



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 14, 2018

Day 4

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Fourth Session

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Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (NDP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP), Deputy Chair of Committees

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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)
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Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (AP)
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 14, 2018

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon, members. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that we have, seated in your gallery, a friend and former colleague of mine, Shannon Stubbs, Member of Parliament for Lakeland and the Official Opposition critic for Natural Resources, who has done a brilliant job fighting for Albertans with respect to the Vegreville immigration centre, our natural resources, and now on the criminal justice issue in rural Alberta. We welcome her to the House.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. S. Anderson: M. le Président, c'est avec fierté que je me lève à la Chambre aujourd'hui pour introduire l'école Corinthia Park school. These students – I believe there are about 60 of them – are accompanied by teachers Mme Nicole Côté, Mme Elizabeth Creurer, Mrs. Pamela Sims, Miss Kaylee Rattray, Mrs. Sharon Sereda, and by chaperones Mrs. Penny Matthews, Mr. Dean Matthews, and Mr. Jeff Fox. I would ask them all to rise right now, and if we could give them the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

You were doing well on the pronunciation for the first sentence. Then it got a little complicated.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you Woodbridge Farms elementary school. This school has a wonderful community garden, and I'd like to compliment the students on their knowledge of provincial politics. The students are with their teachers, Antonia Triska and Garth Baker, and their chaperones, Judy Andrekson and Shelley McElveen. I would like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly members of the town of Morinville seniors. They are here in the gallery to take in question period as part of a seniors' tour of the Legislature Building and the grounds. Hopefully, later I will be able to take a photo with them. I introduce to you – and as I call out your names, please rise – Ms Rosie Badura, Mrs. Janet MacDonald, Mrs. Vivian Rousseau, Miss Karen Wotherspoon, Mrs. Mary Benson, Mrs. Evelyn Briton, Mrs. Irene Grant, Mrs. Margaret Short, Mrs. Jennifer Berry, and Mrs. Moira Murdoch. Please extend to them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly our newest addition to the Airdrie city council, Ms

Tina Petrow. Tina Petrow was just recently elected. She is a mom, she is an entrepreneur, and she is a long-time community volunteer. Would you please greet her with the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Kaitlin Gareau. Kaitlin is a bachelor of social work student from Grant MacEwan University, and she is currently doing her field placement in my constituency office. Kaitlin has previous work experience with inner-city crisis relief work and is passionate about helping Albertans. I'd ask that she please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to be a social worker myself and honoured to have colleagues from the Alberta College of Social Workers join us here today in the Assembly. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Henna Khawja, MSW, RSW, a clinical social worker, and director at the Islamic Family and Social Services Association; Matthew MacIntosh, BSW, RSW, a social worker at Alberta Health Services; and George Jason, whom I've known for many years. It's so wonderful that he could join us here today. He's a retired social worker with an MSW, and he's chair of the Alberta College of Social Workers Social Action/Social Justice Interest Group, Edmonton. I'd ask my colleagues to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. minister, just to note that I was advised yesterday that the Saskatchewan Legislature elected a Speaker who is another social worker.

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

Ms McPherson: My guests have not arrived yet, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions. First, I introduce members who are here because they're part of the provincial critical care strategic clinical network, seniors' health SCN, and the provincial ICU delirium team. They're here today to recognize World Delirium Awareness Day and raise awareness about delirium and build understanding about its impacts. The SCNs are leading the standardized approach to prevention and management in all settings, a key action in achieving the vision and outcome of Alberta's dementia strategy and action plan. I now ask Barbara O'Neill, senior provincial director; Dr. Jim Silvius, senior medical director, seniors' health SCN; and the other members of their team to please rise and receive our warm welcome.

The Speaker: You have a second introduction?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The second is a group who are volunteers and members of the Kidney Foundation of Canada, northern Alberta and Territories branch. March is National Kidney Month, which is an important opportunity to raise awareness of how to prevent kidney disease and promote early detection as well as

access to care. The support and compassion of dedicated volunteers like our guests in the gallery today help make life better not only for those affected by kidney disease but also their families and their friends. I'd ask that Flavia Robles, executive director, and Manuel Escoto, communications and special projects co-ordinator, as well as members of the Kidney Foundation, including two recipients and one aspiring recipient and their moms, please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly guests here to mark national Dietitians Day, which is today, and Nutrition Month. Every March we celebrate Nutrition Month across Canada, which is an important opportunity to raise awareness about good nutrition and the importance of a balanced diet. It is also an opportunity to recognize the important role that dietitians play in the health care system as front-line providers. I would ask that my guests rise as I say their names and remain standing: Doug Cook, Jody Brudler, Karen Boyd, Colinda Hunter, and Sarah Morland. I'd ask my fellow members to please extend them the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly distinguished members of the social work profession. As you can tell, we are sharing these introductions throughout our colleagues today, so I'll ask our guests to rise as we call your names. Our guests are here with the Alberta College of Social Workers, and we thank all of them for the work that they do to make life better for Alberta families.

First, I'd like to introduce Lynn Labrecque King, Alberta College of Social Workers executive director and registrar; Megan Mierau, generalist with Children's Services; BSW student Christina Foreman with MacEwan University; and Christina's field instructor, Carola Johnson-Vervoorst, MacEwan University, field instructor with Norwood Child & Family Resource Centre. There are a few other people that will be recognized by my colleagues, but I ask all members to join me in giving these folks the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Further to my colleague's introductions it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you some more social workers: Ajay Pandhi, the ACSW council's vice-president; Sadia Sameeullah; Fozia Yusuf, a BSW student with the University of Calgary; and Fozia's instructor, Zakhiyya Bhaidani, a University of Calgary field instructor with the primary care network. I ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three constituents of mine from the crown jewel of the Cowboy Trail,

Sundre, Alberta. The first is His Worship Terry Leslie, the mayor of Sundre, and along with him Councillor Cheri Funke and CEO Linda Nelson. I'd like to ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other guests, hon. members? The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would be remiss if we neglected to introduce, sitting to the left of our MP, Shannon Stubbs, a newly elected councillor for the town of Vegreville, Ms Tina Warawa. Please give her a warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Federal Energy Policies

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In documents recently released by the federal government as a result of an access to information request, we've seen some disturbing news for the oil and gas industry. While our domestic energy industry has had countless regulations, reviews, and burdensome taxes piled on, it seems that foreign oil has been getting a free pass. According to the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, who made a recent reference request, Ottawa has been holding Canadian oil to a higher standard than foreign oil that is being imported into Canada.

It further went on to make the observation: by putting up roadblocks in front of Canadian oil companies, governments are literally losing out on billions of lost tax dollars, and the federal governments are often too much in the practice of obstructing trade to our open markets within the country; nowhere is it more apparent than in the oil and gas sector; in the name of environmental protection we see governments holding back our ethically produced domestic products and giving more free passes to foreign oil producers, often benefiting dictators and despots.

Mr. Speaker, it is time that governments in our country started standing up for Canada, for our job creators, and for the hard-working people across this great nation. We need more than just words and empty rhetoric from this government here and in Ottawa. We need action to support Canadian energy and defend the economic union that previous generations worked so hard to build.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Social Work Week

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a social worker and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees' chapter chair for Edmonton and area human services workers before I was elected, I am so proud to stand here today, joined by guests representing our profession, to celebrate the important contributions of social workers and to recognize Social Work Week.

Social Work Week was from March 4 to March 10, 2018, and it was an opportunity for us to celebrate the vital contributions of social workers to our society through events, film screenings, and more, including a light-up of the Legislature in magenta. The Alberta College of Social Workers has over 7,000 members. Although the college specifically recognizes registered social workers during the week, the government of Alberta also

recognizes those who work alongside registered social workers in the ministries of Children's Services, Community and Social Services, and others.

Bringing Change to Life was the theme for Social Work Week 2018. It is an ideal which social workers and their colleagues embody every day. These professionals help Albertans navigate life's challenges and work towards healthier lives. I encourage all members to continue to recognize the value of social workers throughout the year. Social workers support Albertans in many different areas, including disability services, employment services, income support, and child intervention. Their professionalism, compassion, and commitment to others is truly bringing change to life.

On behalf of the government of Alberta I sincerely thank social workers and those who work alongside them for their contributions in such an important and complex field. Please join me in recognizing all those who work in the social work field every day.

Thank you.

Rural Crime Prevention

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, it's no secret that Albertans are completely fed up with the spike in rural crime. The Official Opposition has been bringing this to the government's attention for months. Very little action has been taken by the government save one: the government rejected our request for an emergency debate on the matter last fall. Months later the government released news about additional funding for RCMP, support staff, and more prosecutors to possibly help alleviate some of the backlog in response times and court delays. It's a good first step, but these measures will take time, time to hire and train these people and get these resources where they are needed the most.

The problem that rural Albertans are facing is now, and the need is immediate. The speed of implementation is a real issue. Already I've heard from ex-members of law enforcement that have offered to return to the ranks to help fill the shortfall, and they were refused. Imagine that. If there is a pool of ex-cops and prosecutors that could step right into the breach and provide meaningful help until more assets are trained and deployed, why wouldn't we be hiring them on this program? It appears like a common-sense approach to take, but unfortunately these days common sense ain't so common.

I recently held a town hall with concerned citizens, the RCMP, and rural crime watch representatives. The anger and fear and frustration is very real. These people want action. These problems are not new; they are just becoming more and more commonplace. People are being victimized over and over again. Insurance costs are skyrocketing or it's being cancelled altogether due to repeated claims. People are becoming educated in protecting their property, but they continue to be victimized due to distances away from law enforcement. Response times are slow. The criminals know that, and they take full advantage of it.

One more thing needs to be said here. Of all the dozens of rural crime town halls that my colleagues have held all across Alberta, not one NDP government member has darkened the doors. Rural Albertans know that government is responsible for providing safety to its citizens. Does this NDP government realize that?

Support Motion 167. Thank you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Calgary Southwest Ring Road

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud today to stand and speak about the southwest Calgary ring road. This project has been

under consideration since 2003. The technical review of the project took eight years. In 2013 the Tsuut'ina Nation agreed to transfer lands to complete the project, and we are forever grateful to these friends and neighbours for working in partnership with us.

Mr. Speaker, we know that a major construction project like the Calgary southwest ring road cannot be undertaken without causing inconvenience for people who live in the area. There were many concerns raised by my constituents about the construction, and I have spent a lot of time working with them and with government to address those concerns.

In particular, I was able to stand by my word and advocate for a citizens' group about protecting Beaver Pond, or wetland 6. As a result of the active participation of my constituents and my continuous advocacy, the Minister of Environment and Parks carefully considered the recommendations and signed a ministerial order directing Alberta Transportation and KGL Constructors to undertake additional protection of wetlands disturbed by the construction of the southwest Calgary ring road.

Further community engagement has taken place through community meetings and presentations, some of which I have attended. These sessions are an opportunity for residents and stakeholders to ask questions about the construction process.

I want to thank Alberta Transportation and the construction partners for providing ongoing information regarding plans, traffic changes, and environmental considerations. I know that the proponents are striving to continue to provide adequate and up-to-date information. I will continue to have an open door for constituents who have concerns, and I want to thank everyone for their continued engagement. It is by hearing your feedback and incorporating the issues raised into the planning process that we can make this process better for everybody.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Respectfully, Members, I'd just like to remind you: please don't use names while we're in discussions in debate, and I would urge all of you to direct your comments through the chair.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Carbon Levy Rate

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When will the NDP government raise its carbon tax by 67 per cent?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, our government was very clear well over a year ago that we will sign on to the federal government's pan-Canadian framework with the approval of the Trans Mountain pipeline. Now, obviously, approval means nothing if it's not constructed. So, as always, we've been very clear that we will not move forward on the federal government's proposals until we see that that construction is fully under way and that approval is given meaning. That continues to be our position as it has been our position all along.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, how does the Premier define "construction under way"? The Premier is well aware . . .

The Speaker: Hon member, excuse me.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is well aware . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you'd direct your comments respectfully through the chair, I'd appreciate that.

Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

The Speaker: Noted.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Kenney: I apologize, Mr. Speaker. I thought I was directing them through the chair.

Mr. Speaker, given that the opponents of our energy industry have committed themselves to doing everything possible to stop that pipeline, is it the position of the Premier that she will not raise the carbon tax by 67 per cent unless and until Alberta oil actually moves through that pipeline?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think it is reasonable for us to evaluate the outcome of the federal Court of Appeal decision and the degree and the state of play with respect to the pipeline's construction. The additional carbon levy planned by the federal government is not expected to come into play until 2021, and by then, we expect that the pipeline will be well into construction and that it will be fully clear to everybody that it will be completed. But we will certainly keep an eye on it because there is no question that the two were always connected, and they will stay connected.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP's own adviser, Professor Leach, says that for the carbon tax to achieve the federal government's target, it would require a price of at least \$200 a tonne. Environment Canada says that it would require a price of at least \$300 a tonne. Does the Premier agree with these estimates, and if so, is it her ultimate policy intention to raise the carbon tax to between \$200 and \$300 per metric tonne?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I must say that it's this kind of Chicken Little behaviour that we have actually grown rather used to from members opposite. I'm surprised to see that coming from the new leader, quite frankly. It's right up there with the stuff we saw yesterday with the alleged claims around the sales tax. But the facts are that our government has committed to a carbon levy, that went up to \$30 per tonne as of January. The facts are as well that we linked the movement with respect to the federal government to the \$40 and then the \$50 in connection with the successful completion of the Trans Mountain pipeline, and that's where we'll go.

Mr. Kenney: Well, there's a fundamental problem here, Mr. Speaker, because the NDP pitched Albertans on this punitive carbon tax for (a) social licence for pipelines, which does not exist. Trudeau cancelled Northern Gateway and killed Energy East. The B.C. New Democrats are doing everything they can to kill Trans Mountain. And Barack Obama vetoed Keystone XL. The other reason, they claim, is to help the environment, but the environment department says that it has to be 10 times higher than it currently is to meet the environmental objective. So what's the point of forcing seniors to turn down the heat at home in the middle of winter with their carbon tax?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker. I'm not actually particularly interested in relitigating the carbon levy, the question of whether climate change is real, and the fact that we need to act on it. I appreciate that the member opposite has many people in his

caucus who do question whether it is real, but over here we do not, and we know we need to act. That's why we brought in a world-leading, a continent-leading climate leadership plan that is reducing emissions on a number of fronts, supporting working families while we do it, helping to phase out coal, increasing renewable energy, and supporting our nonrenewable sector as they diversify and develop additional technologies. It's a good plan.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, polling consistently suggests that about two-thirds of Albertans oppose the NDP carbon tax, yet the Premier and her government seem to insult those people all the time by calling them names. They simply understand what the environmentalists understand, which is that a carbon tax doesn't make any appreciable difference in terms of greenhouse gas emissions unless it is \$200 to \$300 a tonne. This is the fakery of the NDP's carbon tax argument. So my question is: given that Environment Canada says that it has to be \$300 a tonne to meet the global climate targets, how high is the Premier prepared to go? It's a fair question. Why won't she answer it?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What our government will not do is turn back the clock, and what our government will not do is pretend that climate change is not a problem, and what we will not do is leave Alberta vulnerable to the changes in the energy economy that are coming, the way the previous government did. We will not do that because Albertans deserve a government that will lead for the future, and that's exactly what we are doing by taking action to combat climate change here in Alberta.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, here's the problem with the Premier's refusal to answer that question. Instead of reading what sounds like a press release written by Gerry Butts and Justin Trudeau, why doesn't she tell us how high she's prepared to raise the carbon tax? This is an issue because the NDP went through their last campaign without ever uttering the words "carbon tax" or "carbon levy." It didn't appear in their platform. They sprung it on taxpayers just months later. So we're asking the very legitimate question. Given that they hid their carbon tax agenda in the last election, what are they hiding from Alberta taxpayers in terms of their long-term intentions to raise the carbon tax? The Premier herself has said that it will have to go up. The question is: by how much?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've been fairly clear going out I believe six or seven years, and I think that's quite reasonable. I would suggest, however, that the member opposite needs to talk to people in his city that he theoretically represents with respect to what his position would be on the green line. Or he should talk to the people of Edmonton in terms of what his position is on the valley line. Or he should talk to those many, many new investors flocking to Alberta with respect to the incredible growth in renewable energy. The fact of the matter is that we are making great progress on a number of efforts to reduce our emissions. It's about time, it's long overdue, and we are very proud of that record.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Premier is not aware, but as a federal minister I announced a billion and a half dollars for the green line two years before the NDP got around to matching that. I'm glad they finally did.

Pipeline Approval and Construction

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, what I take from all of this is that Justin Trudeau is in charge of Alberta energy and environment policy. After all, Justin Trudeau got the National Energy Board to do his dirty work by invading Alberta jurisdiction over the regulation of upstream emissions, something protected in the Constitution by Peter Lougheed in 1981. Why has this Premier not objected to that violation of our jurisdiction?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, there are times, really, that I think the member opposite is missing Ottawa just a little bit more than is healthy for the debate here.

However, what I will say is that when it comes to supporting Alberta's energy industry and getting the pipeline built to tidewater, we absolutely believe that the federal government needs to step up and support the decision that it made in the national interest to get that pipeline built. Our government will not hesitate to do whatever is necessary to push the federal government to stand up for Albertans and for all Canadians because we know that's what the pipeline represents, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, for months the Premier and her government mocked and ridiculed me for suggesting that we get tough with the B.C. New Democrats on their threats to attack our economy and violate our Constitution, but finally they've come around – I guess it's a conversion on the road to election day – talking about being prepared to turn off the taps. Now we learn they're also prepared to follow our advice with respect to B.C. gas that moves through Alberta. So will they take our advice on one other point? Since they're taking all of our ideas – we appreciate it – will they also take our idea and just scrap the tax?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I will say is that, actually, this conversation is not about the member opposite at all. What it's about is Albertans and standing up for Albertans and doing whatever is necessary, whenever necessary to strategically ensure that we get the job done, that we are closer to securing than any other government in the history of this province has been. I am proud of it. We will keep pushing, and we will get the pipeline built.

2:00

The Speaker: Hon. member, I believe you have another supplemental.

Mr. Kenney: I'll take as many as you want to give me, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Or leave them out.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we've just learned from federal documents that the federal government has zero regulations in place to assess carbon emissions from foreign oil imports, yet they shut down Energy East by imposing a regulatory mandate through the National Energy Board. Peter Lougheed fought and won for us to protect that regulatory authority. Why won't the Premier simply stand up and agree with me that it's outrageous that Justin Trudeau invaded our jurisdiction by getting the NEB into the business of upstream emissions?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, we know that putting a cap on emissions from the oil sands is a critical element in the argument to many, many people who have come to support our position with respect to getting this pipeline to tidewater. People in industry understand that as well as environmentalists. That's why people in industry supported it. We are not going to then turn around and undercut

them, as the member opposite would have us do, as he's busily researching what Justin Trudeau is doing. We're going to continue fighting for this pipeline. We're going to get it built, and I certainly hope that the member opposite will join us in celebrating when we do.

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

Electricity Power Purchase Arrangement Lawsuit Settlement

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The NDP's handling of power purchase arrangements may be the single greatest scandal of this government's short tenure, and that is saying something. Their ham-fisted mismanagement of this file has cost Albertans over a billion dollars, but yesterday the Minister of Environment and Parks said repeatedly that the resolution with Enmax will have "no impact" on taxpayers. This seems to defy logic. Maybe the Premier can help us out. To the Premier: can you confirm that this settlement will actually cost Albertans zero dollars in any way?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated yesterday, we can confirm very clearly that the resolution reached with Enmax will have no impact on taxpayers. In addition, what I can also confirm is that it allows us, as I said before, to accelerate the work that had already been under way between our government and many of our power producers to work together in the restructuring of our energy industry to provide greater stability, greater price certainty for consumers, and greater opportunity to attract investors and, ultimately, also to move towards renewable energy. We're very pleased with the outcome.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Clark: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is simply not true that this agreement does not cost taxpayers. It does. The reported transfer of carbon credits in exchange for an equivalent payment to Enmax appears to be essentially a net zero transaction at best, or maybe it's a massive payout at worst. We simply don't know. It's also been reported that this dispute cost Albertans \$70 million a month. That means over the 19 months of this needless lawsuit, Albertans are \$1.3 billion poorer. Again to the Premier: what was the point of going to court and settling for nothing while the Balancing Pool, which is backstopped by Alberta taxpayers, bled \$1.3 billion?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite knows, when we originally took this matter to court, it was because we were concerned about a clause that the previous government had negotiated inappropriately, we would suggest, behind closed doors, with representatives from Enron at the time, that hurt consumers. We are glad that we have been able to come to a resolution with all of the various parties and to move forward with what was a long overdue restructuring of our electricity system to, again, as I said, provide certainty, to provide investor certainty, and to provide stability . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Clark: Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the poor outcome for Albertans is the result of the legal counsel the NDP chose. Long-time B.C. New Democrat Joe Arvai was hired to stickhandle the

PPA lawsuit on behalf of Albertans. Now, if that name rings a bell, it's because the very same Joe Arvay was just hired by B.C. Premier John Horgan to fight against the Kinder Morgan pipeline in court. To the Premier: will you call on your good friend Mr. Arvay and ask him to do just as good a job for the B.C. NDP as he did for Albertans?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, I think that probably I will forgo that particular option, but what I will do, Mr. Speaker, is to talk about the incredible legal team that we have assembled on behalf of Albertans in our fight to get this pipeline built. In every legal skirmish that has occurred so far, we have stood up for Albertans. The ones we've got decisions on so far, we've won, and since then we've added the pre-eminent Peter Hogg to our task force, the Canadian leader in constitutional law. We will continue to do what's best for Albertans. We will represent them in every forum, exactly what they expect their government to do for them.

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

Rural Crime Prevention

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a member of this Legislature for rural Alberta, I see first-hand the way rural crime is impacting my constituents, so I was pleased to see this government taking action to combat rural crime by investing \$10 million in new resources. I am particularly concerned about how vulnerable rural Albertans are to property crimes. To the Minister of Justice: how will this new funding impact Albertans who are concerned that their property may be damaged or stolen?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. We've heard from rural Albertans all over the province about their concerns around this issue. In particular, I'd like to thank the member for bringing it to my attention repeatedly. You know, this funding will be sure to put boots on the ground as we move forward. We're ensuring that we're using GPS technology better to ensure that we're tracking both vehicles and farm equipment, which I think will increase our rates very much, and we're increasing co-ordination between peace officers and police officers, which will allow us to leverage all those eyes and ears.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, far too often our officers and RCMP get stuck doing paperwork when they should be out protecting our communities. What are you doing to ensure that officers spend less time at a desk and more time out protecting our communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. That's one of the main components of our plan moving forward. We had the opportunity to speak to the RCMP about this in detail because, after all, they are the experts on this file. They told us that one of the things that would help them out the most is to ensure that their officers are able to get out into communities and not be pulled back into the detachment to do paperwork, so we're hiring some civilian staff to take some of that burden off those RCMP officers. I think this will help visibility greatly, which is something we've been hearing about from Albertans all over the province.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the most important parts of addressing rural crime is ensuring that offenders are brought before a judge. What are you doing in this strategy to ensure that criminal prosecutions happen in a timely way?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're very proud to say that part of our plan to address rural crime includes hiring more prosecutors to work in those rural areas. They've had higher caseloads than prosecutors in other areas, so we're working with those prosecutors to ensure that we're able to get them the resources they need. There's no point in catching criminals if we can't also prosecute them and ensure that they're brought to justice.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Electricity Power Purchase Arrangement Lawsuit Settlement (continued)

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This NDP government's mismanagement of power purchase agreements cost the Balancing Pool over \$70 million a month, over \$800 million in a year. The government this week repeatedly refused to say how much their settlement with Enmax is costing Albertans. Yesterday when asked, the Premier claimed: "The resolution with Enmax will have no impact on taxpayers. Absolutely none." The question is that we know taxpayers already paid \$800 million for NDP mismanagement. How much more will we pay in legal fees?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, as has been said, we're very pleased that we've completed the agreement with Enmax. It's a fair agreement for them; it's a fair agreement for Albertans. Again, as has been said many times, it has no impact on Albertans.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. Mr. Speaker, given that the government is responsible for the Balancing Pool and given that all Albertans use electricity and will be on the hook for Balancing Pool losses, the \$800 million we spoke about arising from the NDP government's mismanagement, and given that the government's reckless policy decisions and legal entanglement resulted in an \$800 million bill to date to the taxpayer, to the minister: will Albertans pay for those losses on their electricity bills – yes or no, very clearly – and if not, who is paying?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. As was clearly stated in the news release and previously, this agreement involves carbon credits as an offset to a payment to Enmax, which, again, is a company that belongs to the taxpayers of Calgary. This agreement is also going to help us move forward in our electricity transition. It's going to help us meet our greenhouse gas commitments. Again, it has no impact on Albertans. It's a fair agreement for Enmax. It's a fair agreement for Alberta.

2:10

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, this sounds like a fairy tale for Albertans. Given that last year the government hired a Vancouver lawyer on a sole-source contract with a \$500,000 retainer to handle this file and

given that Albertans are on the hook for this government's policy decisions, especially the Balancing Pool, the question to the minister is: how many tens or hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars have Albertans lost on this secret deal arising from this NDP government's mismanagement?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, when we talk about secret deals, this is all about a secret backroom deal that was from a previous Conservative government, and it did not stand up for the interests of Albertans. It's interesting that what was that government continues to stand up for business and not for Albertans. It's also interesting that they're now the new defenders of coal transition when, in fact, their leader was in Ottawa and was part of the government that came up with the coal transition, something they had no plan for, something they did not tell Albertans about, and they didn't figure out how they were ever going to pay for it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's been so nice to hear what's being said in this room for the last three days. I do hope that continues.

Carbon Levy Increase

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, given that the Finance minister is a fan of telling Albertans that everything is rosy and that things are looking up, up, up, given that unemployment in Calgary is up, up, up to 7.9 per cent, the second highest in Canada, youth unemployment is up, up, up to 13.1 per cent, the highest outside of Atlantic Canada, business closures in Calgary are up, up, up the last two years at over 2,000 per year yet this government continues to force these struggling Albertans to pay the carbon tax on their heating bills, at the gas pump, and at the grocery store, to the Minister of Finance: why is your government continuing to punish Albertans who have yet to experience any recovery in their financial situation by pushing the carbon tax up . . .

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

Mr. Ceci: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, you don't have to take my word for it. Take the Conference Board of Canada's word for it, RBC's word for it, CIBC's word for it, and that of other financial institutions, including ATB. They all say that our economy grew the fastest in the country last year, and they project that we are going to lead again this year.

Mr. McIver: Given that I'd believe unemployed Albertans long before I'd believe this minister, Mr. Speaker, and given that the chamber of commerce, whom I would believe first, has stated that Alberta's carbon levy is imposing thousands of dollars of costs on Calgary's small and medium-sized business and given that I'd take the word of 92,000 payroll job owners in Alberta that lost them in 2017, before the recession, and given that 2,000-plus businesses close per year – and I take their word – again to the minister: why won't the government scrap the carbon tax and other overhead costs for Calgary small-business job creators? Would you take their word for it, please?

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to point out to the member that Calgary is the fastest-growing city GDP-wise in

the prairies this year and is forecast to be the fastest-growing city in the country next year.

Calgary Economic Development beat their targets and has attracted and supported the expansion of over 90 companies that have created over 5,000 jobs in 2017 alone. Compared to a year ago, Calgary created over 20,000 new full-time jobs. Mr. Speaker, we are working in concert with the city of Calgary, Calgary Economic Development, standing up for businesses, attracting new businesses through our government's initiatives, something that the opposition would clearly not do.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister's stats are less impressive when you consider how many jobs were lost during the first year or two of this government's reign of terror* and given that Alberta lost over 10,000 full-time jobs last month and given that the government's own website claims that the carbon tax's economic impact needs to be offset by improved market access but given that the carbon tax has blatantly failed to get any new pipelines completed or even get the social licence, to the minister: why are Albertans, including unemployed Albertans, still on the hook for the job-killing, spirit-breaking carbon tax?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, we know that not all Albertans are feeling the economic recovery. That's why we're continuing with our plan, which supports those who do not feel the recovery yet. We're investing in income supports. We're working with the federal government around EI. We're putting money into transitional supports. What else – what else – can we do? We're going to do it. We're not going to cut the carbon levy, because it has led to the approval of pipelines. We're going down the road we're going down, which is the fastest growing road in this province and this country.

Social Service Delivery

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, we can all agree that those who care for Alberta's vulnerable deserve our support. In this House we should acknowledge them as the front-line heroes that they are, which is why I was so frustrated to learn that these tremendous Albertans were not consulted on the recent legislative changes that have severely impacted their ability to care for those with developmental disabilities. The NDP's labour legislation means that these selfless Albertans are on the hook for up to \$250,000 a year in additional costs. These organizations now face the impossible choice of cutting services or closing their doors. Why did the NDP government not consult its front-line . . .

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was very proud last year to be able to bring forward updates to workplace legislation that had been left stagnant for decades. We made a point of consulting with all Albertans and reached out to organizations, both through industry associations, service agencies, and Albertans themselves, who responded to a series of feedback surveys and other items. Making sure that we have fair working conditions for all Albertans, making sure that our workplace standards protect our Albertan citizens is very important. I'm very proud of the work our government did.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, it's not just the changes to the labour laws that have severely hindered our heroic front-line service providers. Given that this government has layered on the carbon tax, two minimum wage increases, and additional labour changes

*See page 117, right column, paragraph 10

to overtime and given that these service providers simply cannot pass the costs along, again to the minister of community services. Your options are to cut services to the disabled, run deficits, or close the doors: what do you suggest these service providers do?

The Speaker: The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Our record is very clear. We have worked with disability sectors on all issues that matter to that community. Let's talk about the supports intensity scale imposed by that side. We repealed it. The safety standards regulation imposed by that side: we consulted them, repealed it. Last year we worked with them on minimum wage and all those issues. We addressed them, and we will do so going forward as well.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that this minister's record is implementing a carbon tax and other labour legislation that has created a budget crisis for countless front-line agencies and given that this government has shown a pattern of implementing its ideological policies without consulting and given that this is impacting vulnerable Albertans or those that care for them, my question is: did they even think through the implications of this policy, or were they just hoping that our hard-working front-line service providers would make the tough choices for them?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Our government is protecting and improving the supports that Albertans rely on. Just take the PDD program. In two and a half years we have increased it by almost \$100 million; the AISH program, around \$100 million. If we were to take advice from them and reduce the supports by 20 per cent to make it equal to B.C., just in AISH alone every individual would lose \$500 every month. Albertans opposed those kind of cuts, and we stand with Albertans.

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

Rural Crime Prevention (continued)

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We identified rural crime as a crisis over a year before this government made any attempt to even acknowledge it was a problem, last fall even requested an emergency debate, and the government opposed. Last week the government finally announced funding for new police officer positions, but this is all smoke and mirrors. Counties have been putting up their own money but still can't find officers to fill the vacancies. Minister, I asked you twice yesterday, and I shall ask again today: on what specific date will these new RCMP officers that you promised actually be protecting our citizens?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We know this issue is critical to all rural Albertans. We've been hearing from people across the province. That's why we worked in concert with the RCMP to come up with a plan that's their action plan, that will help support rural Albertans, that's supported by municipal councillors in those areas. They stood with us. These RCMP officers will not only put more boots on the ground, but the civilian officers will allow the RCMP officers we already have to get out on the ground and to do more work. Our

strategic intelligence sharing will help them to target prolific offenders.

2:20

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that one reason that crime is out of control is that property crimes aren't taken seriously and that repeat and multiple offenders are not remanded in custody despite long criminal records and serious criminal charges and given that these offenders are simply being released to continue preying upon vulnerable residents and that, as a result, public trust in the justice system has been eroded, Minister, will you commit today to calling your federal counterpart and working to end the revolving door that allows criminals to repeatedly victimize Albertans? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're absolutely committed to ensuring that every Albertan feels safe in their home. That's why we're working with the RCMP, who, after all, are the experts, to ensure that the things we're doing are the things that will maximize the safety of Albertans. Certainly, we've heard very positive feedback with respect to our GPS tracking programs that will target property crimes. In addition, we've already been getting results with our intelligence-led policing in central Alberta, where it was piloted. This allows us to target prolific offenders, who are responsible for a huge proportion of that property crime.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that not a single member of this cabinet, rural MLAs, or, most shockingly actually, the minister herself has attended any of these rural crime town halls to speak to victims and given that your announcement was just another knee-jerk reaction to a crisis you tried to ignore for as long as you could and given that if the government had actually consulted with stakeholders, it would know that just throwing money at a problem isn't going to solve it, Minister, when will your government start taking this matter seriously, and when are you actually going to talk to the victims of these crimes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, nothing could be further from the truth. We've been hearing from Albertans all over the province on this issue. We've been hearing from our MLAs on this issue. My colleagues have been out talking to Albertans on this issue. We're also working with the RCMP to ensure that we have a plan to strategically target these individuals so that we can make moves on safety. This isn't about throwing money at the problem. This is about ensuring that we're leveraging eyes and ears through rural crime watch associations, through peace officers, and through intelligence-led policing to ensure that we're doing our best to target those prolific offenders that are preying on Albertans.

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

Highway 15 Twinning

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Highway 15 is a vital corridor for our oil and gas sector as well as our agriculture producers to move equipment and goods. It's also an artery that serves thousands of workers. To the Minister of Transportation.

You announced budget funding to finish twinning highway 15 into Fort Saskatchewan and to finish twinning the highway 15 bridge. You identified it as a priority in the 2015 capital budget. Could you please provide us an update for the residents of Fort Saskatchewan and Alberta, which it serves?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. member for her question and for her advocacy on this issue. The existing highway 15 bridge is very severely over capacity. Vehicles cross the highway 15 bridge more than 23,000 times a day, and congestion is a serious issue, especially during peak periods. Design on twinning the bridge has begun. Construction is expected to get under way in 2019, with completion of the highway twinning expected in 2022.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Minister.

The tragic news of the loss of a young woman was for Albertans, of course, an incredibly tragic thing to hear. She was only 17, and she passed just across the highway 15 bridge from Fort Saskatchewan. Now, we have been fighting for these improvements for decades. It's something that I'm clearly passionate about, as are the residents of the entire area where I live. To the minister: what are we going to do to make sure that safety is improved in this area?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, our hearts go out to the family of the young victim on the road. The member well knows, because she's been involved in getting the work done to twin that highway, that that bridge will be significantly safer. I expect that that work will continue until we've completed the bridge in 2022. That will very, very significantly improve safety on the bridge, as the member well knows.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the significant investment that this represents in the heartland region and in the safety of our communities, how will the improvements to highway 15 also support working families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the twinning project will create hundreds of jobs in the area throughout the construction process and indirectly in surrounding communities. It also supports our government's economic diversification initiative, that will see two petrochemical facilities built in Sturgeon and Strathcona counties. It will also improve drive-times for local commuters and support economic development in Alberta by improving the connection between Fort Saskatchewan, Sturgeon county, the city of Edmonton, and the Industrial Heartland.

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

Petrochemicals Diversification Program

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last session I asked the Energy minister whether she'd consider doing another round of the petrochemicals diversification program. Now, I'm not going to go as far as the Leader of the Official Opposition and say that she took my idea, but it's nice to see. However, we need to make sure that these programs are delivering value for Albertans when we're using

government money. Since the minister has opened a second round of this program, I hope that that decision was evidence based. To the Minister of Energy: what measurables were collected in the first round to make sure that this program was an effective use of taxpayer dollars, and are you confident this program delivered value for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that question. Absolutely, we talked, through the EDAC report, to many Albertans, and they saw the value of the PDP 1 program, the petrochemicals diversification program. The way it works is that there's up to \$500 million in royalty credits offered, but the catch is that the project has to be completed and operational before any of those can be redeemed. In the meantime we get municipal taxes; we get provincial taxes, federal taxes. People are working and communities are flourishing because of these projects.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you for that, Minister.

Given that the minister is confident this program is delivering value to Alberta taxpayers and given the positive response from businesses involved in the petrochemicals diversification and given that Alberta could benefit from further diversification in other areas other than oil and gas, to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: is your department working with Energy to replicate this type of model in other places in our economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for the question. The answer is absolutely. Our Department of Economic Development and Trade has basically been tasked with making it easier to do business in the province. That's supporting our own entrepreneurs and our sectors like energy, but, as well, we introduced a year and a half ago two different tax credits that are sector-wide, that will support entrepreneurs and businesses in Alberta. The investor tax credit gives Albertans the opportunity to invest in companies in their own backyard, helping them to scale up, hire more people, and grow. Then our capital investment tax credit is a great incentive to encourage investment in Alberta today, which is going to create jobs and help to diversify our economy.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Fraser: Given that the government may enjoy reannouncing this program every year for the benefit of photo ops and convenient Bill 1 material, it makes it unpredictable. If we're trying to promote innovation and diversification, we need to create stability, investment confidence, and not tie important programs to our political whims. To the Minister of Energy: will you consider making this petrochemical investment an ongoing program so that companies looking to invest have more certainty going forward?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we got a lot of good ideas from the EDAC recommendations, and we're acting on early ones. We saw the success of PDP 1, and we've announced PDP 2.0. We're also going to be working with companies who want to look at partial upgrading and also feedstock because this is a holistic plan, because we want a recovery and sustainability that are built to last in Alberta.

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

Carbon Levy and Seniors

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Small-town Alberta is hurting from the NDP's carbon tax. Community volunteers are having trouble paying the tax, and what does this government tell them? Apply for grants to retrofit their facilities, which they can barely afford to keep open since this government imposed the carbon tax. In other words, pay loads of money to save some. Now, Minister, is this the best you can offer when they're struggling to keep the lights on in these facilities?

2:30

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for the question. You know, we created a made-in-Alberta plan that's making sure that we have a system that works for Albertans. Through our climate leadership plan and through the carbon levy 60 per cent of Alberta households are receiving a rebate. We also cut the small-business tax rate by a third. Alberta now has the second-lowest small-business tax rate in the country. I will add that Albertans still pay the lowest taxes in the country. It's about \$8.7 billion less than what they would pay in Saskatchewan, the members opposite's best friends. As far as what Albertans are getting . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gill: Given that a specific example of a facility facing serious hardship is the seniors' centre in Sundre, where hard-working volunteers are doing everything they can do, Mr. Speaker, to keep a much-needed community facility operating, and given that their carbon tax bills are tipping them near closure and this government's solution is to lecture them about reducing their costs through retrofitting, which they cannot afford, Minister, why does this government think that their carbon tax cash grab is more important than the work of these valuable nonprofit organizations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for the question. We're making life better by protecting front-line care and making life more affordable for seniors in Alberta. Approximately 260,000 seniors in our province are eligible to receive up to \$300 annually for the carbon levy rebate. We've also provided a \$500,000 grant to the four largest housing management bodies to conduct energy efficiency audits on provincially owned units. We are encouraging and providing supports for seniors and not-for-profits to reduce their energy consumption, which has the lifelong . . .

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

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that another example of this unfair carbon tax comes from the minister of seniors, who has quietly clawed back the rebates from seniors living in subsidized housing, and given that the minister made this move because the NDP's carbon tax is forcing housing providers to cut services for seniors in their facilities to pay their carbon tax bills, Minister, where will it end, and are you just going to keep taking money away from our seniors, or will you do the right thing and just cut this tax?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. As my hon. colleague just said, 260,000 seniors are receiving up to \$300 on the carbon levy rebate. We've given \$800 million in seniors' benefits, actually, over the last two years to seniors. We're absolutely investing in seniors in our province so that they can live in dignity, and we've got their backs. We're supporting them all the way.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Ranchers' Water Access

Mr. Barnes: At Christmas Alberta Environment and Parks sent letters to some farmers and ranchers advising them that water applications submitted over 16 years ago were being rejected and water access related to these applications revoked. Southeast generational ranchers Aaron and Rebecca Brower received such a letter. They were told that their application, filed 16 years earlier, was being closed and traditional water access cancelled. To the Minister: under whose authority were these essential licences cancelled?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: And forestry.

The Speaker: And forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for this very important question. I know full well the importance, obviously, of water to the ranching community. My family are ranchers just across the border in Saskatchewan, a very similar topography, a very similar climate. It's a dry climate. Water is obviously essential to their operations. The minister of environment has been clear in talking to those ranchers. Both she and I regret terribly that those letters were ever sent out. They were sent out in error. The minister of environment has been very clear that we're making sure that not a single rancher in Alberta will be stripped of their water access.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, after weeks of pressure the Minister of Environment and Parks finally released a statement assuring ranchers that their right to water access will be granted, but given that the minister failed to clarify that their water licences would be reinstated and she did not provide assurances that the original applications' priority would be based on their application prior to the 2001 deadline, again, Minister, will you guarantee the reinstatement of all these traditional water applications and that the priority of these applications will be based on their original submission date of 2001?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to restate that not a single rancher in Alberta is going to be stripped of their access to water. It's obviously essential to their operations. You can't raise cattle without water. Many of these ranchers use that same water for their own household use, so it's obviously very important. The Minister of Environment and Parks has been very clear in instructing her officials that they're to sit down with every rancher in that area to ensure that their processes are respected and that their access to water will continue.

Mr. Barnes: What a shame these terrifying letters went out right at Christmas.

Given that a local rancher was left without critical water access for his livestock and family because of repeated bungling by this NDP government and given that with the stroke of an NDP bureaucrat's pen the existence of a ranch that has been in continuous operation for over a century is now threatened, Minister, has anyone actually been held accountable for this ridiculous boondoggle, and what steps have you taken to ensure this isn't going to happen to hard-working Albertans everywhere again?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. You know, the Minister of Environment and Parks has been clear. You can understand that she was extremely disappointed that this situation ever arose. Obviously, water access for ranchers is vitally important. We're going to continue working with them. I'll continue working with my colleagues at Environment and Parks to ensure that water access for these ranchers will be maintained. For sure, I can guarantee that. I'll also continue working with the ranchers in that area for their historic use of the water as we go forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Electricity Power Purchase Arrangement Lawsuit Settlement (continued)

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I was speaking in this very House about a PPA settlement resulting from this government's mismanagement. The environment minister said, "This settlement has no impact on Alberta taxpayers. It's a settlement between the two parties." Let's be clear. Those two parties are Enmax and the Balancing Pool. Given that the Alberta Balancing Pool is backed and guaranteed by this very government and since this government only has money from the taxpayers, it seems like an erroneous statement. To the Minister of Finance: is this a Balancing Pool problem that we have to pay for later?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's review some of the issues here. Just over a year ago we took action to protect Alberta families. You know, again, I talked about the backroom deals that started all this way back when in the Conservative government. We've settled – and I'm pleased to say that the last one with Enmax was settled – with the companies, and we've provided loans to the Balancing Pool. If we had not acted, consumers would be facing much higher charges, but thanks to our actions next year their costs will be 78 per cent below what they would have been had we not acted.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government is ultimately responsible for the Balancing Pool and given the hidden bill for this settlement will end up being paid by the Alberta government, how much money are Albertans expected to pay on bailing out this NDP boondoggle?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Again, our priority is standing up for Albertans, Mr. Speaker. You know, we've stopped unfair electricity charges that would have resulted from the backroom, insider deals from the previous government. Our government is taking action for regular

Albertans to deal with price spikes. Our Conservative opposition here continues to stand up for this backroom deal, that was bad for Albertans. We negotiated with the companies. We gave the Balancing Pool a loan. They're still continuing to defend the backroom deals that were not good for Albertans. We know what side we're on.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government has been fighting a legal battle on this issue of power purchase agreements since 2015 and given that in this settlement the government has all but admitted that they were wrong and it is their fault, how many taxpayer dollars were wasted? Again, will you admit that the Balancing Pool will end up being paid for by your ministry, Minister of Finance?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

2:40

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I want to say, for I'm not sure how many times now, that the deal that was struck between Enmax and this government was fair for both sides. It was fair for Enmax, fair for us, and it's fair for Albertans. As clearly stated in the news release and as clearly stated here, it involved carbon credits that offset the payments to the company. This agreement will help us move on in our electricity transition and fix a broken system.

Carbon Levy Increase (continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, as has been requested, the Member for Calgary-Hays would like to clarify a matter.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During my question I used the word "terror." Somewhere between my brain and my mouth I meant to say the word "error." I was incorrect to characterize the government that way. I apologize to the government unreservedly. I apologize to everybody in this House and to all Albertans. There's no excuse, and I will be more careful in the future.*

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we'll proceed with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements (continued)

Schoolchildren's Transportation

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government's policies are hurting Airdrie families and families all across the province. One example is how this government changed the rules when it comes to busing children to school. That was Bill 1 last session, and then, of course, there's a massive carbon tax, which also affects busing. The Rocky View school board is currently facing a \$1 million revenue shortfall for student transportation, but of course the students need to still go to school somehow. So what does a school board do?

Well, Rocky View schools has taken the initiative to engage in extensive consultation with parents about how to handle this problem created by the NDP government. They held public meetings in Airdrie, Cochrane, and Chestermere, made presentations at school council meetings, and asked parents and staff to review various options through an online survey. Some options include transferring funds from instruction to transportation; increasing bus ride times, meaning some rural students may be riding on the bus for up to three hours each day; changing schools' start and finish times in

*See page 113, right column, paragraph 3

order to accommodate more bus runs; and reducing the number of school days. I have been impressed by the way the school board has been handling this issue in working with parents and staff to decide next steps. Perhaps the NDP could take some lessons from them on how to do proper consultation. But the trade-offs in this case are, unfortunately, very significant, and families have this NDP government to thank.

It is time for a government that consults with Albertans and puts families first rather than an ideological agenda. Albertans deserve a government that actually studies the impact that their policies will have on families and communities. I hear many complaints from residents about the very policies this NDP government has the audacity to tell them are good for them. People know when something isn't working. Mr. Speaker, this NDP government is out of touch and needs to stop making life harder for Albertans.

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

Economic Diversification and the Future Economy

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A shift is currently under way in the global economy. Artificial intelligence and innovation will drive the economies of the future, and we must ensure that our province has an opportunity to lead in the research and development of these industries. Companies like Google DeepMind here in Edmonton give us a small glimpse of what's on the horizon. In only four hours their AlphaZero program was able to teach itself how to play chess and beat the reigning AI program, Stockfish, 28 to 0. There are many breakthrough stories like this one happening throughout the industry, and they will have major implications for our local economy if we don't play a part in it.

In order to keep Alberta competitive, one year ago our government introduced the Alberta investor tax credit and the capital investment tax credit. Before our government introduced the AITC and CITC programs, high-tech companies faced challenges and barriers starting up and investing in our province. For far too long Conservative governments put all of their eggs into one basket, and when the global price of oil inevitably declined, not only did workers lose their jobs, but our government also lost the ability to support the important programs our communities depend on.

The results of these tax credits speak for themselves. To date the CITC has conditionally provided \$60 million in tax credits, stimulating more than \$1 billion in capital projects for manufacturing, processing, and tourism infrastructure. The vast majority of jobs created from these programs are full-time, and each dollar provided generates upwards of \$2 in provincial taxes. Whether these funds are being accessed by companies like Google's DeepMind or Canadian-owned and -operated Aurora Cannabis, we can be incredibly proud that people are looking to Alberta to expand their operations because of these new tax credits.

I'm proud to be part of a government that is creating new opportunities within our communities and truly building a diversified economy for the future.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three pages that were incidentally omitted from my previous petition, related to calling on the government of Alberta to enable

written protocols for all species on which restrictions on rehabilitation or fostering [animals] are placed under the ... Wildlife Rehabilitation Permits, so that orphaned and injured animals may be assisted.

I'd like to add those to the previous petition.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 2

Growth and Diversification Act

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and introduce Bill 2, the Growth and Diversification Act.

This bill will enable government to reinforce two successful tax credit programs that have already spurred innovation, diversification, and job creation in our province. Mr. Speaker, we want to see this trend continue. This bill would create a new interactive digital media tax credit to ensure the growth of the digital media industry, a burgeoning sector that has great growth potential here in Alberta. Combined, these actions will encourage investment in new products, services, and capital projects, and these tax credits offer increased opportunities for more economic activity, diversification, and growth. This legislation would also include support for 3,000 tech spaces in postsecondary institutions across Alberta and new scholarships to help grow a future high-tech workforce.

We know that investment is a key driver of growth and diversification and investment in Alberta businesses and in our future workforce. This proposed bill will ensure that government continues to promote economic diversification and support employers and entrepreneurs in creating jobs and encouraging high-tech training opportunities here in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, furthermore, this being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of the bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Bill 201

Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to rise and request leave to introduce Bill 201, the Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018.

I'd like to thank Parliamentary Counsel. I'd also like to thank the many fire chiefs around the province and in my constituency who consulted with us. This bill proposes to amend the Employment Standards Code to protect part-time, casual, volunteer firefighters from loss of employment because they are or have become a part-time firefighter. Currently employers can and in some cases have terminated employment for missed time due to fulfilling duties as a part-time firefighter. I'm hoping that my colleagues will take the time to consider this bill and will see fit to support this bill as it advances through the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a first time]

2:50 **Tabling Returns and Reports**

Mr. Cyr: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table a press release and federal ATIP documents obtained through the Canadian Taxpayers Federation that show that the Canadian government does not force the upstream and downstream emissions test on foreign oil imported into Canada, therefore discriminating against Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of a document referred to by the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition in a speech yesterday in regard to the National Energy Board, clearly showing that upstream and downstream emissions played a significant role in the stopping of Energy East.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I referenced something in my question today. It's an article from CBC News entitled Calgary's Economic Growth Will Slow to 2.5% this Year, Predicts Conference Board of Canada.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe that we had a point of order today. The House leader for the Official Opposition.

Point of Order Remarks Off the Record

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j) today. It has been awhile since we've had a point of order during question period in this Assembly, and unfortunately today we have to end that track record.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition has done a great job – two major things he's changed that I never thought I would see in my time in this place. The first is to bring significant decorum to this Assembly, which I think is to his credit, and the second is to get the government to fight for pipelines.

Today while the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills was asking a question of the Minister of Community and Social Services, the postsecondary minister, a minister of this government, heckled to him: you hate disabled people. We saw the chief opposition whip today rise and apologize to this Chamber for mistakenly saying one word inside his question. It is ludicrous that this government continues this behaviour. It is unbecoming of a minister of the Crown to act like this in this place. He should stand up from his seat right now and withdraw and apologize for that comment.

I encourage the government, through you, Mr. Speaker, to stop this behaviour and to start taking the business of this Legislative Assembly seriously and to stop playing games because Albertans have had enough of it. It's inappropriate for a minister of the Crown to act that way.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I obviously didn't hear the comment, although I'm sitting right in front. But I have had the opportunity to confer with the Minister of Advanced Education, and he indicates that that's not what he said, so that's, I guess, that.

The Speaker: Any other members?

Regretfully, I did not hear the comment being made. I would just use this as an opportunity to remind all of us, however, that comments such as this, if they, in fact, do happen on occasion, you be conscious of the consequence of that and show respect not only to the other members but to the House and to the people of Alberta.

I want to thank all of you for the tone and tenor. As we all know, in this – it's certainly my experience – it's not just the words; it is sometimes the visual connections that have an impact on us.

With respect to this particular point of order I wasn't able to hear the comment nor see, but again I use this as an opportunity to remind all members.

Orders of the Day Committee of Supply

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

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

Hon. members, before we commence this afternoon's consideration of supplementary supply, I would like to review, briefly, the standing orders governing the speaking rotation. As provided for in Standing Order 59.02, the rotation outlined in Standing Order 59.01(6) is deemed to apply, which is as follows:

- (a) the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes,
- (b) for the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (c) for the next 20 minutes, the members of the third party, if any, and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (d.1) for the next 20 minutes, the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent Members and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (e) for the next 20 minutes, private members of the Government caucus and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak, and
- (f) for the time remaining, to the extent possible, the rotation outlined in clauses (b) to (e) shall apply with the speaking times set at 5 minutes as provided in Standing Order 59.02(1)(c).

During the first rotation speaking times are limited to 10 minutes. Once the first rotation is complete, speaking times are reduced to five minutes. Provided that the chair has been notified, a minister and a private member may combine their speaking time, with both taking and yielding the floor during the combined period.

Finally, as provided for in Government Motion 6, approved by the Assembly March 13, 2018, the time allotted for consideration is six hours, three hours this afternoon and three hours tomorrow morning.

Supplementary Supply Estimates 2017-18 General Revenue Fund

The Deputy Chair: I will now recognize the hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General to move the estimates.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would like to move the 2017-18 supplementary estimates for the general revenue fund. If passed, the estimates will authorize an approximate increase of \$720,000 in voted amounts for the office of the Child

and Youth Advocate, \$1.5 billion in voted expense funding, \$35.7 million in voted capital financial transactions for the government. The estimates are consistent with the fiscal plan as presented in the 2017-18 third-quarter fiscal update and will authorize increases and transfers to the office of the Child and Youth Advocate and for the following 10 departments: Agriculture and Forestry, Children's Services, Community and Social Services, Culture and Tourism, Education, Indigenous Relations, Justice and Solicitor General, Labour, Municipal Affairs, and Status of Women.

The ministers responsible for these departments and I will be pleased to answer questions from all members of the Assembly. Madam Chair, these supplemental estimates represent the finalization of our budgets. As we've worked through the recession, that we're now beginning to come out of, obviously some Albertans have needed some increases in support. I think that at this time it's critical that we continue to invest in services for those people, including health care and education, because people still get sick and children still need an education regardless of whether we're in a downturn.

I'm very proud of those actions that we've taken. With that, off we go.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members wishing to speak from the Official Opposition? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. For our 20 minutes is it okay to go back and forth, hon. minister?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, you're okay with going back and forth?

Ms Ganley: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: Please proceed.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you. Respectfully, I will keep my questions as succinct and to the point as I can, and I would hope you have the opportunity to do the same with your answers. I guess I'll just, you know, quickly stand up and say that when we're spending \$55 billion a year, it's disheartening to be standing here looking at an increase of over a billion and a half dollars, that wasn't budgeted. It's a big number, of course. It's a burden on the next generation. It's a burden on our economy.

3:00

But I want to start with page 2, near the top of the page, the financial transactions amount to be voted under section 3 of the appropriation act. We have a number, 35 and a half million dollars. Of course, one of the big components of financial transactions is debt and interest. Is the minister able to tell me how much of this is interest payments that the government didn't foresee last spring when they tabled their budget, and does any of this increase in interest have anything to do with the downgrades in credit?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. That number, as I understand it, is made up of multiple different components. I don't have before me all of the different components, so I'll have to undertake to get back to the member on that one.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you.

Yeah. That's our concern, of course. We agree wholeheartedly to take care of Albertans that are in need and a temporary hand up where it's needed. We just want to make sure that the enrichment of bondholders in New York and Switzerland is not at the expense of everyday Albertans.

Madam Minister, I want to talk about the Education capital investment transfer next. On page 38 of the supplementary supply document it notes that 31 and a half million dollars will be transferred to capital investment from expense for infrastructure maintenance and renewal of school facilities. I would like to ask you, please, as kind of a three-part question: how many school facilities will be maintained or renewed with this money, could you please provide a list of the facilities for which you need this money, and is the transfer of any of this money related to the damage of any school because of a natural disaster? Of course, the terrible fires we've had may have had an effect. So if you could do that, I'd appreciate it.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you so much, and thank you so much for the question. The infrastructure supply is for all of the school boards. It's allotted to them based on enrolment and so forth. This is a movement of money for regular infrastructure maintenance for schools as they follow through with those normal procedures, right? It could be for painting. It could be for putting on a new roof. It could be for new furnaces and so forth. This is directed to all school boards, and they make their choices about how they make the infrastructure maintenance and renewal decisions based on each of their individual schools.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you for that. I was Infrastructure critic in 2012-2013. One of the things I remember: the government had a list rating the condition of schools, what kind of condition they were in. Unfortunately, once or twice a school that was rated good, if I remember right, ended up with a serious problem that not only affected the taxpayer but, more importantly, affected the quality of the education for the students. With respect, Mr. Minister, I'd like to ask you about your feelings on how accurate you think the school index of condition may be and what we've done in the last year to ensure it's as accurate as possible.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you very much. Yeah, it's very important, especially when we consider that we have almost 200 new school projects on the go, that we have a proper system in place to ensure that timely maintenance is being conducted on schools, because of course if you reach a point where, let's say, you're not working on the roof, then you end up, you know, with this domino effect of a structure being compromised. School boards do conduct their own maintenance procedures and so forth, but we also have, through our department, people to conduct evaluations on schools as well.

Yeah, I recognize your concern. Of course, if you don't have timely maintenance or if it's not being spent on those little things, then you end up with a big thing that costs considerably more money. You know, I think we definitely compensate school boards adequately in terms of infrastructure supply and maintenance, and we also entertain extraordinary circumstances for more extensive modernizations. Those are the ones that go into our actual capital projects, which can often be a school being rebuilt, right? When you see a major modernization, then the school is, like, as good as new when it comes through.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. Line item 2.3 lists that the government is transferring 31 and a half million, as mentioned in this line item, to line 3.1 under capital investment, yet in line item 2.3 you are asking for an increase of \$4 million. So the government is transferring out and transferring in. Can you explain how you are transferring money from this line item while also requesting additional funding?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Well, thank you for that. What happens is that infrastructure supply and maintenance money is transferred as a matter of course, and we do it on a sort of go-forward basis. The additional monies are for extraordinary circumstances that have come forward in regard to the maintenance bills that schools have had. You know, I can tell you that globally, Madam Chair, through supplementary supply we're asking for an additional \$18 million. That is to cover an increase in enrolment in our schools here in the province of Alberta. We saw that enrolment in our school authorities increased by 2.2 per cent compared to the budget percentage, which was 1.8 per cent. That additional increase of .4 per cent represents the entirety of the extra money that we require for operations. Materials and maintenance are part of that operational budget, so it can pretty much globally explain the individual line items that have made adjustments here in supplementary supply.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you for taking me there. That was where my next question was headed.

I understand \$13 million is to address the increased student enrolment in public and separate schools, with the remaining \$5 million to address increased student enrolment for private schools and early childhood service operators. Okay. Wonderful. For the \$13 million being directed to address the increased student enrolment for public and separate schools, could you please tell me how many more students enrolled in the public and separate system beyond your initial estimates? To what point do you need this additional money? How many additional students are there? How much is being allocated to Edmonton public and Edmonton Catholic? How much is being allocated to Calgary public and Calgary Catholic? How much is going to urban schools across Alberta, how much is going to rural schools across Alberta, and please tell me: do your enrolment patterns indicate if there is a movement of students from rural schools to urban schools?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Well, thank you for that. Globally, again, like I said, the supplementary supply request from my ministry is to meet the increase in enrolment that we've seen after we did our September 30 count of students here in the province of Alberta. Like I said, we saw an increase of 2.2 per cent in our enrolment from the budget estimate of 1.8 per cent, and that all breaks out individually according to enrolment in individual school boards.

Certainly, we can supply you the information around where the net increase is. I don't have that right at my fingertips. I mean, we can say generally that we're seeing net migration from other provinces and from other countries and from other regions in Alberta into suburban areas, number one – right? – so you see sort of the areas around Calgary and Edmonton and, well, Grande Prairie themselves, Lethbridge to some extent, Red Deer to some extent. Then, of course, you can see the reflection of enrolment, by dollars, to the public schools and to the private schools.

In terms of the actual numbers I would be happy to break those out for you and supply those for you. Thank you.

3:10

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, and thank you, Minister. I appreciate that. I would really like to get my hands on those numbers, and I'm sure our Education critic would as well.

Madam Chair, \$5 million has been allocated to address increased student enrolment for private schools and early childhood service operators, with \$1 million going to private schools and \$4 million going to private early childhood service operators, I believe. How much did enrolment numbers increase with the private school system? Were these students previously enrolled in the public system, and how much of this money is being allocated to urban-based private schools versus rural-based private schools? Do you have any idea what those numbers are now, and would you comment, please?

The Deputy Chair: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Yes. Of course, by percentage you can see a general trend by the fact that we were allocating more money to accredited private schools and to early childhood services as well. Definitely, you can see that there's an increase there. In terms of the actual numbers I can certainly supply those for the hon. member.

Again, I find it encouraging in a way, because by seeing our enrolment continue to grow in the province of Alberta, we're seeing people making an investment to have children, to settle in and have a family, and to make that stake in our cities and towns and rural areas here in the province of Alberta. I mean, I think it's a great sign of hope and optimism. Certainly, even though we've experienced an economic downturn, people are still moving to this province and settling in, having families, and so forth. You know, when they do that, that ensures the long-term stability and diversity of our economy, and indeed, of course, then we have to make sure we educate those kids so that they can contribute to the future prosperity and quality of life for everybody here in the province.

Yeah. I mean, we made sacrifices in other areas to make sure that we're funding for enrolment here in the province of Alberta for our schools. It wasn't an easy thing to do, by any means, but I think it's worth it. We're seeing a continued reflection, starting to turn the corner on the economy, and certainly, like I say, families are making the decision to settle in and buy a house and have kids and go to school. You can't beat that.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Barnes: Are you able to provide a figure on how much of this money is being allocated to faith-based schools, and how many of our new children are being enrolled in facilities operated by private early childhood service operators? So faith-based and private early childhood service operators: do you have any numbers, please?

Mr. Eggen: Well, certainly, it's possible to do so. I think it's very important for us perhaps at this juncture to just remind people that we are continuing with funding for all of these different forms of schools. We have many different choices for education here in the province of Alberta. We have our public education. We have separate schools, Catholic education. We have charter schools. We have private schools, home schooling, and francophone as well. For

each of those choices, the enrolment is growing, and in each of those we are funding as we have.

It's important to have stability. It's important to make sure that we use all the capacity that we have available to us, Madam Chair, because as this growth continues year by year, in some places we'll see even as high as 5 or 6 per cent growth in certain school boards around the province. You know, we need to make sure that we have all the capacity, all of the different forms of education available to us to make sure that there are spaces for kids. We have done that, and we are doing it again here in this budget, as you can see, with supplementary supply, disbursing the funds appropriately as the enrolment grows in each of those different choices and different places.

So, yeah, we can find that individual information for the hon. member. It's a good juncture and a good point in the session here to just remind people about those things.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you. Mr. Minister, I talk to Albertans everywhere that are very, very concerned about the deficit and the debt and the cost of the interest. You know, you're back asking for \$21 million over last year's budget. Was there any attempt to reallocate hard-earned tax dollars within your department? Was there any attempt for savings or other mechanisms rather than coming back to the taxpayer?

The Deputy Chair: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. I would say in this Chamber and to all Albertans that the investment in individual children's education is absolutely worth that investment, every single dollar, and to suggest in any way that you can make cuts – 20 per cent cuts, 15 per cent cuts, or whatever – to our education system here in the province of Alberta without critically damaging the quality of education that we provide and we demand for our children is absolutely incorrect. It's misleading, it's spurious, and it is damaging as well. You can't on one side have all of those things that you asked for and then also look for ways by which you can cut those same things. I mean, it's not only illogical, but it defies common sense. It defies gravity, and it makes – I wanted to put that [inaudible]. Just kidding.

You know, we know there are more kids coming to our schools – right? – tens of thousands more kids, and we're going to make sure that we educate them in the best possible way. Yes, of course, we always look for savings. We always look for ways by which we can save money in education, and we've been successful at doing so. It's just like when you have your road. You want to get across the river. You want to build a bridge across that river. It's not like you can sort of compromise and say, "We're going to go, like, three-quarters of the way" or "We're going to just make it out of Popsicle sticks" or whatever. You need to build that thing. When I have tens of thousands of new kids coming to our schools, we have to build that edifice that will educate those kids in the best possible way. There's no compromise, and that's not what we would want. That's not what Albertans would want, and the parents of those children certainly wouldn't want that as well.

I stand by our supplementary supply. It's a reflection of the increase in enrolment in our schools in the province of Alberta. That's a fact. I think it's something we should all be proud of, and I humbly ask for that difference in order to educate kids in schools in our province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I and our caucus, too, are all about and are fully in agreement on getting as many scarce resources as possible to the classrooms to help our kids, help our teachers, help people that work hard to do such a good job of providing our education. But that brings me to two things. That brings me to the carbon tax. Numerous rural boards across Alberta are complaining about the burden of the carbon tax, the burden it is placing on their transportation budgets, transportation budgets that, you know, I will note that in rural Alberta have had a decrease in funding of \$3 million before the burden of the carbon tax. We're taking dollars from the classroom. We're taking dollars from the students. We're taking dollars from professional development. It's a mystery, the opposites of how these two things conflict and contradict each other. Could you please explain how you are underspending your transportation budget and you're imposing the carbon tax, and many of our school boards, especially in smaller communities, are struggling?

The Deputy Chair: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Absolutely. We just had, for example, Madam Chair, a rural education symposium here last week, and it was great. We had more than 350 people show up for a number of days talking about challenges and opportunities for rural school boards here and across the province. It was very informative and very useful, and lots of people had some very, I think, innovative and creative ideas for us to ensure that we have equity for education for students and schools and school boards across the province no matter where they are located. Of course, that's a challenge, right? You have some schools and school boards that are . . .

3:20

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Your first 20 minutes have expired. We are now on to our second set of 20 minutes. Is it the same member that would like to ask questions?

Mr. Barnes: Yes, if I could, please.

Minister, do you want to finish your answer?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Great. Thanks. I was just getting going.

The issue around student transportation, say, for example: we know that the formula and the way by which we pay for student transportation needs to be modified for rural areas. You have some school boards that run school runs every day of thousands of kilometres, and, yes, you do have kids riding very long distances.

You know, we need to find ways to innovate. I mean, I have through Bill 28, as you may recall in the last session, asked, compelled school boards to look for ways by which they can co-operate between school systems so that you can share bus routes and so forth. We've looked and are looking for ways by which we can improve rural transportation, and I certainly know there's lots of room for improvement. Absolutely. Part of that, of course, is to make sure as a base that you fund each of these programs and fund through our main budget and supplementary estimates to meet the needs of enrolment. We know that as well in rural school boards sometimes the enrolment is declining. So, again, we certainly do need to entertain a way by which we can change that funding so that we can have equity between school boards and each school in the province regardless of its geographic location and so forth.

I do recognize those things, and it's important. I certainly heard it loud and clear at the rural symposium. You know, it's important always to have an intelligent and balanced and realistic

conversation about these things as well, and school boards know that the importance of having education around climate change and having students engaging in those things is an important part of an education here in this province in 2018. So it's not as though you just take those things out, but certainly we're looking for ways by which we can assist school boards. I mean, we just had an announcement today from Municipal Affairs that it's going to be moving, I think, \$15 million to established schools to apply for a solar panel program. I already put in place a \$50 million solar panel program for new schools in the province as well. I mean, this is just an example of how you can use innovation.

Of course, we just talked about my infrastructure supply and maintenance bill. Schools are moving on changing their lights to LED, they're changing their heating systems, changing windows, and we will continue looking for ways by which we can do that. You save money, you reduce your carbon footprint, and you provide an education opportunity for children. All of those things are positive, Madam Chair. I recognize that we have to keep moving on these things. It's not as though we've solved the problem, but with constructive engagement such as I had experienced at the rural education symposium here last week, it makes me know and feel that we are heading down the right path and that we have school boards and parents and students and so forth working together with us in a constructive way to achieve all of those goals.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you for that, Mr. Minister, and I sure respect your answers. School boards, though, that are already running big deficits and are further going in the hole because of the carbon tax: it didn't sound like there was anything specific there about where they can balance this year's budget, where they can provide better service to their students. Again, it's a problem in rural Alberta, and I would hope that reallocation of assets would have an opportunity to help our rural students more.

Mr. Minister, the Auditor General came out a short time ago, and remembering what he said as best I can, basically the initiative to reduce class size has been a failure. All the money directed at this has not led to a reduction in class size, and now in line item 2.5 I see you list a decrease in funding required for the class size initiative of \$1.7 million. Given the Auditor General's report, which indicated that the Ministry of Education has consistently failed to meet class size objectives, can you explain how underspending this line item would decrease class sizes in Alberta's classrooms? Minister, have you given up? Is class size the wrong thing to be talking about for all these years? Was any progress made? Please explain the \$1.7 million reduction to what appears to be front-line teachers and workers.

The Deputy Chair: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Certainly, the Auditor General's report on the class size initiative line item was informative and constructive and useful, and my department and ministry are working to ensure that we meet all of the recommendations of the Auditor General in regard to the class size initiative. It's important that we have transparency and we have ways by which we can show demonstrable progress in improving the condition in the classroom for students, for teachers, and for the community at large. Each of the recommendations that the Auditor General had put forward in regard to the reduction of class sizes: we are certainly moving on those immediately and most rigorously as well.

Yes, certainly, improving classroom conditions in general and looking at class sizes as a means by which to do so is something that is front and centre for our government. You know, it's important that we have laid down this foundational work during an economic downturn in the last couple of years to ensure that we've held the line on the condition of classrooms to the teaching conditions in classrooms. Indeed, we've started to see some demonstrable progress, I think, that's reflected in the fact that part of the collective agreement that our teachers here in the province of Alberta signed included a fund, a \$75 million fund, to improve classroom conditions, to be worked on between teachers and school boards with specific goals in mind: working on improving math and communication skills, critical thinking skills, and so forth.

I mean, I can start to see where in the last couple of years we held the line to ensure that, you know, we funded for enrolment, that we had these different funding mechanisms in place over the last couple of years so that we have solid ground by which we can stand on to move forward on reducing class size and improving classroom conditions in general. I've been working very hard to make sure that we can not just look at the status quo but make demonstrable improvements in these regards over the next number of years.

The specific line item, the change in the class size initiative around this supplementary estimate: I will get back to you to give you some more specific information as to the variation of \$1.7 million down, but it is in no way a reflection of us not standing by this very important initiative and goal, which is to improve classroom conditions, to reduce class sizes, and to continue to produce some of the best education here in the province of Alberta that you can find anywhere in Canada or, I dare say, the world.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, hon. minister. I appreciate your time and your answers.

I want to switch gears to Children's Services. We're voting on an incredible 113 and a half million dollars, almost a 10 per cent increase from the budgeted amount. Madam Chair, through you to the minister: you're requesting an additional \$113.5 million in supplementary funding. What costs has the government come up with in the last year that you were not able to predict and budget for accordingly? We're almost 10 per cent up here.

3:30

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think it's important to note that I was always taught not to leave free money on the table, so certainly we were happy to welcome funding from the government of Canada for the early learning and child care centre framework in Alberta. That amounts to \$45.6 million, which is close to half of that number in terms of that. I'm happy to work with the federal government in order to deliver on that.

Madam Chair, certainly here in Alberta we're very proud of having a young population, and that continues. We continue to see significant growth in the number of children and youth, which directly impacts a number of the services and supports that my ministry provides to children and families, so the reality is that the demand for some of our programs increases as we support families to get back on their feet and overcome the stresses associated with challenging economic times. Through supplementary funds we can keep stable funding in place so that we can continue to meet the needs of Alberta's children and families and continue to invest in the future of our province. We work closely with our partners to make sure that all children grow up in a safe environment.

In most cases the funds will be used to address caseload pressures. Caseloads are not just numbers on a balance sheet but

real people, real children in real families that we need to support to ensure that they have the best possible outcomes. Caseload pressures are as follows: \$31.4 million for child intervention services, \$5.3 million for supports for permanency, and \$10.2 million for foster care supports.

Additionally, supplementary estimates for Children's Services, as I spoke, include the federal government transfer, which will allow us to invest in affordable quality child care, and we are also investing \$4.85 million in child care accreditation to address growth pressures.

Certainly, in terms of child intervention, I think every member of this House is aware and has had it brought to mind that every child, regardless of whose care they are in, deserves to grow up in a safe, loving, nurturing environment, and in order for our children's future to be bright, we need to invest in the opportunities that allow children to thrive. So under child intervention we've invested a total of \$31.4 million.

Children's Services, Madam Chair, has engaged in multiple practice initiatives to support staff to work with children and families in different ways with a goal of supporting families to keep their children safe at home. Our investment includes \$1 million for family enhancement services to provide early wraparound services to families to ensure that children stay with their families and do not enter into care. This means investing in services like conflict resolution, parental skill development, counselling, or providing in-home support workers to help parents be at their best.

We've also invested \$3 million in support in financial agreements to provide young adults who were formerly in care the support that they need for a successful transition to adulthood. Madam Chair, as the parent of an 18-year-old I can confidently tell you that when children become adults, they still need a lot of support and guidance. This additional investment has been used to address caseload growth driven by two factors, extending eligibility from 22 to 24 years of age and automatically enrolling youth when they turn 18.

We've invested an additional \$11.2 million in child protection to provide supports for the most complex cases. Increases in child protection costs are being driven by two factors. The first is a growing number of children and youth receiving services overall. Madam Chair, the second is the greater complexity of cases where children require specialized placements that can provide intensive mental health support and treatment, behavioural therapy, and drug addiction treatment.

We are also developing training for staff and caregivers that will create greater understanding of indigenous culture and historical trauma and child development, helping them to better support children and families. The reality is that when you have caseload growth, you must invest in additional front-line staff to support service delivery in a timely fashion. As a result, \$10.2 million was invested to address the salary pressure to meet the needs of the families that we serve.

In order to support equitable access to postsecondary education for children and youth in care, our government has invested \$6.2 million in registered education savings plans. This addresses a liability related to the ministry's obligation as a parent to these children and also means that we can capture available federal and provincial RESP grants for children in care.

Under child intervention there is also a \$200,000 reduction for approved in-year administrative savings.

In regard to supports for permanency the \$5.3 million in funding will address caseload growth in the supports for permanency program, which provides supports for adoptive parents and private guardians of children who've been in permanent care. Every child deserves to grow up in a healthy, loving environment that supports

their healthy development and prepares them for a bright future, and we recognize that many children who've been in care require additional support even after leaving care. This program provides much-needed supports for caregivers to meet their children's needs, whether through ongoing counselling, respite, or supports to maintain cultural connections.

The Deputy Chair: I just want you to be aware that you had agreed to go back and forth with the member.

Ms Larivee: Yeah.

The Deputy Chair: Okay.

Ms Larivee: That's absolutely fine. It was a very broad question, Madam Chair, basically addressing every single factor of what we're doing within this, so I felt that I was answering that very broad question by giving some details in terms of what we were doing. Certainly, if the member has an additional question, I'm happy to save some details around supports for permanency and foster care support and other important components of our budget for future questions.

Mr. Barnes: Well, thank you. I absolutely agree. Families and children are of paramount importance, and it's paramount that we have the supports there for them. Hey, I too have an 18-year-old. It's special watching them grow up and get on their own, for sure.

But I want to talk about what your department hasn't done. The House is still waiting to hear the final recommendations of the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention. We talked about a whopping \$113 million extra. Okay. Thanks to the federal government for \$45 million more, that you people immediately spent. Are the staffing costs associated with finishing the work on the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, that we're waiting for, part of the remainder of that \$60 million, \$65 million given that this work was extended following the first panel meeting in January? Minister, second to that, if it is not within the supplementary budget and isn't being absorbed by the department, what other important work is not being completed by that staff while they focus on the final recommendations? Again, I'll ask you to be as brief as you can, please.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm thankful, again, to all the members of the panel for the work that they have done. Certainly, the member has spoken to the representatives from his side of the House at the table. Through the process of the panel it was decided, first of all, to extend that work because of the importance of the work, and that was certainly a consensus in terms of the direction of the House, but also the consensus of the panel was to have the final recommendations sent to the expert panel members in order to revise those recommendations.

I'm thankful that those recommendations were shared with the expert members. The experts have been working diligently, along with support from ministry staff, in order to make sure that they are what we would call SMART – I think we're all kind of familiar with that – specific, measurable, you know, details such as that. I'm thankful for the work of the expert panel members in doing that, and I certainly look forward to receiving the recommendations after they are done that work.

There's been a high priority in providing all the support needed to the panel throughout this whole entire process, but as we have not received those recommendations yet, the results of the recommendations are not reflected in this. Certainly, within the

ministry we have utilized the resources that we already have to provide the support needed to the panel and to the panel members to make sure that we can move forward as quickly as possible on this.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. We have heard from community not-for-profits and we've heard from child and family service providers that their budgets are being heavily impacted by the layering effects of the carbon tax, statutory holiday pay, overtime pay, the minimum wage increase. The layers of burden, many of them have called them. Their expenses have continued to balloon due to external factors that have forced many of them, unfortunately, to cut their services, run deficits, or even close their doors. Will any – any – of this additional 113 and a half million dollars that your department is requesting be directed to help these good agencies offset their costs?

3:40

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. We have an incredibly valuable relationship with a number of agencies that provide care to Albertan children and Albertan families in need, and I'm so thankful for the incredible work that they do.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

We are now at the last 20 minutes for the Official Opposition. Would you like to continue to go back and forth, or what would you like to do, hon. member?

Mr. Barnes: I'll continue to go back and forth.

The Deputy Chair: With the Minister of Children's Services?

Mr. Barnes: Yeah. Okay.

The Deputy Chair: Please go ahead.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you. Next question. On page 22 of the supplementary supply estimates document you state that you have found cost savings of \$375,000 that have been "made available from lower than budgeted expense in other programs." Could you please elaborate on which programs these cost savings have been found in and if you will be adjusting your budget for these programs for the upcoming budget? Where specifically will these funds be redirected? Can you please comment on any other cost savings your department found or any other cost savings and more effective measurements and techniques you tried to implement?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will certainly be happy to answer those questions. The ministry proposed and Treasury Board approved \$200,000 in administrative savings and a decrease of \$175,000 from the capital grant budget. Within that, child care program planning and delivery was \$100,000, and early intervention services for children and youth was \$100,000. Child care subsidy and support: that's the capital grant of \$175,000. Again, these savings were in addition to the \$200,000 included in child intervention services.

Certainly, while we do feel the need, absolutely, to ensure that every child, again, has all the care that they need to grow up in a safe, loving, nurturing environment, we understand very much the responsibility within the department to find every saving possible

to ensure that the dollars that we are spending are on the services that need to happen for those children and that we do everything we can to conserve dollars for that very important work. That was certainly the drive behind finding these administrative types of savings.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that answer.

On page 22 of the supplementary supply estimates document you requested \$47 million in additional funds "to address higher caseloads and increases in cost-per-case." I'm wondering: what are the factors that have caused such a drastic increase in caseloads? Why has the cost per case increased so dramatically? Why were these factors not considered just a short 11 months ago, when you submitted your budget last year? Forty-seven million dollars, Madam Minister.

The Deputy Chair: The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Once again, you know, I'm really glad to see that Alberta continues to be full of new, young Albertans ready to grow and thrive and meet their potential, but that means that the growing number of children and youth in this province require an additional investment in terms of supporting them in situations in which their families and those children need support. Again, we've had a substantial increase in the number of children that need care.

Also, you know, the complexity of the children and families entering into the child intervention system varies in any given year, and it's certainly not something that we can predict with absolute accuracy in terms of what those families are going to need. On a case-by-case basis we work with those families and with those children to do what we need to wrap around them to provide the care and the support and the encouragement and the resources to make sure that they have the very best chance of staying together and succeeding and to ensure the very best outcome for those children.

I'm very proud of the work that our front-line staff in Children's Services continue to do in identifying those needs and working with those families and making sure that they have the support they need in order to have the very best possible outcomes. That's certainly what we're seeing reflected in this increase in the budget.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to talk a little bit more about the \$45 million that the federal government did provide for a child care subsidy and supports for early learning and child care centres, fully offset by a transfer from the federal government under the multilateral early learning and child care framework, I understand.

I have three questions. Is this a one-time payment or a funding commitment that will continue? Was this commitment from the federal government granted to Alberta before or after you presented your last budget? You cite that this money will be used to support the delivery of early learning and child care systems that reflect local and regional needs. What programs specifically are being implemented to ensure that Albertans are treated equally and treated fairly? Of course, I'm wondering if this program will have an impact on provincial taxpayers and on the provincial budget going forward.

The Deputy Chair: The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm really thankful that the federal government has worked with us and identified that

affordable child care is an incredible priority for all of us for many reasons: in the interest of the children, in the interest of their parents, and in the interest of our economy. With that, just this fall, so well after the budget was presented and debated, we finally signed off on a bilateral agreement with the federal government in which we were allocated \$45.6 million for this year. And it's not just for this year. That agreement is for three years that we would have that funding. Certainly, the commitment within the framework is to a 10-year span, in which we can renegotiate that. We're looking forward to continue to work on that. Of course, I would have loved to have seen more, and I hope that they continue to recognize the investment in that as we go forward, but it's certainly a great start.

I've spent a lot of time visiting the 22 centres, talking to parents and child care professionals, and at every centre I visit, I hear tremendous stories about the value to moms who have been able to get back to work and, importantly, to families to have the dollars that they need in their pockets to spend on their families. Madam Chair, that's what's happening. Those dollars are actually translating for these families, who desperately need those dollars, into spending them on their children here in this province and contributing to the economy in being able to get back to work. It's stories like hearing parents cry tears of relief and joy because they can afford to pay their rent, food, and pay for child care that continue to motivate me to work toward universal, affordable, quality child care in Alberta.

Certainly, with those dollars we're going to expand our early learning and child care centre pilots to about approximately 78 new ELCCs across the province, and I'm excited to see that that will create up to 4,500 additional child care spaces. I'm looking forward, again, to expanding that pilot right across the province and making that universal access and showcasing what that can look like to Alberta families and making sure they, again, have the dollars that they need and access to that quality child care that we know will make life better for their children and their families.

Mr. Barnes: Are any of the costs to the programs outlined in the supplementary budget a result of your government's policies such as the carbon tax, the labour law change to overtime and statutory holidays, or the minimum wage increase? Again, Madam Minister, you know, asking for an extra \$113 million is a huge number in spite of some assistance from the federal government, and I'm wondering how much of the extra cost relates to your government's policies on the carbon tax, overtime, and the minimum wage.

The Deputy Chair: The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, there are substantial caseload pressures, which are the primary drive behind the increased need for funding. Examples include our investment of \$10.2 million for foster care support, which is, again, addressing the caseload growth pressures. Foster and kinship caregivers, we know, are amazing individuals who step up to offer temporary, safe, stable housing, demonstrating the best of Alberta in terms of showing what community really means. I'm particularly proud that, compared to last year, there's been a 15 per cent increase in the number of children and youth placed in kinship care rather than foster care.

I think we need to make sure, as we go forward, that we provide the resources to our foster parents and to their support. We need to continue to provide resources to supports for permanency. We need to continue to provide resources within the child intervention system to invest in our families, to invest in our children, to make sure that despite the challenging economic circumstances we've

found ourselves in – thank goodness everything is moving up, up, and up according to the Minister of Finance – we've been able to provide the support needed to the families during those challenging times and to invest in Albertans and invest in those positive outcomes.

Those caseload growth pressures are the primary drive for this, Madam Chair, and that is the reason why we are coming back for supplementary estimates.

3:50

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Madam Minister. I want to switch gears to the \$3.3 million increase being asked for in supplementary supply estimates for Labour. I'm wondering: what specifically are the reasons that an additional \$3.3 million is being required for workforce strategies? What was missed in the earlier budget, and what is this necessary for?

The number strikes me, interestingly. I saw a report the other day that the increase in the minimum wage, you know, will cost Alberta 10,000 to 20,000 jobs. I've talked to many greenhouses, I've talked to many small businesses that have reduced their hiring because of the labour changes, because of the increase in the minimum wage, because of the increase in the carbon tax. Unfortunately, you can bet that some other employers, whether not-for-profit, government, or private, will be forced to pay less, hire fewer people, provide fewer hours.

Of course, in Alberta we have the good fortune of a lot of great people. We have the good fortune of a lot of commodities, but the one thing that is true about a commodity market is that you end up being a price taker, not able to sometimes do more than just be the most efficient producer and competitor that you can be.

Ms Hoffman: Take your product to tidewater.

Mr. Barnes: That would help a lot, wouldn't it?

I guess what I'm concerned about: we've seen \$700,000 in this ministry not spent. It was not spent, and it is now transferred from skills and training support, where, I think we all agree, huge improvements in the workforce and quality of life and opportunities for all Albertans can be made. We're seeing a situation where our unemployment rates – we've heard several times in the House just today and yesterday how Alberta's unemployment rate is second only to Atlantic Canada's. How incomprehensible, amazingly so, so sad that Calgary and Edmonton are numbers 2 and 4 in all of Canada for big metros and their high unemployment rates.

I saw that the U of C economist put out yesterday that Calgary's wage rates are back to 2005-2006 levels. Ten years is a long time ago. It's hard to make ends meet when you're a family and supporting a community. I'd like to ask one of the ministers: are you at least targeting this extra almost \$4 million to do a full impact study on the effects that your government's layer of burden has had on our job providers and our employees?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The \$3.3 million in additional expense for the Department of Labour is to address skills training in Alberta. As we know, when we go through an economic downturn like this, it's very important that we're able to provide additional skills training to individuals.

Madam Chair, as everyone in this House will be aware, as the economy develops and as we all move forward as a province,

sometimes individuals need to retrain themselves in order to maintain their ability to get into that labour market. This funding is required to address skills training for Alberta's unemployed, marginally employed, and underrepresented groups in the workforce. The request is fully offset by the federal government's expansion of the new labour market development agreement and the new workforce development agreement. Additional funding will primarily be invested in Labour's transition to employment service program, among others, which provides unemployed individuals one-on-one services that facilitate employment. These services include job matching, short-term training courses, and equipment required for the job.

To reiterate, the intention here is that it will be fully offset by federal funding, but I think it's worth taking a moment to note that these sorts of programs are absolutely critical, particularly at times like these, to ensure that individuals are able to get into the workforce and to maintain full employment. I think that it's certainly of value to us on this side of the House and, I would hope, to everyone in the House that we can get individuals into the workforce at this time, when the economy is starting to turn a corner and starting to take an upswing again. I think it's important to ensure that those values and benefits, with the economy as it continues to grow, are shared by all Albertans, Madam Chair. I think it's absolutely critical that people who work full-time not have to stop at the food bank on their way home to feed their children.

You know, in addition to changes we've made to protect the most vulnerable and to ensure that everyone has access to a decent income, ensuring that people who have been out of work have the ability, as the economy grows and as the economy comes back, to retool their skills and be able to get back into that economy so that they have the opportunity to benefit from it is a great program, and we're very proud of it.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Madam Minister. I guess that just in the last couple of minutes I want to go back to the overall presentation of the supplementary supply estimates. Asking for a billion and a half dollars with a day's notice: you know, it's incredible sometimes how the government of Alberta has functioned. I want to just make sure, though – in the Q3 update I was probably surprised the most by two things. Number one is that your government had a \$500 million cushion, that if oil prices were low, you were going to have this reserve transferred to cushion the total deficit amount. Of course, when oil prices ended up recovering a bit to \$60, that didn't seem like it was necessary. I would just like some assurances from a minister somewhere over there that nowhere in the 2017-2018 supplementary supply estimates are there any contingency plans for transferring any reserves, whether they're nominal or real or not, that may impact on these numbers.

The other concern I still have from the presentation of the Q3 update last week and the budgeting is the total absence of the amount of money that's being borrowed for capital funding, you know, the total amount of the 9 billion to 9 and a half billion dollar deficit that your government is running up this year for operating expenses. Again, we've talked about putting the groceries on the credit card. That's what your government is doing. But you were quiet – you were absolutely silent – on the fact that another 5 and a half billion dollars of capital investment was being borrowed without a payback plan, without full recognition of the interest and the cost on future generations.

Of course, now, when we're looking through the 2017-2018 supplementary supply estimates, we see parts where capital has had, as I was talking about to the Minister of Education, an impact on renovations and repairs and \$31 million that just a year ago was not allocated.

I guess, again, to the government. You know, we've seen you accumulate \$50 billion in debt in just three short years, a reversal of our net financial position of almost \$60 billion in just three years. Now I'm seeing – let's get the exact number here – a financial transactions amount to be voted on of almost \$36 million. Of course, I'd asked that question earlier, and I appreciate the hon. minister's promise to get the answer to me, but again a lot of Albertans have expressed great, great concern to me that your government doesn't have a plan to get our operating budget back in balance and that your government doesn't have a plan to repay these billions and billions of dollars in capital debt.

Now we're seeing here, you know, some side of – I don't know – 2 per cent, 2 and a half per cent of the budget, \$36 million, that could be going to front-line workers, that could be left in the pockets of Albertans. Are we going to have to be dealing with this down the road? Are we not going to have a plan to ensure that we are able to repay this? Hon. minister, if you don't mind, I just want to ensure that you have no plans for transferring reserves, nominal or otherwise, to cover any of this increased spending of a billion and a half dollars.

4:00

Ms Ganley: That covered a lot of different things. I'll try to cover all of them as we go forward.

The hon. member made reference to the cushion we put in the budget to deal with the volatility of oil prices. I think, Madam Chair, that that's a very reasonable step for the government to take. Certainly we make our forecasts on . . .

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

We are now moving on to the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

You have 20 minutes combined. Would you like to go back and forth?

Mr. Clark: I would like, with the kind indulgence of the minister, to go back and forth if that's all right, if we can do that. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Which minister would you like to address first so I can make sure?

Mr. Clark: Gosh, that's a great question. You know what? I will address my questions first to the Deputy Premier, just a couple if I may.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Deputy Premier, you're welcome to go back and forth. You're fine with that?

Ms Hoffman: I don't have any supplementary estimates.

The Deputy Chair: Yes, you do. Apparently you have questions today.

Hon. member, please go ahead with your questions.

Ms Hoffman: It's her. I'm not asking for any money.

Mr. Clark: Sure. I'm happy to address it to whichever member of Executive Council would like to respond. I do actually have a question about Health at one point.

I'll just open by saying a couple of things, Madam Chair. If you don't mind, I'll take a few moments here at the beginning. Also, my

colleague from Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill will take a good portion of our allotted 20-minute time. I'll just start with some general comments and can certainly happily address my questions to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General if she would so like to answer.

Here we are being asked to approve spending of a billion and a half dollars with scarcely 24 hours of notice. I think that that level of lack of transparency in terms of the spending that this government undertakes is frustrating to me and it is frustrating to Albertans. We often will need supplementary supply, of course, for some minor in-year corrections. I would understand that. But when you look at the third-quarter fiscal update, when the government brings in an additional \$2 billion of revenue but finds an additional \$1 billion of money to spend, it is tremendously frustrating for Albertans to see. Some of that, I will acknowledge, perhaps would come from student enrolment growth and things that I think Albertans would support. But there are many other areas where Albertans would expect any additional spending to be offset by reasonable efficiencies.

More to the point, this is a budget that is set every year, and we find that scant months after that budget is established, it's blown out of the water with this government seemingly being unable to find any meaningful ways of constraining spending. I would not look at the past budget as being what one would consider to be fiscally responsible. But even at that it gets overspent. This has happened every single year that we've been here. This government seems to have a chronic problem, which, unfortunately, seems just as bad or even worse than previous governments.

As we look at the remarkable amount of money that we're being asked to approve here on the first page of the supplementary supply estimates, what I want to ask the minister is: have all of the new or revised programs, initiatives, policy changes, et cetera, that have driven the requested increase been publicly announced? Can you please detail, if they have not yet been publicly announced, which specific unannounced programs this supplementary supply, in any of these ministries, is intended to fund?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I will seek guidance from you because I am happy to run through every single program that this is intended to fund as the member has asked me to do, but that will likely take us to the end of our 20 minutes. If you would like an answer to that question I'm happy to provide it, but you've literally asked me to comment on every single program in here. I'll do it if you want.

Mr. Clark: Why don't we limit ourselves to any unannounced programs, if you could tell us which amounts of funding here, that we're being asked to approve, relate to any programs that have not yet been announced.

Ms Ganley: Well, again, we have various ministers answering for various ministries. I'm happy to run through each and every program, and those ministers will be aware of whether or not those have been announced. I mean, if you want me to answer that question, I can launch right in. All right. I would propose to go alphabetically. The first one I have up is Agriculture and Forestry.

If you wouldn't mind running through your supplemental estimates and which programs those are and when they were announced.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. I mean, really what I'm asking is: the funding here that we're being asked to approve, is it all related to programs that have already been announced, that are out there publicly announced, or is there subsequent funding? I'm thinking of Justice, for example. There's a \$10 million announcement that's happened in-year for RCMP funding; that's an example of something that I presume is embedded in these supplementary supply estimates. But are there things coming that we haven't been told about yet but that are embedded? Obviously, if they haven't been announced, as much I would love to hear you announce them here today, are there things coming from any ministry that we haven't been told about yet, or are we only approving dollars for programs that have already been publicly announced, or are there some other gems coming in the next short while, before the end of the fiscal year?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Again, that question translates over hundreds of programs. I'm happy to run through each of the programs. I can't tell you off the top of my head which ones have been announced, but if you'd like me to list them, I can start with my ministry if that's more appropriate.

Our supplementary fund is required to address several things, including spending pressures faced by the ministry. Specifically, they include \$18.9 million for the RCMP contract, to address compensation increases. What that has to do with is the fact that the federal minister has announced that in the interim, while we are awaiting potential unionization with respect to the RCMP, there is an increase in the salaries for those RCMP officers. So for the province's portion of that, which represents the PPSA, which covers rural Alberta and urbans less than 5,000, that amounts to \$18.9 million, and that includes both back pay and current compensation.

Another \$8.2 million is for Legal Aid caseload services. That's just related to an increase in demand.

Another \$3.2 million relates to the Justices of the Peace Compensation Commission. That's required by the Supreme Court, and that's how those compensations are determined. That committee had its outcome fairly recently, so that's one of the things that's in there.

There is \$3.9 million for supplies and services, which supports the sheriff's branch commercial vehicle enforcement and correctional services.

There's \$1.1 million for the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services grant. Part of that money is coming from Justice; part of it will come from Community and Social Services and, I believe, from Health as well. That announcement, I think, was actually last week.

An Hon. Member: On Wednesday.

Ms Ganley: It was on Wednesday, I'm told. So that's that.

And \$0.9 million is for the biology casework analysis agreement for policing. What that is is that when we take biological samples, they are sent to a lab. There was a 10-year deal in which the federal government's costs increased, but they didn't charge the provinces any more. That deal has elapsed, so now the province is paying increased costs year over year for the processing of those samples.

Then \$0.8 million is for the municipal police assistance grants. Once we get the total numbers on populations in from municipalities, those grants are based on population, so those go up. That is the Justice supply.

I hear that my colleague the Minister of Economic Development and Trade is happy to talk about his programs, and I'm sure all my other colleagues are.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow I believe has some clarifying questions.

Mr. Clark: Thank you. I think that's probably covered off that question, so we'll move on to the next one, then.

This part I'm a little curious about. The Q3 fiscal update showed that Health is expected to be \$58 million over budget in-year for operating expenses, but we don't see any supplementary supply for Health. I'm curious how that all hangs together, what internal funds Health is finding that are happening without a transfer, how they're able to do that without seeing that show up here in supplementary supply.

4:10

Ms Ganley: Madam Chair, what I believe is before us in this instance is the supplementary supply estimates, so I have answers to those questions.

The Deputy Chair: To clarify, I believe the member has actually asked a question related to supplementary supply. If he wants to clarify it again, he can.

Mr. Clark: That's fine. I think what I'll do is end my questions here and hand my remaining time over to the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I was hoping to ask a question of the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, but I can move on to Children's Services and go back if that's okay.

The Deputy Chair: If that is what you'd like to do, please go ahead.

Ms McPherson: Sure. Okay. I'm unsure if the first question actually applies to Children's Services. It has to do with the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. No? Okay. I'll move on from there. Thank you.

My first question. On page 22 what were the main sources of the higher caseloads and cost per case? What has changed in the way that child intervention supports for permanency and foster care support are delivered?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, thanks to an increasing number of children, we did have increasing caseloads in terms of that, but we are, as I stated, working with children and families in different ways, so that certainly increases the complexity of practice when the focus is on keeping a family together and providing those supports in order to keep a child safely at home. We're certainly investing money in terms of wrapping services around families in order to make sure that children don't come into care, if at all possible that they can stay safely in their homes. That means, again, investing in kinds of services: parental skill development, counselling, providing in-home support workers, conflict resolution. In terms of making all those things happen and in terms of being able to deliver that kind of care with an increasing caseload, we needed some additional staff as well in terms of

making that happen, so that would certainly be in regard to child intervention.

In regard to supports for permanency it is, again, strictly related to caseload growth. Children who have been in care oftentimes need additional support even after leaving care, so that's what supports for permanency is about. We want to make sure that we do continue to support those children and youth in order to have the very best future, including supporting young adults to transition to adulthood. Part of the reason why that caseload growth was increased was because eligibility was extended from 22 to 24 years, and we've also moved to automatically enrolling youth when they turn 18.

Lastly, the complexity of care for children has increased. The more we can keep the simpler cases in-home, the more it means that the cases that actually do come into care oftentimes are the most complex. Again, we have a growing number of children and youth, but the complexity of cases where there's very specialized placement that children need – that might include intensive mental health support and treatment or behavioural therapy or drug addiction treatment and making sure that staff have all the training that they need and caregivers have the training they need to understand indigenous culture, to understand historical trauma in child development and really provide the very best care, so a lot of care driven that way. Then, again, some caseload growth pressures for children placed in temporary foster and kinship homes as well is what drove an additional investment of \$10.2 million into foster care support.

Hopefully, that answered the member's questions, and I will continue to hopefully answer her questions to the best of my ability.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

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

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister for the answers. Also, near the bottom of page 22 there is \$16.5 million, roughly, for encumbrance from higher than anticipated caseloads in child intervention. I'm wondering what the sources are for that increased demand. Is any of that as a result of the first round of the child intervention panel recommendations?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. To be clear, in '17-18 the Children's Services budget was reduced by \$16.557 million due to overspending in the previous year. So in order to meet the obligations of the ministry, Treasury Board has approved \$16.557 million to cover that encumbrance and restore the budget. Obviously, there were some pressures from last year that we needed to recognize and deal with, that we realized at the end of the year. That broke down to child intervention services receiving an additional \$8.2 million, supports for permanency an additional \$1.8 million, foster care an additional \$5 million, child care program planning and delivery receiving \$557,000, and early intervention services for children and youth receiving \$1 million.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to the minister. On page 24, item 3 under capital grants originally allocated \$250,000; \$175,000 in child care grants appear to be allocated but not issued. Of the \$175,000 granted, where did that go?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Certainly, we're very proud of the work that we have been doing. In terms of providing support for a child care subsidy and supports, part of that, thankfully, is the \$45.6 million, as I said, going to early learning and child care centres in terms of that and also the need to continue to support accreditation growth as well within child care subsidy and supports. We do provide a certain amount of support to various child care facilities throughout the year, and certainly there can be some variations in terms of what that support looks like. So we did decrease \$175,000 from the capital grant budget as a result of a variation in that amount.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

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

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair. If I could just go back to Agriculture and Forestry, I'd love to ask a question about that.

The Deputy Chair: Go ahead.

Ms McPherson: Great. Thanks. On page 18 the supplementary amount of \$1,050,000 is requested to provide funding for wildfire aircraft inventory related to an encumbrance in 2016-2017. I'm wondering if this is due to extra use charges during the Fort McMurray fires and if this is equipment that's leased rather than owned.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Chair and to the member for the question. I think I want to congratulate the member. I believe that's the very first question ever asked of me by a member of the Alberta Party. I'm just saying. Yeah, that's a really good question. We all, of course, remember the wildfire season of 2016, where we had the Horse River fire, which devastated Fort McMurray. It's also important to note that the wildfire season in 2015 was actually even worse. We burned more trees, more timber in 2015.

The member is absolutely correct. The aircraft that we had helping support, you know, fighting those wildfires in those two years were used extensively, and because of such, the parts that were available to repair those vehicles, that were in storage, had been used. This is now replenishing the stock of those parts. Parts are on hand. Aircraft, as I'm sure you understand, is not like my old truck, where if there's a squeak in it, I'll just wait till it breaks. You can't let that happen in aircraft. So this is being able to restock the supply, those parts for those aircraft. It's important in keeping these aircraft up.

You know, I find it interesting that even with all that snow on the ground, we've had seven wildfires already this year, right? So the aircraft are going to be needed as we start to dry up in the spring. It's making sure that the aircraft are there, ready for our women and men in the field to be able to do the good work they do that protects our communities.

4:20

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

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

Ms McPherson: Thank you very much. I do understand that wildfire season starts in March. I'm just wondering if the minister can let us know if the planes are leased or owned by the province.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thanks. These are the four aircraft that the government does own. We do have other aircraft and companies

that are on contract, but these are the four aircraft that the government does own.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you. I believe I'm almost out of time, so I'll let my questions rest now.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak from the Alberta Party?

Seeing none, I will now move on to the government side of the House. The government members have 20 minutes. Hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood, would you like to go back and forth, or would you like to take 10 minutes?

Connolly: No, I'd like to go back and forth if that's all right.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Please go ahead.

Connolly: Thank you very much. I'd like to start off with some questions to the Minister of Education if that's all right. I'm very happy to see that we're keeping up with enrolment through the supplementary supply. I know that's been a problem in the past. I know that for many of us, it was one of the reasons that we ran with the NDP because I know the previous government was planning to not keep up with enrolment and refused to keep up with enrolment and for several decades wouldn't keep up with enrolment, which is why we had fewer resources in the classroom, which is why we had overcrowded classrooms, and which is why we have a huge deficit of teachers in the system.

I'm really proud to see that this minister has been able to build probably more new schools than any previous Minister of Education, at least in the past couple of decades. In fact, I've been at two school openings just in the past few months. One was in the Minister of Infrastructure's riding, right beside mine, l'école du Nouveau-Monde. I was so happy to see that we're finally building francophone schools as well. I know some of this money for supplementary supply and for the school facilities' infrastructure will be going to help our francophone schools.

A lot of the time in the past when schools were no longer needed by the CBE or by Calgary Catholic – I can only talk about Calgary in particular – those schools were then given to the francophone board instead of them having been able to build their own schools. This led to the francophone board having to pay a lot more for upkeep of these old buildings, having to pay a bit more for resources, and having a lack of resources compared to other school boards. So I'm really happy to see that we're finally putting money not only into the francophone board but into all school boards to make sure that they have the proper resources that they need. That's really something that the minister's supplementary supply will do, so I'm very happy to see that.

I'm also happy – once again when we talk about new schools, building new schools is the best way to lower class sizes. Like I've said many times, when I was in high school – obviously, in junior high and elementary school it was a similar story – I think it was in grade 11 or grade 10 that if everyone showed up to my English class, which was about 40 kids, there weren't enough desks for everyone, so we actually had to have one kid sit on the floor. If you were the last one to show up that day after everyone showed up, you would have to sit on the floor and do your work there. That's even with the teacher's desk. So a kid was in the teacher's desk, somebody had to sit on the floor, and we still did not have enough.

Mr. Eggen: Was that you, Michael?

Connolly: No. Luckily, I was always early. Thank God.

It's important to know that this was how our school system was and sometimes still is because a lot of times we don't have those resources. But we were able to build, I believe, 173 new schools in the past three years or finish 173 schools in the past three years. I'm incredibly proud of the work that our Minister of Education has been able to do for this province. Like has been said previously, right before we were elected, we had empty lots with big signs saying: new school will be built here. Those lots remained empty for years and years and years. So we are finally getting those schools, that were promised decades ago, built today, and we couldn't be prouder of the Minister of Education.

I was just recently at a few schools in my riding. I was at St. Rita, which is in Ranchlands, which is near my constituency office. We were able to give them a grant to improve their learning commons. A lot of my elementary schools, especially in Hawkwood and Ranchlands and Silver Springs, which are older neighbourhoods, are trying to improve their libraries, to build more learning commons, to have what a lot of them call a makerspace, where kids get to go and actually build things. They're so proud of that, but they need a little bit of extra funding. So I'm really proud that we're making sure that those schools have the funding that they need, whether that be through the Minister of Culture and Tourism, where that grant came from, or from the Minister of Education, because these schools do need upkeep and they are really putting forward incredibly gifted students.

I was just at another school in Silver Springs – it's called W.O. Mitchell – which, again, is a much older school, built in about the '70s. That school needed drastic upkeep because it was an older school. Now it contains the Spanish bilingual program, which, again, is an incredible program that we have in Calgary. We also have the German bilingual program. We have several languages that are in our ridings. I know that in the Member for Calgary-Bow's riding there is a German school, Bowcroft, that we were able to visit.

W.O. Mitchell I was just able to visit because I was giving them a grant. The minister of environment's office and the climate change office were able to give out 10 grants of up to \$1,000 for students to improve their school, community, or Alberta in general through technology to improve their carbon output, whether that be in the school or, again, in the community. At W.O. Mitchell I was so proud to see what they were doing. It was a group of fourth graders. Only 10 of these grants, I believe, were given out across the province, and my riding actually got four of them, so I'm really proud of the work that the students in my riding have been able to do.

At W.O. Mitchell they have compost bins that don't really work, so they're going to reuse the compost bins to create a garden, and with the grant I believe they're going to buy or create new compost bins so that they can use that to fuel the garden. With the garden they're going to grow vegetables, which they're then going to use to create a stew to feed to seniors in the neighbourhood.

That's directly because the Minister of Education is seeing that we have these old schools that can be reused. It's directly in this supplementary supply that we're making sure that these old schools are still able to be used, still making sure that these schools are able to run properly, and making sure that we don't forget the students that are already at these older schools. A lot of my schools, again, have been there since the 1970s and so need refurbishment every so often or else they can't really work.

If the Minister of Education wants to explain a little bit about how we're keeping up with enrolment, how we're making sure that these

older schools are being modernized, and how building new schools is helping us move forward in Education.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for his comments and questions. Yes, it's sort of an interesting process where for each of the budgets that I've built for Education, we've seen the enrolment into our schools here in the province of Alberta grow past our expectations. Again, as I mentioned before, I think this is a sign of hope and optimism not just for families making choices around building families and having kids and so forth, but it's a good sign for our economy as well. Let's not forget that Alberta has the youngest population in the country and the most driven as well in the country, so we're seeing quite remarkable growth in certain areas of the province. This supplementary supply request to have the \$18 million is a reflection of that.

4:30

We saw remarkable growth, and we're meeting, Madam Chair, the physical needs and human resource needs for that growth as well. Just to give some numbers from this fall, we opened 53 new or modernized schools, which more than 36,000 students were attending. The scale of it is quite remarkable. We've hired more than 1,100 teachers as well to go along with this. Of course, you can't open a school without all of the custodians and the secretaries and the support staff that you need to make a school go.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

It's a reflection, I think, of Albertans' commitment to education. We know that overwhelmingly Albertans want and are willing to make a commitment to our education even during tough economic times. Certainly, we made sacrifices in other areas in this government. I'm very proud of how this caucus, our cabinet, and our Premier said that we will make sure that we will invest in those children's education regardless of, you know, how it might be a bit of a difficult economic exercise to make it happen. As we move out of an economic recession, now here we are with all of these new physical resources available to us, new schools in the places where we need them. We will continue to build those schools and supply the teachers and support that are necessary along the way.

I think, hopefully, that Albertans learned an important lesson, which is that you must plan for the future. Planning for the future includes making investments in infrastructure and making investments in our children so that they have the very best education to move forward and to contribute and prosper here in the province of Alberta in whatever they may choose to do with their lives in the future. So, yeah, this supplementary supply is a reflection in a smaller way of our larger commitment to K to 12 education here in the province of Alberta, and I'm really proud of it, quite frankly.

You know, the infrastructure maintenance and renewal element of this: it's interesting to see that sort of highlighted because, again, we're working on ways to ensure that school boards are spending the money on infrastructure renewal and maintenance at every step of the way. They do a great job. I don't deny it. We want to make sure, especially with all of that new inventory of hundreds of new schools, that for the next 50 years we're spending at the right time on the right maintenance so that we get the maximum benefit from each of those schools along the way. That's part of what we're doing, moving that infrastructure maintenance and renewal funding into capital to ensure that it's tied more to the actual physical buildings and the maintenance that they require.

Thanks very much. I mean, I'm sure that all of you have attended new school openings here in the last number of months. I can tell you that it's one thing to see the beautiful buildings that are there – we've put in lots of features that enhance learning and so forth – but it's more the sense of community, that sense of a focal point for young families to be proud of, not just to go to school in but to have community events in, community league and sporting events and so forth. It's just a real source of pride for, I think, each individual community, and cumulatively there's a sense of pride for all of us as Albertans demonstrating that to our children and to their learning.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to be able to get up and ask some questions here. You know, I'm going to be honest. My knowledge of agriculture is not that great compared to some of the members in this room. However, I do know that members from the opposition make it seem like they're the only ones that represent rural communities in this House. But, of course, we know that's not true. We have a number of representatives here from the governing party that represent rural communities.

I'm specifically wanting to get up and ask this question of the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry simply because I've heard that he's done a number of town hall meetings throughout the province where he's been able to go and actually talk to a lot of the farmers who at one time were outside on the steps of the Legislature. He's been able to give them correct information about some of the programs that we've been doing. He's an incredibly knowledgeable and experienced individual, and he's been able to talk to a lot of these farmers about how our government is doing great things to help a lot of these farmers all across the province. Of course, this is an opportunity for me to learn from a colleague.

One of the things that I find absolutely fascinating is that, unlike other jurisdictions throughout our great land, we have the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, and it's a really important aspect in the work of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, of course. I see that here in the supplementary supply estimates there is a request of \$56.8 million, and that's specifically for the provincial share of AgriStability indemnities and AgriInsurance premiums. I'm hoping that the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry can go into a little bit of depth on why that money is specifically needed, how that money goes to help farmers all around the province of Alberta.

The Acting Chair: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Chair and to the member for the very good question. He's right. There is, you know, \$53.4 million of AgriStability indemnities. I'll just touch on that for now. AgriStability: I think you could talk to probably just about any producer in Alberta, any producer in the country, and they would tell you it's a program that works okay. It doesn't work great at times, but it works okay.

The program itself is funded 60 per cent by the government of Canada and 40 per cent by the province, and it is used for those times where there are large crashes in the price of a commodity. Part of the program as well: this is actually to cover losses, for the most part, for a lot of our producers. But a big part of this is for the cattle industry, where the ranchers lost – I think there was a large crash in the price of beef in 2016. It was about a 30 per cent decrease at that time. We haven't seen a decrease like that since the BSE scares of 2003, so that was a really big hit on our industry. How the

programs works, then, is that it takes about a year or so for those claims to be ready from the government of Canada, the government of Alberta. So that's basically what that is for.

Interesting to note – I think it's a good time to bring that up now – on the AgriStability portion of the program is that at the federal-provincial-territorial ministers of agriculture conference in St. John's, Newfoundland, last year we made a decision to tweak that to make it a little bit better for our producers here in Alberta and, frankly, across the country, so that's what we have done. The whole business risk management suite of programs that is administered, as the member has said, through the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation is currently going through a review, looking to see what more we can do to tweak those good programs and perhaps make them even better.

The AgriInsurance you see there at \$3.4 million. I think you could probably talk to any farmer in Alberta and realize that that's actually not a very big amount. We had a pretty wet fall in 2016. It went over, you know, to a fairly wet spring in 2017. But the year as a whole was a pretty good, solid average year last year. We had some dry conditions in the south, other than the 1.7 million acres of irrigated land that we have in southern Alberta, which did very well with the good heat and the good moisture and the good reservoir capacity that we have in our irrigation system. They actually did fairly well, but there were some dry conditions.

4:40

Also interesting to note, Member, is that, especially with cereal crops, when you have fairly dry conditions, the quality of the grains can actually be increased. There is often a higher protein content for those crops where we maybe didn't see the quantity, but the quality can be very good. So we had that. As well, we had very, very few hailstorm claims last year. It wasn't a very big hail season. We'll see what this year has to offer.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Otherwise, that \$3.4 million in AgriInsurance went to cover those claims for those severely dry conditions that we've seen in southern Alberta. Like they say, God willing and if the creek don't rise, hopefully we'll have a good year this year.

Loyola: I believe I have around 30 seconds left, Madam Chair. I'll just cede my time, and I'll keep asking questions next turn.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We will now move back to the Official Opposition. The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: You have 10 minutes. Would you like to go back and forth?

Mr. Stier: Yes, please. If the Minister of Children's Services would be so kind, that would be great.

The Deputy Chair: Minister, you're willing to go back and forth? Please proceed.

Mr. Stier: Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you, Minister, for the co-operation. I'm assuming you would be responding today to Municipal Affairs questions, which are going to be my focus. Without further ado, I'd like to proceed if possible. Madam Chair, the problem is that I recognize that this person probably is the likely person to respond to those questions from what I observe in the House today.

I'd like to start with AEMA, if I could, Minister or Ministers. You know, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency is part of Municipal Affairs, and they provide assistance to municipalities and their citizens when there are huge disasters. I was certainly witness to those many times in my life, whether it was the flood in '13 in High River or the Kenow fire this year in the Pincher Creek region and Waterton park. That kind of funding is normally called DRP funding, I believe, and it's normally budgeted, from my years of experience here, at roughly around \$200,000 because it's hard to predict a year in advance, which normally happens every year, what's going to happen.

I noted that on page 56, line 9, there's a figure of \$18.6 million here this time around. I suspect – and perhaps correct me if I'm wrong – that it's probably as a result of the fires that have been experienced this year, but it may be other outstanding files on other things. Would the minister be able to comment on what that \$18.6 million represents? Either one is fine to answer.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. As far as I understand, the conversation that we had was that Municipal Affairs was on the agenda for tomorrow to have questions asked about it. So while that's the case, I certainly can take a few moments to speak about this based on my previous experience within Municipal Affairs.

The member would be correct that the disaster recovery program is not something that we can predict, Madam Chair. Obviously, each year one never knows, you know, what kind of disasters might occur, but there are typically a number of things that happen across the province. I mean, obviously, the fires in southern Alberta are an example of a large-scale disaster that we were all very much aware of. However, there are unexpected events that challenge the emergency capacity of municipalities that happen on a much smaller scale across the province as well.

I certainly think that the Minister of Municipal Affairs would be happy to speak to that during his allotted time. I am sure that he would be happy to provide you with more details at a future time as well in terms of doing that. Glad that we can always provide support to municipalities in terms of disaster management.

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

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Chair. I apologize to the minister. There seems to have been some miscommunication because it was our understanding that there would be someone on this file here this afternoon.

Anyway, if I could proceed, MSI is a topic that is well known within the municipal world. You know, the website says that the municipal sustainability initiative, or MSI, "helps support local infrastructure priorities and [helps] build strong, safe and resilient communities." It's the usual statements that are there every year, I think. We saw at one point \$1.18 billion in MSI capital on the website, for 2017, and the estimate seems to be pegged at \$1.65 billion. That's page 56, line 4. Regarding the additional \$800 million that seems to be in there, I'm wondering if anyone knows what that additional \$800 million was for. Was it unexpected? Stuff like that for that portion, please.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Chair and to the member for the question. You know, it's important to ensure that municipalities have the funds they crucially need to maintain their infrastructure

for the citizens of Alberta. We heard from the Minister of Infrastructure this morning about how this government initiated the largest infrastructure build in the history of this province. That is going to go a long way in not only fulfilling the infrastructure deficit that was left with us by the previous government but also a long way to stimulate the economy, to have people, both contractors and the workers that work for the contractors, back to work. It went a long way.

This is part of that. This will not be an overall increase to MSI funding levels, but it will most certainly help municipalities with cash flow to assist them with those priority projects that they have on the go. This will, you know, get them an opportunity to put shovels in the ground. We're hoping for some warmer weather here. The snow will melt, and it'll dry up enough to get at some of those projects.

This isn't, you know, completely unusual. This was very similar to what happened in 2015 with the previous Conservative government. It's important to a municipality, it's important for the infrastructure builds, and, as we heard earlier, it's an important priority to Albertans. I think it's a very palpable question.

As well, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association is meeting this week to talk about their concerns with some of our other ministers, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade and the Minister of Municipal Affairs, to ensure that their voices are heard by this government on a lot of their issues and, of course, without a doubt, on their infrastructure needs, infrastructure builds as we progress throughout the year.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Stier: Thank you. Time allotment left, please, Madam Chair?

The Deputy Chair: Two minutes and 57 seconds.

Mr. Stier: Okay. I guess a quick one if I could. As the minister is aware, MSI was originally created in 2007, expired in 10 years. We're entering our second year after the deadline. I'm wondering. This \$800 million we're just talking about now: is some of it being directed to developing the new plan, that is apparently in the works, for MSI? Can we have any comments on that, please?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Chair and the member. This additional funding is going to be allocated in the 2017-2018 budget. Obviously, I can't comment, you know, on the future of that budget. We're going to be hearing from the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board here next week on what that budget necessarily will be. But it's important to note that this isn't an overall increase and will be allocated in the 2017-2018 budget. More information on the MSI funding, obviously, will be announced as well in the budget. But I do want to thank the member for his interest and for his questions.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: You still have a minute and 45.

Mr. Stier: Okay. Thank you. All right. So I guess we don't really know what that \$800 million was destined for, being used for exactly, but thank you for the response.

There was an additional \$4 million being spent at one time on the Wood Buffalo fire. Was it reported in this budget or a portion of this supplementary as well? Is some of that remaining Wood Buffalo being taken care of with this \$800 million?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.
4:50

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Member. That's a really important question. I'm not sure about, you know, that number, if that was included in one of the recommendations from the three reports that came out: one commissioned by the Department of Agriculture and Forestry, one commissioned by Municipal Affairs, and one by the municipality itself. Though I can't answer that question directly, it did speak to the need to make sure that we are listening to the needs of municipalities, whether Wood Buffalo or across the province. The needs in Wood Buffalo are somewhat unique, obviously, to take into consideration the tragedy they went through last year. A lot of that money, whether it's in Wood Buffalo or across the province, is to make sure that they have the infrastructure they need. In Wood Buffalo I would venture to guess a lot of that will be to do with being even more prepared. Even though we did avoid any direct loss and tragedy in that wildfire, we did lose a lot of structures.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Member.

We will now move on to the government side. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, you have 10 minutes. Would you like to go back and forth?

Loyola: Yes. Back and forth, please, Madam Chair. My questions will be directed to our new mother, the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate the minister, of course, on the birth of her child. I want to say how fantastic it is that all of our ministers who have had children – when they bring them into the House, you can see the faces. Well, I'm looking that way, so I tend to see the faces on that side of the room and how they all just light up when a baby comes into the room. I think it's wonderful. It gets us kind of working more amicably together, perhaps, when babies come in. I think that we need more women and more babies and especially nothing stopping more women in this House so that they can be here and help us make these really important decisions like the decisions of the Ministry of Justice.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General – you know, I've had a few cases where people come to my office in the constituency looking for a request for legal aid, and I know that she has an amount here in the supplementary supply estimates dedicated to that. I'm hoping that she can go into a little bit more detail on that particular program and the money that she requires for that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm very happy to discuss this topic. And thank you very much to the member for the question. It's a topic that's near and dear to my heart. Legal aid, obviously, provides funding for individuals who are unable to access the legal system by any other means. It's a program which I think most participants in the justice system would agree has been underfunded for a number of years. The demand on that program has obviously increased because it's based on financial eligibility guidelines, so if an individual falls within those guidelines, they have access to the program. What that means is that if they find themselves accused of a crime, we are required to cover a certificate for that individual.

Of course, as people have had some lower incomes and there have been a few more people who haven't been working, the demand on that program has increased quite considerably. The

increase that this government has put into that program has been over – with this, it's even more than 25 per cent, probably closer to 30 per cent. That's to ensure that during this time of economic vulnerability, those individuals who previously were working and find themselves unable to work have access to that program, and I think that's pretty critical.

A lot of this is defence against actions of the state, and I think sometimes people don't understand how important that is. When someone stands accused of a crime, they haven't yet been convicted of that crime, and I think it's important that they are allowed to make full answer in defence. Ultimately, the system is intended to get to the meat of the matter, and I think it's important that those individuals have access to counsel.

Another really important thing that legal aid does is that it provides access to counsel in a lot of family law matters. One of the reasons I think that is so important is because there can be a significant imbalance in power between one parent and the other parent. In addition, they can provide access to counsel for children in custody dispute matters, which is often very important. That imbalance in power means that when Legal Aid is able to step in for the parent who has less access to resources, I think that creates just sort of a fairer society overall, and it ensures that everyone is able to meet their obligations.

Really, in this case the increase to legal aid is a result of the fact that in order to continue paying for the services that we had committed to Albertans, we needed a little bit more funds to pay for those services. I think that at this time of economic vulnerability, it's important to keep that commitment.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you once again, Madam Chair. One of the things that, you know – one of the misunderstandings, perhaps I'll say, and one of the stereotypes that tends to exist out there because of the 44 years of Conservative rule in this province is that somehow the NDP are antibusiness. Of course, that stereotype and misunderstanding is promulgated by members of the other side of the House. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth, so I really wanted to give the opportunity to our Minister of Economic Development and Trade, who's doing an amazing job, specifically with – for me, whenever I'm out in the community, I talk about the Alberta export expansion program, the way that we're working with farmers and agriculture to add value to the agricultural products here in the province and, of course, innovation.

I see here on page 34 that there's a transfer amount of \$10 million that's going to be put towards the Alberta carbon conversion technology centre. This is an incredible innovation that's being supported here in our province, and I want the minister to comment on that and give us more details about it.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I'll thank the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for the question. I'm quite excited about this. This is a partnership between the province of Alberta, the private sector, and the federal government, so what this is technically, as far as on paper, is a transfer from the expense category over to the capital investment category. The \$10 million that we've delivered through Alberta Innovates is for this facility, the carbon conversion technology centre. This was a partnership, like I said, between industry through COSIA, Canada's Oil Sands Innovation Alliance, the federal government, and Xprize.

What this facility does is that it's attached to the Shepard natural gas facility in Calgary. What they are doing is taking carbon dioxide emissions and turning it into useful products, so taking what was a by-product or a waste product or a leftover and converting it into useful products. One company, that was one of the quarter-finalists, is taking that and injecting it into cement, and what it actually does is that it makes cement about 30 per cent stronger. It's actually less expensive because you can think of it as a bit of a filler. It makes the cement greener. We're not just sequestering carbon; we're now turning it into a useful product.

There are a number of other companies that are in there commercializing their ideas. They've already been tested in a lab. This facility helps them to commercialize it and bring it to market. We are very excited to partner with industry. Here's a great example of an investment that not only aligns with our climate leadership plan but has the potential to deliver significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, diversifying our economy, creating new jobs, so we were quite excited when I made that announcement in March of last year. It was a little over 12 months ago – or exactly 12 months ago; pardon me – that we announced this facility. Obviously, it's up and running, and I'm quite excited at the opportunities.

5:00

This is another prime example of innovation that is going on in Alberta in our oil and gas sector, our energy sector, that will continue to ensure that Alberta is a world leader when it comes to the environment and the economy and our energy sector. So we're very proud to be partnering with those companies and other orders of government.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, once again. I see that I probably have about 30 seconds left. I want to congratulate the Minister of Economic Development and Trade on this incredible innovation that's happening right here in the province. It's projects like these that are going to help create a sustainable economy with great, mortgage-paying jobs here in the province. I look forward to more projects like this here in the province, that our government can participate in.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak on the Official Opposition side? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to go back and forth with the minister of agriculture if I could.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. You have 10 minutes.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you. If it's okay with the minister, I'd like to go doing that. Madam Chair, I'll be splitting my time at some point with my compatriot who is the critic for forestry, so I'll be going strictly on the agricultural side of it for now.

Under this ask of \$257,223,000 in addition to the little over \$4.5 million made available from lower than budgeted expenses elsewhere in the ministry, it's incumbent on us to find out what that money is for. Minister, I see that \$56,881,000 is needed to fill a gap in the department's grant to Agriculture Financial Services. As you know, that corporation has in the past been somewhat beleaguered on the management side of things, so I was wanting to know if that

is the province's share for AgriStability and AgriInsurance, since the last time around you were \$35.5 million short. That's about \$90 million dollars over the last few seasons that you've underbudgeted on that line item, and I was wondering if you could give me some background as to why the low budgeting and what those reasons might be.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Chair and the member for the question. As I'm sure the member is aware, you know, you can't predict what Mother Nature might do in any given year. You can somewhat predict what the markets might be doing.

I'll split this answer a little bit. A large chunk of that supplementary estimate of \$56.8 million, \$53.4 million, is earmarked for AgriStability. AgriStability was going to be implemented a lot because of the reduction in commodity prices for beef in the year 2016. Many people realize that the price for beef did go down quite a bit that year. We saw about a 30 per cent decrease. We haven't seen a decrease like that since 2003 or so, the BSE scare. It was a hit to our producers. It wasn't easy to predict, so it wasn't included in the budget.

This has been going on for over 10 years now, how we do budgets in Agriculture and Forestry. We have a base budget that supplies the ability to run the base programs, to keep the lights on, if you will, but we can't predict necessarily how the year is going to be. In AgriStability we couldn't predict necessarily that the market was going to take a crash. That's why we have to come back for supplementary estimates, to ask for the money to be able to pay our obligation around AgriStability.

It's also important to note that AgriStability is 60 per cent federal government and 40 per cent provincial. This is our share to ensure that the AgriStability program does what it's designed to do, and that's to pay out those programs. As I'm sure the member would agree, you know, that AgriStability needs a little bit of tweaking. We did have the ability to do some of that tweaking last year. It'll take shape now with the new Canadian agricultural partnership program and with AFSC.

Now, the second half was AgriInsurance, and that's actually, you know, a fairly low amount as compared to other years: \$3.4 million. We had, as I've answered previously, a fairly good, average year last year in agriculture. We had some really good crops, you know, in northern Alberta. We had some fair crops in central Alberta. For the unirrigated acres in southern Alberta it was a fairly dry year. The irrigated acres because of the heat in the year did actually really well. We had, you know, about 60 or so specialty crops grown in southern Alberta, and I think that's amazing: 1.7 million acres of irrigated land in southern Alberta. They always have pretty good water. We had some good snow packs, as we do this year, so I'm looking forward to some good years there.

To summarize, we can't predict necessarily what the weather is going to do, how it's going shape up. This is how budgets have worked for over 10 years now. You know, look for the base funding, and unless nothing happens, unless there are no hail claims, unless everything is perfect in our total 50 million acres of agricultural land in Alberta, it's going to happen where there are going to be hail problems, a crash in commodity prices in whatever commodity that might be, or, like we saw last year, dry conditions.

Thank you.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks, Mr. Minister. I was able to attend yesterday at the supply management function with you and visited with – and I'll give absolute and great kudos to one of your staffers

– Mr. Dave Burdek. He's well versed in this. Could you tell me some of the lessons that have been learned from the unharvested crop disaster, if you have some ideas as to how time and money could be saved? As you know, the funding to the producers needs to be timely.

The Deputy Chair: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Chair, and to the member for the question. It is a very good question. Without a doubt, when we had those unharvested acres, we hadn't seen that many unharvested acres for about 50 years. It wasn't a situation that AFSC or our producers or the province or, frankly, anybody was used to in our collective memory. There were some lessons learned there without a doubt. We had an ability to direct AFSC to have a look at how they're doing inspections for those unharvested acres. They had the ability to speed up that process a bit and the ability to do a bit less sampling so that process would be speeded up. That was still going to be a judgment call of the inspectors. We need to trust in the training and the ability and the experience of our inspectors when they go out, you know, to make some of those judgment calls.

Without a doubt, we did learn some lessons there from, like I say, an incident that's only happened twice in 50 years. You know, the programs are there. The programs are robust. In many ways the AgriInsurance programs that we have with AFSC are the envy of the country, perhaps the envy of the continent. I have got a lot of confidence in how the programs are running, but whatever we can learn – sometimes those experiences are hard-luck experiences, as we had with unharvested acres because of extreme, wet conditions. If we can learn something from that to make our systems that much better, then we should take advantage of that. Sometimes those are hard lessons to learn after something happens.

It's hard to predict, again, what weather might do. Here's a weather event that was highly unusual. It is a bit of a reactive process, where we're learning something that's happened. Again, it's so hard to predict, next to impossible to predict, what exactly weather is going to do. But we did learn some lessons there and hope that they're incorporated in AFSC and that we don't anytime soon have that many unharvested acres in the province.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks, Minister. Last year there was \$25,503,000 for the department's grant to AFSC's agriculture income support program, and you've touched briefly on some of that. The question this year is that you're asking for another \$53,430,000 for income support. In previous years this is used, as you've discussed, for things like low beef prices, the bovine TB program. Could you itemize what this large amount is for in this case? In such years of the bovine TB issue, which was a good part in the southern part of the riding of Drumheller-Stettler, the federal government actually rebated the province back a substantial part of the AgriStability money, or there was a cost share. If you could go into that, please. Could you also advise if you're expecting any sort of rebate from the federal jurisdiction this year?

5:10

The Deputy Chair: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Chair. I'm always looking for money from the feds, Member, but there are two different programs here. I want to address that first. There's AgriStability and AgriRecovery. It was the AgriRecovery program that took place with the bovine tuberculosis crisis that we had, and that's a different program. There are different parameters that have to be met for AgriRecovery to take place. It was AgriRecovery that you were mentioning, not

AgriStability, that actually kicked in to assist our producers with the bovine tuberculosis programs that we had there.

You know, of special note to the producers down there that had this bovine tuberculosis issue: I want to thank them, the producers, the municipalities, and, frankly, the federal government and our own government for the quick response they had. I've heard from producers down there that they were extremely appreciative even though this was in many ways a tragedy, where many have lost their entire herds.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now return to the government side. You have 10 minutes. Would you like to go back and forth, hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie?

Loyola: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to turn my questions once again to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. But before I ask her a question, I just wanted to actually thank a number of my colleagues here from the government benches. Last weekend we joined a number of women and supporters of the Me Too movement out on the steps of the Legislature. I wanted to bring attention to that gathering, that rally, and the fact that a lot of the speakers at that rally were incredibly grateful for the amount of money that went to help with sexual assault here in the province of Alberta and in building more awareness around that and what we need to do. I think that it's very important for every member of this House to become more informed about the Me Too movement and – I've said this before in this House – especially me myself as a cisgendered male to acknowledge how I can be a better ally to women, especially those who are survivors of sexual assault, and how we can do better. We can do better in this province.

I'm really glad to see that a specific amount of money has gone to the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services, the grant specifically, in order to help a lot of those organizations, and I'm hoping that the Minister of Justice can elaborate on her feelings about why this is so important and why we need to continue to fund and create awareness around the issue.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, and thank you for the very important question. This, of course, voted supply amount is going to fall into Justice as well as Community and Social Services, a couple of other ministries. I think this initiative was ultimately spearheaded by the Minister of Status of Women, and I think this is a fantastic initiative. Obviously, the rise of the Me Too movement and a number of other factors have sort of combined to create a situation where women are finally feeling comfortable coming forward and sharing their stories. I think that that's just fantastic.

As a result of that, though, the demand for counselling services throughout the province has massively increased, and I think, on the one hand, that's really, really good because it means that people are going forward and they're seeking the help that they need in order to deal with their feelings and in order to deal with often the very traumatic things that have happened to them. But because there was such an increased demand for counselling, we were hearing from AASAS and their partners. That's the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services. Many of their members were having a lot of trouble meeting the need for counselling, so the wait times for folks to be able to get into that sort of counselling were getting quite lengthy.

Of course, as we all know, when someone is dealing with a traumatic issue like that, when they have the tenacity and the ability to come forward and to discuss that, it's important to deal with that

trauma right away. Those wait times, we thought, were not acceptable, so we were able to provide this grant and to support that community organization in delivering these services to women throughout the province. We're very excited to have been able to do that, and we really hope that that's able to help many survivors.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Loyola: I want to thank the minister for that answer. I think it's really important that we continue to do our very best, all members of this House, to continue doing what we can to create more awareness around the issue.

I'd like to turn my questions now to the Minister of Community and Social Services, a good friend of mine. I cannot tell you the number of people who come into my constituency office on a regular basis that get services from this ministry. It's not necessarily a bad thing. It's just demonstrating that we have this incredible ministry that provides services. I know that it's stretched in terms of funding, but hopefully that will change as the recovery grows and the tax base grows as more people get more jobs with this recovery coming on and, of course, also by the fact that we have the \$25-a-day daycare program, which means that more women will be able to get into the workforce as well and will also increase the tax base here in the province of Alberta.

To the Minister of Community and Social Services. I know that the economy is looking up, but we also know that there's a lot more work to do. We also need to ensure that no one gets left behind. How is your ministry protecting services that Albertans rely on?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Member, for the question. It's a quite broad question, so I can talk about all my supplementary estimates, I think, in answer to this question. What we have done in this estimate is that we have added \$239 million to support the services that we provide. Essentially, we were faced with the choice that either we stand with Albertans and provide the services they need or we turn our backs. But we stood with Albertans, and we have pretty much strengthened and improved all services that Albertans depend on; for instance, employment and income support. We have seen a huge increase in the number of Albertans seeking those supports, so we were able to provide additional funding there to support the staff and to support Albertans who are seeking those supports.

Similarly, with the assured income for handicapped people, the AISH program, there were a number of individuals who were seeking those supports, and our caseload was a bit higher than usual, so we added \$23 million to make sure that anybody who is qualified to get AISH gets the support that they need.

Persons with developmental disabilities program. That's another important program. It's designed to include individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. We added \$46 million to make sure that Albertans with intellectual disabilities get the support they need and they deserve.

5:20

In terms of family supports for children with disabilities, we added \$19 million to make sure that families are getting the supports they need with their loved ones who have intellectual disabilities.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

We also added \$5.1 million to community supports and family safety programs, line item 6, and I just want to touch on that a little

bit. As the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General mentioned, we've worked with the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services from pretty much the day we became government. First, we provided them \$800,000 to support an award-winning campaign, the I Believe You campaign, essentially to raise awareness about how to respond to survivors when they do seek out support and do disclose. They need and deserve to be believed. That campaign, coupled with other social media campaigns like Me Too, encouraged many survivors to come forward, and in 2016 we saw that increase in counselling wait times and for supports for sexual assault survivors. At that point we provided \$1.6 million to specifically address the caseload counselling wait times. Then in the fall the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services asked for \$8.1 million.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

We now revert to the Official Opposition. Member for Little Bow, would you like to share your time with the minister?

Mr. Schneider: If the minister is agreeable with that, back and forth.

As my colleague from Drumheller-Stettler mentioned already, this year the supplementary supply for Ag and Forestry is \$257,223,000 in addition to \$4.5 million made available from lower than budgeted expenses elsewhere in your ministry. Because I don't have very much time, I'll just ask some pretty pointed questions. Where did the \$86,000 in savings come from that you mention in the supplementary supply description?

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Chair. I would make a small suggestion that there was a little bit of noise from my side of the House and I couldn't quite hear the question, but I know he's talking about wildfires, the budgeting. You know, last year we had, for lack of a better term, a fairly lesser fire season than we've seen in the past. There were only 1,231 wildfires in 2017, 49,000 hectares. It sounds like a lot, but when you compare that to previous years – we, of course, remember the Horse River wildfire in and around Fort McMurray, that devastated Fort McMurray. That was only one of the extreme fire events that we actually had that year.

On wildfire preparedness, \$38 million more was spent in 2016 than in 2017. Actually, 2015 was a bigger year than we saw when we had the Fort McMurray fire, so there were more forest fires, more wildland fires in 2015 than 2016. Last year we were showing a little bit less of a wildfire season. But how do we do budgets? We can't predict wildfires, obviously. There's a base budget that will go a long way to supplying the crews with what they need: recruitment, getting equipment ready, putting the lights on, and getting ready for the fire season. Then, as the fire season progresses, we're able to find out and then know the actual costs of fighting those wildfires.

Mr. Schneider: Is any of the money that's being asked for through supplementary supply earmarked to improve communications between all facets of the fire response agencies? I think, as we've all seen, we do have a problem there.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the member. Even though that's a really good question, that would probably be a better question addressed to Municipal Affairs.

Having said that, I know that even with the wildfires that we had in southwestern Alberta last year that came out of the national park,

there were issues around communication. I think there's an ability, an opportunity for all levels of government within Alberta to be able to increase that. This funding doesn't necessarily go to address that. Those were actually some of the recommendations that came out of the Horse River wildfire as well. The three commissioned reports, that were commissioned by all three levels of government, you know, made similar recommendations. This budget won't necessarily address that. Like I say, that probably would be a question that would be best asked of Municipal Affairs.

This supplementary estimate funding will go a long way to pay for those expenses that were for fighting those wildfires. These are a breakdown for anything from, you know, extra wages and benefits to supplies and services to contract services to aircraft parts, everything that has to go towards making sure that we're ready to do what our women and men in the wildland fire service do, and that's protect their communities, protect Alberta, and protect lives, industry as well. They do good work, and this obviously is going to be funds available for them to continue that good work.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Minister. So no point in me asking questions about communications?

Mr. Carlier: You can ask.

Mr. Schneider: Do I understand that Municipal Affairs takes care of the communications for forestry?

Mr. Carlier: No. Without a doubt, you know, there are communication systems within forestry as well. Sorry, Member; I think you're wondering about the co-ordination between them. The co-ordination between the different levels of government, whether it's provincial or municipal governments or the emergency services, frankly: you know, that is being looked at through Justice and Municipal Affairs. We would have, I suspect, a say in that to make sure that Agriculture and Forestry is part of that co-ordination. It hasn't necessarily been focused as coming out of this ministry but others.

Mr. Schneider: There's a business called Viking Air down in Calgary. Now, they have purchased from Bombardier a piece of equipment called a Super Scooper. We won't rhyme anything with that, but this is a piece of equipment that has been fantastic, sold all over the world, to scoop water up for firefighting. Now, I understand that their board of directors has put forward questions to go out and sell the Super Scoopers to anybody that can stand to take one. I just wonder if your ministry had talked to Viking Air of Calgary about this newer technology.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Chair. Thank you to the member. Yeah, I'm aware of this company that is making these Super Scoopers, a somewhat unfortunate name, maybe, in some respects. It is something that this government supports. Important to note, though – you know, I'm not trying to anticipate your additional questions, Member – that the government of Alberta owns four air tankers. Other air tankers or aircraft that are needed to fight wildfires are on a contract basis. This is a Calgary-based company. I would encourage those contractors, if they're looking to retrofit or perhaps buy new equipment, to look at this company. It's a great Alberta product. I can't dictate that they should, but I'm hoping that they would consider it.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Chair. We own four tankers; we lease the rest. Is that a good hybrid, cross, mix? Is it better to own some and lease some? I mean, has your ministry done any kind of analysis as to leasing them all or owning them all? Just a question.

The Acting Chair: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Member. You know, that's actually a fascinating question. I think that it has worked well in the past. I don't anticipate that there's anything to be fixed to make it work better. We have the ability with crossjurisdictional agreements, both within Canada and to the United States and even around the world, for resources of either human power or equipment to make sure that we have the necessary resources to fight our wildfires and, as well, to help out our neighbours in their wildfire-fighting seasons.

5:30

As we saw and as I noted, last year Alberta had a fairly – not a very big wildfire season. We didn't have a large number of wildfires. B.C. unfortunately did, right? So we had the ability to assist them. That assistance was mostly in the form of people power, not so much resources. But those contractors as well have the ability to go across boundaries. Also, we do contract people power as well, you know, boots on the ground. Some of those are contract crews. Some of them are crews that are on standby; others are not. Crews that are not strictly on standby will have the ability as well that if there's a wildfire season that's worse, like we saw last year in B.C., they're able to go across the border and do what they're trained to do and, frankly, make some money doing it. That's worked well. It's a bit of a comparison to our contractors as well. Even though our contractors are under contract to ensure the safety and well-being of Albertans, if our season is low, they do have an ability to go across the border and assist our neighbours across the continent.

I think that currently the system is working well or is working like it should be working, but I would welcome any suggestions, you know, like if the province of Alberta should be buying more aircraft. That might not necessarily be a bad idea.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: I think I've got 30 seconds, so I might only get the question in. Being that we're talking about B.C. and the fires that they had, has your ministry developed any new strategies to combat the pine beetle problem within forestry so that we don't experience those devastating fires that British Columbia experienced with dead and unharvestable wood, strictly a pine beetle issue? I just wondered if the ministry of forestry had done any more work . . .

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. Would you like to share your time with the minister?

Loyola: Yes, I will share time with the Minister of Community and Social Services, Mr. Chair. It's along the same vein as I was asking the Minister of Justice in terms of the monies provided for the Sexual Assault Centre and creating awareness around that. I believe it is in the \$5.1 million for family and community safety that monies from this ministry have also been allocated, but I'm not a hundred per cent sure on all the details of that. To the minister of community services: I'm hoping that you can provide some more detail on some of the grant funding provided through your ministry for this particular issue.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Member. As I was discussing earlier, we have worked with the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services from day one. Initially we provided them a grant of \$800,000 for the I Believe You campaign, then \$1.6 million for counselling wait times. Then last fall, when we met – the Minister of Justice, Status of Women, and my ministry – we were all working with them on a business plan, and they presented a business plan of \$8.1 million for all three ministers. We did provide them \$4.1 million in operational funding, and that was an ask above and beyond what we already provided them. So we funded their entire business case, and \$5.1 million was the share that Community and Social Services provided out of that \$8.1 million in funding.

Our hope is that this funding will go a long way in responding to the survivors who are coming forward and providing them with the supports they need, crisis support and counselling support. The funding that was provided by Justice and Solicitor General will go to facilitating survivors in court processes. If they choose to pursue those matters in the courts, then that funding will support them with the court process. That increase of \$5.1 million in the community supports grant is exclusively for the business case that the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services provided us.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I notice here, too, that there are two line items dedicated to persons with disabilities and the supports that are provided for them. I'm fairly familiar with the supports provided for adults in the province. Could you go into a little bit more detail about the difference in the supports for children with disabilities and what your ministry is providing for them, Minister?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the member for the question. As you mentioned, the persons with developmental disabilities program, the PDD program, provides supports to adult Albertans with disabilities, and as the name suggests, the family support for children with disabilities program provides supports to families who have children with disabilities. Supplementary funding is needed to address the caseload growth in this area, and we are asking for \$19.8 million. This year the family support for children with disabilities caseload is projected to grow by 10.7 per cent, nearly 12,500 people. There are many reasons for that, I guess, more awareness about the programs that government is providing and more families seeking those supports for their loved ones.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd now like to go back and forth with the Minister of Children's Services if she doesn't mind, just to ask her a couple of questions there. I'm going to start with a relatively broad question. I couldn't imagine not following through with the amount requested. I believe it's \$46.9 million for child intervention to address the higher caseloads. To the minister: what would happen if we chose not to fund this? What detrimental effect would that have?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the very important question. I think it's, again, important to recognize that caseloads are not numbers on a balance sheet. They're really about real people, real Albertans, real children in real families that absolutely need the supports that we provide in order to have the very best outcome. Those children, those families count on us to ensure that the supports we provide are there to keep their children's future bright and to invest in those opportunities for those children to thrive.

Certainly, some of the important work that we're doing is providing those wraparound services to families to help ensure that children stay with their families and don't enter into care. Certainly, what would be put into jeopardy by not providing those services, Madam Chair, would be that we actually would start to see an increase again in children in care. There's been important work done within Children's Services and with the staff, with tremendous commitment of our front-line staff, to wraparound families to keep children safe in their families, in their homes instead of the disruption of having to apprehend them and bring them into care.

5:40

We've seen a reduction in the number of children being brought into care, which, certainly, evidence shows is incredibly important to the children of this province. We want to be able to continue that. We want to be able to provide support to those families. We want to provide the services that they need to help parents to be at their very best and to keep those families together. Certainly, without this investment, we would be seeing children not getting the support they needed, families not getting the support they needed. Instead of being held together, families would be torn apart, and instead of children having all the opportunities they need to grow and thrive, they might not even be receiving the supports that they need in order to be able to move forward.

I'm really thankful for the support of everyone in this House to recognize the value of quality child intervention services. This government will continue to be committed to supporting the work that our committed front-line workers do to provide every child who comes into their care and every family that comes into their care with the support they need in order to have those good outcomes.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you once again, Madam Chair. Our government is working really hard to make life more affordable for Alberta families, and of course this ministry specifically has a lot to do with that. I'm hoping, Minister, that you can go into a little bit more detail on how the funds provided through your ministry ensure support for Alberta's children and youth.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the question. We have a wide variety of services that we provide. We've talked about child intervention quite a bit, you know, and talked with other members of this House about supports for permanency and about providing supports for adoptive parents and private guardians to be able to support the children to the best of their ability with that additional support as well as helping those young adults who have been in care successfully transition to adulthood. So some amazing work is happening there.

I think one of the things that a lot of Albertans are excited about is the work that we're doing around supporting access to quality

early learning and child care programs. Certainly, there's a lot of evidence to show that investing in those early years, investing in those years when we know, as evidence shows, that brain development is so important – that early childhood development sets the framework and the baseline from which children can grow into their full potential. Investments in those times have, certainly, a return that's greatly multiplied over time.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll now return to the Official Opposition side. The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

The Deputy Chair: Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Chestermere is a great place but a long way from Sundre. A very different elevation, Madam Chair.

Mrs. Aheer: Is it the golden jewel?

Mr. Nixon: Yeah. Exactly.

The Deputy Chair: You have 10 minutes. Would you like to go back and forth?

Mr. Nixon: I'd like to go back and forth with the Justice minister if possible, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Please go ahead.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to start off with the \$18.9 million that the Justice minister is asking for in supplementary supply, that's stated for the RCMP. Her department, you will know, recently announced a \$10 million investment in RCMP officers and Crown prosecutors, \$8 million for RCMP officers and \$2 million for Crown prosecutors. My curiosity is up as I look at this number to know if any of this number will be going towards paying for part of that investment in the short term to get officers into our communities. The reason I would ask is that the reality – and I think that if the Justice minister has taken any time to come and talk to any of our communities, and I'm not sure she has, but if she has, she will have heard from the RCMP and from the detachments that they do not have enough officers in the depot in Saskatchewan to be able to fill positions at all, right now anyway.

In fact, Madam Chair, right now Lacombe county, which I have the privilege of representing, Red Deer county, which I have the privilege of representing, Ponoka county, which I have the privilege of representing, Mountain View county, which I have the privilege of representing, and Clearwater county, which I have the privilege of representing, are all going forward with investing their ratepayers' money in police officers in their community. Lacombe county and Red Deer county in particular have now been waiting upwards of two years to get an officer because of that investment. If this amount of money that I'm talking about right now in supplementary supply is being invested into the government's promise to be able to put boots on the ground in our communities, the question then becomes: how is that possible? If we can't get an officer with a two-year wait, how is the government going to be able to get officers in the period of time between now and when the budget comes down? You know, it begs the further question, Madam Chair, of how the government is going to follow through on their promise when there are no officers in the community. That is one of the first questions that I'd be curious to hear about.

I'm also interested in the \$810,000 amount that's for the municipal policing grant. The same question: will that go to helping

communities that are investing in officers or in administration staff? That's another issue. Again, if the minister has taken some time to talk to communities, I'm sure that she has heard that there's a need to invest in administration staff to be able to get our existing officers out actually working in the field and not in the office doing paperwork. And if that amount is being invested into those, will it be prioritized for rural communities, that are receiving an epidemic proportion of crime, as you know, Madam Chair?

I know that just recently, it seems, the government is starting to come around to recognizing what is taking place in rural Alberta, so I suspect that maybe they are looking at that with supplementary supply. Of course, the last time that we talked about this in great detail in this Chamber, the government denied that that epidemic was happening inside our communities and, in fact, denied an emergency debate, so maybe they have chosen not to put that in supplementary supply. But based on their announcements in the last few days, I find that interesting.

The other question I have is: in what ways is any of this supplementary supply by this ministry being used to deal with the unique problem that we're facing in rural Alberta communities in regard to crime? I think this minister has indicated in the press lately and in answers to questions inside this Chamber that the government is finally taking this issue seriously. The proof will be in the pudding, so to speak, Madam Chair. But we're excited to see at least that, you know, again, like with so many issues that we've talked about in this Chamber, we lead. The government is finally following.

The people back home in my communities right now don't have time anymore to wait. The people that are facing home invasions and constant victimization from crimes don't have time to wait, the people that are waiting on this Justice minister to pick up the phone – maybe she'll use some of supplemental supply to do that – to call the federal Justice minister and start lobbying for Criminal Code reform to make sure people in my communities aren't being convicted 51 times and then coming back and revictimizing people in our communities. [interjection] The hon. Member for West Yellowhead may think that's funny, but I can assure you that people in my community do not.

My first set of questions to the minister. What in the supplementary supply is she using for that rural crime problem? And will she use any of it to finally come and visit and talk to the rural people that are being impacted by crime in central Alberta, or will she continue to stay in Edmonton and not talk to us?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. There was a bunch of stuff going on in those questions. I'm going to try to address them in roughly the order in which they were posed. Obviously, we've been hearing from rural Albertans about their concerns, and we take those concerns very, very seriously. That's why we announced funding for a strategy to address what's going on in rural Alberta.

I'd like to note that since the member seems to editorialize, I'll feel free to do so as well. I'd like to note that when his leader was asked in Olds just recently about what their plan was, he said that they needed a year to develop their policy. I agree with the member. I think that the time for action is now, and that's why we're taking action right now.

With respect to this \$18.9 million to address the RCMP contract, that's actually a number that relates to a slightly different thing although, interestingly, quite related to the issue that he identified. We've heard from a number of communities as well that there are

concerns with being able to recruit and retain RCMP officers in certain areas. One of the reasons for that is, as the member will no doubt be aware, there was a Supreme Court ruling a couple of years ago that the RCMP were permitted to bargain collectively, so they have been in the process of attempting to pick a representative in order to do that. That process continues to be ongoing.

In the interim the federal minister – I can't remember his exact title – of public safety or public security had allowed an increase in the salaries of RCMP officers, and in part that was intended to address the fact that they're having trouble retaining people because while this process of waiting for the collective bargaining to work itself out goes on, those officers were not receiving any increases, so that had created that problem. As a result, he approved a certain number of increases over a couple of different years, and some of them are retroactive. So this \$18.9 million is actually going to address that contract. Because the province contracts through the PPSA and we pay for policing for rural communities and for communities with 5,000 people or fewer, unlike other municipalities, this is our portion of that. Because the salaries of those officers have increased and there's some back pay that results from that, this number is going to pay directly to those front-line officers, so that's a contract piece there.

5:50

The \$0.8 million for municipal police assistance grants: that requires a little bit of explanation. Alberta is actually, I'm very proud to say, a province that invests more into policing than any of our western neighbours. The way we do that is twofold. For rural municipalities and urbans under 5,000 the province pays for policing subject, of course, as the member has noted, to the fact that they can contract for additional officers by paying for those officers. For other urban centres they pay for their policing, and the province supports them in three ways. We support them through police officer grants, returned fine revenues, and municipal police assistance grants, which is noted here.

In this case the increase relates to the fact that those municipal police assistance grants are based on population, so because the final population numbers came in a little bit higher, essentially there's a little bit more money that's owed to those municipalities to support them in paying for policing. That's what's going on there.

The member also asked a question about civilian staff. That isn't represented here, but in the announcement we made with respect to the RCMP, that's exactly what we're doing. Part of that will be to hire 40 civilian staff. Some of them will be placed in crime reduction units doing intelligence-led policing, and some of them will be placed, 23 of them, in a special unit that will allow RCMP officers to call in and make certain reports. As the member will no doubt be aware, sometimes the uplinks in the cars, the ability of the officer to put their report on those uplinks from the cars, aren't able to make it. The result is that those RCMP officers have to drive from wherever the crime was committed back all the way to their detachments, and sometimes that's quite a long distance, as the member is no doubt aware.

Those civilian employees will enable the officers to phone in certain very basic reports and have civilian employees do that data input, and then those officers are able to stay in their communities. We've certainly heard from those communities that one of their big concerns is about visibility.

I think that answers all of the questions. I tried to write them all down. Thank you very much.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I will point out one thing in response to the minister. Our leader, as she pointed out, was referring to a year, but what he was referring to was that if we are fortunate enough to replace this government in a year, we would finally have to take action because the government has chosen until now not to take action. You know, it begs the question from hearing the monologue from the minister: what has taken her so long as the Minister of Justice to take action despite being warned by rural Albertans for over a year that this was taking place? For over a year to leave rural Alberta completely abandoned while being victimized is a real shame.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We will now return to the government side. Are there any other members wishing to speak? Hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, you have one minute to go back and forth if you would like.

Mr. Malkinson: Oh, wow. Thank you, Chair. I was wondering. There is an amount in estimates for Economic Development and Trade regarding the Alberta carbon conversion technology centre. I wonder if the minister could tell us about what that's for.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister for Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I'll thank the member for the question. Essentially, what we're doing here is transferring \$10 million from the expense category over to the capital investment category. This isn't an increase, and the funding was required to address the capital investment for the building of the facility. This is a partnership between the private sector, the government of Alberta, partnering as well with the federal government to essentially turn carbon dioxide emissions into useful and usable products. It is an incredible story which I look forward to telling the House more about at my next opportunity.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. Oh. I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee shall now rise and report progress.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

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

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration the supplementary supply estimates for the fiscal year ending 2017-18, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

The Acting Speaker: Having heard the report, all those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed, please say no. So ordered.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Given the time and the progress we've made today, I move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 9 tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m.]

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