



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, October 31, 2017

Day 46

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (NDP)
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Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),
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Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)

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New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 27 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, October 31, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

As we begin another day's work here, help us to proceed with the respect and honour this House deserves, filling our hearts and minds with wisdom and determination to always do what is right for our constituents in this province and always remembering that for a society to be truly healthy, democratic, and prosperous, we must first care for the weakest and most vulnerable amongst us.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Constituency Week

27. Ms Ganley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that, notwithstanding the calendar filed with the Clerk pursuant to Standing Order 3(5), the constituency week for the 2017 fall sitting shall be held the week of November 20, 2017, with the Assembly reconvening on Monday, November 27, 2017.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. By way of background I can indicate that the motion proposed is moving the constituency week, originally set for the week of November 13, to the following week. This change would allow for greater participation of MLAs in AAMD and C and AUMA conventions in the coming weeks. I should indicate here for the information of all members that in a few minutes I intend to move Motion 29, which addresses the fact that moving the constituency week would result in a loss of Monday business.

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak to this motion?

[Government Motion 27 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Morning Sitting Adjournment

28. Ms Ganley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that on Thursday, November 9, 2017, the morning sitting of the Assembly stand adjourned at 10:45 a.m.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. This change is being made to accommodate Remembrance Day ceremonies scheduled to take place in the rotunda at 11 a.m.

The Deputy Speaker: This motion is not debatable.

[Government Motion 28 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Morning Sitting Items of Business

29. Ms Ganley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that, notwithstanding Standing Order 8(2), during the morning sitting on Tuesday, November 14, 2017, the only item of business for consideration of the Assembly shall be Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As the members know, the Assembly does not sit on November 13 due to Remembrance Day. When the opposition were consulted about moving the constituency week as per Motion 27, it was pointed out that this would result in the loss of Monday to deal with private members' business. Motion 29 is aimed to address that fact by ensuring that private members' bills are dealt with on Tuesday morning, November 14.

The Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to this motion?

[Government Motion 29 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Morning Sitting Adjournment

30. Ms Ganley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that on Thursday, November 16, 2017, the morning sitting of the Assembly stand adjourned at 10:45 a.m.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. This time change is being made to accommodate Louis Riel Day ceremonies, which take place in the rotunda at 11 a.m.

Thank you.

[Government Motion 30 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 20

Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead on behalf of the hon. minister of environment.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I move second reading of Bill 20, Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act, on behalf of the minister.

This bill will allow for the approval of two interbasin transfers from the North Saskatchewan River basin to the Beaver River basin, and this bill is a plan to make life better for all Albertans.

These interbasin transfers will allow Whitefish Lake First Nation and the hamlet of Mallaig in St. Paul county to connect to regional waterlines in order to address long-running issues with drinking water in their communities. Clean drinking water should be seen as a basic human right, and the Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act is an important step towards solving drinking water issues in these communities.

Interbasin transfers are not to be taken lightly. The Water Act requires that any licence which transfers water between major river basins in Alberta be authorized by a special act of the Legislature. All western provinces have legislation that prohibits transfers between major river basins with some exceptions allowed. Since 2003 five interbasin transfers have been authorized in Alberta by a special act of the Legislature. All five were potable waterline

extensions to rural communities. This is why our government introduced Bill 20.

Both St. Paul county and Whitefish Lake First Nation explored multiple options, and connecting to the regional waterline was determined to be the best solution to address their drinking water challenges. To ensure a safe, reliable supply of drinking water for their residents, both communities have requested that the province approve an interbasin transfer, allowing them to extend existing regional waterlines.

Whitefish Lake First Nation looked at five options prior to pursuing an extension of an existing potable water pipeline from the highway 28/63 regional water commission in the North Saskatchewan River basin. The highway 28/63 regional water commission received \$20.66 million from our government's United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples/First Nations regional tie-in project fund. That was quite a mouthful; anyway, I got through it. An additional \$1.98 million was committed by the federal government to complete the waterline connection to the reservoir on the reserve.

Of course, environmental impacts were considered prior to introducing this bill. Mallaig and Whitefish Lake First Nation are small communities, and the North Saskatchewan River is a reliable source of water, with an average annual volume of approximately 7.5 billion cubic metres flowing through Edmonton.

The existing municipal allocation held by EPCOR to provide drinking water throughout the capital region totals close to 200 million cubic metres. The proposed transfer for St. Paul county and Whitefish Lake First Nation would total 600,000 cubic metres. Environment and Parks confirms that the additional transfer of drinking water will have no measurable effects on the North Saskatchewan River. Consultation has been conducted, and both proposed interbasin transfers are widely supported among the stakeholders.

St. Paul county also specifically engaged a water rate policy on the upcoming water rate increase for Mallaig residents prior to engaging in the regional waterline connection project. Mallaig residents will receive three months' notice that the water rate will be raised to match the two other hamlets in St. Paul county that already receive EPCOR-treated water via the regional waterline. This is in addition to written notice from the county in January 2017 regarding the county's move to full-cost recovery water rates that come into effect as of March 2017.

10:10

Provincial and federal grant funding for the project will help ensure that St. Paul county's water rate is the same as other users on the highway 28/63 regional waterline. There is no water rate increase anticipated for the residents of Whitefish Lake First Nation.

Alberta's water for life strategy sets the stage for a new way of working with Albertans to ensure safe, reliable, and quality water supplies for a sustainable environment and a growing economy. Water for life is centred on the achievement of three goals: safe, secure drinking water; healthy aquatic ecosystems; and reliable, quality water for a sustainable economy.

Approving the interbasin transfers would support the water for life strategy and is a key priority to providing safe and reliable drinking water on-reserve as part of the implementation of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

I hope the House will support Bill 20, thereby providing the necessary approval for the interbasin transfers for both communities. It's important to note that both river basins are open for allocation, so there is no impact to the other licence holders.

Following the approval of the Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act, two water licences will be issued under the Water Act, one licence to the county of St. Paul and the other to the highway 28/63 regional water commission to provide water to the Whitefish Lake First Nation. The Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act includes the maximum amount of water allocated to each community on an annual basis.

I hope all members of the House will see the value of allowing these interbasin transfers to secure a reliable source of drinking water for residents of Mallaig and Whitefish Lake First Nation. This solution has widespread stakeholder support. The environmental impact study identified no concerns regarding the long-term health of the North Saskatchewan River. Both projects leverage federal funding.

If approved, the county of St. Paul and the highway 28/63 regional water commission will be responsible for construction, operation, and maintenance following completion of the pipelines.

I'm very proud to move second reading of Bill 20. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Good morning. I rise this morning to speak in favour of Bill 20, the Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act. This act, if passed, would allow for the transfer of water from the North Saskatchewan River basin to the Beaver River basin through two water pipelines. One pipeline will connect the Ashmont water treatment plant to Mallaig, and the other will tie into the existing Highway 28/63 Regional Water Services Commission waterline between the village of Vilna and the hamlet of Spedden and run north to Whitefish Lake First Nation.

The Water Act states in section 47: "A licence shall not be issued that authorizes the transfer of water between major river basins in the Province unless the licence is specifically authorized by a special Act of the Legislature." Bill 20 fulfills this requirement.

Mallaig is a hamlet in the county of St. Paul which currently obtains its drinking water from nearby groundwater sources. While there are no immediate concerns with Mallaig's water source in terms of quality, the water source that Mallaig draws from has seen its levels decrease in recent years to the point where it is quickly becoming critical that they find a long-term replacement. The groundwater source that the community is currently using is simply not able to sustain the expected population in years and decades to come. Mallaig's current water treatment process meets health requirements, but the North Saskatchewan River basin water that they will be receiving through the pipeline is of higher quality.

The Whitefish Lake First Nation, on the other hand, is facing a slightly more critical issue. They currently draw their water from a nearby lake which has recently seen a measurable and escalating decrease in its water level. This is due to the lake's inability to naturally recover the water that the community draws from it. This drop in water level is concerning not only from an environmental standpoint, but more importantly it has resulted in increased parts per million of carcinogenic contaminants that exceed recommended levels.

While it doesn't present a short-term health problem, it is critical that the Whitefish Lake First Nation switch to the much higher quality North Saskatchewan River basin water without delay. I think that in our society, in a first-world country, it's expected that we would have good water for the people of Alberta. The sooner the community switches, the sooner the lake they draw from will begin its water level recovery, which will undoubtedly bring ecological benefits to the lake and the surrounding community.

The UCP caucus supports Bill 20 and looks forward to passing it as quickly as possible so as to not delay the construction of these two important water pipelines. Clean, reliable drinking water is vital to maintaining a healthy and successful community, and Bill 20 ensures that the Whitefish Lake First Nation and the hamlet of Mallaig have access to a high-quality and sustainable potable water source for many, many years to come. Section 47 of the Water Act mandates that any transfer of water from one river basin to another must be approved through a special act of the Legislature. Again, Bill 20 fulfills that requirement.

Another reason why this should be passed without delay is that Bill 20 has the support of the municipalities in the area. Since the proposed pipelines are being built on existing rights-of-way, the project minimizes the negative impact on area property owners. When it comes to the cost of the pipelines, the money has already been approved at all necessary levels of government. This is a shovel-ready project.

The pipeline that will service Mallaig is budgeted to cost \$10.2 million, with \$4.75 million to come from the federal government, \$4.75 million from the provincial government, and the remaining \$700,000 to come from the local municipality. The pipeline that will service the Whitefish Lake First Nation is budgeted to cost \$22.6 million, with \$20.66 million being paid for by the provincial government and the remaining \$1.8 million being paid for by the federal government. The federal government's portion covers the cost of the pipeline being built on federal and reserve land.

Lastly, I'd like to address the issue of availability of water in the North Saskatchewan River basin. I know that some of my colleagues from southern Alberta have been dealing with a shortage of available water and that in some places the shortage of water has even started to impact their community's ability to grow and expand. According to Alberta WaterPortal the annual discharge of the North Saskatchewan River is 7.3 million cubic decametres. The total amount of water being transferred between the North Saskatchewan River and the Beaver River basins in Bill 20 is 601.1 cubic decametres, which represents just eight one-thousandths of 1 per cent of the annual North Saskatchewan River discharge, not much at all, obviously. Now, the Beaver River basin flows into Hudson Bay, and the North Saskatchewan River also flows into Hudson Bay via Lake Winnipeg.

I'd like to thank you and urge all of my colleagues on both sides of this House to support Bill 20.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 20, on the face of it a logical and sensible and, obviously, critical thing to do for health and for sustainability of communities, including a First Nations community. I want to add my caution, though, to that of the mover of this bill. The reason these bills come to the Legislature is because it's a big decision. Transferring water from one basin to another has costs, and it has benefits.

10:20

I don't think we in the Legislature necessarily appreciate the costs of continuing to transfer water from one basin to another. We've had five in the past. I was part of those decisions. They were in southern Alberta and related to some groundwater quality issues and quantity issues.

I think it behooves us to think about why we are continuing to have to provide interbasin transfers, which have some ecological

risks. Those are contamination of certain species going into another ecosystem and potentially becoming invasive species, overriding certain species of fish, dominating the fish mix, and certain potential toxins, obviously, whether plant toxins or industrial toxins.

So there's that dimension, and there's the other dimension, which has to do with whether we're conserving appropriately the water that we're currently using in a particular basin.

The third aspect is: do we understand what's happening to our groundwater? Why is the groundwater declining in that area? What are the factors that are contributing to its decline? Is it population demand, agricultural demand? Is it industrial demand? Is it a failure to conserve in places where we could be conserving?

Are we seeing the kinds of issues related to the Rosebud area, where fracking and coal-bed methane actually contaminated quite a significant number of people's groundwater wells and therefore required trucked-in water and eventual new sources of water for these folks? What do we know about our groundwater? What do we know about what's happening, especially in the new shale gas developments? We seem to have learned nothing from the 2006 fiasco in Rosebud, where after all this volume and this gas was coming up in people's water wells, we suddenly realized that we didn't know what the baseline gas was in those wells because we hadn't been doing baseline groundwater monitoring.

We did 12,000 samples in that area, and 10 years later we don't have meaningful results from those groundwater tests because the sampling techniques were different, the laboratories were different, the standards were different, and we can draw almost no conclusions from that whole Rosebud fiasco. Are we doing baseline groundwater monitoring now in relation to the shale gas developments? No. We're leaving it up to the industry to decide whether groundwater is being protected or not, and only on complaints do we actually get in there and sample the water.

So I have serious concerns about our groundwater. I'm not saying that this particular transfer is wrong. I'm saying that we haven't yet taken seriously the growing threat to both surface and groundwater in terms of our demands: agricultural, industrial, residential, municipal. We haven't taken seriously the fact that, especially in the southern and eastern parts of this province, we're headed for real trouble with climate change. We don't know what we should know about our groundwater, we don't know what the industrial impacts are, and I don't think any of us believe that we're conserving our water and using it to the best available opportunities.

Again, a note of caution that these issues come to the Legislature because we have the final say, and I don't know how much information we have to make these decisions. We continue to pass them. This will be the sixth interbasin transfer. I don't know if we're asking the right questions of our ministry, and that includes the Energy ministry because the industrial activity in this province is second to none under the surface. Over 450,000 wells puncture through our water tables, and we don't know what we need to know.

I met with a groundwater expert last week at the University of Calgary. He's still trying to sift through and get some semblance of conclusions, some reliable conclusions from those 12,000 samplings that were done in 2006 and '07 in the Rosebud area. He's having a great deal of difficulty because of the problems I mentioned.

We don't know the volumes of water available in our groundwater, which is the ultimate source of our surface water. We need to start asking some hard questions of our Energy and Environment ministries and ensure that we know what we're leaving for the next seven generations.

I will be supporting this transfer but with great concern that we don't know what we need to know to make these decisions. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), any questions or comments?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm very proud to stand up today and speak to Bill 20. It's been something that's been on my mind and on the mind of our council out in St. Paul for quite some time. The project has been something that has been talked about and planned for quite a few years, so it's really good to see it come through in this fall session so that they can get to work on this project and finish the final leg of it.

It's very important that we do respect the Water Act and these clauses that try to protect the interbasin transfers. I know from my previous life in the industry that when major pipelines are being built all the way across the province, north and south and east and west, whenever they come to transfer water across, they're not allowed to do that. They have to do their hydro testing and keep that water on that side. So I do respect the reasons for having this part of the legislation and part of the Water Act.

However, the fact that our northern communities are isolated doesn't mean that they should be living in substandard conditions, and I speak specifically to the Whitefish Lake First Nation. They're a very viable, vital community up there. You know, they're doing great things. They've got some great education programs, trying to get their youth trained up for industry work in scaffolding and other areas.

I know that one of the other issues that they have is busing. A lot of the students from Whitefish Lake are bused to Ashmont. This waterline is a step in the right direction, and the next one that we're going to have to work on is – and I see the minister shaking his head. You know, there are times when the kids miss a whole week of school because of muddy roads or snowy roads. That's another one that we're going to have to deal with, but this waterline is a step in the right direction.

As well, I'm sure that people have heard me speak about Mallaig quite often. They host Haying in the 30s every long weekend in August, where they raise money for cancer support groups. They do a wonderful job there. It's a very, very unique community, one of the few that's actually growing out in that area of the county. There are some beautiful homes in there. This is just another thing that's going to help make them a more attractive place for young families to move to.

I really support Bill 20, and I hope everybody else does as well.

One thing I'd like to add is that the waterline currently ends at Ashmont, and it's completely legal to pull up to the water station at Ashmont and fill a truck with 4,000 litres of water and drive to Mallaig and put it into a cistern. You know, the pipeline is just going to serve to make it easier to do those water transfers.

I don't see a real issue from an environmental standpoint. The amount of water that we're dealing with here is not that substantial that it's going to cause any real grief to the Beaver River watershed.

I would hope that everybody, you know, recognizes the importance of fresh, clean drinking water at Whitefish Lake and Mallaig. I think that they deserve and have a right to it, just like any other Albertan does. So whatever we can do to push this bill through as quickly as possible so that we can carry on with this project would be much appreciated by the county of St. Paul. I know that for sure.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to start by thanking the opposition for standing up and supporting this bill. It's obviously a very important bill, and I, too, will speak to it in a few moments.

I just want to note that this is \$20 million out of the \$100 million coming from the budget this year to enhance water to communities, and I know that you support all of that. I'm just wondering if the member can speak to the fact that they voted against the budget and here we are in this place, where the actual fruits of the budget are being discussed, and they're voting in favour of it. I just wonder if you might somehow articulate how it is that you're working with the communities to enhance the things that we absolutely, obviously agree on in terms of the benefits to the community, agree on in terms of the need to have communities live in the modern time, you know, with fair and just services, as every other community in Alberta would rightly expect, as you do as well, and then at the same time vote against the very budget that allowed the money for this to happen. I'd just like to hear how you would justify that.

10:30

The Deputy Speaker: Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you. Thank you for the question. Yeah. Indeed, we did vote against the budget. We voted against a \$10 billion deficit and ever-growing debt in the province that our children and grandchildren are going to have to pay for. This project is very much needed, and it's a very small piece of the pie. I really appreciate that the government has put this money in because I think Whitefish Lake absolutely deserves this and the hamlet of Mallaig absolutely deserves this, like I said.

The road construction project that I talked about as well: I mean, it's going to take a lot of money, and it's going to take collaboration between the federal government and the provincial government. This is what we're here for, to push forward these projects and make sure our communities are viable and that they have the rights and the drinking water that they need. So, yes, you know, we can vote against a deficit budget and still support community programs that are needed.

An Hon. Member: No. You can't.

Mr. Hanson: Yeah. We can. We just did.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much. I appreciate that comment. I'm just wondering if I can ask the hon. member whether we can anticipate that in the next budget coming forward, you will speak favourably in terms of our increasing the provincial budget in order to provide roads for indigenous people in this province.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, do you wish to respond?

Mr. Hanson: Madam Speaker, thank you very much for the question. I will not be voting in favour of any budget that increases the debt load on future generations of Albertans, period. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to stand in this Chamber and support Bill 20, the Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act. Many of you in this House will have heard me speak about my roots from small-town Alberta, from the village of Thorhild. I'm quite familiar with what living with groundwater supply is like. Thorhild for many, many decades, even when I was a child until I probably was in my teen years, relied upon well water, and the whole community had a reservoir from which they drew their water. I know that home movies will testify as to the quality of that water. When siblings and I were bathing, we had home movies taken, and there were comments when people see them because the water is yellow. It was yellow coming right out of the tap because of the organics that were in it. People are shocked now to see that that water quality was acceptable back then.

Ultimately what happened was that the city of Edmonton water supply eventually was brought to Thorhild and some other surrounding villages and communities, and it really improved the quality of life for that village. The water was less and less desirable, and it ultimately got to the point where they demanded something be done, and finally it happened. It was actually an extension of a city of Edmonton waterline that went out to Thorhild and other communities which were relying on well water that wasn't up to the standard that most of us in Alberta in more urban situations expect.

Many people had their own wells, of course, in town, but in my grandmother's case that well in Thorhild was one that was only for vegetable washing. That was all you could use that water for. The rest of it was well water from a reservoir that everybody used. But the quality of life of the whole community changed when they could turn on a tap and have a reliable source of water that didn't smell like peat moss, as their source of water in Thorhild did. So I'm sure the communities of Mallaig and Whitefish Lake will benefit in a similar way from this water transfer.

But I agree with the Member for Calgary-Mountain View that we definitely must take seriously the concerns about water transfer between basins. Water is life, but also there are things to be concerned about when you are transferring between basins. That was taken into account prior to this legislation being brought forward.

It's not every day that a water basin transfer happens or takes place. It was noted by other speakers before me that there have only been five such transfers since 2003, which indicates that it's very seriously considered before a decision is made to go ahead and do an interbasin transfer. These transfers are done to really raise the quality of life of the communities that they're proposed to serve. There is a good reason why the transfer has to come before us in the Legislature for approval; it is a serious thing to do, to have an interbasin transfer.

I know that the government consulted with other stakeholder groups, and this was determined to be the best way to move forward. I can only imagine what the people of Mallaig and Whitefish Lake First Nation are thinking about in anticipation of having a higher level of water quality available to them in the near future.

The fact that we're going ahead with this is a moment to celebrate, but it's something that we also have to take a look at in respect of the whole picture of water quality in Alberta. I do agree with other speakers. Knowing that water is life and conservation is important and groundwater quality is important, this government is taking those thoughts into their consideration in a longer term picture. We certainly are aware in this province of the value of our water resources and the need to look at a long-term measure to protect them. I think that in the shorter term we must also act in the

interests of the communities we are serving in other more rural areas of the province so that they are not denied the health and quality of the water supply that most Albertans take for granted in their more urban settings.

St. Paul county and Whitefish Lake First Nation have already been looking at options for years and applying for funds to make these waterlines a reality. I know that it was years ago that Thorhild was looking to do the same thing. I think that in the future when we do see these types of situations occurring, we should probably see what we can do to expedite the new supply of water for communities where we can within budgetary limitations. It's such an important consideration for the quality of life of the communities and the people in them that we serve. It behooves us to see if we can speed up the process where there is a demonstrated need for a higher quality of water when the current supply of water is dwindling over time.

Now, it's a testament to the work and vision of this government and the federal government that funding is already in place for both projects. We've heard that St. Paul county has \$9.5 million in funding from the province and the federal government. They must spend the federal funding by March 2018, or it will expire. The highway 28/63 regional water commission received \$20.66 million from our government's United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples/First Nations regional tie-in project fund. An additional \$1.98 million was committed by the federal government to complete the waterline connection to the reservoir on-reserve. It's truly the case, Madam Speaker, of citizens, municipalities, regional organizations, the provincial government, and the federal government all working together.

I know, Madam Speaker, that our government also thinks of a clean and sustainable environment for all Albertans as they consider these kinds of transfers. After all, the impacts that our actions have today will have a great impact on our children and grandchildren far into the future. We on this side of the House know that and try to enact legislation that takes environmental sustainability very seriously. I'm proud to note that environmental impacts were considered prior to introducing this bill.

Mallaig and Whitefish Lake First Nation are small communities, just as the village of Thorhild when I lived there was quite tiny. They deserve our consideration and respect when it comes to making sure that their water supply is up to the standards that all the rest of us in Alberta take for granted.

10:40

The North Saskatchewan River is a reliable source of water. The amount of water that this transfer will take from the flow of source of the North Saskatchewan River is really quite small. EPCOR already holds an allocation close to 200 million cubic metres to provide treated drinking water throughout the region. The proposed transfer for St. Paul county and Whitefish Lake First Nation would total 600,000 cubic metres. Extensive bottling has been done to confirm that this additional transfer of drinking water will have no measurable effects on the North Saskatchewan River. I also further know that the government has consulted with NGO stakeholders who study and monitor water use and that no concerns were raised. As with everything this government does, we also considered the criteria of making life more affordable for Albertans.

We know that St. Paul county consulted with Mallaig residents before deciding to pursue this option. The water rates in Mallaig are set by the county, and after this extension is completed, the water rates in Mallaig will be the same as in the two other hamlets in St. Paul county that already receive EPCOR-treated water via the regional waterline. Funding from the provincial and federal governments for this important project will help ensure St. Paul

county's water rate is the same as others on the highway 28/63 waterline. There is no water rate increase anticipated for residents of Whitefish Lake First Nation.

I'm also very happy that this project falls within the parameters of two of our government's strategic policies moving forward. One is Alberta's water for life strategy, that is centred on the achievement of three goals: safe, secure drinking water; healthy aquatic ecosystems; and reliable, quality water for a sustainable economy. Another key priority for our government, as it should be for all Albertans, is the absolute necessity to provide safe and reliable drinking water for First Nations as part of the implementation of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. This is one of the initiatives that I'm most proud of that this government has put into place since its inception after the 2015 election. It is a long time overdue, we're actually doing it, and it's the right thing to do, Madam Speaker. I hope that everyone in this Legislature agrees.

For these reasons I'm going to support this bill, and I hope that everyone in this Legislature does so as well. I remember seeing yellow water coming out of the tap in Thorhild and knowing that I thought it was odd, even as a kid. The people of Mallaig and Whitefish Lake First Nation deserve to have clean, clear, fresh, well-treated drinking water coming out of their taps, just as everybody else in the province does.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, thank you to the member for his thoughtful comments. I assume, given his research on the issue, that he has been given some explanation for why the groundwater is diminishing and the lake water is diminishing. Could he share with the House his research on the explanation for why the water is diminishing?

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the question from the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. While we certainly are aware that the groundwater is diminishing and there are concerns around that, I don't profess to be a hydrologist or a complete expert on the matter, but I'm certainly aware that it's a concern that we have in this jurisdiction, as it is throughout the world. Water resources are something that we have to pay more attention to, and it's the responsibility of every government, every jurisdiction to do so. We take that seriously here.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to discuss this very important bill. I'm also very pleased to hear the tenor of the debate this morning. From all sides the debate has been productive and has contributed to, I think, improving the lives of Albertans, as is the main priority of this government.

I do want to make some comments on the interchange between the Minister of Indigenous Relations and the member representing Lac La Biche-Two Hills-Cold Lake, if I have that in the correct order.

Mr. Kleinstuber: Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Dr. Turner: I'll get *Hansard* corrected later.

I think this interchange actually strikes at one of the fundamental differences between this side of the House and the other side of the House. I mean, everybody in this House agrees that the millions of dollars should be spent on getting a safe, reliable, healthy supply of water to the residents of Mallaig as well as to other parts of St. Paul county, including Whitefish Lake. Also, everybody agrees here that UNDRIP is a very important issue and that we need to do everything in this House to make sure that the principles of the TRC report as well as the advice that's been given to us by the United Nations is fulfilled. So we have to spend money now to achieve this.

That money, actually, is going to help prime the economy of this province, the economy of St. Paul county, the economy of the residents of Whitefish First Nation, and, basically, the economy of the city of Edmonton because EPCOR is actually going to be the contractor that does this work. That money is going to be spent now, and it means that the children and the grandchildren that were referred to by the member opposite are actually going to be able to benefit from a healthy, safe water supply. They're going to have a much higher quality of life. They are going to do better in school. There's good evidence that with a safe water supply the attendance at school is better and the achievements at school are better. There will be the ability to participate in various sporting activities that come along with having an adequate water supply, and there will be less time spent dealing with the sort of adverse effects of poor water supplies, that really do have a major effect on health.

I'm actually pleased that we're adding to the deficit to get this accomplished, and I'm pleased that that's going to mean that those children and those grandchildren are going to be able to benefit now rather than having to wait for some unknown future to benefit. They may actually not survive to that future if we don't spend that money now. So I think that's one of the most important issues here, that there are things that we need to spend money on now, irrespective of the fact that that may add to our deficit, because they are needed and they are essential.

I'm the MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud, and it's bounded by the North Saskatchewan River. The quality of life of those that live along the North Saskatchewan, all the way from the headwaters above Brazeau, all the way down, actually, into Saskatchewan and Prince Albert, and then all the way into Manitoba and eventually into the Nelson River: that's a key thing to me. I'm reassured that this bill, as has been stated before, with a water transfer, is not going to have any effect on that, but it does represent, I think, a recognition that we have to husband our water supply very, very carefully.

I was born and raised in southwestern Manitoba, and the Assiniboine and the Souris River are very important water sources there. About 20 years ago or maybe longer the government of the United States acceded to some demands from the state of North Dakota to change the way that Devils Lake was drained. That's a lake in North Dakota. Now, the Devils Lake was previously in the drainage of the Missouri River, and with the changes that came about, the Devils Lake ended up draining into the Red River. Well, guess what's connected to the Red River? The Assiniboine at the Forks in Winnipeg and then the Souris River in southwestern Manitoba. What happened with that change in the drainage was that there were invasive species that did come up the drainage from Devils Lake. You know, there are going to be some long-term consequences, so I'm very familiar with the need to make sure that we're doing things very safely.

10:50

I know the member across may disagree with this, but the Beaver River is really underappreciated, both historically and currently, in

the economy of Alberta. The Beaver River does connect to the Churchill River in Manitoba through Lac Île-à-la-Crosse in Saskatchewan, and it was a very important river in the exploration of western Canada. Indeed, my hero, David Thompson, came to the Beaver River in 1798 and actually made it all the way to Lac La Biche. There was a fort – I think it was called Cold Lake house – that was established on the Beaver River, and it was one of the first fur trading posts in Alberta.

As has been said, the Beaver River now probably has a smaller discharge and needs some assistance in maintaining its activity, and I think the work that the environment department has done to make sure that this is being done safely is going to protect us in that.

Another thing that I do want to speak to – and I've spoken to this previously – is the wonderful work that's done in the village of Mallaig. That Haying in the 30s organization that was alluded to earlier is a phenomenal organization. In my experience as a cancer physician at the Cross that group has been instrumental in improving the quality of life of a large number of people from northeastern Alberta, and whatever can be done to help that community and that group I'm definitely in favour of.

I basically want to summarize that, you know, no matter where people live in this province, they deserve to have clean and safe drinking water, and providing that water, especially to First Nations and to small communities, is an obligation that this government takes very, very seriously. Those who live in Alberta's urban areas like me rarely think about water, but it's certainly in the minds of those that live in rural areas and in First Nations. We don't take these transfers lightly, but this one is a good one. It's a fundamental need and I believe should be a human right. As a physician I'm very cognizant of the need for any community to have a safe and reliable water supply. I think that should be a human right, and I'm pleased to see that our government in collaboration with the federal government is moving in the right direction to achieve those ends.

With that, I will encourage all of my colleagues on both sides of the House to support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you very much to the member for the great statement that he made. When he mentioned that he was happy to spend the money on this exact thing, there were a couple of snickers over there from the Member for Airdrie, who apparently believes that we need to be prosperous before we can be caring and compassionate. So can you please explain why it's important to spend this money and to help these individuals have clean drinking water?

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood for that very insightful question. It comes down to that fundamental difference between the party across and the party on this side of the House. We recognize that there are certain inviolable needs of the citizens of Alberta: education, health care, safe and caring institutional environments, good roads, safe bridges, maintenance of all of those things, making sure that our environment is taken care of, making sure that we have the resources to encourage the diversification of our economy, making sure that we have resources to make sure that our colleges and our universities and our institutes of technology are able to get our citizens ready for the future, whatever that brings, making sure that we can attract businesses like Amazon. That's going to create 750 great jobs close to Airdrie, isn't it? It's Balzac, actually, where that's going to be.

I mean, if we didn't spend some money on encouraging Amazon to think about actually having its headquarters here in Alberta – and, by the way, that probably is adding to our deficit, but I'm happy to see that money being spent. You know, again, who could be against providing a safe, potable water supply to our First Nations people? For 150 years the government of Canada has not stepped up to the plate on that. I'm proud of what our minister is doing to make sure that the pipelines – the Minister of Infrastructure is helping out. The minister of environment is helping out. They're stepping up and making sure that this fundamental human right is supplied.

Thank you very much for the question.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to pick up on the member's comments about the truth and reconciliation process. In my constituency I have the Stoney Nakoda First Nation. Often when I have meetings with them and talk about the things that we're doing to help indigenous communities, they say: "You know what? We've heard all that before. We sat with the former government. They sat and told us they were going to do all this and do that, and they never did." When I meet with the First Nations, they tend to be skeptical about the things that we're promising to them.

I think this bill right here is a good example of making good on our promise to the truth and reconciliation process. It's putting it into action. They say: talk is cheap; let's see your action. This is action. This is giving clean drinking water to First Nations communities and honouring the truth and reconciliation process.

We heard the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills earlier say that he wouldn't vote for a deficit budget. Now, these people can't wait for oil to be \$100 a barrel again to have clean, safe drinking water. They need it now. That's why we're doing this now. They can't wait. This is their human right. It's on the provincial government to give these people their human rights. You know, the folks over there want to slash public services and balance the budget, pray for oil to come back up, and only then would they consider giving people their fundamental human rights. They did it for the last 40 years, total inaction from the conservatives, so I'm proud of our government that we're doing this and would like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud for his comments, too.

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

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am very delighted to stand up in support of this bill today because it truly is a moment where we get to reflect on a much larger issue and place ourselves in the context of history and place ourselves in the context of doing what's right.

When this government entered into the responsibility of taking care of all of the people in this province and making life better for everyone, we said from the very first day that that included indigenous people and that we were going to ensure that that happened in a way that had not happened previously across the country and, essentially, for the 150 years of the existence of Canada. It's now time for us to step up and do something different. As part of that, we adopted the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples and made the commitment that we would do everything we could to change our laws, our policies, and our practices to align ourselves with that wonderful document, which was largely written here in Alberta, by the way.

11:00

As a part of that process, we distributed the United Nations declaration to all of our ministries within the provincial government and as well to many community organizations such as treaties 6, 7, and 8, to the Metis Settlements General Council, to the Métis Nation of Alberta, to the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, and to the friendship centres. The question that we asked all of them in giving them this declaration was: what do we need to do to bring Alberta into the modern times, to align Alberta with the international declaration that indigenous people are indeed people that need to be respected for who they are and provided with the services that we would expect to have in any other place in this city or in this province?

From that came a list of about 20 first-step items. We understand there'll be many more as time moves on, but we derived a list. One of the top items on that list coming from the indigenous communities was the fact that so many indigenous communities were living with inadequate water supplies, something, of course, that was very concerning to those communities. They had lived for thousands of years, tens of thousands of years on this land being able to drink the water, being able to provide for the health and well-being of their communities just by being part of nature and taking care of nature in a way that we all should be doing, a lesson we need to learn from the First Nations communities and the Métis communities in this province.

Now they find themselves in a place where, because of our water use, because of our industrial use, because of our municipal use, and because of changing environmental circumstances, the undeniable truth of climate change, they're not able to drink the water in the way that they used to be able to drink the water. They used to be able to go out onto the land and dip their hand into any puddle and drink that water feeling safe and secure that that was going to enhance their well-being, not harm them. Now we find ourselves in a very different place. Part of our commitment through that United Nations declaration is understanding that we have been part of that change, that very unfortunate change that doesn't allow them to drink the water in the way they used to.

So we made this decision, made a decision that we have a commitment not only to the individuals who are living in those communities right now but to all the generations coming forward, many generations ahead, to provide them with what we all expect, and that is clean, drinkable water accessible to them at all times for their health and their well-being.

As a government we also faced a second problem. The second problem was that the previous governments have always taken the position that First Nations issues are a federal jurisdictional issue and have always essentially dismissed the First Nations people in this province and the Métis people in this province by virtue of saying: "I'm sorry. There's nothing we can do about that. That is a federal government issue." For the very first time in this province we made a decision that that kind of jurisdictional divide was not acceptable to us. We had committed ourselves to the United Nations declaration, and as a result of that commitment, we had to fulfill it by actually living in practice the commitments that we had made.

So we made a decision that has not been widely done across this country. In fact, we may be the very first provincial jurisdiction to have said: we are going to put money in our provincial budget to provide water to First Nations communities in spite of the fact that First Nations communities are supposed to be taken care of by the federal government but, clearly, for over 150 years have not. As a result, in the spring we put \$100 million in our budget in order to ensure that there is clean drinking water in various communities throughout this province. I'm very happy to be here today to help

us spend \$20 million of that \$100 million to ensure that clean drinking water is coming to the Whitefish (Goodfish) Lake First Nation and, of course, to the community of Mallaig close by.

This is really important for a number of reasons. One of them is that we're fulfilling our commitments. It's the right thing to do, and we are a government that puts our money where our mouth is, so we know we have to put dollars into it. You can't make commitments with your heart and then run away with your wallet. It just doesn't work that way, and that's how it's always worked in the past.

Having fulfilled that commitment, we also realize that there are some other benefits, that I want to make sure that we point out here. One of them is that we have made sure that we have provided leadership to the federal government. As a result of our decision to put \$100 million into water for reserves, the federal government has stepped up. In all of the communities that we have designated for bringing water to the community, the federal government has agreed that they will work with us to ensure that once the pipe arrives at that community, that water will be dispersed throughout the community appropriately. That means that we, through our leadership, are actually getting the federal government to take action on something that they have neglected for 150 years. That's an incredible stance for us to take.

As well, that means we're also leveraging federal dollars. We're getting them to invest dollars in our province, which is something that we're very proud to do as a province, and to ensure that we are getting our just due in this larger entity of Canada, that we are very proudly a member of.

The benefits of taking this kind of important leadership position are numerous. We have a commitment filled, we have an increase of dollars brought into the province, and we have helped a federal government which is dragging its heels to take steps forward on commitments that they have made but they have not followed up on with their wallet, unfortunately a problem with many governments. Thank goodness; finally, an NDP government got elected, so we could actually do these kinds of things.

One of the other things that I also think is very important about this type of movement forward is the fact that we sometimes hear complaints about resources going to First Nations communities. Of course, I could take hours talking about why it's appropriate for that to happen, but one of the things I want to remind people of is that whenever one part of our community experiences a better life, we all experience a better life. This is an absolute, great example of that. We have a First Nations community that is asking for water, we have provided the dollars for that water to arrive there, and, lo and behold, at the same time we have another community close by the First Nations community which benefits from the work we have done for the First Nations community. As a result, Mallaig is now finding itself able to get clean drinking water, that they were not able to get before.

This summer a very similar process happened when we brought the water pipe from Stony Plain to the Alexis reserve, just west of Edmonton. While we brought that water to the Alexis reserve as part of our commitment, we also made sure that it was available to all of the summer homes around Lac Ste. Anne and to the town of Alberta Beach and other towns along the way.

It's something for us all to remember. If we want to uplift the province of Alberta, if you want to uplift your community, you need to uplift other communities. Alberta is uplifted when the First Nations communities are uplifted, and when the First Nations communities are uplifted, so are the rest of the cities and towns in the province of Alberta. That is the nature of good governance, and that is the commitment that we made to ensure that all people live a better life in the province of Alberta.

I think that having made these steps along the way, we have taken some very important first steps, but we also need to do a number of other things, and I'd like to mention a few of those things. One of them is that we now need to ensure that First Nations have full participation in terms of the water regulation boards across this province. So if Whitefish (Goodfish) is on the waterline, they should also be on the board that regulates that waterline. That's a commitment we're making to try to work with all the municipalities to ensure that First Nations truly have representation, that they can speak to their needs, that they can fully participate, because we believe that that is good. That is good for First Nations, but it is good for all of Alberta. We all lift up together, and I think that's something that's very important for us to remember.

I also want to comment on the very important comments that were given by the MLA for Calgary-Mountain View about our concern for: why is it that we're having difficulties with water in various parts of this province? Another commitment we have made to First Nations in this province is to talk to them about water just as an issue, not connected necessarily to a pipeline of water to their community or to other specific projects but, rather, to look at: how do we ensure that water is well protected in this community, in this province and that we can make sure that that water will be a benefit to all generations coming forward? As a result, we have established a committee working with First Nations communities to discuss water, to discuss water movement, and to discuss how we can improve the health and well-being of all the community through ensuring clean and safe and protected water.

11:10

I take the comments from the Member for Calgary-Mountain View very seriously when he reminds us that there is scientific work to be done to ensure that we have an understanding of the water needs that we have in this province, that we have an understanding of the present circumstance of water in this province and how any actions that we take moving forward will affect the present circumstances and the circumstances that should have been in place and that were in place long before the nonindigenous people arrived in this province.

From this one small action I've already mentioned four different ways in which this has serious implications for us in the province, with the United Nations declaration, through leveraging federal action and dollars, and through benefiting everybody in this province.

I stand here proudly with my colleagues saying that this is what you get when you have an NDP government. You get people who are committed. You get people who turn that commitment into action, and we get results today.

I want to thank those members of the opposition who have stood up in support of this piece of legislation for recognizing the important work that is going on today and supporting us in doing this. I look forward, as I mentioned earlier, to their support for actually putting their money where their mouth is and not simply standing up and making a commitment to support individual projects in their community, whether it be an emergency room or an ambulance service or a bridge or a road being built, but actually

standing up when it's time to pay for all those things, when it's time to commit yourself to saying: if I say that this is worth doing, then I will actually do something to make it happen. That's what you get when you have this government.

I look forward to our other initiatives moving forward. I look forward to all the work coming out in this particular round of the Legislature and all of the work that we as an NDP government are committed to providing on behalf of our constituents, the people of Alberta, including the First Nation and Métis people in this province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to take a short moment to praise the Minister of Indigenous Relations for the work that he and his team in the ministry have done. I've had an opportunity to witness the minister and his team in action when we've been in meetings with the Stoney Nakoda First Nation in my constituency. The ministry has bent over backwards to meet with the nation there, and the ministry has worked extraordinarily hard to move things forward. I know that the ministry is struggling under the enormity of what work was left for them by the former government due to their inaction, but I know that the minister, the Indigenous Relations ministry have taken up the task to tackle those difficult issues. I just want to thank him for the work that he and his team have done, and I want to put it on the record that it hasn't gone unnoticed. Thank you, Minister.

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

Any other speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, I will call on the hon. Member for West Yellowhead on behalf of the minister of environment to close debate.

Mr. Rosendahl: I would like to move that we close debate on Bill 20.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader, I just would like to have an announcement on behalf of the Speaker that he would like to proceed with the group photo of Members of the Legislative Assembly on the front steps, which is scheduled to take place at 12:10 p.m. today. The Speaker would ask that members be prompt to ensure that the photo will be taken as quickly as possible. Thank you.

The hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Seeing as we have made some good progress already this morning, I move that the House adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:15 a.m.]

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