



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 15, 2017

Day 54

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature**

Third Session

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

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (UCP),
Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition
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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (NDP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (NDP)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (NDP)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (NDP)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP)
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (NDP),
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Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (UCP)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (NDP)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UCP)
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (NDP)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP),
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Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (Ind)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (NDP)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (Ind)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (NDP),
Deputy Government House Leader
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (UCP),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
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Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (UCP)
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (NDP)
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Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (NDP)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (UCP)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

Party standings:

New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 15, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly students from St. Jerome Catholic school who are here to visit the Legislature today. They're here with their teachers Alicia Centis and Julie King as well as chaperones Dianne Wozniuk, Curtis Morrison, and Nadine Estrada. I'd like them all to stand up, please, and get a warm welcome from the Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Dr. Turner: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you 31 students from Monsignor William Irwin school in Terwillegar Towne in Edmonton-Whitemud. I've had the pleasure of meeting with this class and doing a Read In Week. They're accompanied by their teacher, Michael Leskow, and student teachers Sydney McLeod and Jessica Tannahill as well as some parents: Joanne Mitchell, Deanna Morrison, Sandra Smith, and Deborah Merriam. They're behind me, and I'd ask them to stand and receive the usual welcome of this Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some of Alberta's paramedics from the north and south areas of our province. These caring professionals work every day to keep Albertans safe, healthy, and well, and I'd like to thank them for their dedicated service. I'd invite them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some of Alberta's committed paramedics serving in the central Alberta area. Paramedics are often the first on the scene, providing urgent care in traumatic situations. We are making sure that the staff have the mental health supports they need to deal with the emotional stress caused by this type of work. Thank you for your service. I'd invite the paramedics from central Alberta to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two constituents and friends of mine from the great town of Rocky Mountain House. The first is Stuart Burke, who works for Husky in our community as a safety co-ordinator, and around our community we affectionately refer to him as Safety Stu. He keeps us in line.

With him today is Her Worship Tammy Burke, who is the new mayor of Rocky Mountain House, the second female mayor that our community of Rocky Mountain House has had. The reason I bring that up is because, of course, our first female mayor was Helen Hunley, who would go on to be the first female Lieutenant Governor of our great province and the first female many things for our community and this province. Tammy has some big shoes to fill, but I can tell you that our community believes that she can, and we're looking forward to seeing what she does with her term.

I'd ask if both of them would stand up and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly some of Alberta's dedicated paramedics serving in the Edmonton area. I'm proud to call them my colleagues. We're proud of the contributions paramedics make to the health and well-being of Albertans in communities all across Alberta. I particularly want to mention the excellent and professional care that was provided by these paramedics to one of our colleagues yesterday. Thank you for your service. I invite you to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you Jessica Lamer, a senior captain with Edmonton fire rescue services; Amy Benson, a paramedic with Alberta Health Services; and Constable Sylvie Boy, who is with the Edmonton Police Service and also a former sergeant in the French army. Together they recently ran in the Servus Edmonton half marathon wearing their uniforms and full gear to raise money and awareness for PTSD. Thank you for your service and your dedication to this cause. I'd ask you now to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly nine fantastic paramedics from Calgary. Our paramedics work extremely hard and provide great service to Albertans, ensuring emergency medical services are there when we need them. Thank you for your caring, compassionate, and professional service. I invite you all to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on your behalf today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta Rick Massini, the chair of the board of trustees of the Medicine Hat public school division; Mark Davidson, superintendent of the Medicine Hat public school division; and Arlene Hrynyk, president of the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta and trustee for the Northern Lights school division. These three individuals are deeply committed to our province's public education system, and I know that we are all proud to call such dedicated people our fellow Albertans. I would ask that they all stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. Thank you for coming.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you members of the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta. I think Arlene was already announced, but she's worth two introductions since she's so awesome, and the same with Rick Massini from Medicine Hat, certainly deserving of the same. We also have Cathy Hogg, who's the executive vice-president of the PSBAA. I also have Lanie Parr, who's the director of the PSBAA, and Cheryl Johner. She's an Edmonton public school trustee and at PSBAA as well. I think Nathan Ip is here. He is with Edmonton public schools, of course, and must have something to do with the Public School Boards' Association because he's sitting so close to them.

If you don't mind, Mr. Speaker, I can just give my other introductions as well. I have the president of the Alberta School Boards Association, Mary Martin. I have the executive director of the College of Alberta School Superintendents, Barry Litun. I have Michael Hauptman, who is the vice-president of the College of Alberta School Superintendents.

So lots of people here today as part of the introduction of Bill 28, and I would be very proud if everyone could give them a big round from the floor.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Not to be left out, I too want to recognize some of the members of the Health Sciences Association and the Alberta executive board seated in the members' gallery. They represent approximately 3,300 EMS practitioners across Alberta. We are committed to assisting EMS with resources issues through a greater emphasis on paramedic integration and community-based care by reducing wait times for EMS crews and emergency departments. Thank you for the advocacy and partnership in making life better for Albertans. I ask that Mike, Trudy, Travis, Evan, and Cameron please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

1:40

I have a second introduction as well, if you would indulge me, and that is to recognize the province's nurse practitioners who are here today and the high quality of care they provide for Albertans every day. This week we celebrate the dynamic contributions of nurse practitioners to the wellness of Albertans by recognizing nurse practitioner week. Nurse practitioners in Alberta are a valuable part of patient-centred care, and we are proud to partner with them to ensure the best care for Alberta families. I invite Jared, Teddie, Lesley, Margaret, Tara, Marcie, and Lisette, who are seated in the members' gallery, to also rise and receive the warm welcome and our gratitude.

The Speaker: Welcome.

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

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Kyler Chittick, a new comms assistant for the Alberta Party caucus. Kyler is very well qualified, with a master's degree in political science from York University. He's a recent graduate – and quite young as well – of the honours program in political science at the University of Alberta and a debate champ, which I'm looking forward to some training from him on. He's also published

a review in the *ESC: English Studies in Canada* publication as well as helped me a great deal with the speeches that I made in support of Bill 24 this and last week. If he could please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and in the most neutral way possible – because I know that from time to time this particular individual, who's been introduced in the House before, is a little bit sensitive about being introduced by anyone inside the Chamber. On behalf of the Government House Leader and myself, so that it is as neutral as possible, I would like to welcome to the gallery the newest Canadian that is here. She's a wonderful part of the press gallery, plays things right down the middle, doesn't pick favourites ever. As an important part of the process to all of us, I think we can say: congratulations and welcome to your new Canadianness, Emma Graney.

The Speaker: For her and for you, hon. members, it wouldn't be the first time that you folks saw everything and I saw nothing.

The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to introduce some very amazing kids to you and through you to all members of the Assembly. Here today we have two Great Kids award winners. For the past 17 years the province has hosted the awards to recognize children and youth across Alberta from ages five to 18, and these great kids receive the award for helping, inspiring, and changing the lives of others. Today I was pleased to meet with these two young leaders to celebrate their successes and thank them for their continued contributions to our province.

I also want to take a moment to encourage Albertans to nominate great kids for the 2018 awards. This year the awards will recognize great kids who've made a positive difference while overcoming difficult life circumstances. Nominations are open until November 24, and more information is available at greatkids.alberta.ca.

Mr. Speaker, I will ask the following individuals to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: great kid Tyra Cardinal and her mother, Melody, and great kid Aisha Symington and her father, Gerry.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Government Policies

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I moved here with only dreams, willing to work hard, and for a decent shot at the opportunity this land had to offer, and this land did not disappoint me because it is built on Alberta values. Under the NDP the very values which made this province the greatest place to live in the world are under serious threat. The NDP is hiding from Albertans the severe damage that's being done with their policies such as the carbon tax, the departure of almost \$40 billion in investment out of this province, the almost 200,000 people who have lost their jobs, and now it's showing disrespect to religious minorities and their beliefs. Albertans, as we know, voted for the NDP not knowing that they were going to get an anti-Albertan, anti free enterprise, anti family values, and antireligious government.

Mr. Speaker, this Premier and members of this NDP caucus have openly protested against oil and gas pipelines, and now, all of a

sudden, they claim to be champions of Alberta's resources. Please. If that is the case, why can't the Premier stand up against the Leap Manifesto and denounce it? But that would be considered doing the right thing for Alberta, the complete opposite of this NDP ideology.

A lot of this NDP caucus moved to Alberta from other provinces, looking for jobs before they became accidental MLAs, and now they want to change the fundamental values of this province. Mr. Speaker, Albertans will not let that happen.

Before I was a Conservative, I was an Albertan, and I will always stay that way. I am willing to put every single thing on the line to protect these values so that we can pass them on to future generations so that once again this land becomes a beacon of hope for hard-working people around the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Coal Worker Transition Supports

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We in Stony Plain know that the coal industry plays a crucial role. Families and generations have been built around it. I know the transition, driven by a combination of federal and provincial regulations and other global circumstances, has had its toll on families in my region. Coal workers are asking questions like: what's next, and will I still be able to support my family?

I want all of you, the coal workers, to know that I have your back and this government has your back. That's why we recently announced new transition supports for coal workers, supports that will help bridge your income, whether you're retiring or finding a new job; supports that will help with retraining, employment placement, and job matching; supports like tuition vouchers to help cover costs related to postsecondary education. And we will have facilitators meeting directly with you, your union, and your employer to figure out the supports that work best for you. Please know that I will fight as hard as I can to make sure that the federal government steps up on this issue as well. You have my full support every step of the way.

Stony Plain is a strong, resilient, and compassionate community, and to all of those coal workers I want to say this. You should be proud of your hard work, powering our province and building our communities, because we are. We want that good work to continue, so we stand ready to support you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a request for unanimous consent to introduce a guest who arrived late.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly one of the newest team members in the Edmonton-Decore office, who has come into the position hitting the ground absolutely running. I don't think my team could survive without her now. She's made an incredible impact coming into our office. I would now ask Janelle Venne to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Programs for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This September I received a visit from a very distraught constituent in my St. Paul office. She along with others had received a letter from a local not-for-profit that funding from Alberta Health Services to the St. Paul Abilities Network, or SPAN, would not be continued and that the STRIDES program would be cancelled as of October 2017. This program directly affects the daily lives of people in our area suffering from brain injuries. The STRIDES program assists these individuals, expanding their independence through volunteering and socializing.

I immediately contacted the management at SPAN to get the facts. I was shocked to hear that we were talking about a program that costs AHS \$24,000, all of this while our government went out and toured the province over Bill 203. How much did that cost? I then contacted AHS to find out why this front-line funding was being cut. Frustrated, I was told the funding was not being cut.

On November 3 I met with SPAN board members as well as an AHS representative by phone. Finally, I found out that this front-line program would be shutting down in order to divert funds to another program – and get this – because the other program could not afford to continue due to the increases in minimum wage.

1:50

In this House we warned this government about the consequences of their ideological policies like the carbon tax and minimum wage increases on not-for-profits and food banks. Now brain-injured individuals in my constituency can't gain the skills and reassert their independence.

Mr. Speaker, policy matters. This government's policy has lost common sense, and now the results are showing up. Those that need help and support the most are hardest hit. This government that vows to protect the front lines in Alberta is doing anything but. The unintended consequences of the increases to minimum wage and the carbon tax are hitting Albertans on fixed incomes and negatively impacting organizations that try to make life better for Albertans in need.

This government claims to be making life better. Go and tell that to the folks that depend on the STRIDES program.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Provincial Response to Federal Policies

Mr. Nixon: Yesterday I pointed out that the NDP had been unwilling to challenge their Trudeau Liberal allies on their constant attacks on Alberta, whether it be the taxes on small businesses, the carbon tax hike, or attacks on Alberta's constitutional right when it comes to upstream emissions. But now they will speak out when it comes to taxes on marijuana sales. The NDP have barely made a noise over two years of constant attacks from the Trudeau Liberals until now. Perhaps the NDP are seeing the errors of their way, Mr. Speaker. Here's hoping that this is the beginning of a new era, but I will say that I'm not holding my breath. Will the NDP now vocally object to the Trudeau Liberals' unacceptable tax hikes on Alberta small businesses, and will they stand up for Alberta?

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

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said yesterday in answer to essentially the exact same question, our minister at the time had conversations with the federal Minister of Finance around some of the concerning elements of their plan, and we have seen that some of those elements have in fact been changed as a result. In addition, what our government has been doing with respect to small businesses is supporting them here, from the government of Alberta here in Edmonton. For instance, what we did was we brought in a 33 per cent cut in the small-business tax. That's the actual record that we are taking to Alberta small businesses, and that's why the number and the prosperity of them . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: Nearly 200,000 Albertans are currently unemployed, and many more, sadly, have quit looking for work altogether. Thousands of businesses have gone under. Tens of billions of dollars of capital have fled Alberta. The Trudeau Liberals' attacks on our province certainly aren't helping matters. They're making it worse, Mr. Speaker. But only when it might affect their bottom line does the NDP government decide to speak up. It's shameful, and Albertans deserve better. Now that the NDP have crossed the Rubicon and dared to challenge their close allies in Ottawa, will they object to the Trudeau Liberals' attack on our energy sector?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've indicated before, our government has been standing up for Albertans with respect to the federal government and on behalf of Albertans since the moment we got elected. That's why, for instance, we have a pipeline to tidewater approved, because we've been working with the federal government. On top of that, we got them to change their position with respect to EI as a result of the job losses that we were suffering from, you know, 12 and 18 months ago. We're pursuing their support with respect to our coal transition program, that the Member for Stony Plain just talked about, and we'll . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: Two cancelled pipelines, Mr. Speaker.
Alberta does need to get a fair deal from Ottawa on the upcoming marijuana tax since it's the provinces that will bear most of the costs. But what about a fair deal for Alberta workers? What about a fair deal for Alberta's industries? Or does only the government income matter to the NDP? Why is the NDP only willing to fight the Trudeau Liberals when it's about who gets the profits taken from hard-working Albertans? When will the NDP get their priorities straight and start standing up and fighting for Alberta, start standing up and fighting for small businesses, for families, for the unemployed, for the energy sector, and for this great province? [interjections]

The Speaker: Do you want to chat, or do you want to have another question?
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What we will not do is grandstand in order to relitigate the fact that their leader lost the election to the Trudeau Liberals a year and a half ago. I'm sorry that they can't get over it, but they clearly are having trouble with it. What we are doing is focusing on supporting Albertans. You know what? It's working. Over 70,000 jobs have been created since

last June, housing starts are up, manufacturing is up, growth is up. We are leading the country now because of the work that we are doing focused on Albertans, not focused on yelling at Ottawa.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Provincial Policy on Illicit Drugs

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, on to another apparent priority of this government. Yesterday my colleague from Calgary-West asked about the Associate Minister of Health's public musing regarding decriminalization of hard drugs, drugs like fentanyl, heroin, and crystal meth. The Member for Calgary-West clearly asked whether the minister would back away from her reckless speculation. The minister responded with this: "no plans . . . at this time." At this time. Will the Premier denounce her minister's irresponsible and dangerous comments?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I will do is denounce the member opposite's reckless characterization of what the associate minister said. What I will further say, as the minister yesterday said, is that there is absolutely no plan of any type, not now, not in the past, not in the future, to legalize hard drugs. The member opposite spreading misinformation as though that were a true thing is profoundly irresponsible. We have real problems to address in this province, and it's about time they start focusing on them.

Mr. Nixon: When hundreds of Albertans are dying at the hands of hard drugs, this is what the NDP are talking about, Mr. Speaker. It's outrageous. And this from the minister that is supposedly responsible for handling the fentanyl crisis. I've personally seen the toll these hard drugs take, and I can tell you that making these drugs more available will not help. Will the government clearly state that it is against the decriminalization of hard drugs, including in the future, none of this "at this time" hedging and that type of stuff, make it extremely clear, and apologize for the minister's comments?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the member expected a different answer, but the thing is that you actually have to listen to the answer that the Premier gives. She made it very clear that we have no interest in working to decriminalize possession of illegal drugs. The designation of legal or illegal drugs is a federal responsibility. Again, they're spending all of their time wanting to argue with Ottawa. We're spending our time focused on Albertans. We're making life better. We're increasing access to services. It's about time that the members opposite started focusing on Alberta, too.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. What we just watched the Premier do in this question was deny what her associate minister said in the press. It is a clear quote from her associate minister that the Premier is dodging. This is the question on behalf of Albertans: will the Premier step back from her associate minister's comments, apologize for what her associate minister is saying, and make it clear to Albertans that the NDP do not support decriminalization of hard drugs?

Ms Hoffman: We do not support the decriminalization of hard drugs, Mr. Speaker. We've made that clear. The members opposite keep trying to whip up things and create discord, but on this side of the House we treat . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Please continue.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we look at the public health crisis, and we are finding ways to address it instead of trying to stigmatize and scare people about what may or may not happen. We're working with patients. We're working with their families. We respect them, and we are fighting to save their lives.

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies and Disposable Income

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, we recently learned some very troubling data from Statistics Canada. Last year Albertans saw their disposable income drop by an astounding 7.4 per cent. Alberta was last in Canada by far. Saskatchewan only saw a drop of .8 per cent. When Albertans were already down, the NDP's only solution was to hike taxes, killing business and taking more money from Albertans. The NDP doesn't want to talk about their track record of devastation; they want to talk about anything else. Will the NDP take any responsibility at all for the drop in Albertans' disposable income?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I just outlined, in fact, we know that Alberta families were suffering as a result of the price drop for oil. We know that that caused a lot of hardship. What our government did was we made a choice. We made a choice to stand with Albertans, to stand behind them, to not take a bad situation and make it worse. That's why we invested in Alberta, and now we're seeing results: over 70,000 new jobs since last June, when those statistics were calculated, housing starts up, housing sales up, manufacturing sales up, retail sales up, small-business confidence up, and it . . .

2:00

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, their choices drove \$40 billion worth of investment out of Alberta.

Just six weeks from now the NDP has another big tax hike planned for Albertans. That's right. Albertans can look forward to a 50 per cent hike to its carbon tax. From fuelling your car to putting food on the table, the carbon tax hits them all. The NDP has even planned a massive 75 per cent tax on home heating in the middle of winter, no less. Given the documented disastrous effects of the NDP policy and the StatsCan report will the NDP give Albertans an early Christmas present and put a hold on the massive 50 per cent tax hike?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what I can say we will do is that we will continue after January to be overall the lowest taxed province in the country. In addition to that, we will also be the province that for the second year in a row leads the country in economic growth. On top of that, we will continue our record of building and creating more jobs, 70,000 since June of last year. We will continue to have Albertans' backs. We will protect their important public services. We will make life more affordable. We will make life better for them. Thank goodness we were in charge when the recession hit because it wouldn't look that way if these guys had had their way.

Mr. McIver: You're right. It wouldn't look that way, Mr. Speaker. The tax advantage has shrunk dramatically, and we've got to get rid of them before it's zero.

Albertans are hurting, and the NDP is only making a bad situation worse. It's sadly ironic that when Ottawa threatens to take a cut out of the government's income, the Finance minister goes to the mat, but when the NDP or the federal government takes money out of

Albertans' wallets, crickets from this government. Will the NDP get its priorities straight, stop allowing Albertans to get attacked without defence, and stand up for them instead of just for your own treasury? Families matter, too, Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I think I've just answered that question – I don't know – about five or six times this week already. Nonetheless, the members opposite talk about what they think we're doing wrong, but they won't come clean on what they're talking about. Their leader is talking about a 20 per cent cut to the budget. Do you know what that would do to our schools? Do you know how many thousands of teachers would be laid off? Do you know how big class sizes would get? Do you know how many people, how much longer the wait-lists would be in our hospitals and for surgeries? [interjections]

The Speaker: Please.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, that kind of reckless, irresponsible approach to managing our budget would hurt Albertans and hurt Alberta families, and it will not happen on our watch. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. minister.
Calgary-Elbow.

Dementia Care

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last spring I asked the Minister of Health why Alberta lags the country on dementia care. I asked when we would see a provincial dementia strategy and the funding that goes along with it. In June she promised that we would see a strategy in the next couple of weeks. In September she said that it's coming soon. Albertans are still waiting. To the Minister of Health: where is the dementia strategy, when will we see it, and why is it taking so long?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We know how difficult it can be for families when they themselves or somebody they care about is struggling with dementia or other types of mental conditions that impact their ability to recall. We know how heartbreaking that is. That's why we're working with our front-line providers as well as with community partners to increase resources. The dementia strategy is definitely a work-in-progress. I want to make sure that we get it right, and I will be happy to table it in this House when we do.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, more long-term care beds, we know, are desperately needed, but that is only one aspect of dementia care. Seventy-one per cent of people with mild or moderate dementia live at home. There are remarkable people working in the community to improve the lives of everyone impacted by dementia, and while this work has tremendous meaning, without a provincial strategy they can only do so much. These are the people who spent so much of their time providing input into a draft strategy, that already exists. Again to the Minister of Health. You were handed that draft strategy back in the summer of 2015. Why haven't you implemented it, will you, and when?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. Like him, I want to make sure that we have all of the right supports in our communities and that we're

protecting and strengthening public health care. I hope that's what he believes, anyway. Time will tell. It's important that we make sure that we have those resources and that when we have the strategy, it's the right strategy. The department did receive it. They've done some work with the contributors, and they're working to make sure that it has the fulsome that we all expect. I look forward to that being the case and being able to share it in this House in, hopefully, short order.

Mr. Clark: But with respect, Mr. Speaker, how does the government know what they're doing or why they're doing it if there is no strategy? Albertans are struggling, and the cost of doing nothing is high. People living with dementia can't get the supports they need at home, they have difficulty navigating the system, and their families and caregivers are struggling to support loved ones. Ontario committed \$100 million to their dementia strategy and an additional \$20 million to improve respite care for unpaid care partners. Again to the Minister of Health I will ask one more time: will we ever see a provincial dementia strategy, and if we do, will it come with the funding necessary to have an impact?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member again for the question. We definitely have tabled many pieces of finance bills in this House. You know, it's been interesting to see what the opposition's record is when it comes to funding public health care properly. We continue to work with our partners. We continue to make sure that we're protecting health care. We've done a number of initiatives. Alberta Health Services last year launched 811, the Health Link number. You can speak to a certified nurse who can help you with accessing these specific resources and so forth. We're supporting the community agencies. We'll continue to do so. When it comes to budget time, I really hope that members opposite put their money where their mouth is because, absolutely, we plan on protecting and strengthening public . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Emergency Medical Worker Supports

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Emergency medical services workers provide an incredibly important service to Albertans, often when they need it most. EMS personnel respond to dangerous, often life-threatening situations in order to literally save lives. Given the dangerous conditions that EMS staff work in every day, to the Minister of Health: how is the government ensuring that EMS workers receive health and occupational health and safety protections?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I was fortunate to meet with some incredible paramedics earlier today. EMS personnel work tirelessly to protect and save the lives of others, often at the greatest risk themselves. One of the issues raised today was the high injury rate for paramedics. That's why I'm proud that we're working with paramedics to invest \$20 million to equip more than 350 ambulances with power stretchers to help EMS workers lift people safely without injury to themselves.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. EMS workers are also exposed to significant trauma and work in stressful conditions. To the same minister: how is the government caring for EMS workers who are suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder, or PTSD?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Without a doubt, EMS workers deal with some of the most horrific and difficult trauma scenes imaginable. I want them to know that we recognize their hardships. We have worked to ensure that paramedics have access to trauma counsellors and training supports, and we recently announced Canada's first accredited facility dog program, giving EMS personnel therapy dogs to help after traumatic events. We know that there's more to do, and we thank them for coming to the call and being there with ideas as well.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. EMS workers are part of an integrated response to an emergency. Doctors, nurses, and other health professionals are part of a co-ordinated response to an individual in crisis. To the same minister: is the government supporting the role of EMS workers as an integral part of the health system's response to an emergency?

Ms Hoffman: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. EMS crews are a vital link in our health care system both as first responders and as medical practitioners in the community. We changed the scope and practice of paramedics so that they can treat patients directly on the scene, giving better care to Albertans closer to home and sometimes in their home. You know what won't help? EMS will not be helped if Jason Kenney moves forward. His 20 per cent proposed cut to health care would lead to skyrocketing wait times, trauma to those workers, and trauma to the Albertans who rely on them. Instead, we believe in giving our health care workers the tools, support, and resources so they can do more, not less.

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

Methane Gas Monitoring

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This province is full of hot air when it comes to the NDP pledge of a 45 per cent reduction in methane gas emissions by 2025. The Alberta Energy Regulator fails to reliably monitor the amount of leakage from Alberta's 400,000 oil and gas sites, and industry is underreporting by between 60 and 360 per cent, according to independent studies. To the environment minister: how can Albertans trust that your government will meet the target when it has no credible measures?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

2:10

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, when we discuss methane regulations, we're proud to work alongside industry for a made-in-Alberta solution to plan to cut methane pollution by 45 per cent. We'll soon be announcing next steps in our balanced plan, that will protect jobs while reducing pollution. We do know what's at stake. It's jobs, but it's also the health of our children and our grandchildren, and we take that job very seriously.

Dr. Swann: It requires independent science, Mr. Speaker.

Methane also leaks into groundwater. For example, Encana's coal-bed methane exploration in Rosebud in 2006 was alleged to have contaminated drinking water, forcing expensive studies. It's

still before the courts. The NDP has missed another opportunity to prevent similar disasters with shale gas activity by failing to require baseline groundwater testing before industrial activity. To the Energy minister: when will you hold industry accountable by requiring baseline groundwater testing for all shale gas wells?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we're using facts, science, and innovation to develop a balanced plan, the approach that will create the best conditions for the oil and gas sector using innovation and implementing new technologies. These draft regulations that I mentioned will be available soon. There's going to be plenty of time for feedback, and I invite all members opposite to be part of that feedback loop.

Dr. Swann: Without baseline testing, Mr. Speaker, nobody knows what's going on under there.

As if the lack of monitoring of methane gas leakage in the atmosphere and groundwater is not enough, the NDP also eliminated the independent monitoring agency and relies solely on the Alberta Energy Regulator, which is entirely funded by industry. All of this makes NDP promises of better environmental stewardship ring a bit hollow. What is the government doing differently to ensure credible, independent monitoring of methane in our air and water?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned earlier, we're working alongside not just industry but environment groups and all kinds of groups involved with the oil and gas industry to develop a plan. But when our hon. colleague there mentions hot air, what we hear from the opposite side is not to get a made-in-Alberta plan. They want an Ottawa-imposed plan. They don't want us to use science or innovation to tackle that. They want us to create uncertainty about Alberta's industry so that we will get an imposed plan. On this side of the House we're standing up for an Alberta-made plan, and we're going to get that plan done.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

FOIP Request Process

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, Albertans want to know what this government is hiding. While this secretive government pays lip service to openness and transparency, they offer gift cards to mass-delete e-mails, and their key advisers are interfering with access to information. Yesterday this government refused to condemn political interference by the Premier's former chief of staff in the FOIP system. In fact, the minister casually dismissed our questions. Now that the minister has had a chance to review the documents, does the minister wish to change her answer?

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

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've reviewed the matter in question and continue to be confident that Mr. Heaney's actions were in line with the law and best practices on handling FOIP requests. We take Albertans' right to access information very seriously. We continue to improve turnarounds for FOIP requests and are proactively sharing more information with the public than ever before.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that in April 2014 the Government House Leader, while in opposition, felt that simply a political staffer reviewing a FOIP request was enough to make

accusations of political interference in the process and given that the Premier's former chief of staff intervened to outright stop the release of information that was deemed legitimate by trained FOIP officers, would the Government House Leader agree that Mr. Heaney's action, without a doubt, constitutes political interference in the FOIP system, or has a seat in government changed his mind?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since day one we have been working to make this government more open, transparent, and accountable to Albertans. In fact, we're the first government in Alberta's history to post the salaries and contracts of all the Premier's and ministerial offices' staff. Again, we take Albertans' right to access information very seriously, and we'll continue to do so as we go forward.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that this government takes access to information so seriously that they continue to allow the former chief of staff's action that directly interfered with the release of information that was deemed appropriate by FOIP officers, will the minister commit to a full investigation of what is clearly a breach in the law?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We very much believe that Albertans deserve honesty and transparency, which is why we're working to make government open and transparent. We're proactively sharing more information than ever before. We're hiring more employees to clear up the FOIP backlog. In contrast, Mr. Kenney won't disclose his campaign contributions. He's keeping his plan a secret and would make reckless cuts and fire front-line staff. We absolutely will continue to ensure Albertans get the honesty and transparency they deserve from the government sitting on this side of the House.

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

Children's Services Concerns

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An employee of Alberta Children's Services who was operating an unlicensed day care is facing child pornography charges. This employee of the province works in a department tasked with looking after our most vulnerable children and is being charged with multiple child pornography charges. To the Minister of Children's Services: have you initiated an internal investigation to the alleged activities within your department, and is the department fully co-operating with the police?

The Speaker: Proceed.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If concerns are ever raised about the conduct of our employees, we take every concern extremely seriously and act quickly so that Albertans know we are doing whatever we can to support their safety and well-being. We are committed to co-operating fully with police as they continue their investigation and providing whatever assistance is required to ensure that all young people are safe.

The Speaker: Could I seek an opinion from the Justice minister? The line of questioning: is it sub judice with respect to the criminal charges that may be pending?

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, I think I'd say for now that that first question related to an internal investigation.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that all the employees of the province receive a criminal record check before being hired and given that youth workers in the not-for-profit sector have to have a vulnerable-sector screening, to the Minister of Children's Services: does every single employee in your department also have a vulnerable-sector screening, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All new Children's Services hires are subject to pre-employment checks, including a criminal record, vulnerable-sector check, and a check in our internal case information system. Employees are also subject to background checks again when they change jobs or are promoted. Once again, we are doing whatever we can to support the safety and well-being of Alberta's children.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope that that is grandfathered to existing workers as well.

Given that the 2016 corporate employee survey showed that in the former superministry of human services only 45 per cent of employees felt that essential information flows effectively from senior leadership to staff and given that many of the people in this House have spent almost a year now attending meetings of the child intervention panel and recommendations should be coming forward soon, does the minister have confidence that her department has the ability to communicate critical information and protect the children that they are tasked with protecting?

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Absolutely. Since becoming the Minister of Children's Services, I've made tremendous efforts to reach out to front-line staff from right across this province, recognizing how important it is to learn from them about what their front-line experience is. I continue to work with senior leadership within the ministry at all levels to ensure that we work together to ensure that information flows as easily as possible and to recognize that that's beneficial to the commitment that every single one of us shares to making sure that the children of this province are safe.

The Speaker: Thank you.

2:20

NAFTA Negotiations

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, in 2016 Alberta industries exported \$68 billion in goods and services to the United States. Maintaining a strong trade position with the U.S. is vital to the success of Alberta's economy, which is why we must ensure that Alberta's voice is strong and steadfast at the table where NAFTA is renegotiated. To the minister of economic development: what assurances have you obtained from the federal government that Alberta's trade-exposed industries will be protected during the NAFTA renegotiations?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, on behalf of the minister of economic development I can assure the member that this government is very active in promoting Alberta's interests both as a government on its own but also by representations to the federal government. In terms of the specifics that he would like to know with regard to these negotiations, I will take it under advisement and provide him with the information at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that roughly 86 per cent of Alberta's exports go to the United States, making the NAFTA negotiations imperative for the success and viability of Alberta's economy, and given that the federal Liberals have already demonstrated wilful negligence with respect to Alberta's economy by killing two pipelines and given that there are far more seats and votes for the federal Liberals in Ontario and Quebec than there ever will be in Alberta, again to the minister: what are you doing to ensure Alberta is not sold down the river in exchange for favourable concessions for Quebec and Ontario?

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, the Official Opposition is trying to pit Alberta against everybody else in the world and in the country. It's not helpful, because we've taken a very strong position with the federal government, and they know that we've advocated very strongly for pipelines, for protection of Alberta's industries, including softwood lumber. All of those things have been top priorities for our minister of economic development and for the government as a whole. Unlike the opposition, we want to work constructively with our partners in the United States and the Canadian government and right across the country in order to further Alberta's interests. They could learn from that.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, just take your social licence with you. Given that the United States is a key export for Alberta markets and given that organizations such as the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and the Alberta Wheat Commission have indicated that they are in favour of the status quo and given that the federal government seems more interested in image politics and virtue signalling, not unlike our government, than actually getting a deal which is good for Alberta and Canada, again to the minister: how are you ensuring that Alberta's best interests and not the Liberal's style-over-substance machine are being represented at the NAFTA negotiation table?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think if the hon. member had a social licence it might be taken away for reckless driving. We're working very closely with the federal government on the negotiations. The American position has been very, very tough, and the Canadian position I think has been equally tough. We believe that by working with the federal government, we can protect Alberta's interests. By attacking everybody that doesn't live in this province as the opposition does, all we do is isolate Alberta and set our interests back. That's not what this government does. We stand up for Alberta and for Alberta jobs and for Alberta exports.

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

Carbon Levy Increase

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Merry Christmas, Alberta. January 1, 2018, will mark a 50 per cent increase in the carbon tax, that means nearly 30 cents in excise taxes on every litre

of gasoline, 25 cents in excise taxes on every litre of diesel, and a 50-cent tax increase on every single gigajoule of natural gas to heat our homes. Can the Minister of Energy describe how increasing the cost of fuel for vehicles and heating our homes is making life better for Albertans?

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we are moving forward in this province with building Alberta and with a climate leadership plan that has secured us two pipelines. We are recycling those revenues back into things like, for example, cutting the small-business tax by a third. We're also doing things like investing in the Calgary green line and making sure that we lower our greenhouse gas emissions, create 20,000 jobs while we do so, and grow the economy in Calgary. That's the way we're going to move this province forward, and we're going to make sure that we have a made-in-Alberta plan, not made in Ottawa, to do it.

Mr. MacIntyre: Given that over 70 per cent of homes in Alberta are heated by natural gas, meaning a significant increase in cost for families right across the board, and given that estimates of increased direct and indirect costs due to this upcoming carbon tax hike range anywhere from \$500 to \$1,000 per family, knowing this, why is the NDP still pursuing a policy that hurts families and makes Alberta much less competitive?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, two-thirds of Albertans do receive a rebate for their average use of CO₂ in a year, CO₂ that causes climate change. I will bring us back to the news conference that I did on January 2 . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Stop the clock.
Keep going.

Ms Phillips: . . . of this year, where that hon. member stood in his place and denied the science of climate change. He did it over and over again. You know what? On this side of the House we embrace reality. We're going to move this province forward.

Mr. MacIntyre: Given that this government clearly expects Alberta tradesmen to lug their tools around in Smart cars and scooters or face punitive costs at the pump and given that just a few short years ago Alberta had some of the lowest fuel excise taxes in the country but now, under the NDP, citizens in the heartland of agriculture, oil, and gas will be paying the third-highest fuel tax in the country, will this government be considerate to Alberta families and small businesses and delay implementing this unreasonable carbon tax increase?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member asked the question about affordability, which is why we are providing two-thirds of Albertans with a carbon levy rebate. We are also eliminating a number of school fees, making life more affordable for thousands of families, in particular in Calgary. We have frozen tuition. We have invested in child care. We have capped electricity rates. We have introduced a new child benefit. You know what else we've done? We've made life more affordable by raising the minimum wage for our most vulnerable workers, including women. On this side of the House we believe that sustainability means taking care of our neighbours, and we will get it done.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

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

Workers' Compensation for First Responders with PTSD

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day Albertans rely on first responders such as firefighters to stay calm and use their training to make life-saving decisions for us in life-threatening situations. Not surprisingly, they experience high levels of posttraumatic stress disorder as a result of the situations they attend to. To the Minister of Labour. It's been brought to my attention that the current Workers' Compensation Board claim process for PTSD is causing more harm than good. Why isn't a more modern and thoughtful approach being taken when evaluating these claims?

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour and democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is asking about the processes at the Workers' Compensation Board. I'm very proud to be able to say that we initiated the first review of the Workers' Compensation Board in 15 years to make sure that we have a system that is sustainable, that is providing rehabilitation services for workers. Part of the recommendations that the panel we created provided were around presumptive coverages for PTSD as well as the processes at the Workers' Compensation Board. We continue to review the report received by the panel and work to make a better Workers' Compensation Board system for all Albertans.

Ms McPherson: Given that the 2012 change to WCB legislation was designed to make it easier for first responders to seek treatment for PTSD, can the minister please explain why firefighters who are seeking treatment for PTSD are being required to get a second and a third opinion as to whether or not they meet the diagnostic requirement?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When someone is insured at work or someone suffers from PTSD that has been caused because of their work, we need to know that they are getting fair compensation, that they're getting help to get back onto the job and to be able to return to work safely. That is the purpose of our Workers' Compensation Board system. Initiating the first review in 15 years was an important part of our government's commitment to making sure that we have a Workers' Compensation Board system that fits all Albertans, is sustainable, and offers fair rehabilitation. Making sure that workers are receiving the care that they deserve is a priority . . .

2:30

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Ms McPherson: Given that having to repeatedly relate the experiences that lead to PTSD without the benefit of a therapeutic relationship actually further traumatizes a person and given that the WCB published a fact sheet in February of this year detailing that PTSD is a presumptive disorder for first responders, again to the Minister of Labour: when can we expect that the WCB will stop the practice of compelling first responders to seek multiple assessments for PTSD, further damaging their mental health and discouraging their colleagues from coming forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Making sure that firefighters and first responders are able to access the presumptive coverage that they are entitled to is very important. I am concerned to hear that there are firefighters who feel that they are not able to access presumptive coverage for PTSD. Making sure that we have a strong WCB system is why I did do something, why I enacted the first review of the WCB in 15 years. The previous government let the system languish. I'm very proud to be taking action to make sure that all Alberta workers can receive rehabilitation, to make sure that we have a sustainable system going . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Kenow Wildfire Response

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, the Kenow fire that occurred in Waterton Park and areas of the MD of Pincher Creek has raised many questions about the emergency response by a coalition of area landowners. These residents have grave concerns regarding communication difficulties, fire preparedness, and the lack of proper notification. Therefore, this group is requesting a formal inquiry into the events surrounding this fire as it relates to all of the government agencies involved. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. Previous wildfire events have led to such inquiries. Will your ministry be conducting a formal inquiry that covers all aspects of the Kenow fire, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. While it is true that we've had, you know, some wildfires in the southeast corner of the province, overall we've had a very good fire season, with only 15 per cent of the 10-year average of fires, so only 15 per cent of that. Our firefighters have been doing a fantastic job. Their presuppression efforts have been, bar none, some of the best in the world. I'm very proud of our firefighters and the excellent work that they have done.

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if he answered the question about my formal inquiry.

Given that there were several different government entities involved in this event, including the forestry ministry, Environment and Parks, Parks Canada, the MD of Pincher Creek, and the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, and given that landowner questions remain mostly unanswered by the various agencies, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: will your ministry, which includes the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, have a key role to play in an inquiry into the Kenow fire, and to what extent does it have any responsibility to see that this results in a report being completed?

The Speaker: The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wildfires are always scary, and we empathize with anyone who lost property or livestock as a result. I'm immensely proud of the first responders who fought these fires, both their own wildland firefighters and the many municipal firefighters who helped protect homes and businesses. Officials from the AEMA are in constant contact with affected municipalities and local leaders, and always after an incident such as this they work together to analyze what happened after the experience in order to continue to make the services that we deliver better after every single event. We will learn from this experience. We'll continue to move forward. But in the meantime an incredibly . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Stier: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're still not getting an answer to the request for a formal inquiry.

Given that the various local government agencies directly involved in your emergency response to the Kenow fire have not yet been able to provide any clear details on a formal inquiry and given that the affected residents have some very serious concerns and questions on this incident and given that the ministries involved will hopefully conduct an inquiry at some point, to the forestry minister again: are you prepared to meet with these local concerned landowners and also provide an opportunity for public input into the questions at public meetings yet to be held, and if so, when and where might they be?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question and the suggestion. I think it's a worthwhile suggestion, and I'll most certainly look into it, talk to my officials to see what we can learn from this. In every experience in wildfire season we do learn something. I am proud of the co-operation between the various government departments, between the municipal departments that does take place. In every emergency situation, wildfires or not, there will be something to learn, and I will most certainly take his suggestions into consideration.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Farm and Ranch Worker Regulation Consultation

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago the government announced that it was going to begin public consultations on the OHS recommendations from the technical working groups as part of the farm and ranch workplace legislation. These online and other consultations will take 11 weeks, ending mid-January. It's also been reported that the government has sat on these recommendations for seven months and are just now releasing all the technical information, which means they were completed about the same time as the labour and employment standards working groups. Minister, why the delay?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of the work that our government has done to ensure the rights of farm workers in Alberta and that they have the same protections that farm workers across the country have had for years. We've received, with gratitude, the work of the technical working groups. The OHS groups spent significant time because it is technical information. We needed to take time to review the recommendations of the technical working groups as well as translating that into plain-language summaries so that when we went out to talk to farmers and ranchers during a time when they would have time to be able to respond, they would be able to respond to all the recommendations.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that the hon. Minister of Labour stated that the delay was due to harvest but the report was completed in March or April, long before the normal harvest, which is when these OHS working groups' recommendations were completed, Minister, what is the real reason your government delayed the release of almost 200 pages of technical details seven months after completion but are only giving farmers

and the public less than three months to consult on these recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We promised Albertans that prior to making any changes to the regulations, they would have an opportunity to review those recommendations and provide their feedback, and we have followed through on that promise. All of the technical working group reports are now posted online. As well, we've taken the time to do a plain-language summary to be able to assist farmers and ranchers when reviewing this information. Making sure that we are having safe workplaces and that we are making life better for farm and ranch workers is a priority for this government. Jason Kenney and the Conservatives would not be supportive of this work and . . .

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

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that it's a given that the government is desperately trying to give the impression that it believes in proper consultation and given that we have seen time and time again that the approach is all sizzle and no steak, Minister, given that you will be introducing the OHS bill later in this session, wasn't the seven-month delay nothing more than to give your department time to work on your bill in such a way as to make passing farm and ranch safety regulations easier in 2018?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, that question had a lot to chew on, but I wouldn't have called it steak in that case. I'm very proud of the work that our government has been doing to ensure that farm workers in Alberta have the same rights and protections that farm workers across the country have had for years. So thank you to the technical working groups and all who participated, and I'd like to thank the farmers and ranchers, the owners and operators, who are right now giving us their very valuable feedback into the draft regulations and the technical working group recommendations. Their work is appreciated. I will continue to do everything I can to keep Alberta's workers safe and to engage with Albertans about these important changes.

Advanced Placement Courses for Rural Students

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to represent many gifted, ambitious students. Recently one of those students came to me, concerned that she was not able to take any advanced placement classes as a student based in a rural area because there was no online programming offered. Advanced placement is an internationally recognized program that prepares students to experience college- or university-level courses while enrolled in high school. Given that AP programming is offered through Edmonton and Calgary schools, can the Minister of Education please provide clarity on why equal opportunity is not being granted to children that live in rural areas?
2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. Certainly, it's important to look for equity in programming and so forth in all of our schools around the province. I was just up in the hon. member's constituency last week, with very engaged parent groups and teachers as well. Certainly, it's important to look for choices that people can have for their

students in all corners of the province, so I'd be very interested in pursuing this further. I think it's a very important thing to point out, and I thank him for that.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Education released a statement touting that dual-credit programs are available to every corner of the province. Given that specialized programming such as advanced placement is offered in urban centres and given that all Alberta students should have access to programs that allow them educational enrichment opportunities and the ability to get a head start in postsecondary education, can the minister please tell me if there is currently programming in place to empower ambitious students in rural areas to participate in high school programs such as advanced placement, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, thank you for pointing this out to me. I mean, it's interesting that, in fact, the school board in the hon. member's area also is providing the distance learning programming here in the province, so certainly we can work together with Pembina Hills to perhaps pursue this further. I certainly know the advanced placement programming very well. I used to teach it before I was elected here. It's very worth while, and it would be worth while to look for ways by which we could provide it to all students in the province.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Giving our rural high school students a head start on their postsecondary education is crucially important. Given that we live in a technologically advanced world and given the growing prevalence of educational platforms that are now being offered through online or distance learning and since advanced placement programming is not offered in rural communities directly, when will the Minister of Education commit to rural communities to provide equal access to programming?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we've been working to achieve equity in programming across the province. Like the hon. member mentioned, I'm putting in a long-term, stable way by which to provide dual-credit funding for everybody in all corners of the province. You know, I was just up a few months ago in the hon. member's area at Neerlandia school, a very nice new school. We took a very bumpy road down to Westlock. Neerlandia school would not have been built and that bumpy road would stay bumpy if you took 20 per cent out of the GOA budget as the UCP would be doing if they ever got elected. I don't think that's going to happen. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

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

Statement by the Speaker

Interrupting Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, just to remind you, it's been a long-standing practice in the House that when members' statements are made, comments and observations or thoughts are not to be expressed at that time. There were one or two earlier in the session today where that was not the case, so I continue to ask you to respect each other for the two-minute period.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Residential School Intergenerational Impacts

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Between 1880 and the 1990s in Canada some 150,000 indigenous children between the ages of four and 16 were placed in residential schools, where they would be away from their families for 10 months a year. Living conditions were often poor, and many suffered from physical and sexual abuse. In fact, some 6,000 children died at these schools, and more died of exposure trying to escape. There were 25 such schools in Alberta.

In 2015 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission presented 94 calls to action for Canadians to help rectify this dark chapter in our history. Alberta is committed to using the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples as a framework for reconciliation. The government of Alberta's approach to implementing the principles of the UN declaration, inclusive of the TRC's calls to action, directly includes indigenous participation. We are implementing a number of the truth and reconciliation calls to action.

Government has supported the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Government has also directed the development of an indigenous cultural awareness program, which will focus on learning about treaties, residential schools, and the historical and contemporary experiences of indigenous Albertans. Alberta Education is enhancing curriculum to provide additional opportunities for students to learn about indigenous histories, perspectives, cultures, and contributions.

Budget 2017 included \$120 million for off-reserve housing, \$100 million to ensure that more First Nation communities have access to clean and safe drinking water, and millions to help indigenous peoples participate in Alberta's climate leadership plan.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that the harmful effects of the residential school system on indigenous communities will last generations, but I am proud to be part of a government that is finally moving forward in the right direction.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Government Policies

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, I try to live by the principle of disagreeing without being disagreeable, but frankly I'm struggling under the weight, record, and actions of the Alberta NDP. Nothing personal, but in the style of a great Canadian hero, Rex Murphy: never waste a good rant.

I committed myself to public service with many goals and objectives for a better Alberta. I believe it is the responsibility of my generation to hand the baton of the future of our great province to the next generation better than we found it, full of hope, optimism, prosperity, and a compassionate society that allows each and every Albertan to reach their full potential, free from the shackles of paternalistic, self-righteous ideology and what I have come to view as business-decimating, investment-repelling, job-killing policies and what I once characterized as anti-Albertan, but I'll now reframe that as antiprosperty in the name of political correctness, which I'm not universally recognized for.

How did I come to such conclusions? Let me count the ways: an overreaching, anticompetitive, environmentally immeasurable carbon tax; a punitive minimum wage that hurts those it purports to help; irresponsible coal shutdown, decimating an industry, towns,

people, and short-circuiting a technology play and export opportunity; turning the Balancing Pool into a borrowing pool, where we may drown in yet more red ink; social licence that acts like a learner's permit, unlikely to make it past the graduated licence phase with a limited number of passengers, home before midnight, and still zero tolerance from the authorities who issued it; playing croquet with federal Liberals, Lotus Land NDP, and envirocrusaders like Berman, Mahon, and Hudema, when Albertans truly need us to play a little hardball; supersonic flight of \$35 billion in foreign investment; a debt burden that will take generations of austerity to repay.

Mr. Speaker, I rest my case. Is this the baton we wish to hand to future generations? I think not and encourage all of us in this House and, indeed, all Albertans to reject this reckless and irresponsible path and demand a return to the Alberta advantage.

Thank you.

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

Technology and Economic Development

Ms Luff: Thank you. Everywhere I've been over the last four months, whether it be the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region summit or Calgary Economic Development outlook 2018, I've heard variations on one theme, disruption. Alberta experienced a profound disruption in its economy with the global collapse in the price of oil and is currently adapting to a new normal, where oil is hovering at half of what it once was. We are living in a time of unprecedented speed of technological improvements, and we need to be adaptive enough in our economy that we take advantage of these technologies rather than being left behind.

Whether it's self-driving cars, artificial intelligence, or decentralization of electricity production, the world 10 years from now is going to look a whole lot different than it does right now, and it's going to affect the way that we work. Recent reports suggest that more than 40 per cent of jobs are likely to be affected by automation and advanced technologies over the next 20 years. Todd Hirsch, the chief economist for ATB, noted that in times of economic crisis humans have a tendency to want to just go back, go back to a time when things were okay. However, most of us know that this isn't possible. We must embrace the talents and skills of our people and look to the future.

2:50

Calgary and Alberta are full of entrepreneurs who are shaking things up and embracing the new economy. Prefabricated self-designed interiors like those that DIRT produces are revolutionizing the way that we build things. Cask canning solutions invented and produces the first canning system for small breweries right in Calgary. Benevity is a global leader in workplace giving technology, and our recent bid for Amazon HQ2 showed off Calgary's creative talent at its best.

When I speak with Calgarians about the future of business in Alberta, many of them tell me that they could never vote for a party that would repeal the carbon levy, which is making their businesses more sustainable and more efficient, that the investor tax credits are making a difference in helping to attract investment, and that they appreciate our small-brewing grants.

When we look to the future, it's high tech, it's low carbon, and it's local. We're doing it in Alberta now, and we can do more of it. We have to because going back isn't an option.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to give oral notice of a motion for tomorrow's Order Paper, that motion being:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) commencing November 27, 2017, the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings for consideration of government business for the duration of the Third Session of the 29th Legislature 2017 fall sitting unless the Government House Leader notifies the Assembly that there shall be no evening sitting that day by providing notice under Notices of Motions in the daily Routine or at any time prior to 6 p.m.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the appropriate time I intend to move the following motion pursuant to Standing Order 42:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately develop a co-ordinated strategy responding to the government of Canada's recent policies that are detrimentally affecting Alberta including but not limited to the proposed amendments to the income tax legislation that impacts small businesses and its position regarding the assessment of upstream emissions that encroaches on Alberta's constitutional jurisdiction with respect to the development of Alberta's natural resources.

The Speaker: Hon. members, at the end of the Routine, Motions under Standing Order 42, we will discuss it at that point.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Bill 28 School Amendment Act, 2017

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with great privilege to introduce the first reading of Bill 28, the School Amendment Act, 2017. This is legislation that through a series of amendments will make life better for Alberta students to strengthen our province's education system. After thorough review I've decided to propose amendments to the School Act to better reflect what needs to be done to strengthen our education system. The School Act has served Alberta students well for almost three decades, and we're confident that as a result of these amendments it will continue to do so. This legislation builds on positive existing practices and paves the way for future work that will also help students, schools, and communities.

If passed, the School Amendment Act, 2017, would pave the way for new professional standards for principals and superintendents, which would ensure that they are equipped to lead modern, inclusive schools that are prudently administered and prepare each and every student for success.

Other proposed amendments include establishing a common age of entry for students entering kindergarten, improving the process for the creation of separate school jurisdictions, authorizing the Minister of Education – that's me – to establish standards of education service agreements between First Nations and school boards in order to help close the achievement gap for indigenous students.

This bill is comprehensive and will ensure that the School Act continues to form a solid foundation for success of Alberta's kindergarten to grade 12 education system. I'm very proud and truly honoured to move first reading of Bill 28, the School Amendment Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of Statistics Canada's job vacancy and wage survey. It shows that things are improving in Alberta, that jobs are up in the province. From the first quarter in 2016 to present job vacancies are up 11,725, meaning that more Albertans are getting back to work.

I have a second tabling. My second tabling is a letter from the town of Vegreville. It is to the Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal and the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. It is a letter that is thanking the government for its ongoing support during its fight against the federal government over the closure of the case processing centre, and it speaks to the importance of the CARES program, the community and regional economic support program, for rural Alberta. It says that "these actions reinforce that rural Alberta remains a priority for our leaders and that our community has not been forgotten."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite five copies of two newspaper articles, one entitled Alberta Dementia Strategy Coming Soon, Health Minister Promises. That is from June 5, 2017.

A second is five copies of an article entitled Alberta Dementia Strategy Promised for This Fall, from September 18, 2017.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms Renaud: St. Albert.

The Speaker: St. Albert. Sorry.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is an article from PressProgress entitled Alberta's New Interim United Conservative Leader Was Spokesman for Group Opposed to 'Homosexual Agenda'.

The second is a copy of an open letter to Mr. Brian Jean, former leader of the Wildrose Party, entitled Wildrose Misrepresents Albertans on Official Legislature Documents – Why?

Thank you.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table three documents that I referenced in my speech earlier on Tuesday. The first document is entitled Cutting Red Tape in Canada: A Regulatory Reform Model for the United States? by Laura Jones of the Mercatus Center, George Mason University.

The second document, Mr. Speaker, is entitled Canada's Oil and Gas Sector at Risk? How Excessive Taxes and Regulations Undermine Our Competitiveness by Germain Belzile, Montreal Economic Institute.

The third document is an executive order by the President of the United States of America from February 2017 ordering the cut of two regulations for each one regulation proposed.

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

Mr. Malkinson: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of ATB Financial's economics and research team publication titled Employment Insurance Numbers

Highlight Labour Market Recovery. It shows things that are looking up in Alberta. Jobs are up, and the publication states that “more Albertans continue to find employment” as the “downward trend in EI recipients is expected to continue.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a document, a letter that I penned to the Minister of Transportation. It says: “Do you recall on April 23, 2014, when you [said] the following . . .?” I just might add, “Mr. Premier, will you please stop the bafflegab” – that’s my favorite part of the letter – “and admit that your government is interfering with the freedom of information process?”

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: Hon. members, I think we’re at the point where there was a motion earlier. I would call upon Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Provincial Response to Federal Policies

Mr. Nixon:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately develop a co-ordinated strategy responding to the government of Canada’s recent policies that detrimentally affect Alberta including but not limited to the proposed amendments to income tax legislation that impacts small business and its positions regarding the assessment of upstream emissions that encroach on Alberta’s constitutional jurisdiction with respect to the development of Alberta’s natural resources.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 42 I would like to ask for unanimous consent to move the following motion. I have the appropriate number of copies for the page.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members . . .

Mr. Nixon: I get to speak to it. I was trying to wait and make sure that it was okay to speak.

The Speaker: Okay. I thought you’d finished.

Mr. Nixon: Am I okay to continue?

The Speaker: Please.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks. For months Alberta’s small-business professionals and farmers have expressed grave concern with the Trudeau Liberals’ proposed changes to the tax code. I’m sure my colleagues in the government have heard the same thing back in their constituencies. I know my colleagues in the United Conservative Party have heard a lot of concerns from Albertans, a lot of concerns about the need to urgently deal with and address this issue, concerns particularly on how this move by the federal government, the Trudeau Liberals, will impact their small businesses in Alberta, farms here in Alberta. I know there were town halls held all across this province for months, well attended. I’m sure you had the opportunity to be at a couple yourself, Mr. Speaker, to listen to some of the concerns your constituents in Medicine Hat probably have with this.

The reason this is urgent, Mr. Speaker, is that small businesses are the engine of our economy. Ottawa’s changes, the changes that are being brought forward by the Trudeau Liberals, are risking

derailing any sort of economic recovery here in the province of Alberta. Constituents that I have spoken to and that many of my colleagues have spoken to believe this is an extremely urgent matter. They are very disappointed to see that so far the NDP government has not addressed this issue at all, has not taken the time to stand up on this issue. The reason why I bring this to this House is because of that urgency, the urgency that I’m hearing. I know you are probably hearing from your constituents as well that there be a firm stance from this place, from this Legislature, standing up for Alberta, standing up for small businesses, standing up for farmers, standing up for Alberta families against what is clearly an attack.

Now, you know, Mr. Speaker, I’ve talked a lot about the fact that the government has been silent on other areas of intrusion into Albertans’ rights that are urgent, in my mind, stuff like upstream resources, et cetera.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order by the Government House Leader.

Point of Order Speaking to Urgency

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I hesitate to stand on a point of order, but section 42(1) clearly indicates that the person proposing the unanimous consent to bring forward the motion can speak to the reasons why it is “of urgent and pressing necessity.” The hon. member is arguing the case. He really should wait for the vote before doing so.

The Speaker: To the point of order?

Mr. Nixon: I’m responding to the point of order.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Nixon: The Government House Leader may not have heard how clear I was on how urgent this is for constituents and for Albertans. That’s what I was speaking about. I appreciate that he may want to downplay the urgency that Albertans are feeling on this issue, but clearly I’m speaking about the urgency of the matter.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I tend to agree with the Government House Leader. Your requirement is to speak to the urgency and the pressing matter. If you could get to that. I hadn’t quite heard it yet.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will try again, then.

Debate Continued

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, without a doubt, this is an urgent issue because small businesses, farmers, Albertans, hard-working Albertans are under attack by the federal government. They’re urgently asking – and I know they are asking the members across the way – for this place to stand up for them, which is why we’re bringing forward this motion. We’re giving the government and this whole House an opportunity to show that level of urgency, and I would ask all members to show that they actually stand up for Albertans like their Premier says in this House every day. If they don’t, then clearly they don’t stand up for Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. member has asked for unanimous consent to proceed to debate the motion.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

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

Bill 27
Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017

The Chair: We are on amendment A1. Are there any further speakers to this amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to stand on this amendment to Bill 27 as the Member for Calgary-Hays. The amendment actually talks about striking out section 23.97(1)(a) and substituting:

- (a) the person holds
 - (i) a senior official position, section 23.925 applies, or
 - (ii) a senior official position referred to in section 23.926(1), sections 23.925 and 23.926 apply,

or

by striking out subsection 23.97(2)(a) and substituting:

- (a) the person holds a senior official position, sections 23.925 and 23.926 apply, according to their terms, to the person.

Madam Chair, I've no doubt that the bill is well intended, and I expect that members from all sides of this House are interested in making sure that the way we do our business meets a high ethical standard of business, but there are certain questions I think we need to consider. One is whether the people on the agencies, boards, and commissions are going to be allowed to have the skill sets, the experience, the business background in order to make informed, quality decisions that are always in the interests of Albertans. I have no doubt that whoever is on the committees will do the best that they can, but again it's the informed, quality decisions that you will get from having people with experience in the different endeavours that the agencies, boards, and commissions look after.

Of course, the obvious dichotomy here is that if you have someone in a particular line of work and they're speaking on rules and regulations about that line of work, it might be able to be said that they are feathering their own nest or trying to make things better for themselves. That's actually a legitimate thing to think and to worry about. This is not criticism. The government may well consider also that if you don't have people that work in that line of endeavour, that business, that industry, that profession, you may well not be getting the best quality of information from that agency, board, or commission. So I'll acknowledge that that is a bit of a catch-22 or a dichotomy or something not obviously and easily solved.

We need to think, Madam Chair, about whether the price of having somebody involved in these areas of endeavour is worth it to get the best quality of advice. I think, in my view, there is a place for people that are actually working in the different areas of endeavour that will actually be able to make rules, regulations and advise the government on things more effectively and provide better advice and make better decisions than those that are from other areas of endeavour. No matter how good those people are, there's nothing like actually having your hands in a particular area of endeavour in order to give good advice.

3:10

I acknowledge that this is something that will probably always be a struggle. I guess I would ask that we consider what is in the best interests of Albertans, at the end of the day. I think this amendment is designed to support that.

Madam Chair, I think there are other sections – no. You know what? I'll just stick to what I think is before us now, and I will ask members on all sides of the House to consider what, at the end of the day, is going to get a better decision made for Albertans.

For that reason, I will be supporting the amendment and would ask other members of the Assembly, respectfully, to do the same. Thank you.

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will keep my comments brief. I just wanted to mention that, really, in many respects this piece of legislation is about trying to strike the right balance, to make sure that agencies, boards, and commissions and those who serve on them are also held to the appropriate levels of accountability and responsibility, and I think that it's incumbent upon all members in the Assembly to ensure that that happens.

However, what we don't want is to get to a spot where the pendulum swings so far in the opposite direction that those who are experts in a field are going to be put in a position where they are unable to serve on an agency, board, or commission, particularly on some of those which are voluntary. The heart of the amendment is to try to get closer to that balance.

I think, from my perspective, that this amendment works in that direction. I can't tell that it would also be a perfect scenario, but in so many cases we are working to the best-case scenario and the best solution possible, and I think it's very important that we make the appropriate considerations to legislation. I think that's what this amendment does in trying to strike a better balance so that we aren't limiting people's ability or desire to participate in agencies, boards, and commissions but also making sure that the Ethics Commissioner will have the ability to have some guidance and oversight.

I think that at present inside the legislation it is a little less than certain in that respect, and I think the amendment before us now provides some clarity and some certainty. I encourage all members in the Chamber to go ahead and support the amendment so that we can move forward to have a better balance involved in this particular piece of legislation.

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

Mr. Orr: Thank you. I would just like to further contribute to what's been said, and I would like to add some specifics, actually, some concrete examples, I suppose you could say.

Let me begin, though, just by referring to section 23.926(1) of the act before us, which states that "if any of the . . . senior officials is involved in any appointment, business, undertaking or employment, including self-employment," then they are in breach of this act. If you consider that the kinds of people who are allowed to sit on boards are not allowed to have any appointment, business, undertaking, or employment, including self-employment, related to the commission that they might be sitting on, then my question specifically becomes: who are we to appoint to the Safety Codes Council?

The Safety Codes Act, quite frankly, is a fairly technical document, and the only people who really know anything about it are either the tradesmen, the contractors, or municipal officials who, in fact, actually work with that act and who are involved in the safety codes industry in this province. If none of them are allowed to sit on that council because they, in fact, do have an appointment or a business or any kind of undertaking or any kind of employment, including self-employment, that puts them in breach of sitting on that council, then my real question is: what kind of people are going to be allowed to sit on the Safety Codes Council who will even understand anything about it?

The same goes, for instance, for the Alberta Boilers Safety Association. Boilers are extremely complex, highly dangerous, require various levels of steam tickets in order to even operate them based on the size of the boiler, et cetera, et cetera. Again, only the tradespeople, the contractors, the industry owners who are involved with those kinds of things would even understand the nature of what it means for a boiler to be run safely. But now, in terms of overseeing this, all of those people are hereby exempted from having anything to do with boilers because, again, if they have any business, undertaking, employment, or self-employment that has anything to do with this, which would in fact give them the knowledge to qualify them to sit on a boiler safety association, who is going to sit on that association? Where are we going to pull people from that have any idea about this? Are we restricted to simply retired people, maybe students who are just learning?

What about the elevators that we go up and down every day? There is an association that governs the regulations, the maintenance, the operation of those things. Once again, it's the tradespeople, the companies that run these businesses, some of the regulators that understand this. But by section 23.926(1) all of them are in fact excluded, and they are in breach of the act if they seek to become a chief executive officer, a chairperson, or a person holding any other position identified under this section.

So I don't quite understand how we're going to get qualified people to actually manage these important safety associations – building codes, boilers, elevators, and all kinds of others that we could name – where they're going to come from.

We could also talk about the Alberta Securities Commission. We've already been through this a little bit in recent history. Are we going to appoint people who know nothing about securities? The people who actually understand how securities operate, how the markets operate are the people who are involved as brokers and traders and businesspeople and bankers and all of the people who, quite frankly, actually have some other form of business or undertaking or employment in this industry. They're the only ones who actually know what the Securities Commission should be doing, and we're going to now exclude them.

We could take this one step farther, which I'll ask about. How about the Labour Relations Board? Is anybody involved in labour relations now going to be excluded? That could include union people. That could include employers. It could include contractors. All of these people now are not allowed to sit on or engage in labour relations. It could include the lawyers that work in this area. There are all kinds of people, but if they are employed in that field, they're now excluded.

I would really appreciate the minister explaining to me how we're to get qualified people on these agencies, boards, and commissions under these rules. Because of that I think the amendment warrants some serious consideration, maybe a little retweaking if you want to do that. But I would really appreciate the answer to some of these questions for these agencies, boards, and commissions.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise in the House this afternoon to speak in support of the government amendment to Bill 27. I'm glad to see that members of the opposition see the merits in the amendment. It's always a pleasure to see the House transacting business the way that it ought to be doing. Well, with a couple of exceptions here, perhaps. Yeah. Just to sort of, unfortunately – well, I guess I can't refer to my absence.

Now, my understanding is that this amendment that was introduced is focused on the transitional provisions, and it shouldn't

be understood as impacting the broader policy intent or the impact or effect of this bill. I think it's important that that is very clear. Instead, what it does is that it deals primarily with the application of transitional provisions to board chairs.

3:20

Now, of course, great care goes into drafting bills, but, you know, there's always a chance for improvements, and, like I said, that's why we're here. I mean, if bills could be drafted perfectly on the first go, there wouldn't be much work for hon. members, would there?

I think that, like I said, it's welcome that discussion and debate have helped us to improve this. Now, the broad bill, I think, we have some good consensus on, and it's good that we clarify this, you know, partly because of some of the points that the hon. members have brought up as well.

Now, this proposed amendment is composed of two changes, clause (a) and clause (b). Referring first to clause (a), first, it amends transitional provisions under 23.97 to make it very clear that the concurrent employment provision in the original bill was limited to CEOs and other designated positions as currently worded, and we have to grant that. It would have applied to all chairs as well, and applying to all chairs would have caused some of these issues, you know, potentially excluding qualified personnel and qualified personnel that couldn't otherwise be attracted to these positions. I think that clarity is welcome.

Secondly, it amends section 23.97(2) to ensure that the chairs who are not subject to an employment contract are also covered by this transitional provision. Now, unless we amended it, this transitional provision, not the broader bill, would have misapplied, certainly, these provisions to board chairs and, you know, basically undermined the intention of the bill itself, of some of these legislative requirements.

I don't know if I need to belabour this point. It looks like we have, you know, broad consensus around accepting this amendment, so I do hope that we do have your support on this amendment and on the larger bill.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to take the opportunity to respond to some of the issues that the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake brought up earlier this morning regarding this particular bill, and of course our other colleagues in the House have brought up issues as well regarding specific industry players and their participation in some of these agencies, boards, and commissions.

I want to state specifically that we are not prescribing the codes of conduct by which these agencies, boards, and commissions would address some of the issues. I want to make it abundantly clear that it's the responsibility of these agencies, boards, and commissions to come up with the codes of conduct themselves.

Now, I think that we who have been in the House know when there is a conflict of interest, and we also know when there is a perceived conflict of interest well enough so that we know, as has been done by a few members in this House when we're debating

particular bills – they have excused themselves from the House, and they have left because they understand knowingly that there could be, if not a conflict of interest, at least a perceived conflict of interest.

Now, the great thing about this is that on these agencies, boards, and commissions the people involved themselves would be coming up with these codes of conduct. Now, again I want to stress that we are suggesting things that they have to look into in terms of establishing the codes of conduct, and those are a requirement to conduct themselves impartially, restrictions on acting in self-interest or furthering a private interest by virtue of one's position. Notice how it says "restrictions," right? We understand that. We want to have people who are involved in the industry playing an instrumental role on the agencies, boards, and commissions when they apply, especially if they're volunteers, right? Especially if they're volunteers.

The other aspects there are restrictions on gifts, including monetary limits; limitations on concurrent employment or other offices. As we've already debated and moved, the amendment has clarified specifically what we were talking about in those instances.

Of course, this isn't like a one-size-fits-all, and all the agencies, boards, and commissions are going to have to apply the same rules or, better stated, the codes of conduct. However, they're using the Conflicts of Interest Act as a base from which to establish those codes of conduct as they continue to move forward.

I remind all the members of this House why it's so important in order for us to move this particular piece of legislation. It's because we're trying to create greater transparency. We're trying to work towards more diversity on our agencies, boards, and commissions. We want to make sure that people are remunerated appropriately for the work that they're doing, of course, and therefore continue to strengthen these institutions that further complement the work that we're doing here in the House, which is at the service of all Albertans as we try to move this province forward.

I believe that those were the main concerns that members of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition expressed during the discussion on the amendment and the discussion on the bill itself. I hope that that satisfies, at least to some degree, the questions, the inquiries that they had.

I also want to remind the members that, as was discussed this morning, we will be reviewing the Conflicts of Interest Act. We know that eventually it will be handed over to the Resource Stewardship Committee, where I look forward to discussing that in great detail so that we can further strengthen the piece of legislation itself, now knowing that it will also specifically apply to agencies, boards, and commissions of the government of Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, I would like to actually speak to the bill itself here in Committee of the Whole. Bill 27, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017, has been brought forward as a way to create a more consistent set of rules for the province's 136 agencies, boards, and commissions, which I will just refer to as ABCs for short. The bill will affect, actually, all of the ones that fall under the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act. It includes many of the health agencies and other groups as well.

As a United Conservative Party member, as a conservative, quite frankly, I support anything that contributes towards good governance, clear rules, transparency, and accountability, especially when it comes down to these government agencies. I think this is extremely important, and I think many of my colleagues would

support also the respect for taxpayers' money and just the accountability of government to citizens for the spending of money and the use of it by members who are servants of the government.

While I get the value of rules – as just sort of a personal thought aside, I guess, sadly, I wish that laws would actually solve the problem – unfortunately it seems too often that laws don't actually constrain those without morals. It's really only people of character and integrity who will act honourably. But having said that, we still have to do the best we can. We still have to be clear about what the expectations are and trust that people will actually of their own volition choose to act with honour and respect.

3:30

In terms of the actual content of the bill, clearly it does ask for the ABCs to write a code of conduct, which is good governance practice on the part of all boards, quite frankly.

Senior officials will be asked to make regular declarations to the Ethics Commissioner of their involvement and their potential conflicts, and there will be some restrictions on them for up to a year after in terms of what jobs they might be eligible or able to apply for.

Within four months of proclamation of this bill it will enforce that all ABCs and their subsidiaries submit a written code of conduct to the Alberta Ethics Commissioner for review. The commissioner will then review them by March 31 and report on all the findings a month later. All the ABCs within Alberta Health Services, postsecondary institutions, Alberta Securities Commission, Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, and others will be included in this required submission.

Across government this bill will provide, I think, some increased clarity and consistency around what conflicts of interest might be. What are the rules? What are the procedures? Hopefully, it should close any loopholes with regard to conflicts of interest. The government does need to increase the public's trust when it comes to the hundreds of thousands of tax dollars that are being used in some cases, quite sadly, to line individual members' pockets.

I do have the concern, though, as has been voiced and somewhat resolved, I suppose, by this amendment, that it will be harder to find good people in some cases because of the limitations on their other involvements, because of the – I don't know – challenge of filing with the Ethics Commissioner. We know that the Ethics Commissioner has been fairly strict or fairly narrow in interpretations of what conflict might look like and the limitation on work for the year following service. I do think it's going to make it harder for good people to step forward because of these concerns. I guess that is the question that will need to be sort of resolved in the working out of this.

It's something that we've already raised: the deep concern within many communities that the bill will affect the ability of industry experts to serve. We've heard that from ranchers, farmers, with the farm commissions. Many of them were really not entirely clear on, at least in the administration of this, how Bill 27 will affect the many expert boards and commissions: the Wheat Commission, the Barley Commission, the canola, Chicken Producers, egg producers, many others, just to name a few. Our concern is that it will prevent industry experts from serving on these boards, especially in a voluntary or quasi-volunteer role, yet allow them to maintain their employment or their business or their job that pays for their living while they're trying to serve on these commissions.

Can the canola commission not have canola farmers or marketers? They're really the only ones who know the market. Can the chicken producers' commission actually have chicken producers because they're in conflict? No one else really knows what's going on, and unfortunately raising two urban chickens really doesn't

qualify a person to know anything about the production of commercial chickens for the marketplace. So there is a question about who will be able to serve on these agencies, boards, and commissions as we go forward.

My question, I guess, in simple boils down to: is this bill actually finding the balance between ethics and expertise? I do think that is the challenge. How do we balance the ethics versus the expertise? I hope we're not trading one for the other, because that wouldn't move us very far ahead. How do you provide for the many ABCs that depend on expert knowledge in their area in order to contribute knowledge and leadership that's needed for the ABCs?

The main Conflicts of Interest Act, not just the amendment here but I'm going back to the original act, as has been mentioned, does call for a special committee to be struck every five years starting from December 1, 2012. Five years is 15 days away, quite frankly. Why is this bill presented now, when, in fact, we're 15 days away from a required committee being entrusted or committed to looking after this bill? I really think we probably would have been wise to actually let it go to committee, have a full and thorough review, a deep look at it, take time to engage with stakeholders. I guess I raise the issue of stakeholders at this point, too, because a number of these boards and commissions, their mandate responsibilities actually require that certain industry stakeholders have a seat at the table, so there's a real question there of how that will work for them on these things.

I think actually having waited the 15 days, allow the committee to begin to do its work, begin to speak with stakeholders to consult with them to actually do a really good job of this: being as it's only 15 days away, it would have been a better thing to do. Why is it introduced now, 15 days in advance? I wonder if it's political staging. Or is it an attempt to upstage the proper, mandated work of a legislative committee? I do have concerns about the timing of this thing being presented.

But, all in all, the principle, the intent of the bill, is moving in the right direction. I might have preferred to see it presented in a slightly different way, but I will support the bill, and I do think the intent is one that we need.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to the bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 27. I spoke earlier, but I didn't have the opportunity to speak at second reading, so I'll just maybe provide some comments of a more general nature with respect to the bill.

I think it's important to recognize that here in the United Conservative Party we support good governance and improved clarity for agencies, boards, and commissions, and at the end of the day we want to make sure that we get to a spot where this legislation has provided a real framework for that to happen. You know, we've seen over a long period of time that there have been examples of high-profile agencies, boards, and commissions where the behaviour of some of those individuals who have been appointed to that hasn't been ideal, and there's been little to no recourse to rectify that situation. So it's my hope that that is exactly where we can arrive on Bill 27.

It's important to note that the United Conservative Party strongly supports transparency and accountability, and we want to work to make sure that we get that across the line. Accountability is a core function of the United Conservative Party. I think that was made clear in question period today, where a number of members on our side of the House highlighted some of the challenges that the current

government is having with respect to openness and transparency, so it's my hope that over a period of time this government will heed some of their advice and ensure that we do remain open and transparent.

We've seen this government engaging in political interference at the highest levels, including in the Premier's office and directly interfering with access to information requests. It is of key underlining importance to the United Conservatives that we have openness and transparency in government, so it's my hope that we can get there for some of the agencies, boards, and commissions on Bill 27. We have been founded as an organization specifically with reference to respect for taxpayers' money and greater accountability from government to its citizens, and hopefully that is exactly what Bill 27 will provide.

I'll conclude my comments on that and look forward to some continued debate and look forward to hopefully being able to continue the discussion around this and around the review at committee as well, as that is an important step.

The Chair: Just before I recognize the next speaker, hon. members, I've had a request to revert to introduction of guests very briefly, for which we need unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

3:40 Introduction of Guests (reversion)

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Chair and to all the members for indulging me. It gives me great pleasure to introduce a few people who are really important to me, a couple of very young conflict-of-interest enthusiasts who are joining me after school today. First of all is my daughter Opal Schmidt. She is in grade 5. She's learning the cello. She's quite a skilled athlete, and she has her dad's sense of humour if not his good looks. I ask that Opal Schmidt please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Joining her today is her brother Gus Trefz. Gus is seven, in grade 2. He's learning the violin. He's a video game enthusiast. He can play Minecraft like nobody else. He also really likes Batman, and it's my pleasure to call him my son. Gus, if you would rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Joining them today is my assistant Karlie Hanoski, who kindly shepherded them safely from school to the Legislature because child care in this province doesn't meet the demands of a legislator's schedule. Karlie, it's a pleasure to include you on my team, so would you please rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Bill 27 Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017 (continued)

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: A hard act to follow, Madam Chair, indeed. It's nice to have them with us today.

I will move that we adjourn debate on Bill 27 and that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Hinkley: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 27. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? Say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, say no. So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 29

An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is an honour to rise and speak to Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving, for second reading.

Impaired driving injures or kills thousands of Albertans every year. Any form of impaired driving is unacceptable and dangerous and puts everyone on our roads at risk. This government has made a commitment to improving safety on Alberta's transportation network. In order to maintain safe roads and deter impaired driving, we must have a robust program of provincial administrative sanctions and roadside detection processes in place.

This is particularly true as the country prepares for the legalization of cannabis. By amending and updating the Traffic Safety Act, we would continue to honour our commitment to promote safety on Alberta's roads. Too many Albertans have lost loved ones or seen loved ones suffer injuries that alter the course of their lives forever as a result of an impaired driving incident. We've heard from Albertans concerned about what legalization of cannabis will mean for the safety of our roads. The vast majority of Albertans support robust impaired driving laws to ensure the safety of everyone.

The proposed amendments that I will speak about today are the result of consultation with Albertans and our traffic safety, law enforcement, and industry stakeholders. They reflect the changes being proposed by the federal government to the Criminal Code of Canada and ensure that we would have the provincial sanctions in place that reflect the new federal impaired driving laws when they come into force in the near future.

What this bill means for Albertans is that our law enforcement organizations would have the tools they need to sanction impaired drivers to get them off the road immediately, with consequences that are serious enough to deter drivers from getting behind the wheel impaired by any substance in the first place.

In April 2017 the government of Canada introduced legislation that would legalize the use and possession of nonmedical cannabis in Canada – that's Bill C-45 – and make changes to federal transportation-related laws, including impaired driving laws, in the Criminal Code of Canada. That's Bill C-46. These federal changes include three new impaired driving offences specific to cannabis, to cannabis-alcohol combination, or other illegal drugs.

In addition, in May 2017 the Alberta Court of Appeal ruled that section 88.1 of Alberta's Traffic Safety Act is unconstitutional. This section imposes an indefinite licence suspension on a person charged under the Criminal Code with impaired driving, a suspension that lasts until the disposition of the Criminal Code court

proceeding, an indefinite period of time, Madam Speaker. This indefinite licence suspension must be changed, according to the court direction, to a fixed-term suspension no later than May 18, 2018.

To respond to these changes, we are proposing amendments to Alberta's Traffic Safety Act. Currently the government of Alberta uses a combination of tools and sanctions to encourage drivers to make safer choices. These provincial administrative sanctions include licence suspension, vehicle seizure, remedial education, and ignition interlock device installation among other requirements.

The administrative sanction programs include zero tolerance for alcohol for drivers who are in the graduated driver licensing program; the immediate roadside suspension program, an escalating series of sanctions for drivers found with a blood-alcohol concentration between .05 and .08; and the Alberta administrative licence suspension program, a series of escalating sanctions for any driver charged with a Criminal Code of Canada impaired driving offence, such as driving with a blood-alcohol content over .08. Two of these programs, the zero tolerance program and the Alberta administrative licence suspension program, would be updated as part of these amendments.

The first amendment to the Traffic Safety Act addresses the Alberta Court of Appeal decision from the Sahaluk case. At issue was the indefinite term of a licence suspension for drivers criminally charged with a blood-alcohol concentration over .08. When the law was put into place in 2012, the licence suspension remained in place pending the outcome of criminal court proceedings, a process that could take anywhere from three to 24 months.

The new suspension will no longer be tied to the criminal charge. We propose changing the term of the licence suspension for these drivers to 90 days, followed by a year of monitoring through the ignition interlock program. This would succeed in addressing the court's ruling, which also included a recommendation to establish a monitoring system for demonstrated high-risk drivers. At the same time, we would provide a way to take impaired drivers off the road, along with a serious enough sanction to deter impaired driving in the first place.

Madam Speaker, the next proposed amendment reflects the overwhelming response that we received from Albertans during consultation about zero tolerance for drivers in the graduated driver licensing program. GDL drivers are new to driving and have yet to build the driving skills that more experienced drivers have attained. This program is designed to give novice drivers an opportunity to gain driving experience while limiting known risks. This proposed amendment would allow a zero tolerance policy for GDL drivers for cannabis, cannabis-alcohol combination, and illegal drugs in exactly the same way that we currently do for alcohol.

The next proposed amendment would expand the Alberta administrative licence suspension program to reflect the three proposed new federal Criminal Code offences for drug-impaired driving and drug-alcohol combination impaired driving. These offences relate to new blood-drug concentration limits and new blood-alcohol concentration limits.

3:50

Drivers reasonably believed to be at or over any of these new concentration limits would be subject to the sanctions laid out in the Alberta administrative licence suspension program. The program includes immediate licence suspension for 90 days followed by one-year participation in an ignition interlock program as well as other consequences. This means there would be the same consequences whether a driver was impaired by alcohol or cannabis alone, cannabis-alcohol combinations, or other impairing

substances such as illegal drugs. This reflects what we heard from stakeholders; namely, impairment is impairment and should be treated the same even if the substances causing impairment are different.

This is important because drug users rarely use drugs alone. Drugs, particularly cannabis, are often paired with alcohol. Research shows that combining two impairing substances like cannabis and alcohol greatly increases the level of impairment beyond the level that would be achieved with one or the other alone.

Having the same sanctions for all kinds of impaired driving, especially the requirement to use an alcohol ignition interlock device, would help to ensure that high-risk drivers cannot combine drugs and alcohol and place themselves and others at greater risk. Ignition interlock devices are one of the consequences that effectively work to deter any form of impaired driving, and courts already order ignition interlock monitoring for drug-impaired drivers convicted under the Criminal Code.

The following proposed amendments reflect the reorganization and renumbering of all transportation-related offences as part of the federal Bill C-46, part 2. These proposed amendments update references to the Criminal Code of Canada in the Traffic Safety Act. Additionally, they correct a previous legislative drafting error, ensuring that all peace officers who are properly trained and appointed can enforce impaired driving laws. If these proposed amendments are not made in advance of the federal legislation, sections of the Traffic Safety Act would become unenforceable.

We're also taking this opportunity, as we make amendments to the Traffic Safety Act, to update and streamline some of the processes and procedures of the Alberta Transportation Safety Board. The board is the final administrative authority for decisions about drivers' licences for motor vehicles. They review the conduct of unsafe or high-risk drivers, including impaired drivers, and determine sanctions and hear appeals of decisions made by law enforcement and the registrar of motor vehicle services.

The first proposed amendment would clarify how the board would reconsider its decisions. Upon application, the board would have to grant one reconsideration but only if the circumstances of the appeal have substantially changed since the original decision. Decisions already reconsidered would not be reconsidered again, which, Madam Speaker, is the current situation. That said, drivers always have the right to appeal a board decision to the courts.

Another proposed amendment would remove the authority of the board to hear appeals on court-imposed drivers' licence suspensions. This would align with other quasi-judicial boards in Canada. Drivers may always appeal their court-imposed suspensions to a higher level of court.

Finally, the Minister of Transportation – that's me – would be authorized to make regulations respecting the use of electronic documents and e-signatures.

Additional proposed amendments are administrative in nature and would clarify incorrect references and processes. The Alberta Transportation Safety Board has both requested and is in support of these proposed changes.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, the amendments proposed under Bill 29 are not only necessary to ensure continued safety of all users of Alberta's roads but vital. These proposed amendments anticipate changes to the federal Criminal Code while providing a made-in-Alberta program of administrative sanctions that would send the message that impaired driving in any form cannot and will not be tolerated. Our stakeholders and our constituents have made it clear that this is the response they want to see as we prepare for cannabis legalization in this country.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, for this opportunity. I look forward to debate on these proposed amendments, and I encourage all members to support Bill 29.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving. This bill makes necessary changes to Alberta's Traffic Safety Act to reflect the pending federal impairment laws, which are before Parliament in the form of Bill C-46. Bill C-46 establishes standards for impaired driving under the influence of cannabis. It also allows for a saliva test with an approved screening device, but more on that in a minute.

With the legalization of marijuana arriving on July 1, a little more than seven months from now, Alberta needed to amend its own provincial administrative impaired driving sanctions to reflect those changes. This bill makes those changes and, in doing so, treats cannabis, our new legal drug in Canada, the same as alcohol in our province's existing administrative sanctions. These sanctions, which all provinces add as an added level of deterrence to driving impaired, can include licence suspensions, impounding vehicles, and requiring interlock devices.

I am pleased to see that Bill 29 extends zero tolerance to new and novice drivers for marijuana. This is an important point because the majority of these drivers who hold what we call graduated licences are young, and driving while impaired takes a disproportionate toll on them. While Alberta is proposing zero tolerance for these novice drivers, some provinces have set their zero tolerance level at 21 and under, and MADD Canada is requesting the age level to be 22 across the nation. As we discuss Bill 29 further, I would like to hear why government has chosen to focus on drivers with graduated licences rather than following other provinces who have set the age at 21.

Another target of zero tolerance laws elsewhere is commercial drivers. Ontario has proposed this in its legislation. The Alberta Motor Transport Association has indicated it supports zero tolerance for its industry, but it prefers government to wait until a roadside screening device for marijuana is available. That's an interesting proposal and one that we would have time to discuss in a committee but not here in this Chamber, where we cannot invite stakeholders to address us.

Now I return to a very important issue, and that is that the legalization of marijuana is not Alberta's doing. The federal government has thrust it upon our country and left provinces to figure out the rest. Bill 29 is just a small part of that although impaired driving is such an important part of legalization that the government has smartly pulled it into a separate piece of legislation.

Let's address a key issue the province faces in keeping Alberta safe on the roads come July 1, 2018. Police have a dependable roadside screening tool to test drivers for blood-alcohol levels now. It has been tested in the courts and is used for roadside suspensions as well as licence suspensions if drivers have a blood-alcohol level between .05 and .08, which is common in other provinces as well. But while there is a dependable screening tool for alcohol for officers who suspect impaired drivers, no such device exists today for marijuana. A saliva test is in the works. The federal government hopes to have it ready to go on July 1, but at this point it's unlikely. Even if it can approve one in time, these devices will be fraught with challenges because testing impairment through THC levels is much different, with some being less effective than testing blood-alcohol levels. Everything is fluid when it comes to drug-impaired driving right now, and it will remain so for some time.

To detect impaired drivers without a saliva test, Alberta will need more officers trained to do the standard field sobriety test at the scene, and the province will need more drug recognition experts who can perform the next step, which is blood testing. Today that specialized training is only offered in the United States. Other provinces say that they will need to double the number of officers who can perform the kind of testing required to enforce these new rules when marijuana is legalized. That training and the anticipated additional officers will cost millions of dollars. It is quite a load on the province, and that is a lot to prepare for before legalization becomes a reality.

I was pleased to hear the minister say yesterday that a public awareness campaign will be an important aspect of its strategy.

There are a lot of unknowns about marijuana and impairment, as I alluded to before. One of them is: how long should someone wait before they drive? Experts are saying 24 hours. Albertans need to know this.

4:00

Medical marijuana use is another question for many people. The truth is that if someone is taking the prescribed amount, we understand that screening devices, which, as I mentioned, do not yet exist, should not red flag them. However, they do need to know that if they imbibe too much, whether they have a permit for medical marijuana or not, they will be charged if they are impaired. It's no different than someone impaired by prescription drugs.

Another myth is that marijuana is less impairing than alcohol. In fact, it affects drivers' reactions and depth perception, among other factors. They are a hazard behind the wheel. We know that most Albertans do not want to get behind the wheel impaired, and with so much uncertainty about this newly legalized recreation drug, the government needs to help them understand the dangers of using marijuana and driving. They also need to know about the new federal and dovetailed provincial rules for combining alcohol and marijuana. Because there is an elevated risk if a driver has both alcohol and marijuana in their system, both levels of government are proposing rules that target the combination.

Bill 29 addresses something else that has been on the sidelines for Albertans, which is the court ruling that struck down Alberta's indefinite licence suspension. Bill 29 reverts to defined terms for licence suspension, a move that needed to occur before May 2018. As we can all see, Bill 29 offers the provincial government an important opportunity to stress the dangers of drinking and driving, smoking marijuana and driving, and taking illegal drugs and driving.

As I said, Madam Speaker, on the training of the officers, to get them all trained in time for July 1 is a huge expense and probably not even possible. My concern is that in rural areas and remote areas of Alberta that expertise will not exist, so I'm not sure how they will be able to enforce these laws. But that's something that the government is going to have to work out, and it's going to be very expensive, and it's going to take some time.

Legalization of marijuana clearly offers a lot of challenges to provinces, but it is important that the government do its best with this legislation for the sake of all Albertans. Our goal in the next few days is to help ensure that Bill 29 becomes the best legislation for our province for dealing with this important issue.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise in support of Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol

Impaired Driving. Bill 29 has really been brought in to respond to the federal government's legalization of marijuana, but the responsibility has been imposed on the provincial governments to implement sanctions for impaired driving. The province has decided to align their deterrence sanctions for impaired driving with those of the federal government's Bill C-46, where part of the act amends the provisions of the Criminal Code that deal with offences and procedures related to drug-impaired driving.

Alberta needed to amend its own provincial administration impaired driving sanctions to reflect those changes as well. Bill C-46 establishes those standards for impaired driving under the influence of marijuana. In this legislation it states that more than 2 and less than 5 nanograms of THC per millilitre of blood is a summary offence and that more than 5 nanograms of hybrid is a hybrid offence. The legislation allows for saliva testing, which authorities can use to prove that a driver should go for more definitive testing. One problem with this is that saliva testing for marijuana levels does not yet exist. These are some of the issues that will need to be hashed out before legislation becomes effective on July 1, 2018.

We've seen that other provinces have been experiencing an increase in impaired driving incidents after legalization, which goes against myths about cannabis being not as impairing as alcohol. Something needs to be done so that police officers and authorities on the road can quickly measure the amount of THC in someone's system and at what level it is considered an impairment. I believe it is the government's responsibility to ensure roads are safe, and when we come to July 1, 2018, we may not have the road saliva testing available. Has this government thought about the repercussions of not being able to test this way?

Public awareness is also very important. We need to not only train our police officers but increase the public's awareness of the dangers of and the repercussions of driving under the influence of cannabis. Does the government have a plan in the works to include public awareness, and what kinds of campaigns would you be considering? All of these questions need to be answered.

Another question is: has this government considered the cost to implementing this act? Authorities will need specialized drug impairment training. There will be a need for increased enforcement on the roads and at this point in time a greater ability to test higher volumes of blood. Bill 29 states that blood testing will be streamlined. If the government has considered this, what is the estimated increase in costs, and how will this affect other blood tests? What will take precedence, and at what cost?

We know for sure that there will have to be increased enforcement on the roads. Other provinces have stated that there needs to be double enforcements on the road. Not only that, but not having enough officers with required sobriety and specialized DRE training in rural Alberta, where there are fewer officers already, could lead them to not being able to respond quickly, which will no doubt increase the time for them to get to accident scenes or pull someone over who is under the influence. How will the province address the many unique issues, ensuring Alberta's rural roads are safe? Without the added support, how will the government cover this cost? The money will have to come from somewhere. It will cost millions to implement legalization, and we know that the federal government will not help cover the costs to the provinces.

Bill 29 will treat cannabis and illegal drugs the same as alcohol in its administrative sanctions. As well, administrative sanctions will be extended to drivers who choose to combine alcohol and cannabis. One of the rules set out through provincial legislation is that it will set zero tolerance for new and novice drivers. This is great, but some of the provinces have included all drivers under the age of 21, and MADD Canada asks that the legislation be set at the

age of 22. I would like to know what process this minister went through when considering the rules and if they've even considered an older age. This does not have nothing to do with the legalization of marijuana but has everything to do with road safety. I'm hoping that perhaps the minister will rethink that one through and weigh the pros and cons regarding Alberta's safety on the roads.

Other provinces are also proposing zero tolerance for commercial drivers such as truckers and transport operators. Why was this not considered when there were discussions regarding road safety? If it was considered, what was the rationale behind not including commercial drivers? While I am pleased to see that new and novice drivers will see zero tolerance, we also need to think seriously about the consequences and rules we all set out. The Alberta Motor Transport Association has indicated that it will also support zero tolerance for their industry but prefers that we wait until there are adequate roadside cannabis screening devices. In my estimation, this is responsible thinking. We need more time. We could possibly have had greater discussion regarding the need for cannabis roadside screening and more.

However, given the time we've been allocated for discussion, it has been really difficult to seek stakeholder input and hear what others might have to say about the legislation. We need to really ask a couple of questions here. How are we going to keep all Albertans safe on the road, whether through legislation, policing, or public awareness? When are we going to be able to use roadside screening and not just rely on blood testing? How much will blood testing cost the province? How will we be able to test blood-cannabis levels quickly and say what is and what is not impaired? What are the consequences of the rules that we have set out? Should we tighten the rules for drivers? What's the cost of all of this going to be, and how is this cost that is forecasted to be in the millions squeezed out of the taxpayer?

Madam Speaker, there are a lot of unanswered questions that really should have been hashed out in committee. My hope is that in the next few days we'll be able to discuss and perhaps bring forward some solid amendments to ensure the very best legislation for the citizens of Alberta.

Thank you.

4:10

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments if anybody has any.

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm honoured to have the opportunity to cosponsor a bill that will make the roads in our province safer. Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving on Alberta roadways, comes to us as a result of a new period in Canadian substance consumption laws. We are happy to work with the federal government to usher in this new era, but we are aware of the major risks that accompany it. The purpose of this legislation is to make avoidable death and injury a thing of the past. As the minister has said, impaired driving is the leading cause of criminal death and injury in this country. This is wrong. It breaks my heart knowing that so much pain and suffering for families and friends is easily avoidable.

Impaired driving is an avoidable and short-sighted decision that hurts the driver and many more around them. Legislation reminding people that impaired driving is an avoidable and unnecessary choice is a worthwhile pursuit for this government. Times are changing, so with the times legislation must change as well.

Our government is happy to work with the federal government on the legalization of recreational cannabis, but that also means

working in tandem with them to address the risks that this brings to our community. Often people consider impaired driving to mean driving under the influence of alcohol. Madam Speaker, I was shocked to learn that according to a 2013 study of fatally injured drivers in Alberta over 55 per cent of them tested positive for drugs, and 25 per cent of them tested positive for having consumed cannabis. This is unacceptable. We are proud to educate Albertans on the risks of driving impaired, but in order to make sure that they understand the severity of this issue, we need to move towards fostering the idea that making these decisions will put your life and the lives of others at risk. These changes are necessary to deal with the reality of increased risk with the legalization of cannabis.

Other jurisdictions across the country are working on legislating changes to impaired driving laws in response to the federal government's decision. Without this legislation we could be left with a void in the legal system when dealing with increased risks of impaired driving. The changes we are making to the Traffic Safety Act are going to hopefully save lives. By moving towards a 90-day fixed-term suspension period for impaired driving, our government is making it clear that there are consequences for careless and unnecessary dangerous choices. While we don't want to be heavy handed in our approach, we know that this will be a major deterrent in taking the careless risk of driving under the influence of alcohol, cannabis, or other drugs.

This legislation stems from concerns that everyday Albertans have regarding the new cannabis policies coming forward next summer. Over 45,000 Albertans had shared their input and concerns regarding the impacts of cannabis legalization, including their concerns over impaired driving. Albertans made clear that this is a serious issue for many of them, and we are proud to have taken their feedback seriously in drafting this legislation.

Over the summer we also had frequent consultation with major stakeholders such as law enforcement and industry players. Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving on Alberta roadways, is a piece of legislation I am proud to put my name behind. Road travel is an essential reality for the majority of Albertans, and this bill will help give more people peace of mind when it comes to getting on the road. Our goal as a government that prioritizes safety is to have no impairment-related collisions or fatalities. Although this is a lofty goal, the legislation I'm speaking on today will help us get that much closer and make great strides in making our roads safer.

Madam Speaker, I'm sure many of us in this room have been touched by a story regarding impaired driving. This is an unfortunate reality, but it doesn't need to happen. Reminding folks to think twice before turning the key is an effective way to make sure they make the right decision. There will still be instances of impaired driving, but we hope that with Bill 29 we will be able to make people more aware that the risk is not worth the consequence.

When you drive impaired, you're making an extremely selfish decision, and I'm not shy to say that. Too many families have been broken as a result of impaired driving, and Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving on Alberta roadways, will make these gut-wrenching stories less and less common. As a mother, a grandmother, and someone who values safety, whether it be in the workplace, at home, or, in this case, on the roads, I'm eager to get this bill into becoming a law so that we can make life safer for Alberta and its drivers.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the government. This is extremely complex, and I can't even fathom having to deal with all of the information that's coming from the federal government and then trying to apply it here. So thank you for all of the work that's been done so far.

I just wanted to talk a little bit about Chestermere-Rocky View and just the areas around our schools. As the minister well knows, we have some very interesting issues on our roads near the high school in Chestermere, and I've talked at length in this House about all of these youth that are travelling across a divided highway. The speeds have been reduced, and there are all sorts of other things that are going on. Add to that an afternoon where kids – especially if the age, as I understand it, here in Alberta is going to be 18, Madam Speaker, which is younger than in some of the other provinces, you can imagine that there are going to be youth partaking in some cannabis, potentially, before getting into their vehicles and crossing the highway out near Chestermere.

This is one of the things I wanted to talk about, and hence the complexity lies in trying to figure out how to deal with this. I bring this up because I'm not sure how the age was brought in in this province, but it is just something to consider. As my colleagues have mentioned, Mothers Against Drunk Driving is looking more at the age of 22 simply because, as I understand it, the incidence of serious accidents under that age tends to be higher than post age 22. Just something to take into consideration. I am sure it's probably being discussed amongst you as well. But the best way for me to understand that is to have the image of that going on, and being in a rural area, I'm sure that my school is not one of the only ones that would have this situation.

Along with the education that, obviously, needs to come with the complexities of this, as the member had mentioned – I don't think I would call it ushering in a new era, but if that's the language that we're using, then ushering in a new era it is. But also with that has to come the immense amount of education not just for our youth, obviously, but for anybody who's going to be using.

I have to say again that I have zero experience with any sorts of drugs at all, so I can't even speak to the impacts of that other than medicine that has been prescribed to me. I can assure you that with anything that has made me slightly loopy, I've been in the hospital. I haven't actually been outside of a hospital with anything that would alter the way that I think or feel, so I come at this with really, really – I'm asking the questions because I don't know.

On behalf of the young people that are going to be partaking in this, I would ask that the government take a look at these ages to see how the body takes it and to see how they react and, along with that, at the immense amount of education that has to come along with that. It's one thing, of course, to say: don't drink and drive. We know all of these things. These are long tried-and-true opportunities to try and stop people from doing the wrong thing at the wrong time. However, as all of us know, all of us have stories of people in our own families and close networks that have not always done the right thing.

4:20

I love to hear the words “zero tolerance,” all of those kinds of things. That's wonderful. But as my colleague mentioned, we don't have the methodology as to how to test for this. As I understand it, a sobriety test is going to be basically walking down a line and touching your nose and making sure that you're able to drive.

There are so many things that are going to be happening around a situation like that on these busy roads, especially out on highways near my area. Truthfully, Madam Speaker, I don't even know how they patrol that. They can't even patrol it right now to keep the kids safe going across the highway . . .

Mr. Gill: That's 791.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah, 791 and highway 1.

. . . let alone patrol it, forgetting across the highway, for slowing down the speeders and making sure that kids that may have had some cannabis before getting into their vehicles are going to be safe to cross that highway and get home. Not that the government can control that. You know, you can't control every person in what they're going to do, but I really, really think that, with the complexities along with that, we have to take into consideration that these things are going to happen. Like I said, I can't even fathom the amount of work that's going to go into this to try and handle legislation that has been put upon you by the federal government.

With respect to the graduated licence program – this has been mentioned a couple of times – it also includes new and novice drivers and newcomers to Canada as well. Is this education as well, Madam Speaker, going to be provided to newcomers coming to our country? I don't even know what happens with respect to alcohol with that, how that's transferred. We have a lot of people coming from all over the place that may not always understand. Of course, because the legislation provincially is different from province to province, how is it that we're going to make sure that not only our youth understand but that our new Canadians, new Albertans understand and understand, actually, how cannabis is going to impact their bodies? That part of the education.

To the point again: are we actually going to be able to provide enough officers on the road to manage this on July 1? I'm not sure how that's possible. Again, I'm so grateful that this legislation is being brought up now. I'm sure I'm not saying anything that you haven't already thought of, but it's important to discuss it.

I just want to state one more time that the education piece of this is going to be, I think, probably more important even than the enforcement of the behaviours. We have an entire generation of young people here that are going to be, unfortunately, for lack of a better word – I don't know if this is the right word – guinea pigs, you know, for a new substance. Well, probably not; maybe they've had the substance in their bodies before. But as far as we can tell, a new substance in the open. On top of that, we're going to have to make sure that they understand what that substance does to their bodies and the severe consequences that that could cause them down the road should they decide to not follow the laws.

With that, again, I don't think that I've brought anything new to the discussion, but I appreciate the opportunity to talk about it in the Legislature with my colleagues. I would really like to thank the province for jumping on this as soon as you have, to bring this legislation forward so that we can take a look at this societal shift – that is probably more what I would call it – in less than eight months. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this bill.

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

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Like many others, I haven't had a great opportunity to research this important bill yet. I think it's one that we're going to have some lengthy discussions about, with, hopefully, more and more of the evidence brought to bear on the whole question of the timing of substance use, the combination of alcohol and marijuana and other drugs and their impact on capacity to drive safely, the age at which we in Alberta are going to see legalized use of cannabis.

What I am aware of, mostly through medical journal articles and interviews that I've heard, especially around the whole use of

opiates and the combination, often, of some of these opiates with marijuana and indeed the synergistic effects of alcohol and cannabis, is that they are real concerns.

Having said that, I think we're all aware that we're embarking on new territory in Canada, including Alberta. I am one of those who feel that it was important to move towards legalization of cannabis, that prohibition has not historically been effective, and that the criminalization of this drug has contributed to a lot of suffering, a lot of crime, and a lot of damaged individuals when, in fact, it's a very mixed bag. Cannabis has some significant medical benefits, and it has some significant harms when it's misused and when it's started too early.

I guess I'm influenced to some extent by the recent *Canadian Medical Association Journal* reporting that there appears to be very limited support for legalizing cannabis use or for regular use of cannabis under the age of 25 in the medical literature. That's partly because, especially in males, the frontal cortex development is slower than in females. It is the area of administrative control. It's the area of judgment. It's the area of second thought. There is evidence that under 25, especially in males, there is much more significant risk of cannabis use. So I think it's an area that we're going to have to hear more research on, I hope, and have more discussions about.

Certainly, 18 is the very minimum where one would consider legalizing this, and I would argue and will argue that we should be having a very serious conversation about moving that up beyond 18 simply because of the immature brain and the susceptibility of that brain to the harmful effects, in some cases psychiatric effects, certainly serious psychological impairment associated in younger people with regular use of cannabis. It's an important discussion to have.

I think it's timely that the government has brought this forward, and it's important that we have some pretty solid evidence presented here in this bill to help us make rational decisions about how we're going to monitor and enforce standards of safety on the roads, measurements and penalties associated with the use and abuse of these substances.

There's no question in my mind that our culture has come to the point where we have to take responsibility for the array of substances that we're all having access to that have the potential for addiction, have the potential for harm, have the potential for some benefits. It's finding that balance and ensuring that we invest really well in the educational process, both for young people and for older folks, who maybe think they know something about cannabis, who think they know something about the combinations and impacts of the combination of alcohol and other substances. I'm here referring to some of the psychiatric meds – sedatives, hypnotics, painkillers – that are being consumed by people in conjunction with, for example, alcohol or cannabis. Tobacco: another one that's increasingly being associated with cannabis, with the mixing of the two and some of the harmful effects there that may or may not be recognized.

4:30

We're in a brave new world. We've got a lot of important risks and benefits associated with this new wave of tolerance, I guess, and permissive use of these substances, and it behooves us to take our time to hear the best of the evidence.

It's certainly increasingly being researched around North America. I heard a researcher recently at the University of Calgary speak about the fact that there is no safe level that she's aware of of cannabis use in young people. She was referring to under the age of 25. She said that the evidence simply isn't there yet that we know how to predict safe levels of cannabis in youth under the age of 25.

That's somebody who has spent her life researching primarily adolescent addictions and rehab programs for young people with mental health and addictions problems, including cannabis. She was very cautious in her recommendations at the nursing school about the earlier onset of cannabis use in young people.

While we're debating the principle of the bill, I can fully support the direction we're taking. I hope we can take the time to pull in some of the very latest evidence and that we will seriously look at the age of restriction and that this government might consider extending beyond the age of 18 because I think the evidence is not there for safe use at that age. Understandably, with the alcohol legal age being 18, it may in some ways send an inconsistent message, but until we know more about some of the negative impacts of cannabis on the young brain, I think it behooves us to really be careful and consider raising the age beyond 18 at this stage. We can always lower it later. It'll be a lot tougher to raise it in the future.

I think erring on the side of caution would be my one recommendation, that we look at all the evidence and start to address the whole question of: what is the appropriate age, and what's the evidence from around the world where they have had some different age legalization standards?

I look forward to the debate. I think it's one of the most important bills that I've seen come before this Legislature, and it's going to have long-term implications, as we're all aware, since there's nothing that has caused more suffering and death on our highways than alcohol and drugs. We're now being asked to look very critically at this new dispensation under federal law that's going to allow legal access to cannabis.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I look forward to further debate.

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

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

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to support Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving. Like the previous speakers, I think this is one of the most important pieces of work that we as legislators can be doing. What we're doing today is trying to affect behaviour, and the behaviour that we're trying to affect is the perception that you can operate a motor vehicle after having consumed either alcohol, cannabis, or other drugs. We need to drive home the point that you should not be operating a vehicle in that situation, particularly if you're combining alcohol and cannabis. Very dangerous.

I'm privileged to be a cosponsor of the bill, and I'm also privileged to represent the citizens of Edmonton-Whitemud. Edmonton-Whitemud is a great area. We've got great schools, great rec centres, great community leagues, and good roads, pretty well, yeah. I asked the Minister of Transportation to get Terwillegar Drive fixed, but he hasn't gotten to that yet.

My neighbours in Edmonton-Whitemud are very concerned about impaired driving. There was a tragic case a few years ago in which a small child was sitting on a patio of a restaurant in the riding, and an impaired driver actually caused the death of that child. It has had reverberations throughout the city of Edmonton and, I dare say, the province of Alberta, maybe the country. That was a case of obvious impaired driving, and we need to make sure that we get our laws changed so that we can tell people that that sort of behaviour is not acceptable and that we won't tolerate it. In that case there was some confusion about the rules around refusal to blow – I'm using a generic term for the legal concept – but I'm pleased to note that in this legislation that legal option is no longer available. In fact, it wasn't at the time of this terrible accident – I

shouldn't call it an accident – this terrible event. I know that the citizens of Edmonton-Whitemud are very pleased to see us acting on this.

Now, we're also acting on it because the Court of Appeal of the province of Alberta has given us a deadline. We have to have this legislation in place by May 2018, so while we may wonder about what the legal limits should be for cannabis and for other things, we need to get the roadside suspension laws changed.

This event and other similar events have changed my personal behaviour. I now routinely am taking a taxi home from social events, and I am routinely taking advantage of friends who don't consume intoxicating materials and can be designated drivers. This is important. Actually, my wife is on my case all the time about this. The example she uses is: do you want your name as the MLA to appear in the newspaper as having been charged with impaired driving? Now, that's one impediment to me doing this, but I have to say that the major impediment is that I don't want to be in the situation similar to the driver that caused that event in Edmonton-Whitemud.

Any form of impaired driving is unacceptable, dangerous, and puts everyone on our roads at risk. Impaired driving kills and injures thousands of people in Alberta every year, and we have to fix this. We have to get to the point that we've got as close to zero impaired-related collisions on Alberta roads as possible. I think this legislation is going to help in that. It's a universally accepted fact that alcohol impairs motor skills and judgment and must not be done in conjunction with driving. The same is true for cannabis as well, particularly as the combination of cannabis and alcohol and other drugs causes an enhanced impairment of driving. These new impaired driving laws will help to educate people about the consequences of cannabis and drug impairment and deter people from driving after consuming.

We've consulted with Albertans about cannabis legalization and its implications. The majority of Albertans express concern that there will be increased drug-impaired driving following the legalization of cannabis, and those folks support robust impaired driving laws to make sure that everyone is safe on the road.

We are aware that the federal government is proposing legal limits for cannabis and the combination of cannabis and alcohol, the same way they've done with alcohol, with the .08 blood alcohol limit. We want to update the Traffic Safety Act now to ensure that Albertans are ready to apply provincial administrative sanctions that would reflect the new drug-impaired driving offences under the Criminal Code. The changes will also include zero tolerance for cannabis, cannabis-alcohol combinations, and other drugs for drivers in the graduated driver licensing program, as currently exists for alcohol.

We want to make additional changes to the act to align with the Alberta Court of Appeal ruling, to apply additional federal legislation changes, and to clarify existing processes and policies as part of the province's impaired driving approach.

4:40

Alberta's use of a system of immediate provincial sanction is currently one of the greatest deterrents for impaired driving. Proposed changes would be the first step to be ready for the legalization of cannabis. We're going to continue to look at best practices across jurisdictions. We anticipate that Canada's provincial and territorial governments will be updating their administrative programs as well in order to reflect the changes in the Criminal Code of Canada, and maybe we can look to Ontario for what they've done already.

The purpose of administrative sanctions like roadside licence suspensions, vehicle seizure, and ignition interlock programs is to

get impaired drivers off the road. The second and every bit as critical purpose of the province's administrative sanctions is to deter people from driving impaired in the first place. Administrative sanctions like the licence suspension program are proven to reduce impaired driving. They are also in place to provide consequences for new drivers with any level of alcohol in their blood and for all drivers whose blood-alcohol content is between .05 and .08. While not a criminal offence in the Criminal Code of Canada, administrative sanctions for these lower limits are common across Canada. Studies have shown that drivers with a blood-alcohol content of .05 or greater are impaired and are much more likely to be involved in collisions.

Serious consequences and strong deterrents are needed to keep impaired drivers off the road. That's why organizations like MADD Canada, whose pin I'm proud to wear today, the Alberta Motor Association, and the Alberta Motor Transport Association support Bill 29. And I can tell you that my colleagues in the Alberta Medical Association, particularly the colleagues that work in emergency medicine and in surgery and in the intensive care units, are also strongly in favour of these sorts of measures.

In closing, I'm very proud to be a cosponsor of this bill and believe that it's taking an important step to making our roads safer. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Go ahead.

Mr. Mason: I just wanted to ask the hon. member if he is aware that the Whitemud is a city road.

Dr. Turner: Thank you for the question. I'm actually pleased to get the name of my riding in *Hansard* once again. In fact, I was referring to Terwillegar Drive, which is a road that I think the province could help us with.

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

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To close . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are you closing debate on the bill?

Mr. Mason: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Mason: Okay. I appreciate very much the comments on all sides of the House. I found them very useful, and I look forward to the discussion in committee, potential amendments, and further opportunities to answer some of the questions that have been asked. A number of really interesting points have been made.

Madam Speaker, I think what's important is that we're moving as quickly but as carefully as we can to implement these measures before the deadline in the middle of next year, when cannabis becomes a legal substance. It's very important that we get ahead of that and not be caught out. The federal government has, to be very honest, made it somewhat difficult with the timelines that they've put in place. There are unanswered questions about the distribution of financial benefits, taxes, and so on as well as the additional costs borne by provinces, which, quite frankly, are outside the scope of the bill, but they are real and important questions as well.

The important thing here is to put in place a strong and robust system to minimize the dangers of extending legalization to cannabis. We already know that there are very significant and

ongoing problems with accidents related to the consumption of alcohol when driving. One of the points that I think we need to make very clearly is that impairment from cannabis is just as serious as impairment from alcohol. Impairment is impairment is impairment, and we need to take steps to make sure that impaired drivers are kept off our roads. That is the objective of this legislation. In every real respect the treatment of impaired drivers using cannabis or other drugs parallels the treatment of impaired drivers with alcohol, and that's one of the overarching principles that we've established in this bill.

I want to thank all the hon. members for their comments. I've taken good notes, and I know that my department has also been listening attentively, so hopefully those questions can be addressed during the committee stage. I do thank all the hon. members for their support in principle.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'm happy to close debate on second reading of the bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Well, I know that many members are interested in participating in some of the events of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, which is here in Edmonton right now. Since we have concluded successfully the debate on this bill, I move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:47 p.m.]

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