



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 19, 2018

Day 6

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

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (UCP),
Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition
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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (NDP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (NDP)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP),
Alberta Party Opposition House Leader
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (NDP)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (NDP)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP)
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (NDP),
Government Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (UCP)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (NDP)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UCP)
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (NDP)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP),
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Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (AP)
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Deputy Government House Leader
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (UCP),
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Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (UCP)
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (NDP)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (NDP)
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Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (NDP)
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Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (UCP)
Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
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Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (NDP)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP)
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Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UCP)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (UCP)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (NDP)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
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Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Conklin
Vacant, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake

Party standings:

New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 25 Alberta Party: 3 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 1 Vacant: 2

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| Shaye Anderson | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Deron Bilous | Minister of Economic Development and Trade |
| Oneil Carlier | Minister of Agriculture and Forestry |
| Joe Ceci | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| David Eggen | Minister of Education |
| Richard Feehan | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Kathleen T. Ganley | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
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| Sandra Jansen | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Danielle Larivee | Minister of Children's Services |
| Brian Mason | Minister of Transportation |
| Margaret McCuaig-Boyd | Minister of Energy |
| Stephanie V. McLean | Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women |
| Ricardo Miranda | Minister of Culture and Tourism |
| Brandy Payne | Associate Minister of Health |
| Shannon Phillips | Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office |
| Irfan Sabir | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Marlin Schmidt | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Lori Sigurdson | Minister of Seniors and Housing |

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| Jessica Littlewood | Economic Development and Trade for Small Business |
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Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

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Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

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| Clark | Horne |
| Cyr | McKitrick |
| Dang | Turner |
| Ellis | |

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

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| Fitzpatrick | Taylor |
| Gotfried | |

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
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| Ellis | Orr |
| Hinkley | Renaud |
| Horne | Shepherd |
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| McKitrick | Yao |
| McPherson | |

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
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| Kleinsteuber | |

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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| Cooper | Nixon |
| Dang | Piquette |
| Jabbour | Pitt |
| Luff | Schreiner |
| McIver | |

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms Kazim
Deputy Chair: Connolly

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| Babcock | Rosendahl |
| Drever | Stier |
| Drysdale | Strankman |
| Hinkley | Sucha |
| Kleinsteuber | Taylor |
| McKitrick | |

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

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| Carson | Loyola |
| Coolahan | Miller |
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| Goehring | Nixon |
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| Hanson | van Dijken |
| Kazim | |

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

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| Luff | |

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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| Dang | McPherson |
| Fraser | Nielsen |
| Hanson | Rosendahl |
| Kazim | Woollard |
| Kleinsteuber | Vacant |
| Loewen | |

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 19, 2018

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I hope you noticed that it was very springlike last week, largely as a result of the warmth and welcome of this House, I'm sure. So as the snow came, I would hope that you'll bring that warmth back so the snow will know its day has passed.

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon, hon. members.

Please bow your heads. Let us reflect as we commence proceedings today in this Assembly. Let us contemplate our opportunity to once again work together to find a way in which our collective efforts will make our world and our province better. As we move forward, let us also reflect on all the families who have shared the burdens of public life.

As is our custom, hon. members, we pay tribute to members and former members of the Assembly who have recently passed away.

Mrs. Mary Jean LeMessurier
June 12, 1929, to March 11, 2018

The Speaker: Mrs. Mary Jean LeMessurier was elected as the Progressive Conservative Member for Edmonton-Centre on March 14, 1979, and on March 23 of that year was named to the cabinet as the minister responsible for culture, a position she held for two terms of service. In 1984 Mary LeMessurier – we're working on the French and the English – became the first woman inducted into the honorary Kainai chieftainship of the Kainai Blood Tribe. In 1986 she was appointed Alberta's agent general in the United Kingdom and in Europe. Among the honours she received were the establishment of the Mary LeMessurier award for the study of history through the Canadian centennial scholarship fund and being appointed a member of the Order of Canada in 1998. Mrs. LeMessurier passed away on March 11, 2018, at the age of 88.

In a moment of silent reflection I would ask that you remember Mrs. LeMessurier as you may have known her.

Hon. members, please join me in the singing of *O Canada* led by Mr. R.J. Chambers in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all of us command.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, with our admiration, respect, and gratitude to the members of the families who shared the burdens of public life and public service, today I would like to welcome the members of the LeMessurier family who are present in the Speaker's gallery. Please rise as I call your name and remain

standing until all have been introduced: Tim LeMessurier, son of Mrs. LeMessurier; her daughters, Willa Jamieson and Jil Lee; and her daughter-in-law, Tammy Banting. Please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of incredibly bright, intelligent students from the Belvedere elementary school in my riding of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. They are here all week for the School at the Legislature program, which, I must say, is an incredible program. I love the fact that another one of my schools is taking advantage of this program. I've heard nothing but positive things about it, a tribute to the folks running it. They're accompanied by two of their teachers, Shannah Calp and Lona Ani, along with a chaperone, Gesenia Gonzalez. I'd ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. M. le Président, c'est avec fierté que je me lève à la Chambre aujourd'hui pour introduire the students of l'école Father Jan. The students are accompanied by their teacher, Natalie Jurick, along with their chaperones, Tim Dakin, Sherlyne Javier, and Sarah Moellenbeck. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups today?

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly four outstanding educators. Frank Durante, Patricia Makowski, and Norman Martin are recent recipients of Canada's outstanding principals award for 2018, and they're joined by Superintendent Mark Rawlek. Principals and superintendents play an important part in supporting students to achieve their dreams, and today I would like to have them stand, please, and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today the Minister of Community and Social Services will be introducing Bill 5, An Act to Strengthen Financial Security for Persons with Disabilities. This bill will build on the work I did as the MLA for Calgary-Currie in bringing forward Bill 201, to allow AISH recipients and their families to have the ability to save for their future. I'd like to introduce a bunch of people who were very helpful in the consultations. Those would be Joan Lee, CEO of Vecova Centre for Disability Services and Research; Gordon VanderLeek of VanderLeek Law, who was very helpful with my consultations on the original bill; and Tina Trigg, who is a family member, and this bill will help make life better for her and her disabled daughter. I ask all these members to rise, and I ask all members of the House to join me in giving these esteemed guests the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-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 two central Alberta constituents, friends of mine. The first is His Worship Mike Yargeau, the mayor of Penhold. I'd ask that he stand up. Along with him is a councillor for Penhold, Mike Walsh, one of the few people in central Alberta that can actually look me in the eye. That's because he's really, really tall. Stand on up, Mike. I'd ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I will be introducing Bill 5, An Act to Strengthen Financial Security for Persons with Disabilities. In the House today are families who will be better able to provide for their own children if this act passes. They're here today with advocates and workers who have helped to call attention to the need for this change. I'm pleased to ask the following families and advocates to rise as I call their names: Kathryn Burke; Donna Desjardins from Inclusion St. Paul; Bruce Uditsky, CEO of Inclusion Alberta; Braden Mole; and Frances Urtasun. I ask all members to please join me in giving these guests the warm traditional welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a group of individuals from northwestern Alberta. If you could stand as I call your names: Cameron Cardinal, councillor for Mackenzie county; Duffy Driedger, councillor for Mackenzie county; Carol Gabriel, Mackenzie county; Josh Knelsen, councillor for Mackenzie county; Ernie Peters, councillor for Mackenzie county; Jacque Bateman, councillor for Mackenzie county and also northwest Species at Risk vice-chair; Amber Bean, councillor and member of northwest Species at Risk also; Eric Jorgensen, councillor, Mackenzie county, Northwest Species at Risk Committee member; Her Worship Crystal McAteer, mayor of High Level, committee member of Northwest Species at Risk; Byron Peters, deputy manager, Mackenzie county administration, lead for Northwest Species at Risk; Kathleen Rukavina, producer, Long Sleeve Productions; Terry Ungarian, reeve, county of Northern Lights; Lisa Wardley, deputy reeve, Mackenzie county, Northwest Species at Risk chair; and Len Racher, CAO, Mackenzie county. If we could please give them the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. Member for St. Albert, do you have a guest?

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Minister of Community and Social Services will be introducing Bill 5, An Act to Strengthen Financial Security for Persons with Disabilities. If the act passes, some Albertans will be better able to provide for their futures and their families' futures. We have in the House today families who will be directly affected and the advocates who have worked hard to bring this issue forward. I'm pleased to ask the following to rise as I call their names: Shyla Masse, Lesley Tabler, and Sherwin Tabler. I ask that all members join me in giving these esteemed guests the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a dear friend of mine, Robert Nygaard. Robert is a councillor and volunteer firefighter for Big Lakes county, in Faust. He is in town for AAMD and C. I owe a lot to Robert for all of his support. He's a key volunteer on the Lesser Slave Lake NDP constituency association. With that, I ask Robert to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mauri Stiff. Mauri, please rise. Mauri is a constituent in Airdrie, and she's here today to witness all the fun that we have. Please give her the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

LGBTQ2S Rights

Connolly: Mr. Speaker, this evening the University of Alberta is holding a panel – I'll be attending along with the Minister of Culture and Tourism – on the Supreme Court of Canada's historic Vriend decision. The Chancellor's Forum features speakers on how only 20 years ago the Supreme Court unanimously ruled it was wrong to fire Delwin Vriend because of his sexual orientation.

The leader of the UCP was an MP at the time. In fact, he was my MP. He often spoke about his extreme views on LGBTQ2S rights. He said he didn't support the Vriend decision. He called on Alberta MLAs to fight the Supreme Court's ruling because it was, quote, a virus. A virus, Mr. Speaker. It's hard to fathom why he called LGBTQ2S rights a virus, but I bet he wasn't talking about the flu.

The Vriend decision was a historic moment, when Alberta's LGBTQ2S community won their rights. I now sit as a proud member of this Assembly, but I now also sit across from that same former MP. He caused harm when he fought so hard against the most basic rights of myself, other members of this Assembly, and the entire LGBTQ2S community. Frankly, I don't know how to feel about that. Should I feel good that after 13 years as my MP fighting against my rights that we now serve as equals in the Legislature? Or should I feel angry that Canada still has politicians who believe that LGBTQ2S community members are lesser citizens for who we love and how we identify? What pains me most is that he may not even realize how much harm he caused for so many by fighting against our human rights for decades.

But I want to give him a chance to state why he thought it was okay to fire a person for being gay, and I welcome him to apologize to Alberta's LGBTQ2S community for his degrading comments. In fact, I welcome him to join me at tonight's public event and make that apology, just as I welcome the progress we've made as a province and as a government to protect the rights of LGBTQ2S people and to put people first.

Caribou Range Plans

Mr. Loewen: While the government is trying to show that it is defending industry in Alberta by its present position on the Trans Mountain pipeline, Alberta industries are also concerned about caribou plans that could negatively affect them. As with the pipeline

issue and carbon taxes, we need this NDP government to stand up for Albertans.

When the Trudeau government does nothing to exert its authority on pipelines and, in fact, cancels them, this government says nothing to its Ottawa friends. When Trudeau says, “Carbon tax,” the NDP ask: how high? Now the federal government says, “Make plans for caribou,” and the NDP jumps to create parks and shut down industry. What’s worse is that they’re trying to do even more than the federal government is requesting. All of this is driven by their ideology of antipipeline, pro tax, and create parks at any cost. There has already been a massive loss of investment in Alberta due to this government, and this ideology will only further the losses until they start trying to make life better for Albertans by supporting and defending Albertans’ rights.

This government’s response to the caribou issue has been wrought with controversy and lack of meaningful consultation. This has caused a lot of anxiety in the communities who rely on resources from the caribou ranges. The province lacks regional plans in most of these areas but is determined to create protected areas with little information on what will and will not happen in these areas. The NDP government also lacks species management plans, begging the question: how can you make such a dramatic change to wildlife management when you have no plans? Some scientists are saying that even if all the recommendations are implemented, the chance of success in creating sustainable caribou populations is about 60 per cent.

This is alarming; 13.4 million hectares, 23 per cent of Alberta, is considered caribou range. We need a plan that will allow both industry to work and caribou to be preserved. It should not be about creating parks and protected areas in order to live up to some arbitrary 17 per cent committed to by the federal government. This should be about the people and the communities, who are more than willing to work with government to create suitable, realistic, and common-sense plans.

Thank you.

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

Rural Crime Prevention

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government prides itself on social policy, but there is no quality of life when people are not safe. The core of social policy is enshrined in the Charter: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof.”

A citizen’s basic right of safety and security must be protected, yet rural Albertans have been and are daily denied this right because of the failure and lack of action of this government’s social and criminal justice policies. This government constantly talks about rural Alberta needing to feel safe, yet criminals are now routinely, repeatedly, and repetitiously targeting rural communities for the most part unopposed.

Police response times are 30 minutes to several hours, so there is effectively no restraining force. If police do arrive, they may not exceed speed limits to chase these attackers, who race away laughing without consequence. Police are understaffed and overwhelmed with paperwork, so they can only deal with the most serious issues, and property crimes are mostly ignored by force of necessity.

When police do apprehend an individual, Crown prosecutors are ordered by the minister to triage the charge, so often the case just gets dropped. Police officers have expressed their frustration with spending a morning preparing documents and then having the Crown tell them that the case will be dropped.

1:50

Only the most serious cases are given the restricted resources of police, prosecutors, judges, and courts. When a case does go to a judge, the majority of offenders are simply released onto the streets again within hours and return to victimizing citizens. The majority of cases are committed by prolific repeat offenders.

This is a complete failure of social justice and fundamental social policy, that innocent citizens are preyed upon multiple times over by the same criminal elements, and the system de facto permits it. The system protects the rights of criminals, who, in turn, abuse the rights of innocent people. The system is thereby complicit in the victimization of its own citizens, and this is a monstrous failure of social policy.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Response to Pipeline Opposition.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the weekend Tzeporah Berman participated in an illegal protest in Burnaby to block the Kinder Morgan pipeline. This individual was appointed by the NDP to co-chair their oil sands advisory group. Will the Premier now admit that it was a mistake to give Ms Berman the credibility of that position, somebody who is willing to facilitate in breaking the law to stop pipelines?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member knows, we’ve long since had Ms Berman leave that role. As we know, since then she’s taken a position with which we do not agree, which is very much on the edge, I would suggest. Frankly, though, what I would also suggest is that positions on the edge are not helpful. So whether you are chaining yourself to things out in B.C. or denying climate change here in Alberta across the aisle, either version doesn’t help get the pipeline built. Our position of dealing with both issues will get the pipeline built.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the problem is that this was a perfect demonstration of the NDP’s lack of judgment, to have appointed somebody who is willing to break the law in their hostility to our energy industry.

The NDP has failed to – the federal NDP has come out in favour of the Leap Manifesto, keep it in the ground. The B.C. NDP is doing everything they can to block our pipelines, NDP mayors in Vancouver and Burnaby. Can the Premier identify a single political party or organization that’s moved from no to yes on pipelines as a result of her carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Interestingly, there was a poll out this weekend in B.C. which showed that support for the pipeline is growing and that opposition against the pipeline is dropping down.

I’d like to take this opportunity right now, actually, to offer my thanks to our minister of environment, who was in the Lower Mainland over the last few days making reasonable, calm, environmental, progressive, sustainable arguments in favour of the

pipelines, speaking to people on open-line shows and standing up for a reasonable approach to getting the pipeline built, Mr. Speaker. That's the way we're going to get this done, and my thanks go to my minister of environment.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the question was whether the Premier could identify a single party, mayor, organization that's moved from no to yes on pipelines as a result of the carbon tax, and let the record show that she could not identify one because there aren't any.

Will the Premier admit that her own federal party, her B.C. cousins, the NDP mayors in British Columbia, all of the environmental organizations, if anything, have ramped up their opposition to our biggest job creator since the NDP carbon tax came in? Will she admit that the whole social licence gambit is a complete and utter failure?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, what I will suggest is that based on the commentary of the people who are making these decisions, which include the federal government, we have taken the right path to get this pipeline built and that denying that climate change is primarily caused by human activity is not the way to get this pipeline built and that allowing people to take that approach is not the way to get this pipeline built. So it's a darn good thing that people on this side are taking action.

The Speaker: Second major question.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, let the record show that all evidence to the contrary, the NDP still thinks their social licence scam is working. It's not.

Carbon Levy and Pipeline Approvals

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, last year the Premier went to Vancouver ostensibly to promote the Trans Mountain pipeline. She met with her NDP counterpart John Horgan, the now Premier. After that meeting he came out and talked to the media, and he said that our Premier, quotes, had no intention of persuading him, close quotes, to support the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion. I'd like to ask the Premier: were his words accurate? Did she not in fact have any intention of persuading John Horgan to support Trans Mountain?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, as I've said already, we are very pleased to see that the opposition against the pipeline, according to polls, is in fact decreasing, and we're going to continue the good work that we are doing to make sure that that happens. One thing I can say for sure is that we will not win the hearts and minds of the people of British Columbia by pretending that climate change is not caused by human activity. The evidence shows – let the record show – that the member opposite has still not declared that he believes human activity is causing climate change.

Mr. Kenney: I have said that, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is going to get a lot of chances to ask questions after the next election.

Let the record show that she will not contradict John Horgan's characterization of her failure to persuade him.

Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question for the Premier. By how much will the Alberta carbon tax reduce greenhouse gas emissions?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our climate leadership plan as a whole will reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It'll flatten the curve and bring Alberta towards meeting Canada's overall climate goals in terms of the actual megatonnes. I'll let the minister of environment get into that.

We know that the carbon levy is a key part of that strategy, Mr. Speaker, and we know that another thing that it is a key part of is the green line, the LRT in Edmonton, renewable energy, and the just transition away from coal. All those things come as a result of the carbon levy, all those things the member opposite would abandon.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I funded a billion and a half dollars for the green line without a federal carbon tax.

Now, the Premier, let the record show, does not even have an estimate of how much the NDP carbon tax is supposed to lower carbon emissions because the government doesn't have an estimate.

Let me ask a different question. At what level does the Premier or the government believe a carbon tax has to be established in order to achieve the Paris climate targets? What is the level? Does she agree with \$300 a tonne by Environment Canada? Does she believe it should be \$200 a tonne, Professor Leach's recommendation? Or do they have another number? What's the level to achieve the Paris targets?

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have, of course, a \$30-per-tonne carbon levy on an economy-wide basis and a system of output-based allocations to control foreign competitiveness. That was part of the recommendations from Dr. Leach and the climate leadership plan, which also contains the projections around greenhouse gas emissions.

Market-based mechanisms are enabled in article 6 of the Paris agreement, Mr. Speaker, and it is widely acknowledged that carbon pricing is the most efficient and market-friendly way to achieve greenhouse gas emission abatement.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Mr. Kenney: I thank the hon. minister for her non answer, Mr. Speaker. I can only infer that the NDP agrees with Environment Canada that you need a \$300 tax in order to achieve the Paris commitments.

Caribou Range Plans

Mr. Kenney: On a different matter, Mr. Speaker, people in northern Alberta are deeply concerned about a threat to the forestry industry and many other job-creating industries as a result of the government's plans with respect to caribou range plans, which could potentially take as much as half of the land in northern Alberta out of economic use. I'd like to ask the government if it will commit to a full socioeconomic assessment prior to proceeding with any caribou range plan.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that members of our cabinet as well as members of our caucus have held numerous stakeholder meetings with people who, we are hearing very clearly, are concerned about the caribou plan. That's why we put it out for consultation. I'm sure the member opposite will be happy to know that just today a letter was sent to the federal government wherein we indicated that we would not be

moving forward on the strategy until there was a full socioeconomic study and until we were able to work out a plan with the federal government where they would join with us in helping mitigate any problems that would arise.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: I thank the Premier very much for that answer and that commitment, Mr. Speaker. Can she further commit that the government will make an estimate of the impact on jobs in the Alberta economy as the result of any potential range plan?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it kind of goes without saying that that is part of the socioeconomic assessment that the ministers have indicated to the federal government that we want to see completed, so that's exactly the kind of work that we will do. We will also work with the federal government to have them come alongside us in terms of looking at the support that would be needed to ameliorate any changes that would occur. That's the information that was sent by our ministers to the federal government today.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, people in central Alberta share some of these concerns. Can the Premier commit that land will not be removed from economic use in central Alberta and the west country without a full social and economic consultation and study?

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

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, this morning the Minister of Energy and I did write a letter to the federal government indicating that we were suspending some aspects of caribou range planning pending the socioeconomic analysis that the Premier spoke of earlier. What I will say is that the federal Species at Risk Act is an extremely inflexible instrument that has already had negative economic consequences in the southeast, as you well know, for the sage grouse. It is unfortunate that while the hon. member opposite was in government, he did not stand up for Alberta and get that act changed, but we are going to do our best to make sure that we protect jobs on this.

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

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've spoken to this Legislature numerous times about the need to empower our front-line health care workers. Paramedics and nurse practitioners are highly talented and well educated about providing appropriate care, but they're denied the authority to make decisions well within their expertise without the supervision of a doctor. This prevents them from using their best judgement about who does and who doesn't need acute emergency medical treatment. Allowing these professionals more flexibility will lead to shorter emergency wait times, better patient outcomes for Albertans, and save money. To the Minister of Health: when will you allow these qualified medical professionals to practise to their full scope of abilities?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. I was very proud to work to

make sure that we brought paramedics under the Health Professions Act, something that I know paramedics have been waiting many, many years for under previous governments, and that was something that I think moved us along that path. We recently, just a couple of weeks ago, expanded the community paramedicine program again to ensure that paramedics are working as close to where patients are and have the ability to not be seen as experts who are there to transfer but as experts who are there to also deliver exceptional front-line care. We continue to work with registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and other allied health professionals to ensure that we are finding ways to move forward in supporting their scope of practice.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Fraser: Allowing for more discretion in treatment options is important, and we want to get people out of the emergency departments. It's equally important that they be given the appropriate resources to do their jobs. Under this government EMS funding has been unreliable at best. Recent increases barely covered the last NDP cuts to EMS funding. To make matters worse, call volume is at an all-time high. With the next provincial budget coming out this week, EMS are understandably nervous about the direction that this government is headed. To the same minister: will you finally commit to the level of funding that EMS needs to properly do their job, or can they expect more surprise cuts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, thank you so much for the question. Under the former government, of which the member was a member and his new leader was the Health minister, right before the last election they were proposing \$1 billion of cuts to health care, which we know would have impacted front-line EMS workers. What we've been able to do is reverse those cuts, provide stable, reliable growth to Alberta Health Services and their budget in turn, and ensure that we have abilities to make sure that while numbers are up, certainly, response times aren't. We look forward to being able to present the budget later this week, and I look forward to finding out if the member will stand with front-line paramedics or sit with the Official Opposition and cuts.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, this minister should tell the truth. Those cuts were to management and not front-line staff.

Minister, I get it. Your health care is complex, and you have a difficult job. However, you have the power to make improvements immediately. I'm hearing from paramedics that their situations are getting worse: long waits in hospitals, not enough ambulances, putting more strain on our EMS workers. Since you have the ability to resolve both of these issues, the fact that we're talking about this again is troubling, to say the least. Minister, you're the final authority on health care. You need to take responsibility and fix these things. Will you take responsibility, and will you fix it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm so proud to have the responsibility to reverse the cuts that were coming from the member opposite and his then government. You couldn't find a billion dollars' worth of cuts if you fired every manager all across western Canada. This would have had devastating impacts on the people of Alberta. The people of Alberta spoke up, and they made sure that they elected a government that would protect front-line

care, protect their workers, and I'm proud to do just that and find ways to improve it at the same time. We are doing it. We're proud to as government. Feel free to continue to sit with the opposition for deep cuts instead of standing with the front lines that you used to serve with.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm waiting to feel the warm winds of spring in here.

Caribou Range Plans (continued)

Ms Jabbour: To the minister of environment: my constituents are very worried about the proposed caribou range plan and how it will impact our economy and people in the north. Many believe the rumour that our government plans to turn the north into a park. As you know, I've been strongly advocating on this with your department since day one, which is why you visited High Level last August to meet with industry stakeholders, municipal government, and indigenous groups, something we greatly appreciated. Can you update us on what you learned from these sessions, how that has informed the process, and where things are at now?

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to acknowledge the hon. member for her hard work on this file and her efforts to advocate for her constituents and for northern Albertans across the province. In my meetings in High Level I heard many community and industry concerns about the impacts of range planning, and that is why we undertook a robust approach to public consultation. Certainly, we've listened to the results of those public consultations, which is why we are suspending consideration of conservation lands and some aspects of range planning pending a full socioeconomic analysis.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: like me, you represent a constituency where logging and forestry operations support families and communities. I know that stable and secure access to fibre is vital to the ongoing prosperity of our forest communities. What is our government doing to ensure that the forest industry continues to thrive in our province given the issues surrounding fibre access and caribou range planning?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and the member for the question. Forestry is a critical sector of our economy. Over 15,000 hard-working Albertans work in forestry, and the industry is a key economic driver in at least 70 Alberta communities. In my own constituency the forest industry is a key economic driver that supports families, communities, and prosperity. I've spoken to hundreds of constituents who are concerned about the impact that the caribou range plans might have on their livelihoods and their communities. These folks want a balance. They want to preserve the caribou and protect Alberta's forest industry and the community it supports. That's why we have made the decision to defer planning until we're able to understand the impacts on forestry and how we can support those communities.

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

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy: we've faced this issue together as neighbours. You've been hearing the same community concerns, and I know that you are with me in advocating for a strong northern Alberta. Can you tell our constituents what you have done about what you've been hearing?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely. As a northern MLA and as Minister of Energy I've talked to lots of Albertans, many up my way who do share concerns that the caribou range plan could have an effect on the communities. I share our government's belief that Albertans deserve a realistic caribou plan that protects jobs and the economy. As our economy recovers right now, it isn't the time to put in policies that are going to affect our economics. We're securing our economic recovery. We're slowing down, you know, the . . .

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

Emergency Medical Services (continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. EMS response times continue to be at or near crisis levels, especially in Calgary and Edmonton. Red alerts where no ambulances are available are virtually a daily occurrence, adding risks not only to the lives of Albertans but also to the beleaguered paramedics. The latest data available from AHS indicates that EMS staff's median wait time of one hour transferring between EMS and nurses is equivalent to just over \$20 million in salaries lost each year. To the minister: given years of frustration what are you doing to reduce the number of red alerts?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. We are incredibly proud of the work that paramedics do every day in responding to the call on the front lines, and we are also very proud of the fact that when somebody calls 911, they know that emergency responders in our province are the best and the best equipped to serve them. Expanding the community paramedicine program very recently is one tangible example of reducing transfer times. When we have the ability to serve somebody where they are rather than transferring them, that certainly goes a long way. And we look forward to continuing to find ways to invest in initiatives like the power stretcher program; 350 ambulances are to be equipped with those by the end of this . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Swann: Madam Minister, we're talking about red alerts, and we're talking about wasted time in the ER. What is causing the unreasonable wait times, or should we say waste times, in our ERs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the very important question. Certainly, nobody wants to be waiting in the hallways. They want to be providing care on the front lines, and I've heard that loud and clear from our EMS providers. One of the biggest reasons why they are in those positions today is because under previous governments there was failure to build the infrastructure so that patients could be admitted and receive the

proper care in a timely fashion. Usually it's that they're waiting for a bed somewhere in a hospital because for decades we saw the now Official Opposition, when they were in government, neglect to fund the critical infrastructure for the province of Alberta. That's why I'm so proud that we're moving forward with Grande Prairie, with south Edmonton, with Calgary cancer.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Swann: Minister, AHS appears to be paralyzed on this issue. What are you doing to reduce the 650,000 hours per year paramedics spend in ER waiting for the nurses to take their patients?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Again, it goes back to ensuring that there is the space and the staff to be able to serve and to ensure those safe transfers of patients. Making sure that there is a new hospital being built in Grande Prairie, the one that opened recently in High Prairie, the one that opened recently in Edson, the one that we're building in southwest Edmonton, the Calgary cancer hospital, and ensuring that that critical infrastructure that was so necessary to the province and to the front lines to be able to have somewhere to ensure that their patients can receive safe care is a big piece. The other piece is making sure that people can work to their scope of practice, including the paramedicine program, that is ensuring that patients who don't need to be transferred and waiting in a hallway certainly aren't doing that.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Caribou Range Plans (continued)

Mr. Loewen: The NDP government's caribou draft plan in response to the federal government's species at risk regulation is causing substantial concerns by affected industry and communities. Already there is reforestation of seismic lines taking place before consultation is finished. Rumours of knocking down 10-foot trees to plant seedlings are circulating. Presently the cost of reforestation is about \$16,000 per kilometre. Knowing that reforestation can happen naturally and that 150,000 of the 250,000 kilometres of seismic lines could cost \$2 billion, do you think that this is money well spent regardless of who is paying for it?

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we've held numerous stakeholder meetings on the topic of range planning, and we have listened to communities. As a result, we have written to the federal government to ask for three things. We have asked them to partner with us on a socioeconomic impact study, we have asked them to really step up in terms of an infusion of federal funds to restore habitat, and we are asking for them to listen to us as we will bring a delegation to Ottawa to discuss these matters with them. I'll have more to update the House on in supplementals.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the minister just said today that she suspended the parks from further consultation, not cancelled but suspended, and given that the minister has also agreed to do a socioeconomic impact study and went to the feds about that and now I hear, too, that she's asking for federal funds, I guess my question is: what took so long, and what have you done to represent

Albertans by lobbying the federal government on the 65 per cent undisturbed requirements?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll take the 65 per cent clarity question out of that whole basket of questions. That is, in fact, the requirement under the Species at Risk Act, that the plans articulate over a period of decades. We're talking decades here for a 50-year plan, the restoration of habitat. That is why companies have worked with us on those long-term restoration plans, whether it's the forestry companies or oil and gas companies. In fact, I just met with Encana yesterday on this matter. There are a lot of really good ideas out there. There are a lot of firms who want to work with us on this and make sure that we hold off that federal . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the moratoriums on timber harvest are already causing job losses, contrary to the promise the minister has made, and given that these moratoriums have caused overharvest in some areas, breaking their own regulations, how much longer do Albertans have to suffer from these moratoriums before the proper plan is in place, that protects jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we are recovering from the largest economic downturn in the history of the province, and that's why we've made it very clear to the federal government that caribou range plans need to have the requisite amount of flexibility. We have also heard concerns from communities, and that's why we're suspending consideration of conservation lands. We will not sacrifice jobs of hard-working Albertans. As for tenure, we continue to work with those companies – Weyerhaeuser, West Fraser, and others – to find solutions. Certainly, those firms are in a solution space with us.

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

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are common-sense people, and they want common-sense solutions. If left to them, we would have a caribou recovery plan that is practical and effective in areas where it makes sense. Instead, we have a government that trumpets economic diversification on one hand and on the other hand plans to unnecessarily sterilize large swaths of forest. To the minister of economic development: can you please explain how shutting down sustainable forestry enterprises creates jobs?

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

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I've answered the question a few times now, but let me say it once more for the folks in the back. We have, in fact, written to the federal government announcing that we are suspending consideration of conservation lands recommended in the caribou task force report and some aspects of range planning pending a socioeconomic analysis. We will redouble our efforts to work with industry to develop solutions that avoid the imposition of an environmental protection order. Certainly, that Species at Risk Act is a very inflexible instrument, and that's why it is really unfortunate that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed didn't fix it when he had the chance.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Banff and Jasper national parks could not sustain caribou herds despite a thoroughly protected habitat and given that 52,000 square kilometres, almost one-third of the caribou range in northwestern Alberta, is already protected, Minister, how much land are you willing to sterilize for a species that could not survive in parks with pristine wilderness and absolutely no industrial activity?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is not true that oil and gas companies and forestry companies are looking at this as a zero sum. Many have come to us with very substantive and practical solutions, and they are actually making those real on the ground. That's because they, too, understand the risk of a protection order. We understand that as a province, having heard from communities, we need more time to get this strategy right. Certainly, over the last two years we've gained a strong understanding of the health of the herds and the science and what measures need to be taken to reach the requirements under the Species at Risk Act. That's the message that we will be taking to Ottawa as well as the other measures that we've asked Ottawa to consider.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that problems multiply when we try to rebalance nature such as the protections that have resulted in expanding grizzly numbers in northwestern Alberta and given that this government plans to create pens for moms and calves but grizzlies will have no problem digging under the fence to get at the trapped animals, Minister, is the caribou management plan an effective one, or will it simply rub out the forestry sector and the caribou as well?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am not going to engage in amateur wildlife biology right now. We have proceeded in terms of understanding the health of the herds, we are proceeding based on science and evidence, and we are asking the federal government for assistance in this matter. That's why we will be going to Ottawa with a united voice from Alberta, that's why we've asked for their assistance with a socioeconomic study, and that is why we have suspended some aspects of caribou range planning. We have heard loud and clear from the communities in the northern ridings. The members for Peace River, Whitecourt-St. Anne, and Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley have been advocating for their constituents as well.

Thank you.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Peace River recently stated that the government's caribou plan would not result in any job losses or negative impacts to the economy and that the government would not be creating any park spaces, but when the minister's caribou plan was released, it so severely restricted 1.6 million hectares of land, it may as well be a park. Job losses are inevitable. To the minister. Only one can be telling the truth, the hon. Member for Peace River or the minister. Who is it?

2:20

Ms Phillips: Well, how unfortunate, indeed, for this stream of questions, Mr. Speaker, that were essentially answered in the first set by the Premier. Look, you know, we have suspended some aspects of caribou range planning, and we're looking for some assistance from the federal government, as I have indicated now several times. We're also suspending consideration of conservation

lands in the north. The hon. member knows very well the results from the emergency protection order that came in for the sage grouse for his own constituents in southeast Alberta. It's probably time for him to have some hard questions of his leader, who did nothing for nine years to fix that problem.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, despite being frozen out of government consultations, the northwest Species at Risk Committee conducted extensive stakeholder consultations. They drafted an extensive report outlining specific ways to effectively protect the caribou without harming the local economy, yet the minister has failed to meaningfully engage the northwest Species at Risk Committee. To the minister: why has the government refused to involve them when they've come up with common-sense solutions for the caribou and that's exactly what is needed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The perspectives of municipalities and others were incorporated into the draft plans. Having said that, we are just starting to see the economy looking up, and now is not the time to proceed without a full socioeconomic impact assessment, that we can only do with federal assistance. We need more clarity from the federal government in terms of what kinds of resources they want to put towards this particular project, and that is why I am suspending some aspects of caribou range planning as a result.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, to say that the local response to the government's draft caribou plan was not positively received would be a huge understatement. Response to the plan has been overwhelmingly negative, but when asked, the minister offers feeble assurances that the local feedback is being considered by her government. To the same minister: how has the feedback received from local stakeholders been incorporated, specifically included in your government's caribou protection plan?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The president and CEO of the Alberta Forest Products Association says, "It is encouraging that the Government of Alberta has engaged with stakeholders to hear our ideas and work together to conserve caribou." We will continue consulting with all the stakeholders, the local and industry leaders. In doing so, I want to be crystal clear that we are committed to the protection of the caribou herds but not at the expense of jobs or communities.

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

North Saskatchewan Land-use Plan Consultation

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past several months the minister of environment's staff have been having secret, invite-only meetings inside my constituency about the possible closure of land, similar to what she did in the Castle. Despite requests from stakeholder groups, municipalities, and even the media this minister has refused to consult the people in my community about potential job losses, economic impacts, and the recreational impact to my community, that has one of the greatest backyards in the world. So my question is: why is this minister avoiding people that do not have her world view, and will she start to have a conversation with our community finally?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we have released the regional advisory council's advice on the development of the North Saskatchewan regional plan. That regional advisory council was appointed by the party that the hon. member now sits in, and we are consulting with the public on that advice. There couldn't be a more open and robust public consultation process than regional planning. It's set out in law how we undertake that. It's important work, and all Albertans are welcome to give their feedback. The process is structured that way.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, that's not what I asked. Given that this minister still will not come and talk to this community, given that she will dispatch her deputy minister only to talk with outside interest groups, some of them from outside of our province, the question is very, very simple: will the minister consult with our community, or will she continue to only talk to foreign influence groups that are pushing an agenda inside our constituency? Will she come and talk to the people of Rocky Mountain House and Sundre about the future of the Bighorn, or will she continue to hide in Edmonton from the people of Alberta?

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I in fact met with the Alberta Outfitters Association last week. They are the member's own constituents. They were here to discuss with me some problem solving and some ways that we can work together in parks and on public land. I met with the mayor of Rocky Mountain House a couple of weeks ago and discussed the economic development and tourism opportunities that are available through the regional advisory council's advice. I would encourage the member to spend less time on conspiracy theories and more time on providing his reactions back to his own party's regional advisory council.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, conspiracy theories? The minister just stood up in this House and said that she met with the mayor of Rocky Mountain House. I know the mayor of Rocky Mountain House. This minister has not met with the mayor of Rocky Mountain House about this issue or the town of Rocky Mountain House, the county of Clearwater, the media inside Clearwater, the town of Sundre, the county of Mountain View. This minister has met with nobody in regard to this issue, including West Fraser and anybody that has significant demand of or importance in this area. So will the minister meet with this community? Yes or no? Stop dodging the question. Stand up and answer it. We're tired of it.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're asking all Albertans to provide their feedback on the North Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council's report, which we have released publicly. That process takes into account a large amount of stakeholder consultation, which we are committed to doing. It's not just municipalities although they are important. It's tourism operators, it's the private sector, it's the city of Edmonton who depend on the west country for their water supply. This is a very busy landscape, the North Saskatchewan regional plan, and that's why we're going to take the time to get it right.

Thank you.

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

Rural Crime Prevention

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government committed \$10 million to address rural crime. Some welcome expanding crime reduction units and starting a paperwork processing centre, and others like Red Deer county councillor and Alberta rural crime watch director Jean Bota want more work on issues surrounding crime. She said: let's look into the layers; we can't police our way out of the situation. To the Minister of Justice: is the government engaging with affected stakeholders in public, up front, or has the government decided the details based on selective engagement? Is public engagement at the bottom of the list?

The Speaker: The hon. Justice minister and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we've been hearing about this issue from municipalities, from rural Albertans, from the RCMP, from people across this province for quite a while now, and that's why we think that it's time to act. We're absolutely open to hearing from people about their concerns. In fact, I just had an excellent meeting with a number of municipal leaders as well as some members of the opposition that I think was very productive on this issue. We think it was time to act, and that's why we've taken the actions we did, but we're still open to hearing feedback from everyone.

Ms McPherson: Given that the government hasn't explained how the \$8 million to hire 39 RCMP officers and 40 civilian staff and the \$2 million for up to 10 additional Crown prosecutors will achieve measurable results that address underlying issues and given that preventing the issues that lead people to turn to crime to feed their drug habits has been proven to be more cost effective, again to the Minister. Albertans want to know. Where are human services, health, and community-based wraparound supports in your plan to address the problem?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, this is only one part of our plan. In fact, I've had multiple conversations with multiple different people around this. In fact, our police partners keep telling us that many of these issues can't simply be enforced out. That's why our government is absolutely committed to continuing funding to front-line health care services, to continuing to invest in mental health supports. That's why we have continued that funding throughout government to social services, to health, to all sorts of departments. We know that it's more effective that way. I hope the hon. member will support the budget, that does just that.

Ms McPherson: Given that experienced Crown prosecutors are needed to address the backlog of rural crime cases and given that the government's March 6 job posting for a chief Crown prosecutor in Wetaskiwin will cost Albertans over \$180,000 a year and given that Crown prosecutors are hired at \$100,000 to \$180,000 per year, again to the Justice minister: which experienced Crown prosecutors can you hire for \$100,000? If you're not hiring experienced Crown prosecutors, which senior Crown prosecutors do you plan to relocate to train junior prosecutors in rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've certainly heard from Albertans across the province that it's not enough simply to apprehend the criminals. We also need to have

prosecutors in place. That's why we're working to increase that complement across the province.

2:30

Certainly, we've been working with the Crown prosecutors' association. They do have some concerns about the wage freeze that's been in place, and we're having those conversations ongoing. I think it's important that we're able to compensate these professionals in such a way that they're able to perform their functions. So we will continue to have those conversations, and we'll continue to ensure that they are available for the people of Alberta.

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

Caribou Range Plans (continued)

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to actual policy measures of this government, in the past they've shown little regard for the impacts on communities. Now they have put together a draft caribou protection plan without meaningful consultation to truly understand the impacts that any plan would have on working families and industry. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: can you give working families the assurance that your caribou protection plan won't put thousands out of work?

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we have held numerous stakeholder meetings. They have been attended by hundreds of Albertans who are concerned about caribou range plans, and that's why we've listened. The whole point of putting out a draft plan is to hear from people, and we have heard from people in northern Alberta. That is why we are suspending some aspects of caribou range planning and suspending consideration of the conservation lands.

I also want to say very clearly that we are redoubling our efforts to work with industry to develop solutions. We'll be having meetings with industry representatives as we go forward, but there is no question that we need to make sure that we guard against the imposition of a federal . . .

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this minister committed to a balanced approach, protecting both caribou and jobs, and is coming now a little late with a new plan and given that she has no clear understanding of the wide-ranging impacts, including job losses, that would come from restricting a significant portion of the region's land because she has not completed the socioeconomic impact study previously, will the minister commit today to providing her department the resources it needs to complete the proper consultation before they finalize their caribou protection plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I've written to the federal government this morning to ask for their assistance with the socioeconomic analysis, and we will be suspending some aspects of caribou range planning pending the outcome of that analysis.

Over the last two years we have gained a better, more science-based understanding of the health of the herd and the measures that need to be taken to fulfill the very stringent requirements of the Species at Risk Act. It is unfortunate that we were left with such an

inflexible legacy by the Harper government and the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, who did nothing to stand up for Alberta when he had the chance.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am looking forward to what aspects of the plan will be changed.

To the same minister: will the government adjust their caribou protection plans if it is found that working families will be negatively impacted by these plans in any way?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we are recovering from the largest economic downturn in the history of the province. We've made it clear to the federal government that now is not the time to impede that recovery. We will conduct those socioeconomic impact analyses on the federal requirements. We are also asking the federal government to make a substantial investment in terms of what will be required in order to reach that 65 per cent habitat requirement over a period of decades.

I really want to acknowledge the work that the hon. Member for Peace River has done on this file and her efforts to keep it at the forefront . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, there are numerous concerns over the Alberta draft caribou range plan that this government recently submitted to the federal government. One such concern that is being raised is over the idea of the possibility of designating protected areas, that would limit forestry across Alberta. Minister, this caribou plan could cost the northwest region \$90 billion in potential resource revenue. As such, the minister says that she's heard from Albertans, so I guess my question is: has your ministry completed any economic analysis on what the possible closure would cost the Alberta economy in northern areas that may be closed to forestry activities, and does that cost include any compensation to companies that harvest in those areas?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the forestry companies and energy companies and communities understand full well the risk of an emergency order. Certainly, southern Albertans, for which the hon. member also is an MLA, understand the negative consequences of an emergency order like we saw with the sage grouse. We want to avoid that situation, and so do the forestry companies and so do the oil and gas companies. That's why we are ensuring that we are doing a full socioeconomic analysis, but we're also asking the federal government to really come to the table in terms of their investments. Until we see that, we have suspended some aspects . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Schneider: That answer doesn't provide any certainty to the forestry industry, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the caribou herd that once lived in Banff national park was wiped out in a freak avalanche decades ago and given that this government worked with the federal government to recently reintroduce bison, a species that has been absent from the park for a century, Minister, why was there no mention of a plan to repopulate the Banff caribou herd, a herd that did exist in a national park area with no development or industrial projects?

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason why the province of Alberta has not engaged in caribou recovery in a national park is because the Constitution is the thing. That's the answer to that question.

The fact of the matter is that an emergency order is not in Albertans' best interests, but neither, too, is a plan that doesn't accurately balance the need to make sure that we have economic growth and jobs. That is why we have asked for a more fulsome socioeconomic analysis and paused some aspects of range planning pending that analysis, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Schneider: Well, I wonder why this government is picking winners and losers with wildlife.

Mr. Speaker, given that several herds have their ranges primarily in protected areas – for example, the A La Pêche herd has substantial areas within the parks already – and given that the majority of the caribou mountain herd's territory is already in protected areas, Minister, exactly how are more protected lands going to help increase the caribou herd population in Alberta when the herd in Banff national park was already so vulnerable that an avalanche was able to wipe that herd out?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The risk of an emergency order is real, and that is why, for example, companies like EnCana and Jupiter Resources and others have been working really productively with us in the Little Smoky-A La Pêche area. There is a tremendous amount of economic potential in the tight oil and the rich gas plays in that area, but there are also some really good ideas around road sharing and infrastructure sharing and so on. Companies have really stepped up to the plate on that, and we will continue to work productively with them on those suggestions. They know the risk of an emergency order. It's really too bad that other members of this House . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Presently this government's wildlife species plans are old or nonexistent. Plans for important interrelated species that affect caribou, like moose, do not exist. Mule deer plans are from 1989; black bear plans from 1993; and wolves, the key species interacting with caribou, 1991. Minister, how can you claim to be making science-based decisions for caribou when management plans for those interrelated species are decades old, even nonexistent?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you Mr. Speaker. The reason why there are no range plans required under legislation for species that are not at risk is because they're not at risk. So black bear and moose: those populations are stable. In fact, they are not listed. We are required to file range plans with the federal government under the requirements of the federal Species at Risk Act. This is not a choice. That is the law of the land.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the front bench and the backbench: given that this current range management plan for Little Smoky-A La Pêche caribou herds includes government poisoning of moose carcasses and aerial wolf kills in order to save

that caribou herd and given that your submission to the federal government is over 200 pages long but there is barely any mention of predator control beyond talk of expanding this into other regions, Minister, has there been any research encouraging local trappers and First Nations people to help manage the population of wolves instead of your present culling methods? If not, why is this not detailed in the interactive plan?

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

Ms Phillips: The short answer, Mr. Speaker, is yes. We are involving the AWN in those predator control programs, and there are a number of things that Environment and Parks has undertaken for some years in order to protect this federally listed species. Those are requirements under the act to maintain the health of the herds, about which we know a lot more after two years of careful work on this file.

2:40

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that a Quebec study showed that bears have a large effect on caribou calf mortality and, obviously, we have a lot of bears in the caribou ranges here in Alberta and given that biologists say that there has been little studied about predators other than wolves and their effects on caribou and given that the effects of bear predation in your plan is almost nonexistent, Minister, if your plan is science-based, where is the science on caribou calf mortality from bears?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Range planning is a very complex process. There are about 15 ranges that I have to plan for, and they're multi-year initiatives. That is why we have asked the federal government for some assistance on this matter in terms of ability to know more about the health of the herds, more about predation, and so on. There's a robust amount of monitoring and science, in fact, that is being undertaken by our department, and that will continue at least under this government, that values science.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

Hon. members, my apologies to the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. I missed you in the first roster, but please proceed.

Lorelei Beaumaris Community League

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today to honour Lorelei Beaumaris Community League and their accomplishments in the fantastic constituency of Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Lorelei Beaumaris is a vibrant, diverse, and fun community league with a wide range of programming for all ages and a dedicated team of volunteers who understand the value in community engagement. This also happens to be my community league. Dance classes, soccer, preschool ice skating, and free community events are all ways that Lorelei Beaumaris offers opportunities for families. The soccer programs for children and youth, managed by volunteers, have been a great success year after

year. This past indoor season the under-10 girls' team won gold in the city of Edmonton finals, and the under-12 boys' team won gold in the intercities. Congratulations to both teams and the volunteers who coached, organized, and mentored all of these youngsters to gold.

This past fall our government awarded a CFEP grant to Lorelei Beaumaris for \$64,409. That grant went to renovations of the community outdoor ice rink. As a result of dedicated volunteers, specifically a father-daughter duo, this rink won the first on the rink award two years in a row from the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues. Together we celebrated the grant and the award just a few weeks ago. I had the heartwarming experience of helping an excited three-year-old named Maggie learn to skate for the first time. It's these moments, like with Maggie, that you can see and feel the benefit when a government invests in communities and when people invest in each other.

Thank you to the volunteers who plan and host events all year long, who spend countless hours and effort to support families. Your government thanks you for all that you do and for all that you continue to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Rural Crime Prevention Funding

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was so disappointed to see the UCP vote against funding to combat rural crime.

Before I was elected as the MLA for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, I was an insurance agent in Athabasca and Boyle. I've worked with too many people who were dealing with the aftermath of thefts and break-ins, something I've also experienced first-hand. There are stories from every corner of this province of people and families being affected by rural crime. We can see that in some places the problem is getting worse.

It requires real action, something never seen while the Conservatives were in office. I was proud to see our government stand up and vote to provide law enforcement with the tools and resources that they need to combat crime. I was proud of the real steps that our government has taken to make life safer for rural Albertans. I was proud to see that our government is making public safety a real priority, but that priority, it seems, is not shared by the Official Opposition. Instead of standing with our rural communities and our law enforcement officials, they chose to vote against the funding needed by law enforcement to keep our communities safe.

The Leader of the Opposition tells rural Albertans that regardless of the cost something needs to be done and that he'd support more funds to fight crime. However, rather than voting to support our rural communities, his caucus chose to vote down these resources. They chose to vote against law enforcement and against services to support people impacted by crime. Albertans expect their elected officials to walk the talk when it comes to public safety and fighting crime. Through their actions the UCP showed that they have the wrong priorities when it comes to rural Alberta. I am proud to be part of a government that has the backs of rural Albertans and is investing in the resources to tackle these challenges head-on.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'd just like to remind the House that during Members' Statements it's been a long practice here that we do not make comments, good or bad, when the members' statements are being made. I ask you to continue to remind yourselves of that.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Carbon Levy and Pipeline Approvals

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I was amused by the media report where the Government House Leader said: not wanting to raise the carbon tax means a lack of commitment to the environment. What was he thinking? Let's take a look. Sure, the NDP has attempted to buy favour with voters by offering them free light bulbs and shower heads. They're trying to buy favour with Albertans' own dollars. So far Albertans are not giving them the favour they're buying. The government itself has been forced to admit that they won't meet their own emission targets despite their carbon tax and other punitive policies. The problem is that that's where the good stuff ends and the negatives to the carbon tax just get started.

Andrew Leach, an architect of the NDP's plan, points out that an Alberta-only or Canada-only carbon tax will lead to carbon leakage; in other words, the transfer of emissions from Alberta to other places without carbon tax and with low standards, be it Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, or Russia. Mr. Speaker, 759,000 barrels of foreign oil come into Canada each day. The NDP and Trudeau Liberal policies make Alberta product less affordable, further promoting offshore oil imports.

To make matters worse, the NDP's allies, the Trudeau Liberals, have enacted a new approvals process that now means companies won't even try to build new oil and gas projects in western Canada, yet they never target auto plants in Ontario or cement plants in Quebec.

It's not just the emissions that move elsewhere in the world. Well-paying jobs move along with them. We've already seen drilling rigs cross the border to Texas and North Dakota, with companies noting that it's unlikely they'll ever return. So it seems that the NDP's environmental plan really only increases exports of investments, jobs, and economic activity to other jurisdictions.

When the NDP asks, "What's your plan?" the easiest place to start is by undoing the considerable damage they have done, with Bill 1, Carbon Tax Repeal Act. From there we can return to a thoughtful conversation on how to protect the environment for the whole world's children and grandchildren, starting with those right here in Alberta.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased on behalf of some 8,000 Albertans to table a series of petitions raising the concerns about the planned caribou range plans, asking for a comprehensive socioeconomic assessment to be made before the government proceeds with such plans, and calling for the government not to set aside additional parkland in this process. I'm honoured on behalf of these Albertans to present these petitions.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 5

An Act to Strengthen Financial Security for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce and move first reading of Bill 5, An Act to Strengthen Financial Security for Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, all Albertans should be able to plan for their children's future. This legislation amends the AISH Act and the AISH general regulation so Albertans can establish trusts for family members and loved ones who are receiving AISH benefits without affecting their AISH eligibility. This legislation continues this government's work to improve the quality of life for Albertans with disabilities.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

2:50 **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of Investment Intentions of Canadian Entrepreneurs by the Business Development Bank of Canada. In the report it states that 73 per cent of small and mid-sized businesses plan on investing in their business in 2018 and that the average investment amount per business in Alberta is \$330,000, the highest across Canada.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am so pleased to table today the requisite copies of a letter from the ministries of Environment, Agriculture and Forestry, and Energy to the federal government showing our government's commitment to supporting jobs, communities, and our economy, stating our decision to suspend consideration of conservation lands recommended in the caribou task force pending the outcome of a socioeconomic impact study.

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

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of an excerpt from the Conference Board of Canada's Metropolitan Outlook. In this excerpt it shows that Calgary and Edmonton are leading the prairies in terms of GDP growth and that in 2019, just like 2017, Calgary will lead the country in GDP growth. This report shows that things are looking up in Calgary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the Hon. Mr. S. Anderson, Minister of Municipal Affairs, pursuant to the Government Organization Act the Alberta Boilers Safety Association annual report 2017.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Ganley, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, responses to questions raised by Mrs. Pitt, Member for Airdrie, Mrs. Aheer, Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, Ms Miller, Member for Red Deer-South, and Mr. Ellis, Member for Calgary-West, on April 3, 2017, and April 4, 2017, Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General 2017-18 main estimates debate; and response to Written Question 18, asked for by Mr. Ellis on November 27, 2017; namely,

in each of the calendar years from 2013 to 2016 what was the average completion time for a death investigation and what was the longest time spent completing a death investigation at the office of the Chief Medical Examiner?

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 201

Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased today to rise to speak to my private member's bill, Bill 201, Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018.

Bill 201 proposes to amend the Employment Standards Code to protect part-time, casual, or 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. The need for this bill was brought to my attention early on in my tenure, and I heard over and over again from fire chiefs around Alberta and those in the field that this important piece of legislation was needed to protect the employment of those who risk their lives for our communities on a daily basis.

I'd been an MLA for less than six months when I received a phone call from a young man from southern Alberta. He had been a volunteer firefighter for one of the municipal districts in my constituency. I say "had been" because his regular, full-time employer had recently given him an ultimatum. Quote: quit your job or quit firefighting, because as long as you work here, you aren't a firefighter. End of quote. Now, my initial thought was that there had to be some protection in Alberta's labour legislation preventing termination based on an individual's participation as a volunteer firefighter. How wrong I was. Alberta had no protection for volunteer or part-time firefighters.

In Alberta emergency services are stretched so thin in rural Alberta that rural Alberta routinely experiences code reds. If that is the case, why would we refuse job protection for those who volunteer or work part-time as an emergency first responder? It was at that moment I decided that something needed to be changed.

These part-time and volunteer firefighters not only respond to fires but everything from medical emergencies, chemical spills, and traffic collisions, most often in the rural communities that they serve, but these rural communities cannot feasibly afford to staff the fire halls with full-time firefighters. They have to rely on part-time and volunteers to meet these sometimes life-threatening emergencies.

Now, since the recession hit, it has been made very hard and is harder for these fire halls to keep their volunteers. An article was written up in Global News called Answering the Call: Who Pays the Cost of Dwindling Volunteer Numbers? It stated that volunteer fire departments were struggling to get residents to sign up. The mayor of Parkland county said that they needed 40 volunteers to become members of a new, state-of-the-art fire hall that opened in the Acheson industrial area. Ironically, he said that when the spots were not filled, they'd have to look into a full-time contingent, and the cost would be over \$6.5 million. Municipalities are struggling to hire full-time firefighters. He said, "That burden is then assumed by the business community here as well as residents in the benefiting area."

Also, in the same article the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association said, and I quote: when people don't sign up, it also results in longer response times; a long-term problem is that residents in communities will be eventually relying on services in other communities, which will ultimately come at a price. End of quote. That was the chief of the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association.

In May 2017 in a CBC article, Volunteer Firefighters Harder to Recruit and Retain During Alberta's Downturn, Chief Says, it talks about how volunteers make up more than 80 per cent of Alberta's firefighters, and this explains how the economic downturn has hit recruitment and retention hard, especially in smaller communities. An example of that is Rocky View county losing about 16 per cent of its volunteers each year. According to the fire chief, "We'll do our training and then we'll print out our roster sheet and we'll already start losing people."

Many fire halls in rural Alberta cannot hire full-time firefighters, and they are finding it hard to fill rosters with volunteer, casual, and part-time firefighters. The inability to fill these rosters is due to many scrambling to find regular work and knowing that these struggling business owners will not hire those who cause staffing disruptions.

The real problem is that if you can't fill the roster, you can't fight the fire, and you can't save lives, which leads us back to the reason I decided to designate my private member's bill for firefighter leave. I was surprised and disappointed to discover that volunteer firefighters can lose their jobs for responding to emergencies. I realize that businesses are doing what they can during this economic downturn, and that's why I've included in the amendment that the leave would be unpaid.

3:00

The purpose of my bill, Madam Speaker, is not to add another regulatory burden to the business but to help protect not only the firefighters but the communities where these firefighters work and live. These are primarily rural communities, not urban communities, not urban settings. Nobody from the urban centres volunteers in the rural centres. This is all about rural Alberta. Businesses in the community will ultimately pay the price in higher taxes if fire halls need to be filled with full-time firefighters.

My hope is simple, that this bill will close that loophole and prevent anyone who volunteers their time, their energy to protect their communities from having to worry whether they have a job to come back to. My hope is that all members in this House today will support Bill 201 and give the real heroes of our communities their support, that they so graciously deserve.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, can I just confirm that you are moving second reading of Bill 201?

Mr. W. Anderson: That's correct, yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker. An eminently sensible bill: I don't think anybody who cares about emergency response can fault the intent here. I guess the question I would have is – and I should be aware of this – are EMS not, in some cases, volunteers in some areas of Alberta? I don't know the answer to that, but if that is the case – and I believe it is – that there are some EMS programs that are staffed by volunteers, who work as they're needed, then would the member consider a friendly amendment at some point that would include volunteer EMS people? They're all in the same boat, and they're all critically important to serving a community.

Those are just some comments and questions. I'll certainly be supporting the bill, but I think it would be stronger if we included volunteer EMS as well.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. member for St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Lac La Biche.

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

Mr. Hanson: You know, the one that's disappearing. Everybody should know that one by now.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's an absolute pleasure to get up and speak to Bill 201, to protect our volunteer firefighters and temporary fire workers. You know, I want to start by thanking the firefighters in the province for all that they do, both in their duties as first responders and first on the scene to save lives in events or emergencies, in their roles combatting fires and keeping our communities safe but also for all the volunteer work that they do in our communities. I know a lot of them, especially in the St. Paul area. These guys: you see them out working for the ag society; you see them out working for the Lions. They're everywhere in the community, and they're the folks that make our communities better. The braveness and altruism that a person must possess to put the safety of their community above themselves are irrefutably noble.

Now, we can talk about all the volunteer firefighters from all over Alberta that left their families, ran up to the front lines in Fort McMurray during the fires and also in southern Alberta during, you know, last fall, when we had the fires in southern Alberta. Especially up in the Fort McMurray area they didn't realize the long-term health effects it could have on them. A lot of these guys left their jobs, and their employers supported them in that act. I think that most employers in Alberta will actually support this bill as well. There may be the odd one that doesn't, but I think most of them realize that these guys are out there protecting. It could be their house that's on fire when they get called out, Madam Speaker. So these employers know that, especially in small communities, we depend on our volunteer fire departments.

It's disappointing, actually, to see that the bravest among us do not have job security under the current legislation. We hope to change that here today. If somebody undertakes a socially beneficial task but does not have the security of knowing that they'll have a job to come back to, they feel dissuaded in assuming this role. I can attest that I had employees that worked for me in my previous role in the oil field. I knew that, you know, three or four guys on some of my crews often would get called out, especially in the springtime, when the grass fires were rampant and that. It was just something that we accepted and expected would happen, and we just made sure that everybody covered up those gaps. I think, again, that you're going to see a lot of support for this provincially.

Since there's no legislation that guarantees job security for these firefighters, they typically opt to stick to their job, and that has caused the number of people enrolling to be a firefighter on a casual, part-time basis to drop. I'm actually surprised when I realize that this legislation isn't there protecting these guys, too. We've all seen photographs of the volunteer fire department in St. Paul or Ashmont or in our small communities. You know, some of these have 24, 25, 30 volunteer firefighters. These guys are doing that without any protection for their jobs, that their families depend on, which is really surprising, that they would even put that in front for their communities.

When the number of people becoming volunteer, part-time, or casual firefighters is low, fire departments are obligated to hire more full-time positions, which can be very costly and really is not

an economic reality for most of our small towns. They depend on their volunteer fire departments. If someone is willing to provide this community-enhancing service for free but is dissuaded by the possibility of job loss, the cost of full-time firefighters must be absorbed by the fire hall and then relayed back to the community it serves. Again, most of our small communities just can't sustain that type of reality. Full-time firefighter-filled rosters weigh heavy on the costs of the community they benefit. Especially in a rural town the costs can at times be so major and disproportionate to what they would be in urban centres that full-time staffed fire halls are not sustainable.

Let's not forget that especially up in – I want to speak specifically for the area that I represent. We have volunteer fire departments in towns like Wandering River, St. Paul, Smoky Lake, where these guys respond to accidents, highway accidents on some of the busiest and potentially most dangerous highways in the province. You know, everybody talks about PTSD. I'm sure that some of these guys are going to suffer from that in the future as well. So we really need to do whatever we can as a government to protect even the full-time jobs of these guys so that we can continue to recruit. As per this bill, firefighters need job security. They need to know that their job will be waiting for them when they get back from serving their community.

I was saddened to hear that there were currently no job protections in this area, but we can't allow employers to hold it against them if they must leave from time to time to fight fires or respond to emergencies. We want to know that if ever we are caught in a sort of emergency situation, first responders are fully staffed and able to be on the scene as soon as possible because every minute counts. We only have to put ourselves in the situation where one of our loved ones is in a car accident and we have our ambulances in Edmonton or somewhere out of the area and it takes them a long time to respond. Our volunteer firefighters are very often the very first people on site.

Furthermore, not only should we be protecting our goodwill firefighters from being fired from a job they hold because they must go and fight fires; we also must ensure that a prospective employer cannot discriminate towards a potential hire with the knowledge of this person being a part-time firefighter. I'm very disheartened to hear of accounts where a person was told to give up their part-time role as a firefighter or be terminated from their job. This is not the message that we want to send. We do not want to dissuade anyone from filling the fire hall rosters and being on hand to attend emergencies as they arise. I haven't personally heard of anybody – or nobody has come forward to me – stating that they were refused employment or fired for just cause for this, but I will be looking into it. I'll be talking to my local firefighters and just find out how they feel. But I really do believe that most of our employers are behind this.

This bill will serve both firefighters, who deserve the right to protect employment, and also fire halls that benefit immensely from volunteer and part-time firefighters on their roster, especially those that cannot afford full-time ones. In particular, rural towns depend the most on volunteer, part-time, and casual firefighters as it would be too costly for them to hire a full roster of firefighters.

An article was published in 2014. This article, entitled *Answering the Call: Who Pays the Cost of Dwindling Volunteer Numbers*, indicated that volunteer fire departments were having trouble getting residents to sign up. In particular, the mayor of Parkland county, Rod Shaigec, specifies that they needed 40 volunteers in order to become members of a brand new, state-of-the-art fire hall that had opened in the industrial area. He continued to say that when spots are not filled, they are forced to look into a full-time contingent, hiking the cost to upwards of \$6.5 million. He then goes

on: "That burden is then assumed by the business community here as well as residents in the benefiting area." Everybody has to pay; taxes go up.

The Alberta Fire Chiefs Association stated that when people do not sign up, it results in longer response times. Again, I'd just like to remind you that we're not just talking about grass fires and house fires here. These guys get called out to all kinds of emergencies. Specifically, like I said, they're protecting our highways in a lot of these small towns around St. Paul, Wandering River, and Bonnyville as well.

3:10

I think it's clear that volunteer, casual, and part-time firefighters are a considerable asset in our communities, that must be supported. We should not by any means be dissuading them from supporting our fire departments for fear of losing employment or not being able to find employment in the first place. I sincerely hope that this bill will close that loophole so that firefighters will not have to worry about whether or not they have a job to come back to.

Due to uncertain economic conditions volunteer firefighter numbers have been dwindling in rural communities. In the face of an economic downturn people would rather cling to the security of their jobs than risk losing them by having to leave from time to time to respond to fires or other emergencies. I believe that that could be a cause of dwindling numbers for sure, especially when you don't want to risk that you're the guy that's going to be first on the layoff list if you're, you know, running away to a fire once a week or once every two weeks.

Due to the lack of legislation to mandate job security, there is a disincentive to signing up for this position causing these decreasing numbers. We need to end this time of uncertainty for those who are selflessly helping our community and implement legislation to help them feel secure about going to volunteer to save lives and keep us safe. With this bill we will ensure that those who are already enrolled as volunteer, part-time, or casual firefighters no longer have to dread getting a dispatch call for fear of leaving work and how that will portray them to their employer. It will also have a beneficial effect on the enrolment of new firefighters, who will not be painted with the harsh title of unhireable if they're proud to be a supporter of the designation of firefighter.

I will support this bill with the same tenacity that a volunteer firefighter has shown in protecting his community. In closing, I encourage all members of this Assembly to support this bill put forth by my hon. colleague, and I again salute all of the volunteer, temporary, and part-time firefighters in Alberta.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you very much for recognizing me today. I rise today in support of Bill 201, the private member's bill from the hon. Member for Highwood. I think that, first, I'd like to commend the member for bringing forward this piece of legislation to this House. I think it's important that we recognize the importance of our volunteer firefighters in communities like where I come from and where you come from, Madam Speaker. I know that in Sundre, Rocky Mountain House, and Rimbey and everywhere in between, we are one hundred per cent serviced by volunteer firefighters. Our communities could not afford anything different.

It's not just responding to fires, as the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills said. Our firefighters deal with significant things, including medical emergencies. We are at a time right now where we see, under this government, unprecedented red alerts with the EMS situation, and unfortunately right now in rural Alberta our

volunteer firefighters are the ones who have to pick up the slack, as a result of that, when people have car accidents or are facing a medical emergency, sometimes in very remote places. If it wasn't for our volunteer firefighters, we would not be able to service those populations.

Madam Speaker, as you know, I used to live in a very, very remote place, running a backcountry facility that was located on the Forestry Trunk Road of the Red Deer River, about 45 minutes to an hour of gravel away from pavement, with only about three or four neighbours most of the year. Then all of a sudden, on a long weekend 60,000 Calgarians and Edmontonians and people from Red Deer would come and join us in our backyard. As you can imagine, 60,000 people arriving in a remote location like that can result in all sorts of interesting circumstances. If it wasn't for our volunteer firefighters in Sundre and Rocky Mountain House and everywhere in between, we would not be able to handle it. You know, everything from significant injuries, quad accidents, carbon monoxide poisoning, drinking and driving, car accidents, those types of things: you name it; they have to go out and deal with those situations.

I drive, like you do, Madam Speaker, across a very large constituency on a daily basis. The reality is that if I have a car accident or anybody else in my constituency has a car accident, the first people that will be there to help them are volunteer firefighters.

Now, the nature of being a volunteer firefighter means that you have to have some sort of other income source to be able to provide for your family or your livelihood. You're giving of your time to be able to come and help people that are in sometimes very dire circumstances and often putting yourself in danger to be able to respond to help those people. The idea behind the hon. member's bill is to make sure that people that are putting their time forward and volunteering in those capacities do not end up in situations where they may lose their employment or they have to be nervous about responding to fires.

We also saw the incredible circumstances, the very upsetting and tough to watch circumstances that took place in Fort McMurray a while back, and while they would have had paid departments around Fort McMurray, many of our volunteer departments all across the province answered that call to quickly go and help that community through that.

You know, the idea of a wildfire is something that communities that I live in worry about every year. Pretty shortly here, first, we'll start worrying about floods, Madam Speaker, and then right after that we'll be worrying about fires, and if it wasn't for our volunteer firefighters in the community, able to respond fast to those situations, we would lose lots more property, even including whole towns. I mean, I think the last big fire I can think about that we fought in our community was the big fight to save the hamlet of Nordegg, the historical community west of Rocky Mountain House, and almost all of that was fought by volunteers on the ground at first before we could get professional firefighters out to help them.

Interestingly enough, the facility that I used to run, Madam Speaker, that was far away, burned down about 10 years ago now. There was a fire. We woke up in the middle of the night. As you can imagine, an hour away from pavement and probably about an hour and 45 minutes from the nearest town, you're a long way from help. The first people that arrived were volunteers locally within the community, and volunteers further abroad within the community came and helped us put our facility out of fire. While we could not save the main lodge, we were able to save the rest of the facility as a result of those hard-working volunteers that answered the call that day. All of those firefighters would have had jobs that day that they

had to depart from when their pagers rang, and they had to answer the call and drive out to Mountain Aire Lodge to try to save us.

I can think of some other situations similar to that. You know, I spent a night with some volunteer firefighters and volunteer paramedics, interestingly enough. We do have those in our communities from Caroline, which has a whole volunteer EMS department. A 15-year-old girl had broken her neck while on a quad trip. She was from Calgary, and she was in a bad accident. We couldn't get a helicopter to her that evening because of weather, and those volunteers spent the evening on the side of a mountain giving medical treatment to this young lady, who ended up walking and made a full recovery, thankfully. Again, those were volunteers. I think all of us would agree that we would not want to see them lose their employment or end up in a situation that is negative towards their future career aspects because they have chosen to risk their lives to come and help us in our community.

I'm interested in what the government's response will be to this legislation. I think that in general I would suspect that this government has already indicated that they would not want to see people lose their jobs for many different, important aspects. I would think that they would add "volunteering in your community to be an emergency services professional" to that list of reasons that you should not lose your job.

Despite the fact that these individuals are volunteers, I also think it's important to recognize that they are professional firefighters. They go through a tremendous amount of training and give up a tremendous amount of their personal time beyond just volunteering to answer emergency calls and go through the training. In fact, the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright is a volunteer firefighter. I commend him for his service, and I'm always interested to hear the training that they're going through. I know that my friend the hon. Member for Airdrie decided to join some of her fire department the other day to go through that training and found out how, really, it's not that easy, Madam Speaker. Despite the fact that they probably don't have coveralls in my size, I also don't think I could keep up with them.

It's important to recognize that not only are they answering that pager call and then going into, you know, significantly dangerous circumstances sometimes, whether icy road conditions to go help people in a car accident, remote locations for search and rescue operations for people that have been hurt, or, of course, fighting fires inside rural communities – some of these fires are very, very big, Madam Speaker. I think that given the community that you come from, you've probably seen some forest fires up close and personal. It's a pretty scary thing for our firefighters when they have to go respond to that.

A common one that we get in our community is that it starts in the grasslands and moves really, really fast across our ranch communities, and volunteer firefighters, before the government firefighters can arrive, are the ones that manage to keep it in control and at least save property and livestock and animals. Of course, we know we lost an amazing volunteer firefighter in southern Alberta just last year fighting a fire, so I think we can all recognize the importance of volunteer firefighters in our community and recognize the contribution that they make to our community both in the risk to themselves as well as the significant time commitment to be able to complete that job.

3:20

Now, I was surprised and disappointed to discover that volunteer firefighters can lose their jobs for responding to emergencies. I had no idea that that was a possibility or a real thing until the hon. member brought forward his legislation and began to discuss that with me. I think most of my constituents would be surprised that

the people that we depend on on a daily basis for emergency situations could be in a spot where they could lose their career or their job because they chose to respond to that pager call.

You know, Madam Speaker, it is scary for us, yourself and myself and others in this Chamber and across Alberta that live in remote rural communities, to think about what would happen if one day nobody responds to that pager call. If nobody responds to that call to come and help somebody, it would be devastating and, I think, in some ways would change rural lifestyle significantly and to a point where we may not be able to live with that.

It's not just a rural Alberta situation. Though we live in these communities that depend on volunteer firefighters on a daily basis and members on both sides of the House live in those communities, it's actually a very big urban issue as well because the large majority of the emergency calls from my communities, nonfire calls but a large majority of car accident calls or backcountry rescue calls, those type of things, are for people from the large cities coming in and enjoying our communities.

I think many people who depart from Calgary or Edmonton on a weekend to go camping in a place like, you know, Rocky Mountain House or Sundre or Drayton Valley or west of those types of places or out by Athabasca in the north or in Peace Country, where you're from, Madam Speaker, would probably just automatically think that there's a service there that would be able to come and get them if they get into trouble because that's what they're used to in their communities. They come from communities with professional, full-time firefighters, that are on the payroll for the cities or the municipalities that they live in, and they probably don't really know until they have gotten themselves into a situation where they needed our firefighters to help and also when they realized that those were volunteers . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak about this important bill. This bill proposes to amend the Employment Standards Code to protect part-time, casual, volunteer firefighters from loss of employment because they have to become a part-time firefighter, and there are other aspects of this that I'd like to add to later on in my speech.

I want to thank the member opposite for the thoughtful idea of working on this issue and for the important opportunity it provides to talk about workplaces, community, and volunteerism. I know all about volunteerism because of the hours that I've volunteered for many organizations in the community I live in. We can all agree that firefighters are the foundations of our communities, whether we're talking about Fort McMurray or all the way down to Fort Macleod or whether I'm talking about firefighters in Edson, Hinton, Jasper, or Grande Cache, and we can agree that it is an important aspect of our communities.

When it comes to protections for workers, we are on the side of everyday Albertans, and we're working every day to make life better. That's why, for example, we've taken steps to introduce two major pieces of legislation last year that finally brought the Alberta workplace laws into the 21st century, because they lagged behind the rest of the country for many years. It's something that we did, and I'm very proud of the effort that we did to do that. We did this to make sure Alberta workers are being protected and for family-friendly workplaces that are safe, healthy, and dignified.

Now, when it comes to the private member's bill, it certainly touches an important aspect of our emergency services, the ones that we do well to honour – voluntary, part-time, and casual labour – and we all know that because of the firefighters that volunteer and that kind of thing. By working with all our partners in municipalities

– local emergency management offices, employer associations, and unions – we can make sure we are supporting a vibrant and sustainable volunteer and part-time firefighter service.

I know that quite well because, being on the executive for the local union for many years, one of our aspects on our committee was looking after the part-time firefighters that existed in the mill. Some of these employees also volunteered for firefighting service in the community. Sometimes it was difficult for these employees to get excused from their duties at the job because you can't always just stop and leave a job unattended, especially in an operating environment like the mill. It did create issues from time to time, especially on emergency things and like that. I know that full well for what I'm going to talk about in my speech.

The other aspect that this doesn't really look at is the value of search and rescue. Search and rescue falls in the same category as the firefighters because we worked with them on search issues, especially if it involved children. You needed to be there when the RCMP called you. I'm a search and rescuer, have been for many years. I've gone through extensive training on this and these kinds of things to assist. This is the same issue that really needs to be looked at for all emergency responders because we all do those things. We volunteer to cover for those issues. Especially when a child has gone missing, you want to be on top of it immediately. That's where, when a call goes out, you're there as soon as you can or immediately to help organize the search that is needed.

Also, the other aspect of it: it's not only children; it's, as our people age, the Alzheimer's. They just wander away from the homes or their houses or whatever, and they get lost. That's where it's important, when I'm talking about the fact that it should be included in emergency services that are provided by search and rescue, because those organizations are invaluable when it comes to finding lost people or whatever. In some cases we've been called out at all times of the night. That's why we have to have our packs and everything ready to go at a moment's notice. As soon as the call comes in, you grab your packs, your search and rescue gear, and you're out the door. It's important when we're talking about these issues that maybe we might consider those things.

The issue that we need to move forward on this: it's important that we have to work with employers. We don't want employers taking steps to not employ part-time or casual firefighters – we don't want that to happen – because of the potential cost to their business in accommodating sudden or undefined leaves. That wouldn't work. We all know it doesn't work and that kind of thing. We don't want to encourage employers to do this.

It's also not a rural versus urban question. That's something that we've really got to look at. It's an Alberta question that we've got to look at. We need to work with all of our partners, like I said: municipalities, counties, local fire halls, the fire chiefs, the firefighter unions. Of course, me being with search and rescue, we had to work with the RCMP. Of course, quite often we worked in conjunction with the fire department on some of their rescue efforts as well because we had the experience in some of the issues, and they relied on our experience and know-how when we went out on searches and these kind of things. It's important that we do this, and we want to make sure that whatever we're doing with this bill, we get it right. That's the important aspect of it.

3:30

I also want to thank all the firefighters in our region and our search and rescue personnel that stand up every day and put their lives in jeopardy for whatever things that we do. I think it's important as the Member for West Yellowhead that I acknowledge the time and tasks that it takes them for their training and everything

else to do that. I really want to thank them for all the work that they do.

I also want to thank the member for the good work he's done in Highwood, and I look forward to continued discussion about this important issue. I really think, like I said, that we should look at all our emergency services, emergency personnel, that put their lives out there doing whether it's firefighting or search and rescue or these kinds of things. I really think that we should look at that.

Other than that, that's all I have to say on this at this point. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's really an honour to be here to be able to speak on Bill 201. Thank you to the Member for Highwood on bringing this forward. This is a very important bill. It's so important.

I'm a volunteer firefighter. Well, I was a volunteer firefighter. I stepped down from that position just recently as a result of my heart incident. You know, like I say, it's an honour to have been part of the volunteer fire department. In Wainwright that volunteer fire department, Madam Speaker, has been around for 110 years, so people time after time after time have donated their time, their efforts to be able to volunteer, just to be able to keep our communities safe and be able to work in amongst the community and make sure that their friends, their neighbours, people travelling through are safe. This is a super important bill, in my opinion, that this member brought forward. So, like I said, I'm pleased to be able to speak on it.

You know, it takes a lot of good people willing to give of their time to be able to make a fire department work. It's not just when the tones go off. That's what you see. We often will have our radios on, tones go off, and we're going out the door. Tones are going off, and I don't even know often what we're going to. I'm already driving, and we're almost to the fire hall – sometimes we're at the fire hall – before we actually know what we're going to. But they hear the call, and they're off, and they're going.

Now, having volunteer firefighters able to do that and able to secure that is so important, being able to make sure that they're not going to have a chance to lose their job because they heard that call, they heard the tone, and they took off. You know, these are people that are willing to go into danger. They're going into the fire as opposed to everybody else, who's running away from it.

The danger could be a fire. It could be a car accident. It could be anything. Again, the Member for West Yellowhead talked about search and rescue. That's a primary function for us as well, to train for that and to be able to take care of search and rescue.

Often, Madam Speaker, what you'll see is that we'll have a car accident, and people become disoriented. It's 20, 30, 40 below – we've seen this many times – and they've wandered off. We don't know where they are, so we have to do a search. We have to find out where that person is. Or people have taken off, they've gone into the backcountry, and they've gotten lost. They have no idea where they are. They're able to get a message back to us that they're lost, but now we've got to find them. They've said that they know they went down towards the Battle River and they headed towards the west. That's all we've got to go with, so we do a search and rescue from that.

That's a very important point that the Member for West Yellowhead brings up, that that is one of the functions of volunteer firefighters. We train. We train for that. Every Tuesday we do training, and it's from 7 o'clock till usually 9, 10 o'clock at night. We're training for any variety of different things, whether it be

putting out fires, extinguishing fires, whether it be tearing off the roof of a car using the jaws of life to extricate somebody from an accident. It might be just doing ladder work, going up a ladder, using tools up on the ladder. There are so many things that we do.

But it takes more than just great people; it takes a great community. The great communities that we have, you know, in Wainwright, Edgerton, Irma, they all realize that this is something that's a necessary part. I think everybody in our communities has been touched by somebody in a fire department. They know the accident that's happened, and there were these people in their community that were helping them out and keeping them safe, and they stand behind them.

But not always do you find that happening, that people are standing behind it. When I first wanted to join the fire department, that was back in about 1980. That's quite a long time ago. I know that people are doing the math. I wanted to join the fire department, but way back then I was a baker. They said: "No. You can't join the fire department. We don't want you leaving this area, perhaps causing a fire to be able to put out a fire. There's no way." I would understand that I couldn't leave during that time, but there are other times in the bakery that, yeah, we're not making anything that has anything to do with a fire. This is kind of a protection. It would be able to enable our communities to have that staff that we need.

Recruitment and retention is a huge issue for our fire chiefs, being able to find people to be able to go on to it and then train them and then to retain them. That's really difficult. That's one of the biggest challenges that is out there for the fire chiefs at this time.

Another issue that I want to bring up. If we had to go to a full-time fire department, well, most of these communities would not be able to afford it. The volunteer, part-time makes this so it's affordable. You cannot take a community of, say, 500 people that you would have in somewhere like Edgerton and be able to say that we need to have that staffed 24/7 with firefighters and make it happen. It just wouldn't work. The cost to hire full-time is just too prohibitive. Frankly, we need to have the volunteers, and we need to make sure they have the mechanisms and the tools to be able to be hired and to be able to be retained.

This bill, in my opinion, maintains a good balance. First, the employees need to be employed by the employer for at least 90 days – that's what the bill says – so it's not like you're just going on to the fire department. There are 90 days of this. They've looked at that. They've addressed the issue. He has to be employed. This bill, you know, does not require the employer to have to pay for the occasional unpaid leave. When he leaves, you don't have to pay for that, so he's finding a good balance between the employer and the employee. When that guy – person. I shouldn't say "guy" because it could be a man or a woman going out to that fire. In our fire hall there's a very good mix of both of them. When they leave to do that job, they don't have to pay that person at that work, but they will be paid as a volunteer firefighter at that point. It strikes a really good balance in my opinion. We need to look at that and be able to appreciate the thought that's gone into this.

You know, when you look at this: what do we do in the fire department to make someone's bad day a little bit better? That's what we're trying to do as volunteer firefighters. We know that we're going out to an incident, we know that there's something bad that's happened, and we're trying to make that bad day better. We can't always do that. We've had days on the fire department – and it was a clear day. There was nothing that you would find exceptional about it. It wasn't a cold day. It wasn't icy. It wasn't anything. But we had three fatalities in the town of Wainwright area one right after the other, almost simultaneously. It was just like bang, bang, bang. There were three different fatalities.

We were able to get enough volunteers to be able to come out to look after that. Well, we had to leave the first scene. We made sure the scene was secured. It was a fatality. We're not helping that person anymore, but we're going to try to help the family and control the traffic and the incident that's there. But there was another call out. There was another, you know, head-on collision. We had to be called out to that. And there was another one. It was a fatality. Again, it was a third one on a day that you wouldn't expect it. It was a clear midday, no reason. These things happen, but it takes a lot of people, a lot of volunteers to be able to look after three fatalities in the town of Wainwright.

3:40

We're looking at about 6,500 people in our town, so we have about 30 volunteer firefighters at any given time. Typically speaking, you're going to get about a dozen people that are able to come out to a call. People are out of town. You know, they're doing something that they can't even hear what's going on. They've had to put their radio aside.

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

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my privilege and pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 201, Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018. I have to say that I'm very sympathetic to the content of this private member's bill, and the member is to be commended for bringing this forward.

I have to say that I'm also one of the members who was unaware that volunteer firefighters did not in fact have this leave protection already in place, which is, you know, a bit surprising. I mean, this is something that – I talk to volunteer firefighters in my riding all the time, and it wasn't something that had been brought up with me. I have to say that I'm quite happy to see this idea going forward.

I don't think it's possible to overstate the importance of volunteer firefighters to rural Alberta. I know that members previously have made some very good comments, you know, that it's a lot more than just firefighting. I'm actually not too sure about the Canadian statistics. I know that in the United States a full 70 per cent of firefighting calls are nonfire related in origin, so I'm thinking that our numbers are probably pretty similar. Of course, without firefighters responding to search and rescue, responding to highway and road accidents, we'd be in a real bind.

I mean, this is something that we actually found out several years back when along highway 63, a big part of it that I represent, we had actually firefighters in my home, you know, where I'm actually from originally, Plamondon, who got so burnt out by constantly having to respond to terrible accidents along 63 that they and the Wandering River fire department said that they would no longer reply to roadside accidents. As a consequence, there had to be brought in a special unit to deal with that. When the other members are talking about just how prohibitively costly it would be to shift to an all-professional service if you had volunteers not stepping forward, I mean, I've seen that kind of impact quite close up.

Now, I also got a chance to see just how critical volunteer firefighters are for supporting the efforts of our full-time paid firefighters. I think other members have alluded to that some volunteer firefighters actually did go out to McMurray to combat that fire. As a matter of fact, my constituency assistant's husband was one of those members as well as people from Boyle, where I live, and from all across the region. But more than that, I mean, if members can recollect just how dry that spring was and how close we were to a perfect storm, if we hadn't had our volunteer

firefighters out putting out fires like the Opal natural area, you know, all the little sparks that could have created large fires right across northern Alberta, we'd have had a much bigger issue at play. I think we could have lost a lot more than Fort McMurray that spring. So it's absolutely critical.

I mean, there's another aspect to providing fire protection for people in rural Alberta. As I alluded to in my member's statement earlier today, I was an insurance agent for some years in the Athabasca and Boyle areas. As anyone who has gone to insure a farm or rural residence is aware, you know, the distance from a fire hall is pretty important for determining not only what your rates are going to be but, in fact, determining these days whether you can find insurance at all. Of course, if you can't actually get fire insurance, you can't generally get a mortgage and build in the first place, so it's not only critical for health, safety, and well-being, but it's also critical, I guess, for economic development as well. So that's a lot of responsibility that we have riding on the shoulders of not too many individuals.

I know that I live, actually, just about half a block down from the Boyle hospital, where we have the STARS air ambulance. It's one of the places where it will stop and then stabilize patients, you know, before they get airlifted out to larger hospitals. You hear that copter going and it's, like, minus 40 below and it's 3 o'clock in the morning when you can hear that coming in, and you just have to think about the sacrifice of those individuals that maybe work the next day, maybe worked all day that day, and they've got to get out of bed, drag themselves out, and go out and deal with tragedies that most of us almost would never see in our lives. Or they've got to respond to put out a fire, and sometimes they get there in time and sometimes they don't.

It's a heck of a sacrifice for people that have to find other ways to make a living, and I think that it's far too much of a sacrifice to then have these same individuals potentially worry about whether they're going to have employment when they get back. You know, I think that's too much of a sacrifice for society to ask of these individuals. At the very least, there should be some protections for them so that when they're out protecting us, they're not going to face repercussions when they get home or potentially lose out on opportunities that otherwise they should have. I think that's a very important reason why some type of protection needs to be in place for this.

Now, one thing I would have to say, though, in looking over the bill, is that I think the intent is excellent. However, this isn't something that I've actually had an opportunity to talk to people in my riding about. I haven't had a chance to talk to the fire chiefs that I know on just how this is going to work in practice. I think, you know, that like so many things that come before the House, sometimes the devil can be a bit in the details. I really hope that we can get this bill right because our volunteer firefighters definitely deserve to be protected, and by protecting them, of course, we're protecting ourselves.

You know, it goes even further beyond that. I mean, who'd want to become a volunteer firefighter if this is what you're risking? Now, to the great credit of so many people across this province, people have been standing up, but I do know that it's not getting any easier to fill some of the rosters of these local fire departments. I have heard of situations where there have been delays caused by the fact that some of these departments have been undermanned. I'm sorry; "understaffed" would probably be the correct word for that. If it's already becoming an issue recruiting people to serve on these volunteer firefighting departments, if there's anything we can do to make that role more attractive and less of a potential sacrifice, I think it's definitely something that we should look at.

Like I said, you know, I'm concerned about a few of the details, but I'm definitely completely in support of the principle behind this private member's bill. Once again, I'd like to commend the member for bringing this to the House for discussion today.

With that, I would like to rest my comments. Thank you for your time.

3:50

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise to speak about my colleague's thoughtful bill to support our firefighters. In my past life I worked 14 years for the Fort McMurray fire department. I had the honour of responding to emergencies alongside an amazing crew of people over all those years as we tended to emergent situations.

Firefighters risk themselves to ensure the safety of the community they serve. The job they do every day along with other emergency services is the reason that we are all here today not looking over our shoulders, worried about certain issues, certain emergencies. That is why I support this bill. Being a firefighter is already such an imperative role in our world, and those who take it on as a volunteer for the sheer value that it would provide support to the public and to their communities deserve our utmost respect. Firefighters have a counterintuitive job, running towards the flames rather than away while carrying 50 pounds of gear, with not a flicker of hesitation.

You know, this leads me to describe how disappointed and frustrated I am to hear about some of these issues that do affect volunteer firefighters. I was fortunate. I was a professional firefighter, Madam Speaker. I got paid to do my job. I did my shift, and I was done. Volunteer firefighters are in their communities – yes, mainly in smaller communities – and they're on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is disappointing to learn that they don't have any job protection should they actually leave their job to perform this role of a volunteer.

I have to reaffirm that this bill isn't just beneficial to those members who would volunteer as firefighters, but it is beneficial to the communities they volunteer in. Quite honestly, these volunteers should not have to worry about coming back to a job and then finding out that they have lost that job. An employer should not be able to hold it against them if they leave from time to time as the need arises for their services.

Also, I'm really surprised and I find it very unacceptable that firefighters or volunteers might be discriminated against when they're applying for a job. It would be very disconcerting to find out that an employer would not be open to hiring someone who's a volunteer for their local fire department because of the thought that he might miss that person for one to two hours in a day, possibly more.

Consequently, this continued shortage of volunteer firefighters does disturb me. We need to do everything we can to encourage this, and people have to understand that firefighting is a more difficult job than people think. Whether you're a volunteer or professional, as with any job you have to learn the nuances. You have to be educated in that profession. You need to understand that firefighting is not just about putting water on fire. Even volunteers get the very same training that professional firefighters do, whether it's fighting a fire or extricating a victim from a car accident. You know, the basic course that firefighters receive here in Alberta and across North America is collectively called firefighting 1001. It's made up of theoretical things like building construction, dangerous goods, pump operation, basic rescue, and also just learning about other very specialized equipment.

Building construction is a very interesting course in this profession. Our construction methods and engineering standards have provided us with very strong homes that can withstand our very extreme weather. You know, if you think about it, only in the northern hemisphere do people have homes that are built to withstand 40 degrees below and 40 degrees above zero. Our homes are designed to retain heat and to be somewhat sturdy. We can thank, you know, advances in engineering and our building code for doing this.

Again, there's a lot of education that's required in this, especially for a firefighter. We have to recognize that they're not going to run blindly into a home. They need some education. This education takes a lot of time. There's a lot of time invested in becoming a volunteer. They have to assess the amount of the structure that's on fire, as an example. They need to try and understand the construction of that home. They need to anticipate whether those floor joists have five minutes of stability left or 15 minutes.

Personally, I'm not a fan of any of these new floor joist systems. When I say new, I mean that for the last 20 years they've gone with these I-beams, and they're very fragile. They're made up of chipboard and glue. They last not very long, which is very disconcerting.

Firefighters need to gauge the intensity and the risk factor when they enter a building. Once they enter that building – again, this is that additional training that these volunteers get – they go into a building blind. You cannot see a thing. Not one thing. You are walking blind. Your only hope is to feel a wall and step in front of you very carefully and work your way through that entire building when you're trying to search and rescue, trying to find somebody in that building. It is a very difficult and awkward position, but we do it. These people, volunteers and professionals, overcome certain fears, whether it's claustrophobia or a general fear of dying, in order to provide this public service.

This training requires a lot of money and time. It is good that we have a society where people are willing to volunteer for this role in their communities because, quite frankly and with all due respect to our rural areas, there is little economic sense in supporting a full-time fire service. It is very expensive.

Don't get me wrong. We have to also understand that we have fire departments for a reason, and it's not just for the fact that we can have lower insurance rates. Insurance, you say? Yes. Fire departments do have an influence on insurance. So the next time that you're filling out your home insurance policy, pay particular attention to the questions that ask how far away the nearest fire hall is from your home or business. Notice the question about where the closest fire hydrant is to your home, as an example.

Madam Speaker, we have to remember that we have emergency services because when we are in trouble and when we need help, we have evolved to knowing that we can call 911, one number, and get help regardless of the emergency, whether we need something that reflects the law and we require police or we require someone because of a medical emergency, we're going to ask the EMS and paramedics to arrive, or in the cases, in particular, that we're referring to here, disasters like a home fire or a car accident, some issue where people require rescue. We recognize the need to have a system in place that we can count on to alleviate the emergencies that we're in. We'll never know when we'll get into a car accident or slip and fall or have armed bandits sneak into our property to steal. Again, fire departments are part of this system alongside police and EMS.

Now, things like EMS and police are actually more justifiable in small and more sparsely populated areas as they are able to function with very few people. An ambulance only needs two people, at minimum a couple of EMTs, maybe a paramedic in there. Police,

for better or for worse, can get by with one constable and one response unit. Ideally, though, we don't like them to work alone, but that is the harsh reality of our policing.

Fire departments are different. They are organizations that require a lot of people working in unison to achieve its goal. For instance, on your typical house fire you'll have at least one overall commanding officer. He is running the firefighting. He's making sure all his crews are doing their appropriate duties. He might have some assistance in that area. If he sends two people into that fire, whether it's to rescue or to extinguish, he needs to have two people outside, fully geared, ready to go in case they fall. Those are our safety requirements. For every two in, we need two people out.

Not only that, but you're going to have two guys on the roof. They're going to be ventilating that roof. That means they're going to cut a hole in that roof. That's to allow a lot of that smoke to escape to help that visibility as well as that heat to escape so that the rest of the house is less likely to have those prime conditions for a fire.

You also have firefighters who are operating that fire truck, that pump truck. Now, those are amazing feats of engineering, those million-dollar fire trucks. They take that big diesel engine, and when you shift it into pump, it shifts from turning wheels on a fire truck into turning the pump so that they can push vast amounts of water.

4:00

You'll have firefighters spraying water on these surrounding structures as well, so not only is the house that is on fire the main target of their response, but the fire department response crew also has to worry about the surrounding buildings. We don't want that fire to spread.

The point is that there are so many other duties involved, and it requires a lot of manpower – sorry; people power – to extinguish a fire safely. That is why it is so noble to see in our smaller communities a group who is willing to volunteer.

The Deputy Speaker: Other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to talk about Bill 201, the Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018. It's a really great idea that's come forward from the member.

We did extensive consultation about employment standards and labour legislation last year to look at how the laws were impacting a wide range of industries, employers, nonprofits, health care, and some of that work would have been done around looking at employment legislation and as to how it applies to fire services.

Of course, we know that we have 14,000 part-time, full-time, and casual firefighters in the province, and 80 per cent, fully 80 per cent, of them are volunteers, and 8 per cent of them are women. You know, the idea of how it used to look, just a team of men going to battle fires: the face of that is changing. I know that when I made the visit to the Beaver Emergency Services Commission in Tofield, they have two there, and I know that when I go to visit, whether it's in Vegreville or Fort Saskatchewan or in Bruderheim, they all have female members of their services.

I know that in visiting with these volunteers and hired firefighters, recruitment is always an issue. When I went to look at what resources were online, I see that there is a document that is almost 140 pages that is laid out to help local fire services figure out how to address that: how to bring more people on, how to bring new people on, how to fill the positions that they have.

In Tofield, that I referred to, the Beaver Emergency Services Commission has 34 spaces, and right now I think that they have 31

or 32 that are staffed up. For them, it speaks to the kind of work that they've been doing ongoing and the culture around it, but there are many small municipalities where it's proven far more challenging for, I'm sure, a variety of circumstances.

If you just look at the letters that it suggests in this package of material that the service could send to your family to give a bit of information on what you're taking on, you're going to see that your family member is probably going to miss some birthdays, miss some anniversaries, miss visits from in-laws. You know, these impacts are very real. People get called at any hour, day or night, and they have to go out to things like major car collisions. They are often there to control fires, to control the damage that might be happening to a broader area, to clean up environmental spills. They're tasked with, really, not just an important job but a critical job, and that's why we try to do our best to have policy that supports these brave men and women to be able to go out and do something very phenomenal that not all of us have the guts or the gumption to do.

The impacts that this can have on people that join can be wide ranging, so it's important that when we have amendments to the WCB, we're looking at how we best support these people, whether it's making sure that they have PTSD coverage, making sure that we make changes like we saw this year that will cover ovarian and cervical cancer that a firefighter incurs because of exposure in this job. It reduced the maximum exposure period – that used to have to be 20 years for male firefighters – down to 10 years for them to receive compensation. These brave people come into contact with all sorts of carcinogens that are in buildings, in farm buildings, in vehicles. Even just grass fires are quite dangerous.

Making sure that they're well trained is a huge part of it. I had the opportunity last week, as I mentioned, to go to Tofield and spend a Thursday night with the service there and got a bit of a snapshot. You know, I did everything that I could do with them, suited up for the evening, but it was definitely not the same as for the people that go faithfully to those practices every Thursday night.

You know, it's a really great idea. It's thoughtful to think about how we best support these volunteers staying in these positions. As I was saying before, there are some small municipalities that are quite challenged with making sure that their rosters are full. I know that from going to the Bruderheim dinner that recognized these men and women. The awards that they hand out for lengths of service: they're handing out awards for shorter times because it's harder to keep people long term. They have to meet the sort of one-year point that will make that person more successful in staying long term. It's like: once they cross this time period threshold, it becomes much easier to keep them on staff. But they have to feel like they're a part of the team for that initial period, so it means, you know, making sure that on a regular basis the fire service is recognizing their efforts.

I know that firefighters are absolutely the foundation of communities. They are more than just teams of people that get together and fund raise with barbecues and a lot of pancake breakfasts, as my experience has wonderfully been. I've never eaten so many pancakes and barbecues in my life. It's going and making sure that we're connected with these people. You know, they are just always giving back to their community. It doesn't matter what it is. They're incredible volunteers.

You know, in my own constituency I represent fire services in Vegreville, Tofield, Chipman, Mundare, Andrew, Bruderheim, Strathcona county, the Lamont county regional fire service, Fort Saskatchewan. They step up to the plate whenever they have the opportunity to. In Fort Saskatchewan they had the opportunity to help support, at the Legion, people that were coming out of the Fort McMurray wildfires. I know that, as was mentioned before, there

are volunteer services that actually sent members up to Fort McMurray to help fight. In Fort Saskatchewan we had five people that were able to go and support the efforts there and do their part.

You know, as I was saying, we do need to make sure that these workplaces are safe, healthy, that we properly respect the work that they take on. That's why we were updating legislation last year. Of course, when it comes to this private member's bill, it touches on something that is incredibly important across the province. I've met a lot of members that volunteer in rural Alberta, and it's that voluntary, part-time, casual labour, people that are able to support their communities, that make their communities safe, make their communities vibrant. It's very true. This is a huge, important piece when it comes to economic viability.

4:10

You know, the issue that I'm experiencing here is that there wasn't enough consultation. I spoke to the Beaver emergency services, and I asked them who I should be talking to on this, and they said: the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association. Apparently, they are going to be working on this as a policy piece, on how to better support volunteers becoming engaged. That work hasn't been done yet. I would like to see more consultation with our associations that represent our really important men and women that do this, and that's why I have a referral motion.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, your time was just about done, but I will allow you to table that motion. Do you move the motion?

Mrs. Littlewood: Yeah.

The Deputy Speaker: You won't have any more time to speak to it, but you can certainly move the motion, and then we can discuss it.

This will be known as referral motion 1. I'll just give a moment for the pages to distribute this so that all members will have an opportunity to read it.

Any hon. members wishing to speak to the referral motion? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's interesting that we would be placed in this position. I find it quite, I would say, unusual, a piece of legislation that is responsible, in my humble opinion, for supporting a profession – I guess they wouldn't necessarily call it a profession but a job – that's filled by Albertans supporting their local people, local community people, local support. I have personal examples of how this would be brought forward, and I think the timeliness of this Assembly could have been proceeded with, unlike in the case of this amendment that we have in front of us.

The member opposite moves that the motion for second reading of Bill 201, Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 201, Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Madam Speaker, the Economic Future Committee fills an important role, but they have a significant agenda in front of them, and I find it frustrating that the government seeks to create more meetings, more bureaucracy. Certainly, a previous government found themselves in a great deal of water above boiling when they were supposedly reimbursed for meetings that they never even attended. Those situations have changed now.

Madam Speaker, I personally support the bill as previously worded – I simply find it awkward at very best – to continue forward with the short work that we could do in this Chamber, and now we're going to be extending it to some other committee and hearing and such. There has been no mention even of the timing of how this would be brought forward to Alberta's Economic Future Committee. It's awkward timing, so I'm fully with question as to why the government would do this.

In my own personal case these part-time firefighters fill an important role, and there are local incidents where these people provide a valuable service. Yes, the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo has commented that in the cases where there are professional people forward to fulfill these roles in rural areas and in many areas throughout the province, some 80 per cent of Alberta is actually protected, Madam Speaker, by volunteer firefighters.

It's an ironic situation that we find ourselves in, that we have to go to a committee. How long will it take? The government has made no comment of when this committee might even hear this resolution. Madam Speaker, it seems that for whatever reason the government is trying to bury, deflect, delay, sidetrack – and it may be a sidetrack down a dead-end track – hearing interesting information that would support and protect Albertans on a daily basis.

One of the things that came to mind was the recent situation that happened within 10 miles of my home, where the high school principal with five children in his house was responded to at 5:30 in the morning with the carbon monoxide overdosing going on, and it was only through the presentation of a carbon monoxide detector that these people were saved. There would have been a serious need for extensive mental counselling if those people would have come into this gentleman's home with as many as seven dead people if the local firefighters wouldn't have been able to respond and help them.

This is an important situation. When, figuratively, lightning or an event like that strikes near to your home, near to your heart, near to the potential need that this government seems to be deflecting by just referring it to committee, Madam Speaker, it's unusual. I don't understand why they find it entirely necessary to create these deflective actions. They've done that with other motions, and I'm speaking from personal experience. We're talking about referring it to a committee, which is somewhere, again, in a figurative world of never-never land. This is an important situation. Some of the members of the government have actually spoken in favour of this, and I don't understand why they think it has to be referred to a committee.

Madam Speaker, I'll rest for now, and if there are other speakers that want to speak to this, I'd be happy to listen to their arguments to you. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's obviously an issue that a lot of members in this House are very passionate about, why we all want to make sure that we're supporting our part-time firefighters and ensuring that they're doing an excellent job for our communities. I think we've heard countless speeches today about how they are doing that, the incredibly powerful role they make in our communities, the economic impact that they can have.

But I think that when we talk about amendments like this and when we talk about the need to do this, it also comes down to the fact that it is incredibly important, as it was during employment standards, to consult with the associations of firefighters which this would impact. I think that's where we come back down to in

introducing an amendment to a committee. When we contact folks, representatives from the firefighters association, and they haven't heard and had the chance to provide input into this, that's a concern.

4:20

I think that more so than characterizing it as, you know, putting it to the side or trying to really bury this under some committee referral, it is to really acknowledge that this government is and has been committed to speaking with firefighters, the associations, the part-time volunteers, and to making sure that they are part of this process. In fact, it's because we've been talking to them that we know that it's a complicated process and it's important to strike the right balance. Of course, I would put to the members that if we were to put forward a situation where a full-time firefighter was also a part-time firefighter, what occurs in that situation? If you haven't worked out those kinds of loopholes, which are likely to happen, especially in small communities where they volunteer in addition to the work that they do full-time, we need to make sure how we're going to address those issues. That is why it's important to take it to committee.

Of course, when you talk about the crossjurisdictional, where people have put this in place, Alberta Labour was able to confirm that this hasn't been done in other places. I think that, at the end of the day, we need to make sure that we are taking a careful approach when it comes to this bill.

I think that members on both sides truly acknowledge the work. I know that I myself have met with the Strathcona county firefighters, who do an incredible job, who not only have come to meet one on one with MLAs, but they have preparation for how the legislation that they're hoping to change would impact them, the benefits. I think that they want to be part of the process because they were during the employment standards. I want to be able to go back to the firefighters in Strathcona county, to know that they had provided me with information, to be able to have the conversation about what this impact would be for them. I know that many other members in this Legislature would have the same opportunity.

I also acknowledge that the member proposing the bill did so with good intentions. It is with those same good intentions that we want to make sure that we are moving on this issue carefully and respectfully to those involved, to support our communities, to support the very important work that we need to have of fire safety in our areas. I'm hoping that all of my colleagues will support my call and the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville's call to make sure that we strike this right balance, to continue working with our partners in municipalities, local emergency management offices, employer associations and unions, and that we can make sure that we are supporting a vibrant and sustainable volunteer part-time firefighter service.

I think, for those reasons, this amendment actually is incredibly important. It's something that demonstrates that this government and the members in this House have continuously been willing to work with the opposition to make sure that we move forward on this. I also know that in those conversations the members opposite might hear what the main concerns of firefighters are and what a lot of the associations have been talking about.

Just from initial reactions – I'll be happy to table this afterwards. In some local community newspapers there was definitely a quote: "If the legislation comes into place, it's out of our hands, but what we can control is maintaining a good relationship with that employer. If that's a good relationship, there won't be any issues. Locally, if some issues could be solved with maintaining good relationships with the parties, employers, firefighter departments" – I think that's from the fire chief. It just talks about the fact that you need to work out how this is going to look and how that's going

to impact those very associations and those members that are volunteering their time. I think that's a legitimate reason to bring that to committee, to have those conversations, and to make sure that the member is actually talking to those folks.

I mean, I remember that during the employment standards a lot of the firefighters came to the Legislature and met with numerous MLAs, and they told us: you know, one of our top issues is around our pensions. They met with the opposition at that time. They met, and they were told that for them they're actually not in favour of the movement that they are advocating for when it comes to pensions, that they would take those away. I think when it comes to that, the members on the opposite side have to actually go to the firefighters and talk to them about their wholesale issues and not just pick and choose which ones they will be supportive of. In doing so, we can actually demonstrate that we're willing to work with the many people involved in doing this.

I also acknowledge that it's difficult as a private member to do a comprehensive consultation across the province on an issue that impacts so many. I mean, you have limitations as a private member, but I also think that for that very reason it shouldn't be taken that this is something that we want to sweep under the rug at all.

I think it's been very much said by the members that have spoken from this side of the House, Madam Speaker, that this is an issue of importance for all of us and that we will work towards finding the right balance. I think, you know, I mean, that's probably why the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville ran out of time, because she wanted to cover so many of the items that are important to take into account.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I look forward to the rest of the debate on this.

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to the amendment on Bill 201. There are many times in the cut and thrust of debate that we can sometimes use referral amendments to deal with the problems that are in a bill. That's why we have committees, and that's why we use referral amendments to send bills that perhaps have some problems with them to that committee to do some honest investigation of what those problems are and how we can make that bill better and come back with recommendations that will allow a bill to become better. That is not what is happening today. I am not confronted with a bill in Bill 201, Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018, that has any significant problems here. This referral motion is nothing more or less than an attempt by the government of the day to try and sidetrack a very, very good bill for the people of Alberta.

Madam Speaker, I remember being eight years old and probably for the first time in my life understanding the importance of the fire service. We had just returned from Ontario back to Saskatchewan. We were going back to see my family in Shaunavon, Saskatchewan, for the first time, and a fire broke out on a neighbour's property just less than half a mile down from my aunt and uncle's place. I can remember going there and seeing the barn, with all of their equipment and with animals being put in danger and with the farmer wondering how they were going to recover from this fire, and at eight years old it really made an impact on me just how important the firefighting services are to the people in our communities.

We have just spent time listening to members from both sides of this Legislature explain the benefits of this bill, and I have not yet heard a convincing reason for why we would take what is obviously a good bill and sidetrack it by placing it before this amendment, a referral to committee. This bill, Madam Speaker, has clearly

identified the issues for why this bill is needed. Bill 201 has identified that we need to protect part-time, casual, and volunteer firefighters from a loss of employment due to their volunteer firefighting.

Madam Speaker, if there's one thing that government is supposed to do for its people, it's supposed to be able to bring us together in community and be able to protect us and safeguard ourselves. This bill does exactly that. It is helping the government of the day to help safeguard and protect our people and help them to live in community. Why would that be needed to be referred to a committee? We are simply doing the job that we have been elected to do. It makes no sense to this MLA that we would sidetrack a good private member's bill by referring it to committee, especially when we've even heard on both sides of the House today the benefits of this bill. If we are here to protect and to safeguard the people of Alberta and to provide them with a legislative basis to do so, then this bill fits that criteria.

4:30

Volunteer firefighters are critical for safeguarding and protecting the communities that are in my constituency, Madam Speaker. I am unaware of any of the communities in my constituency that are not dependent upon volunteer firefighters. They are a necessary part of being able to protect the safety and safeguard the community which I am a part of.

Madam Speaker, there could be many reasons why you would send a bill to referral. I just don't see how any of them apply to this bill. I know that we've seen that there's been evidence brought before this House this afternoon that talks about the need for an ability to protect the firefighters that are choosing to volunteer, the people that are choosing to be volunteer firefighters. We know that there are municipal levels of government that are struggling to find volunteer firefighters. Why would we sidetrack this piece of legislation when we could be addressing the needs that have already been identified by the municipalities for more volunteer firefighters and when we could support them in that through this piece of legislation? It mystifies me why the government would choose to do this.

We know that when we have volunteer firefighters, Madam Speaker, those spots are now not filled by full-time contingents; rather, they're filled by volunteer firefighters. That actually saves the communities considerable money because if we have volunteer firefighters and full contingents of volunteer firefighters, those small communities in my constituency don't have to depend upon other communities for their fire service. It's important for the people in my constituency to have volunteer firefighters.

In fact, in Alberta in May 2017 in a CBC article entitled *Volunteer Firefighters Harder to Recruit and Retain During Alberta's Downturn*, one of the individuals in that article states that "volunteers make up . . . 80 per cent of Alberta's firefighters." How is it, then, that we cannot come together in this Legislature for a bill that is obviously so very good for the people of Alberta and support it when 80 per cent of our firefighters are volunteers? Madam Speaker, until just recently I've heard nothing but support for this bill, and that's as it should be. When I look at the importance that these people, these volunteer community members bring to the table, it's incredible that we wouldn't support that.

Madam Speaker, I can remember coming home from school one day to see all of a sudden one of the houses just literally half a block away burning. If it had not been for the members of the Drayton Valley fire department, not only that house but many others would have been in danger. How can we refer this to committee when we should be supporting these individuals through a bill like this?

Madam Speaker, I had the privilege of going to Thorsby just about two months ago to be part of the ceremony where they were handing out long-term service awards for volunteer firefighters. It shows you that we've got, you know, people that have devoted their lives. Some of these individuals were getting 10- and 15- and 20-year service awards, yet at the same time these volunteer fire departments are having a hard time keeping people. The ones that have been around for a long time are not going to be around for very much longer. Eventually we all get to the point where we have to move on. It's important for us to support legislation like this, that allows for people to have the capacity to volunteer as firefighters.

Madam Speaker, we often will refer to committee for all sorts of reasons. We might refer a bill to committee because it has a large expenditure of capital and we want to make sure that that capital expenditure is actually good for the economy of Alberta or for that industry in Alberta. I see nowhere in this bill where we're going to be expending huge amounts of capital. That cannot be the reason why we're referring this to committee. Sometimes we'll refer something to committee because we need more information; we need to be able to see how it will serve the needs of the community. This bill has been very forthright and very easily understood by everybody in this Legislature as to how it's going to serve the interests of the community.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Now, I've met with many firefighters in southern Alberta and, certainly, in Lethbridge in both formal and informal settings, so I'm going to begin by saying thank you to the member representing Highwood for bringing this private member's bill forward. I'm also going to thank the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville for bringing forward the amendment. I'm going to get to my support after I share a little with you. I feel I must rise to support the bill and the amendment, and I'll do so by sharing an event in which I participated.

In early October 2017 I was part of a tour of different sport and tourist venues with the selection committee for the 2022 Can-Am Police-Fire Games. There were a multitude of conversations that happened over that weekend, but the most powerful was when I had a conversation with a firefighter from Cardston county, who was in the heart of the Kenow fire. As part of the tour we visited Waterton national park and saw the damage that the Kenow fire had done. We also saw the damage that didn't occur.

This firefighter shared with me that he and another firefighter worked on the pumper truck, which was sitting halfway up the hill to the Prince of Wales Hotel, a historic site. The water was being pumped from Waterton Lake by the first pump up to the pumper truck, where additional pressure was applied so that the water would go up the hill to the two ladder trucks, which were on top of the hill on either side of the hotel. He told me that they were working on the truck when the fire advanced to within 50 feet of them. His voice cracked with emotion as he shared that the crew on the water pump could move into the lake if the fire went in that direction, the firefighters on top of the hill on the ladder trucks could go over the top of the hill and into the lake if the fire went to them, but he and his partner had nowhere to go. They couldn't go over the hill because the fire was all around them. They knew that they would die if the fire advanced to their truck. I have to say that I couldn't hold back the tears as he shared that story with me.

We drove around the entire community. Not one home or business was lost. The only building destroyed was the tourist information centre, which was at the entry to the community or the

outskirts of the community. He shared with me the work that was done by the team prior to the fire's arrival in the community. The entire community was surrounded by hoses 50 feet back from the buildings on the perimeter. The hoses and sprayers soaked all of the perimeter buildings and the forests behind the perimeter in that 50-foot barrier and into the centre of town.

4:40

He also shared with me that when the fire was roaring across the grass fields towards Cardston county – as the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo had said, normally with a grass fire they surround it – they had to run into it because it was the only way to stop it. They all knew that they were probably running to their deaths. Fortunately, they didn't die. I asked how all of the firefighters were dealing with PTSD following this experience. He said that it was very difficult and that because you thought you were running into your own death, it came back at you many times. He said that that happens with many fires but in particular with this one because they were literally running across the fields where the fire was roaring at them. He said that therapists were available to everyone involved immediately following the fire and as needed as time goes by.

Since September 11, 2001, I've become very aware of the risk front-line responders – full-time, part-time, and volunteer – face in these situations. Every day, every instance a firefighter knows that when he or she answers a call, they may not come home at the end of their shift or the event, yet they still go forward and do this job to protect us, our families, and our homes. There aren't any words that truly express my gratitude to every firefighter in this province, especially those that volunteer. My local firefighters receive my thanks every time I see them, every time I hear a siren passing me. In fact, I do something tangible. At Christmastime I provide the four fire stations with homemade cookies to just give them a little of my thank you. My supporting this bill is another concrete way that I can acknowledge what you do and say thank you. To every volunteer: thank you for stepping up. I know this bill will be truly meaningful for each of you.

Now, having said that, I will tell you that I worked in corrections for 32 and a half years. I was a union rep during that time. When I saw "firefighter leave," it immediately kicked in a couple of things in my brain because I know that if things aren't properly written to address every conceivable possibility, somebody is going to say, "No, it doesn't say that exactly," and that firefighter is going to lose their job. I do not want that to happen.

I totally understand how important firefighters are to every community in this province, and if I'm going to put something forward and support it, it's got to be the best. I think sending it to committee so that we can do further work on this to make sure nobody can turn around and say, "No, I'm not doing this for you because you're volunteer staff" – I absolutely have to make sure this is right because I respect and appreciate every single firefighter in this province and every volunteer who steps up to do that job.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak about this referral motion for Bill 201, and I'd like to start off by thanking the MLA for Highwood for bringing forward this bill. It's really an important bill, and I think it helps to recognize the importance of volunteer firefighters in small communities.

I wanted to talk a little bit about the culture in small towns. We are from a similar area. I grew up in Sexsmith, Alberta. When we moved there, there were 300 people. Sexsmith is, well, probably now about a 12-minute drive from Grande Prairie, but at the time it was about a 15-minute drive. If something were to catch on fire, say, somebody's garage or their home, to rely on the paid firefighters, the fire department in Grande Prairie, would mean that people's homes, their property, their lives would be at much greater risk, to have to wait that long for the fire department from the nearest large community to arrive. So we relied on volunteer firefighters. There were a lot of instances, especially in the summer, grass fires and that sort of thing, where the volunteer fire department in Sexsmith would help. They helped their neighbours. You would have a problem, and your neighbours would show up to help you.

I think of a recent example in Sexsmith. In 2015 one of the grain elevators – they only had a few left – caught fire. It took eight fire departments, so a number of volunteer fire departments from around the area, to come and put the fire out. I remember that when I was a kid, we had a grain elevator go up as well. You can see one of those from many, many, many miles away. It has a huge impact on a community. Everybody is up in the middle of the night when there's a fire at a grain elevator. It just really focuses how important it is to have a volunteer firefighting department in your community and how valuable it is to have those people.

This bill certainly acknowledges that by protecting volunteer firefighters, ensuring that they're able to get the training that they need when they need it and not compromise their employment at the same. It does a really good job of showing how important volunteer firefighters are to small communities and how important their skills are to the community as well.

As far as the referral motion I'm not in favour of the referral at this time. I don't think that's the best use of committee time. There are definitely a number of stakeholders that are waiting to speak with the committee, and this bill is pretty straightforward. It's not a money bill. There isn't a lot of due diligence required that hasn't already been undertaken. For those reasons, I will not be supporting the referral motion.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this referral motion. You know, for me, when I look at the original bill and this referral motion, I'm saddened because this bill was proposing to assist casual or volunteer firefighters with the potential of loss of employment for the good work that they do, which, to me, is not even a backhanded reward for protecting our communities.

You know, I've been lucky enough. I've lived in urban areas most of my life. I've been, in fact, several blocks away from fire halls almost my entire life, and I can tell you the security that that feeling gives me, knowing that those firefighters can arrive at my house literally within a matter of a few short minutes. I can't imagine somebody in a rural area not having the support of at least a volunteer firefighting crew that can be there.

This is about safety for our families, this is about security, and this is about being able to sleep at night, Madam Speaker, about being able to count on those people in the community that are giving of themselves in a way which is very much akin to, I think, military service, the reserve. I don't think anybody would argue against letting somebody who is going to defend our country or defend peace, as the case may be, do their reserve duty. I used to work with some individuals who were with the British military. These were

senior executives with the company who every year did their military reserve service, without question from that company. This bill was meant to protect those individuals and allow them to do their duty as well without the fear of losing their jobs or the fear of not getting a job, which is possibly the case for many of these individuals now.

4:50

Madam Speaker, I have another concern, too. I think we're in a position now – we are elected by our constituents to represent them, to make good decisions, to ensure that the decisions we make are in the best interests of our constituents, of the people of Alberta, of the communities of Alberta. I think the opportunity is there for us to do so, but I have other concerns with respect to this referral. I very much enjoy and respect the work that we are able to do on committees. We do it. I think we all work hard. I think most of us try to bring nonpartisanship to those. But I have concerns. I sat on the committee and continue to sit on this committee that this bill is being referred to, and it concerns me because we spent 18 months for a one-paragraph recommendation, that probably will go nowhere, and we did not . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I would like to provide the hon. Member for Highwood the opportunity. I should also add that even though we are on an amendment and will be voting on the amendment, it is still common practice to allow the member to close debate.

Go ahead, hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me and for the opportunity to close this debate. Make it right; make it right; make it right. That's what I've heard from the other side. Let me just tell you folks on the other side that we introduced this bill in 2016, two years ago. It sat on the Order Paper. Yeah, it was a prorogued government, but it sat there. Nobody said a thing. Make it right.

Now it's 2018. The only thing we changed was the title. I get this common discussion, mixing urban and rural. Are you putting a division between urban and rural firefighters? Come on. Urban firefighters are union folks. We know that. Rural firefighters are not. We understand that.

Referring this bill to committee is what I'm absolutely opposed to. Referring it to committee will not help volunteer or part-time firefighters. It's going to go back to an anemic committee, it's going to sit there, and it's going to die on the Order Paper. We know that's the intent. Come on. Let's make it right. The right thing to do is to work with rural, part-time, volunteer firefighters. No, they're not union folks. I apologize for that. But let me tell you right now that they're dedicated, they're committed, and they're personal friends of mine.

And we did consult with numbers of fire chiefs. I said it in my opening statement. Several fire chiefs and firefighters in the rural constituencies were spoken to, not the urbans. I've spoken to the urban folks as well. They have other issues. Yeah, they've got pension issues. Yeah, they've got other issues, but they're not rural firefighters. They're not volunteer firefighters. They're full-time firefighters.

The financial burden on the municipalities to hire full-time firefighters is going to almost bankrupt them because we all know that municipalities cannot run deficit budgets. Now, where are they going to get the money from? They're going to take it from

infrastructure, from everything else that's required to build and hold those municipalities in perpetuity. You cannot put that burden on them. This is just about rural volunteer firefighters. Make it right. Do the right thing. Do not send this to committee.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We will now be voting on the referral motion to Bill 201 as proposed by the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment REF1 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:54 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|---------------|--------------|-----------|
| Babcock | Goehring | Miller |
| Bilous | Gray | Miranda |
| Carlier | Hinkley | Nielsen |
| Carson | Hoffman | Piquette |
| Connolly | Horne | Renaud |
| Coolahan | Larivee | Rosendahl |
| Cortes-Vargas | Littlewood | Schmidt |
| Dach | Loyola | Schreiner |
| Dang | Luff | Shepherd |
| Drever | Malkinson | Sigurdson |
| Eggen | Mason | Sweet |
| Fitzpatrick | McCuaig-Boyd | Turner |
| Ganley | McKittrick | Woollard |

5:10

Against the motion:

| | | |
|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Anderson, W. | Kenney | Smith |
| Cooper | Loewen | Starke |
| Drysdale | McIver | Stier |
| Ellis | McPherson | Strankman |
| Gill | Nixon | Taylor |
| Gotfried | Pitt | van Dijken |
| Hanson | Schneider | |

Totals: For – 39 Against – 20

[Motion on amendment REF1 carried]

Motions Other than Government Motions

Amendments to Standing Orders

501. Mr. W. Anderson moved:

Be it resolved that the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta be amended by renumbering Standing Order 52.04 as Standing Order 52.04(1) and by adding the following after suborder (1):

(2) Suborder (1) does not prevent a Legislative Policy Committee from undertaking a hearing or inquiry during the same period of time that a matter stands referred to the Committee by the Assembly if the hearing or inquiry does not interfere with the work of the Committee on the matter referred to it.

Mr. W. Anderson: Madam Speaker, I'm most pleased today to rise in this House and speak to and introduce Motion 501. The issue that surrounds this motion is most concerning for a lot of Albertans, and

I felt compelled by my colleagues to bring this issue, that isn't a new one, forward to this Assembly for debate.

This motion is being introduced today because current rules stipulated in the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta simply do not allow for any activities to be undertaken by a legislative policy committee other than the specific task assigned to it even if there's ample time between the meetings dealing with the assigned task.

Madam Speaker, this is one more avenue that can be taken and resolved today for members of this Assembly to improve consultations with stakeholders, to help committee members craft thoughtful changes to legislation and policy. There have been groups that have been waiting for years to give timely feedback on bills and policies that directly affect their lives. In some cases these stakeholder groups have been trying to get invited to a committee to present for well over two years. This is just not acceptable. Albertans deserve better. We must and can do better. As my colleagues can attest to, this has been an area that can certainly be improved upon.

This issue, however, is not a new one. It's one that has been going on for years. UCP members have brought this forward to committee multiple times. The government continues to block this essential change. The committee sometimes does not meet for up to three months at a time waiting for the next phase and review to happen, and it is not able to meet because the standing orders do not grant them so. It's not as though these meetings would be held in vain. Government is voted in by the people. We shouldn't just hear from these people every four years; we should be giving them spaces and time to come in and meet with us throughout the year. These people have a right to share their input with the government. They are, after all, the ones who help us legislators do our job in the most efficient and effective manner. If we are supposed to represent them properly, then it only makes sense that we hear them.

Our simple request today is that we change the standing orders to allow committees to hold additional meetings in between other important committee business so that Albertans can be given a voice at the table. We have a government that refuses to consult with Albertans. This lack of consultation has just shown the people of Alberta that their views do not matter to the NDP. When the NDP continue to block committees' important work, our caucus will stand up and fight for Albertans.

I implore all members of this House to stand up for Albertans today, stop wasting precious time, and allow these groups into the committees to present their case. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand up and speak in support of Motion 501, a motion that's near and dear to my heart. I sit on the Resource Stewardship Committee and have for the last two and a half years. You'd think that a committee called Resource Stewardship in Alberta, being that our major industries are oil and gas, would be a very important committee, but in the two and a half years that I've sat on that committee, we've never been able to address one issue with regard to the oil and gas industry. Given the very recent caribou issue that's forefront in northern Alberta and western Alberta, we haven't been able to discuss that at all. Our committee has had their hands tied by the standing orders. We've made numerous attempts to have that changed and have the committee agree with us. As a matter of fact, just this last January 25 I put a motion forward in committee to have this addressed. Again, I think that was the third time that we put that

motion forward trying to get this addressed, and it was shot down again.

The frustrating part is that there are times when we were doing the Lobbyists Act review that we were waiting for reports from the Ethics Commissioner. She was given a four-month time span to come up with her report and do her investigation. During that time our committee could not have a meeting with AAMD and C, who have been trying to get a meeting with us for two and a half years.

These are the things. It seems very frustrating that, you know, even in the interim, while we wait for reports that we know are going to take months to have put forward, an important committee like Resource Stewardship can't actually deal with any of the important issues regarding oil and gas, especially in the midst of a downturn. I mean, every time that the government side gets a chance during question period, they always refer to the worst downturn in the economy in Alberta history. Resource Stewardship, one of the most important committees that we have to deal with these issues, can't even talk about issues that are going to stall things, like the caribou issue.

Now, the response that we got from the members opposite, and specifically the Member for Edmonton-Decore, who seems to be quite vocal on this, is that it is a matter of inconvenience or something. Well, to me, during that time it was probably far more inconvenient for anybody out in a rural riding like myself to come into Edmonton for a committee meeting. I don't see why it would be inconvenient for the Member for Edmonton-Decore to drive across town to attend a meeting. We've had plenty of opportunities where we could have had the AAMD and C.

One of the other responses that we got after I gave my motion in January was: well, we've just had the AAMD and C meeting, and, you know, there was a forum held with all the ministers present, and everybody had a chance at that time to present to the government. Well, if you've ever been to one of those – and I'm sure you have, Madam Speaker – there's a lineup at the microphones. They're only given an hour to ask questions. Each member, mayor, councillor has a chance to ask a question. There's a red light that stops them at 30 seconds, and then the government takes as much time as they want to answer. Calling that an opportunity for consultation is a bit of a joke, I think. It's far better to have the people that are concerned with that particular issue from the AAMD and C. I'm sure that they would send a committee to our committee with some pretty specific asks and concerns that we could deal with at that time.

The same goes, I believe, for the recycle group in Alberta that's been trying to get a hold of us and come and talk to committee, the Resource Stewardship Committee, specifically. They've been denied for two and a half years as well.

Referring things like the Lobbyists Act review: I think that possibly there should have been a special committee struck for that rather than putting that onto the Resource Stewardship Committee, so that we could get some important work done. I'm sure that there are people in the House here that have specific interests in the Lobbyists Act that weren't on the Resource Stewardship Committee at the time and weren't able to have their input into it. I think that rather than saddling our standing committees with some of these assignments, we should strike special committees, especially when we're dealing with issues like the Lobbyists Act review that have to be done in a certain period of time, that take up a whole year.

Now, I believe we're on the third assignment since I started with that committee, which is going to take us up until November of this year, where again from now until November 29, I believe it is, we won't be able to speak to anybody else in Alberta about anything other than the assigned task that we're on.

5:20

So that is why I'm supporting Motion 501. I don't understand the government's reluctance to move along our committees and allow us to work on some important things that Albertans want us to talk about. We're here for a reason. We've got, you know, 12 months of the year that we can be meeting in committee. Even while we're in session, there are evening sessions that we could be holding and having special committee meetings with some of these people. We've got the AAMD and C in town this week, and we could be holding a special committee meeting with them tonight. It wouldn't be that hard. All the committee members are here in town. The folks who are in town: it would be convenient for them. They're already in Edmonton. So why couldn't we do that? Unfortunately, we're not allowed to because we have an assignment and the standing orders prevent us from fulfilling that.

I know that some of the members opposite that sit on the committee are very reluctant to move this forward, but I would hope that they would see the advantage of actually letting our committees do what they're supposed to be doing and maybe referring some of these special assignments to a special committee.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wasn't sure I was fast enough. I'll start again this afternoon by thanking the Member for Highwood for bringing forward this motion. I think it's a really practical motion, and it could be really useful to us. We have been dealing with a lot of legislation in a number of the standing committees rather than dealing with stakeholders and the issues that are concerning the different committees. What has been happening is that stakeholders end up having to meet either with individual members of committees or with caucuses from the committees, and we aren't getting the benefit of the conversations that happen within those discrete areas. We don't hear what questions other members of the committee are asking the stakeholders, we don't hear what the answers are, and I think it takes away from the multipartisan approach of a standing committee and turns it into a partisan activity.

Special committees, as was mentioned earlier, can be struck if we do need to address issues directly. I think that that's a really useful tool, and we should take more advantage of it. For these reasons, I will be supporting the motion.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Motion 501. A motion gives an indication as to the direction that the Legislature would like to adopt on a particular issue, and today we bring before you in Motion 501 a motion that asks the Legislature to consider amending the standing orders. Now, each of us as MLAs received this little book, and we get updates to it all the time. It's called the *Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta*. As we take a look at these standing orders, they outline for us how this Legislature is supposed to work.

We are looking at a motion today that asks us to change the way our legislative policy committees will function. We're asking that suborder (1) does not prevent a Legislative Policy Committee from undertaking a hearing or inquiry during the same period of time that a matter stands referred to the Committee by the Assembly if the hearing or inquiry does not interfere with the work of the Committee on the matter referred to it.

Madam Speaker, we're going to stand today and ask that this Legislative Assembly consider changing the current rules that are stipulated there to allow them to undertake any activities that they may deem important in between the tasks that have been referred to them. Madam Speaker, this would make our committees more efficient, and I would support this motion.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the comments that we've heard so far. Clearly, there is a good case to be made that we need to take a closer look at changing the standing orders to allow for further committee-initiated reviews. I would note that there is a standing committee of the Legislature, that being the Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing Committee, whose mandate is expressly to review proposed standing orders. I believe that that committee is the appropriate venue for the discussion of this proposal to take place.

For that reason, I have an amendment that I would like to put forward, and I have the requisite number of copies. If I may read the amendment while they're being delivered. Thank you.

Ms Fitzpatrick to move that Motion 501 be amended by adding the following after "be it resolved":

that the following proposed amendment to the *Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta* be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing for review and that the committee submit its report to the Assembly on or before June 19, 2018.

As I said, Madam Speaker, I agree with the intent behind this motion. Committees already have the ability when no matter has been referred to them to initiate their own reviews, as the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill has identified. I think it's fair to say that there are times when despite a matter being referred to a committee, that committee could still do other work without impacting that review; for example, while the committee is awaiting public feedback or while Parliamentary Counsel is doing their research. I do think it is vital that we do need to maintain the primacy of business referred to the committees by the House as a whole.

I appreciate that the motion explicitly maintains that a hearing or inquiry must not interfere with the matter referred to it. I appreciate and support that wording. However, I do believe there needs to be significant discussion about what this would look like. Would it mean thorough studies taking place in parallel with what has been referred by the Assembly? Does it mean squeezing in a meeting with stakeholders every time the committee has a gap of a few weeks between meetings? Does it mean inviting lobbyists in to present to committees on matters other than what the committee is studying? These are just a few of the questions that spring to mind when I review the proposed change.

I urge all members to support my amendment, which would see those questions and potentially others discussed by the appropriate committee in due course. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm disappointed in this amendment. I'm a little bit shocked at the behaviour that we've seen and the process that we've seen from government members today in regard to private members' business before this place. We've seen now two issues that we've been dealing with today be sent off to a committee. The problem with that – I don't have to tell you –

is that the members across the way will only send things to committee when they don't want to deal with them. They send them off to committees that don't meet so that they will essentially eventually die on the Order Paper and not have their day in front of this Assembly.

Just a few moments ago we saw the members across the way do the exact same thing they're trying to do now to a bill that would have protected volunteer firefighters across this province. Now we see them coming forward with an amendment to send this to a committee that has not met in almost two and a half years. In fact, it's famously called the no-meet committee, unfortunately, Madam Speaker, because of some of the behaviour that we've seen with that committee in the past as far as members being compensated to be part of a committee that never meets. We have fortunately dealt with that, but the fact is that this committee still does not meet, has not since late 2015, early 2016. Prior to that, they hadn't met in several years.

5:30

Again, every time that this government has taken a private member's piece of business and sent it to a committee, it has never come back to this place. Never. As soon as this government sees a reasonable amendment or motion that they know politically, back home in their constituencies or for certain members of the NDP, is going to cause them trouble, they then send it off to committee so they can look at the reporters and say: oh, we just sent it off to committee. They know darn well, Madam Speaker, that this motion will never ever be debated at a committee, and it certainly will not make it back to this place.

The problem with that and why we are so frustrated by that is that we see things like the carbon tax, that has a negative impact on Albertans all across this province, that is impacting families, charities, municipalities, everybody in a negative way, and we on this side say, "Hey, we've got to make sure that we get this right; can we send this to committee?" And they won't do it.

Bill 6, one of the worst pieces of legislation we've ever seen come from this Chamber, the 29th Legislature. Again, this side of the House begged for it to go to a committee for a serious conversation, but, no, it doesn't go. What goes is legislation from this side of the House, private members' business that this government does not want to face their constituents in voting down. Instead, they're trying to take a politically expedient path by sending it to committee.

Another great example was a private member's bill brought forward by the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, which he brought forward to make sure we could take the biggest money out of politics, which is government money during elections, taxpayer dollars that the government has access to. This government – and there was a lot of press at the time – decided to send it off to a committee. Madam Speaker, this House still has not seen that, in over three years, come back to this place.

This is a tactic by this government to stop legislation or motions that they find politically troubling for them, that they don't want to vote for but that they don't want to tell their constituents that they did not vote for. It is ridiculous, it's unacceptable, and it has to be called out, Madam Speaker. To send a motion to a committee that does not meet – and everybody in this Assembly knows that this issue will never be discussed in that committee – is ridiculous and appalling. Let's just be very, very clear on what's happening here.

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

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, it's no surprise that the members opposite like to create their own facts, eh? They

like to spin things and, like, make it seem like what's true is not true and what's not true is true perhaps. The member opposite from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre just got up in this very House and said that the so-called, quote, unquote, no-meet committee has never met in the past two years. Do you want to know a fact? This committee, Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing, which the Member for Lethbridge-East has the privilege of chairing, actually did meet. [interjections] Yeah. Like, the members across like to laugh at the fact that, oh, they've been caught trying to twist the facts, right? Actually, the last time that the committee did meet was on November 24, 2015, and we were discussing morning sittings, right? This committee is dedicated to doing the work of this Legislature when called upon.

Now, one of the things that I wanted to share, being the chair of the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, is that another way that the members opposite like to distort the facts is that they like to say that, well, we didn't want to meet with stakeholders, when it was expressed multiple times in committee that it was the standing orders that kept us from having to deal with any other business. Now, the standing orders are the rules of this Legislature. They're the rules that dictate what committees can do, when they do it, how they do it. That's what the standing orders are for. But, you know, what do you expect from libertarians? They want to deregulate as much as they can, take away the rules of this and that. They'd rather just not have any rules whatsoever. They wouldn't even want government to exist perhaps, which is kind of ironic since they want to become the government. God forbid that that should be the case. Madam Speaker, it's so important that we have rules.

Now, you know, I have the privilege of working out with the fine members of the Legislative Assembly security almost every morning in the Legislature gym downstairs. They're fine, upstanding individuals. They follow the rules, they're members of integrity, and they know what their job is and how they serve this Legislature. They know better than anybody else, just as much as we should know, that they have to follow the rules, right? I mean, after all, that's what rules were invented for. Now, I understand – I understand – that sometimes you don't like the rules, but rather than break the rules, you should work to see if you can change them.

You know, let me just share with you, Madam Speaker, that this is an approach that I take with my children because I don't like to be a dictator in my house. I don't like to tell my children what they have to do and when they have to do it, but that's the role and responsibility of a parent. However, I also tell my children that if you don't like a rule or you don't like a decision that I've made, then use your words and make an argument to suggest an alternative. Stick with the rules, or work to change the rules, but don't break the rules.

What better way to help change the rules than to send this very motion, Motion 501, to the committee that's actually responsible for reviewing the standing orders of this very House. Now, the members across the way are saying: oh, the government just wants to kill the motion, doesn't want it to come back to the House. But that's the responsibility of this committee. That's what it was set up to do. Now, you'd think that the members across the way would encourage actually sending something to committee for greater review so that we could actually do the job of what that committee is called to do. I mean, after all, it's right in the name of the committee, Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing.

Madam Speaker, I also wanted to state that, you know, members across the way are saying that stakeholders don't have the opportunity to share what their feelings are and what they'd like to see with this government. Of course, I can speak for the ministers here. They try to be as accessible as they possibly can to all

stakeholders, including those of the AAMD and C. They try to get to those meetings, be there, listen, and do as much as they can. Stakeholders also have the opportunity to have meetings with MLAs and to share their perspectives. Of course, we private members of the government caucus do our due diligence, and we are very responsible, and we communicate the opinions of those stakeholders to our ministers whenever we can.

Now, I hear the members across the way just laughing it up. They think that this is the biggest joke ever, but of course the biggest joke is the fact that they like to twist the facts. Now, I would venture that it's just as important to them to make sure that we hear from stakeholders. I don't deny that. It's very important. I've even made the argument as the chair of the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship: let's get the business out of the way, that we need to do, so that we can meet with stakeholders and get that job done.

Madam Speaker, like I said, I find it very important that we pass this amendment to Motion 501, that we send this to the committee that actually has the responsibility for doing such things, the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing. I hope that all members in this House will vote in favour of this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

5:40

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, you just can't make this stuff up. You really just can't make this stuff up, the irony of this government taking a private member's motion, a motion about encouraging committees to be able to do more work, and – what do they do? – they make a motion to send it to committee. Now, honestly, you can't make this stuff up. I can't even believe that we're here discussing this, to be honest. Now, what's interesting, too, is that this committee that they want to send it to won't be able to do any other work other than this until it's done, which was the point of the motion, to allow committees to do more than one thing.

I know that the member opposite there from Edmonton-Ellerslie says – well, you know, it's like a gotcha moment, where he said that they actually did meet. They actually did, two and a half years ago. They actually did meet. It was a great aha moment for him, I know. But two and a half years ago was the last time they met, and now the government is deciding to send this to the committee that hasn't met for two and a half years, that now will not be able to do any other work until it's done this unless, of course, they pass this. But they're not going to pass it. They're obviously dead set on sending it to committee.

Now, I know they're sending it to committee and saying, "Well, this needs to be discussed in committee," but, Madam Speaker, we've been discussing it in committee for over a year. That's what we've been doing. We've been discussing this. Every time this committee meets, we discuss this. We say: come on; let's be realistic here. The committees are hopefully made up of intelligent enough people to be able to decide whether they can take on another task or not. I would hope that we have people on the committee that could make that decision for themselves, not that it has to be hidden in the standing orders, that they're not able to make that decision for themselves. I really believe that the committees can make that decision for themselves. They have to be qualified enough to make that decision.

Now we'll get on to distorting the facts, that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie talked about. He accused us of saying that they didn't want to meet. Well, we give them every opportunity to meet.

I think we tried to pass three different motions, actually, maybe even four, to allow us to meet with these groups, and every single one was voted down except for the last one, that the chair called out of order, which probably wasn't out of order because we started a new session. He claimed that since we'd already discussed it, it couldn't be discussed again. But when you start a new session, then that should restart that, too.

Now, he said that the standing orders, speaking of distorting facts, kept us from meeting. We couldn't meet because of the standing orders. Well, Madam Speaker, I made a motion, that was in order – legal counsel agreed and approved that it was in order – that we could meet with those groups by forming a working group or a subcommittee. You know what happened? The government members voted it down. That was fair within the standing orders. So when the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie gets up and says, "Oh, no; the standing orders said that we couldn't do it," no, that's not correct. The standing orders said that we could. I made the motion, it was in order, it was approved by legal counsel, and they voted it down. So when he talks about twisting facts, I guess that's pot, kettle, black right there.

So this is simple. This is very simple. You pass this motion allowing committees to make the decision for themselves on the work that they do. Now, when the work comes from the Legislature here, then obviously that takes precedence. The members of the committee can make that decision.

Now, I went through and figured it out. In the last year we'd met in that committee five times, for a total of 12 and a half hours. That isn't being overworked as a committee member. But, obviously, the government felt that they were being overworked because they voted it down. They keep putting this off.

The groups that wanted to meet with us. The Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, elected representatives, directly in the communities that we represent. They're here in town this week. How great it would have been while they're in town to meet with them. But nope, can't do that.

The Independent Power Producers Society of Alberta. I would say that this government seems to be concerned about power all the time, power generation and distribution, all these different things. You'd think that they would want to meet with them. I would like to meet with them if for no other reason than they want to meet with us.

The Alberta Used Oil Management Association, another organization that wanted to meet: they might have something very important to discuss with us, but unfortunately we'll never know.

The Beverage Container Management Board is another group that wants to meet with us.

The Alberta Recycling Management Authority. Recycling: what's wrong with that?

Why can't we meet with these people? Some of their concerns could be timely, and by delaying two and a half years to talk to them, to listen to them, all of a sudden their issues are gone, or they've already passed, and we've given them no opportunity to express their concerns to us.

Madam Speaker, we spend lots of time in committee waiting – waiting for reports, waiting for the next meeting to come up, waiting for all the different things that we do in committee – and during those times when we're waiting, there are other things we could be doing. Again, this is as simple as dirt, to be able to meet with a couple of groups like this. It would take us a couple of hours, and we'd have that opportunity. Those people would know that they were listened to. We'd be able to understand their concerns, and we could carry on.

Again, Madam Speaker, I just don't understand. I can't believe that we're sitting here discussing committee work, and it's going to

be sent to committee. This government only does this when they want to kill something. This is about consultation. This is about listening. This is about meeting with groups that have concerns.

Obviously, this government has failed in consultation. Bill 6: classic example of no consultation. Carbon tax: no consultation. It wasn't mentioned in the election campaign.

Caribou issues. There was a group here today in the Legislature. They wanted to be listened to. They don't feel like they've been listened to. They don't feel like they've been consulted. This is what this is about. This is how we could keep from having this reoccurrence of concerns about consultation.

The Castle: again, no consultation. Lots of different issues here that could be taken care of if we just took a little time to meet with these groups when they wanted to meet with us.

Now, I know that they've come up with some pretty feeble excuses on why they didn't want to work with this during committee. They've had lots of time to think about this, the government side. We've given them plenty of time. We've been talking about this for over a year. These groups have been waiting for two and a half years to actually be able to talk to us. I can't believe that with all the time this government has had to think about it, the only thing that they can come up with is to send it to committee. I find it just absolutely appalling. I can't believe that we're at this point. Again, you can't make this stuff up.

Thank you.

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

5:50

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up and speak in favour of referring this to committee. I think this would be something that our colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills would be very much in support of since I know that he has gone on at length in this House about the importance of committee work, that it's vital to democracy.

The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky actually talked previously quite a bit about how AAMDC is coming up this week and how important it would be to meet with the various organizations that are up here for that meeting, you know, made the point that we would actually be out there. As Members of the Legislative Assembly I'm imagining that we will all be attending that.

Now, in some ways I feel like he actually made a point for us on this one in that as MLAs we are all going to be out there. We are going to be out there talking with those individuals, you know, talking with the power producers. On his suggestion that we could have a committee meeting to do that, the only time that one would be able to do that would be after hours when the House isn't sitting, which means that we would be having meetings starting at 7, 8, 9 o'clock at night. That perhaps might not be the most convenient time for that when we could be where they are already, at these meetings. So I appreciate the member for making our point on that one.

Now, I'm also a member of the Resource Stewardship Committee. I've made the point multiple times when these suggestions were brought forward in committee that the standing orders as they exist currently are very clear that while there is a matter from the Assembly referred to the committee, that takes priority and that is the subject that we are talking about.

You know, when I spoke to that motion at the time in committee, I made the point that the proper place to bring that forward is here, so I actually thank the member for taking our advice on that one and actually bringing it forward here in the House where we can address it. Except it's got one little more step to go, and that is for it to be discussed in the committee whose job it is to make these sorts of decisions. I think, perhaps ironically,

that the standing orders as they exist currently would require that committee to meet and talk about this subject. After due consideration, the standing orders could be modified as necessary based on the concerns that come up with that. So I'm glad that, you know, this has moved forward to the correct place where it can be properly addressed.

I hope that when it goes to the committee of privileges and elections and printing, I believe, that it does get due consideration. I always want to make sure that if this motion to change the standing orders is to go forward, it is used appropriately and not used to filibuster, you know, the things that have been referred to committee. Often when bills are referred to committee, they have a set timeline to them that is put there by this Assembly. So I'd hate to see that that would be used as a way to filibuster.

As I mentioned previously, to say that we're refusing to consult with Albertans is, of course, absolute hogwash. You know, I only have to look so far as my colleague who brought forward his private member's bill on daylight saving time, which actually went through the committee process, and how many people came forward to him before he brought that bill forward and how many people came forward and talked to him in committee and how that report came forward to this Assembly. That, hon. members, was a lot of consultation.

I think even of my own private member's bill, Bill 211, which unfortunately did not pass due to the House being prorogued, and I think of the consultation I did on that bill. I did two consultations in Edmonton, two in Calgary, one in Lethbridge, and one in Medicine Hat to make sure that I got a fulsome understanding. I didn't do that through committee. I went out and did that through my ability to do that as a private member MLA, as we all have the ability to do. So to say that committee is the only place where we can do consultation is absolutely ridiculous. Committee is, I think, for certain things a great place to do that, and I think the standing orders as they exist, you know, reflect that.

When committees take their own initiative to explore a topic on their own, it's usually on a specific issue as opposed to meeting with a specific stakeholder. If the topic that we're going to look at, for example, is recycling, well, we would want to make sure that we have all the information available to us and invite all stakeholders, not just one industry group but other industry groups and stakeholders and local community members that would have an opinion on that particular subject. I think that's appropriate when you have an overall subject.

You know, I note for the Lobbyists Act in Resource Stewardship, which is the committee that this was brought forward in, we had meetings in 2017 on January 12, February 21, June 14, July 4. We also met on the Property Rights Advocate on October 10 and on the Conflicts of Interest Act on November 29. Those are meetings of the Resource Stewardship Committee right there. Of course, one could say: "All right. Well, I guess there is a gap in March there." I think the opposition is sometimes being a little enthusiastic in their interpretation of the truth in that there is, you know, nothing else that's going on.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead, hon. member.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Nixon: Madam Speaker, I could have point-of-ordered this several times in the last few minutes by rising on 23(h), (i), and (j), certainly, language that will cause disorder in this House. Repeatedly we've seen government members across the way today

imply that members on this side of the House are not telling the truth or are playing fast and loose with the truth. The member just said similar comments, in fact.

It does nothing to help the debate in this place, Madam Speaker. It is certainly against the tradition of this place, and I would ask that you caution members to not continue to do that.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the point of order? Hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, do you wish to speak to it?

Mr. Malkinson: I think I can take this opportunity, if it would be suitable to the House, to rephrase my last comment.

The Deputy Speaker: I would caution members. We've had rulings before from the Speaker that we don't use language that implies not telling the truth on either side.

Continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To say, you know, that there is nothing happening in those gaps of time, I

think one ought to remember that we're in this Chamber doing work, just like we are doing right now, discussing bills that are coming forward. Personally, I'm very much looking forward to discussing Bill 5, introduced just today, because that particular bill, of course, is very similar in spirit to my private member's bill. I'm happy to bring that forward, and I'm looking forward to the debate on that particular bill.

On the committee meetings, in 2016 there were 88 committee meetings, by my count. In 2017 there were over a hundred of them; I stopped counting at that point. In 2018 so far my count is that there have been 12 committee meetings since January, and of course we are not even done March yet, Madam Speaker.

I think, you know, that the correct place for this to go forward is to the privileges and elections committee, where we have the time to weigh the pros and cons of this particular suggestion in the correct committee to do that. The standing orders as they currently exist would, of course, require that committee to do that.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but pursuant to the standing orders the House stands adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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