we can learn so much from them.

That's why I would urge the House to support this amendment, that shows that when we speak about Albertans, there should be no classification. It should all be equal, and we should be considering accessibility for all Albertans, not one specific person. I would support this amendment. I thank the member for bringing it forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of this amendment. Any time that we can make our communities and our province more accessible is a time that we should all take advantage of. I sense a willingness in this room to support this amendment and therefore to support this motion, so I urge my colleagues to do the same.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other members who would like to speak to A1?
The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to rise briefly in support of the amendment. If it keeps us all on the same page in looking at making Alberta more accessible for all of its citizens, then that can only end up being a good thing. If we're going to work on it together in consultation with those people that we need to help have access, then that can't be anything but a good thing, too. So I'm happy to support both the amendment and the main motion.

The Speaker: The Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to speak on my support of this amendment, something that I have learned, that stays with me, from the Member for St. Albert as well as from those that have the disabilities is: Nothing about Us without Us. I remember that every time I talk about issues that affect them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would speak to amendment A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

5:30

The Speaker: Now we're back to the amended motion. Hon. members, anyone wishing to speak to the amended motion?

Do you wish the opportunity for closure?

Mr. Fraser: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I'd like to thank this House and this Chamber. I mean, I really do believe that when we put before us the important things that we can agree on, there is a symbiotic relationship here. It's encouraging. I just want to thank everybody for their comments. Certainly, hopefully, we can move forward with this committee to truly make Alberta more accessible for all people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 507 as amended carried]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for an interesting afternoon. I believe I learn something every time I sit in this chair. Today was no exception.

I would move that we adjourn this afternoon and reconvene at 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:32 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers.....	1323
Introduction of Guests.....	1323
Members' Statements	
Decorum and Civility in the Assembly.....	1324
PDD Service Eligibility.....	1324
Grande Prairie Diversity Award.....	1325
NDP and Conservative Policies.....	1325
Tourism Week.....	1333
Dave Kirschner, Fort McMurray Continuing Care Facility.....	1334
Statement by the Speaker	
Use of Electronic Devices in the Chamber.....	1325
Oral Question Period	
Provincial Credit Rating.....	1325, 1327, 1330
Provincial Fiscal Policies.....	1326
Economic Conditions in Calgary.....	1327
Auditor General Recommendations on Health Care.....	1328, 1329
Economic Recovery.....	1328
2014 Commercial Fishery Closures.....	1330
Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation.....	1331
School Fees.....	1331
Adult Literacy.....	1332
British Columbia Provincial Election.....	1332
Child and Youth Advocate Death Review.....	1333
Presenting Petitions.....	1334
Tabling Returns and Reports.....	1334
Orders of the Day.....	1334
Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 206 Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017.....	1334
Division.....	1345
Motions Other than Government Motions	
Accessibility Legislation Review Committee.....	1345

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