



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, March 19, 2018

Day 6

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Fourth Session

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

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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (NDP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)
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Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (NDP)
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Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),
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New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 25 Alberta Party: 3 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 1 Vacant: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, March 19, 2018

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Good evening, everyone. Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 3 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2018

The Acting Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 3, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2018.

The act will provide funding authority to the offices of the Legislative Assembly and to the government for the period of April 1, 2018, to May 31, 2018, inclusive. Two months, Madam Speaker. The approval of this act will provide the funds necessary to continue the business of the province while the Assembly takes the time necessary to prepare, present, review, and debate the government's 2018-19 budget plans.

I respectfully urge my colleagues on both sides of this House to support this bill. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to second reading? The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I look at Bill 3, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2018, and I'm surprised that the government thinks that we could even have a discussion on it. Actually, I'm not surprised at all. We're working with a few solitary, isolated figures, and that's it. Not very much detail in this bill, as with all the other bills this government presents. This government is asking us to write them a blank cheque for the first two months of the fiscal year, from April 1, 2018, to May 31, 2018. That's one-sixth of a year. The Minister of Finance and Treasury comes to the Legislature seeking permission to spend millions of dollars, and we have only the sketchiest of information.

Now, members are offered an opportunity to ask the minister about these very large monetary requests, but do we get an answer? I don't know. It's up to the members to decide. I don't think we got the answer that Albertans are looking for. Let me quote from last Thursday's *Hansard* when the Member for Calgary-Hays asked the Minister of Finance about interim supply. The member asked:

Are there any details specific to any ministry that he can share with the House where something more or less is going to be spent this year than in the same period of time in the last fiscal year? Since he's asking for all this money, I thought he might share a little more information than has been shared thus far about what indeed he intends to spend more or less money on.

The minister responded with no details, just vague comments, certainly not any figures or details at all. He did repeat his well-worn mantra of having Albertans' backs. I think that's the mantra they try to play every time we ask them any questions. But, Madam Speaker, we do not see a government taking care of people's backs. I don't want to get into that detail; otherwise, we'll run out of time here. We can talk about the carbon tax. We can talk about Bill 6, but I'd rather stick to this bill.

We see a government focused on pushing through its ideological agenda, the NDP world view. The agenda is not making lives easier. The carbon tax, again, as I said, is a good example of that. Alberta still has a shockingly high unemployment rate. Calgary alone: 7.9 per cent unemployment rate, the second-highest of any large city in Canada. Families are having a hard time making ends meet. I agree with the minister claiming that it's coming down because the unemployed people are probably moving out of this province to other jurisdictions to find jobs.

Small businesses are collapsing under the weight of this government's ideological legislation, which includes, as I said earlier, Bill 6, minimum wage, and that despised carbon tax. Just how high is the carbon tax going to go? Our leader asks the hon. Premier every day, and we still have to hear the answer: up, up, up. The Member for Calgary-Lougheed, as I said, has pointedly asked the Premier, but no answer.

On top of this issue, we have an NDP government saddling future generations with crushing debt. Those generations are going to look back on us and wonder why we let it get out of hand, why we let it go so far, like, billions of dollars of debt. Then we have this interim supply bill that is asking for billions of dollars with no accounting of where it's going to go. I guess that's how this government operates: no accountability to Albertans.

Madam Speaker, taking care of taxpayers' money is a sacred task for legislators. We come to this House and ask questions and are looking for answers to help guide us. As my colleague the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat asked the Finance minister during the period when members on this side of the House are offered an opportunity to pose questions to the government: Minister, we're being asked to approve over 8 and a half billion dollars with only a dozen pages of details and less than 24 hours to read and prepare. He, too, received a vague comment. The Finance minister, in answer to the question about whether any expenses related to the carbon tax, responded:

I can tell you that in my own department there is I think it's in the neighbourhood of a couple of million dollars that are expended on the administration of that climate leadership plan. I can get more specific information and have that for when we do estimates and I sit down and talk with members of the opposition and members on this side specifically about my own budget and my own department.

That wasn't helpful at all.

Mr. Ceci: But it's accurate.

Mr. Gill: He applauds it.

It's a couple of million, when he's coming to the Legislature asking for \$8.5 billion, and the only information we received on those kinds of massive funds is a dozen pages. We thought we might get details when questioning the ministers in this Chamber, which is what we thought is supposed to occur. We were not enlightened at all but were not surprised at the same time. Why did this government not prepare the budget prior so that we can consider this in its entirety? By the way, we also asked this question, Madam Speaker, and didn't get the answer, as usual.

The government asks a lot of us, Madam Speaker. It's requesting billions of dollars and not accounting for it. So what I hope they consider tonight is that when they do this, they are asking a lot of taxpayers where the taxpayers want this money to go. Of course, we have seen how much taxpayers count to them; they are simply there to supply the money. I mean, like, we have all seen the latest polling results. That's why this government's polling results are low, because this government does not believe in respecting taxpayers' money.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. What a wonderful evening it is – isn't it? – to be here in the House discussing interim supply. I'm just loving every moment of it. What I love most is the way that our hon. members and friends from across the way like to characterize the work of this government. You know, it's like, oh, you'd imagine that the sky is falling, right? Well, I am so proud of what this government has done in just the last three years.

I remember being a university student, and every year my tuition would just go up and up and up and up and up, right? You know, coming from a good, working-class home – my parents didn't have all the money that perhaps other families do – it was a challenge. They used to work really hard. I'm really proud of my parents. They both had full-time jobs, and on top of having two full-time jobs, we would also clean, provide janitorial services at night. For 17 years that's all my parents did.

7:40

When I was old enough I would go help them because I'd see how hard they were working. When I think back to the times when, you know, my mom and dad would get home around 5 o'clock, I usually would have something prepared to help them out. I'd have something cooking on the kitchen range just so that I could help out around the house. They'd sit for about an hour. They'd have their meal, they'd have enough time for a quick coffee, and they were back out the door again.

It surprises me because, you know, a lot of the times the members from across the way – I'm not going to say all of them – like to characterize us as perhaps being too privileged or lazy or, I don't know, as if we don't work hard as well, as if we don't know what it's like to put in a hard day's work, because according to them only people who own businesses know that kind of hard work. There are a lot of working people in this province who may not be business owners, but they know how to work just as hard. Some of them have two jobs, three jobs, little contracts on the side to help them make it to the end of the month.

I know that so many – so many – constituents that live in my riding are new Canadians. You know, one of the things that they tell me constantly is: we came to this country so that our kids could have a better future. Some of them are working those two, three jobs, contracts on the side so that they can send their children to postsecondary institutions in this province. You can bet – you can absolutely bet – that this tuition freeze is helping out those families, making life more affordable for these new families, these new Canadians who came here and are doing the very best to contribute to this society, to this province.

I know so many of them. They come and see me at my constituency office or I see them in the community or when I'm knocking on doors. You know, I go door-knocking in my constituency, and I'm happy to say that I'm at that stage now where people open the door and they're like: hey, Rod. Oh. Sorry. I forgot that I'm not allowed to mention my name in the House.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member.

Loyola: It was a mistake.

The Acting Speaker: It's parliamentary practice in this House that we do not use names, nor do we mock the parliamentary practice. So if you could be respectful of the practice and continue and stay on the bill, please.

Loyola: My apologies, Madam Speaker. It was a sincere mistake. I didn't mean it. I didn't mean it. I actually caught myself after I said it, and I apologized.

We've frozen tuition specifically to help these families. And not just new Canadians: there are a lot of people in this province who are benefiting from such a decision. We're trying our best to make life more affordable for all Albertans with the decisions that we are making.

You know, just the other day I was asking the Minister of Children's Services what it would be like if we weren't to fund the programs that she has the responsibility for. I don't even want to imagine what that would be like. Imagine if we had to stop helping people on AISH or income support because this interim supply bill wouldn't pass.

You know, the other thing that I'm extremely proud of is Economic Development and Trade and the fact that in the last year we put forward two tax credits – two tax credits – that we could help Alberta businesses with, the capital investment tax credit and the Alberta investor tax credit, making sure that we were supporting small and medium-sized businesses here in this province, making sure that in this difficult economic time we're at least doing a small piece to help get us back to recovery, help get us on that right path and the minister of development and trade doing his very best to get out there and connect with as many people as possible so that we can encourage and get more investment here in the province of Alberta.

Education, funding for enrolment: the minister has done his absolute best in a very difficult time. Yeah, we weren't able to reduce school fees by the entire amount, but we did what we could in this economic context so that we could make life more affordable for those families.

You know, I was very happy. Perhaps the best thing, especially in my riding, has been the fact that we've been able to build four new schools – four new schools – since being elected. Four new schools have been built in the constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. Those families are incredibly happy because there was such incredible pressure on the existing schools there, on Ellerslie Campus and Michael Strembitsky. The names of the schools: I'm not joshing.

Let me tell you that families were coming up to me and telling me how difficult it was, the fact that they lived so close to the school, yet there was such an enormous amount of pressure before these other schools opened that they couldn't take their kids to that particular school. That was after years and years and years of promises that the schools would be built. I mean, people were moving into the neighbourhood, and they were being told: yeah, a new school is going to be built right across the way here for you. They waited, and they waited, and they waited.

Right now I'm just going to put in a plug to the Minister of Education. Hopefully he can communicate to the Infrastructure minister that now what I would really love is a high school in Edmonton-Ellerslie. We've gotten quite a few schools, but now it'd be lovely to get a new high school for Edmonton public. The other thing that I'm extremely proud of is the fact that we've updated the labour laws in this province. We've come a long way. To be quite honest, we're just doing what other jurisdictions across this great country have done in terms of bringing up our labour law to that extent.

The other thing is increasing the minimum wage for those same people who are working two or sometimes even three jobs. It's well known that if you put money in the pockets of those people, they're going to go out and spend it in this economy so that things can get better instead of it sitting in a bank account somewhere, in savings, which is also good, too. Don't get me wrong. But it's important that

people have the money so that they can make ends meet by the end of the month.

7:50

Madam Speaker, one of the other things that I'm incredibly proud that this government has done, of course, is the creation of the Ministry of Status of Women. What incredible work has been done so far in this province in the Ministry of Status of Women – thank you very much to the minister, who's championed that – in terms of our funding for sexual assault centres here in the province of Alberta, that we're doing everything that we possibly can to respond to the rights of women and campaigns like Me Too and doing our very best in order to move this province along.

Another important part, of course, is the savings that have been made within the agencies, boards, and commissions. Now, I don't know about other members in this House, but I was incredibly surprised to know that we were funding – well, not “we” like ourselves but the taxpayers of this province – golf memberships for the people who were in these positions and also the fact that it wasn't a transparent process in order to actually sit on one of these agencies, boards, and commissions, that people were just being named. Friends of friends of the government were just being named. Now it's a different process, and every opportunity that I have, I go out there and I tell my constituents about the fact that now it's a more transparent and fair process and that you can actually apply to be part of the agencies, boards, and commissions, that we're trying to increase diversity on these agencies, boards, and commissions. More women, more people who are ethnically diverse that also call this province home now have the opportunity to apply to these agencies, boards, and commissions.

I think that it's incredibly important that we continue the work that we're doing because, of course, there's so much more work to do. Don't get me wrong. We can continue doing more work. I mean, trying to reduce school fees a little more, doing our very best to make sure that that dollar in the pocket of each Albertan goes a little bit further: at the end of the day, that's what we're trying to do here.

In terms of infrastructure – I'm going to go back to that for a bit and just talk about the fact that building hospitals, the cancer institute . . .

Connolly: Centre.

Loyola: The cancer centre. Pardon me. I'm confusing it with the one here in Edmonton.

. . . the cancer centre in Calgary, the new hospital in southwest Edmonton. That's going to also help the people from my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie, less stress on the Grey Nuns hospital, all of this is going to . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any comments or questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Absolutely. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate being recognized today. I was interested in – I was listening, anyway, to the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie's speech and to him talking a lot about some of the things that he was proud of or indicated that he felt the governing party that he belongs to did. One thing I noticed that he left out was the talk about the carbon tax, well, the fact that his party never told Albertans about this carbon tax that they brought through when they campaigned. In fact, this was a surprise tax that they put in place on everything after not telling the good people of Alberta what they intended on doing with them, something that Albertans, you know, if polling is to be believed, over two-thirds of them, are upset about.

What was interesting was talk about all the things he was happy about. You know, in my community, Madam Speaker, we have a seniors' centre, the West Country seniors' centre. Right now it's been in the news a lot lately. Some of them came and visited me not too long ago with tears in their eyes, particularly Ray Sharp, who's one of the board members there. He's worked very, very hard to put together that seniors' centre, a place for our seniors, who built our community, to be able to come and recreate.

Ray's wife has some medical conditions that don't allow them to travel more. In fact, she can only be out of the home for a couple of hours at most, and then he has to return her home. Ray has dedicated this time to keeping care of his spouse of many decades.

He came with tears in his eyes, talking about how there was a good chance that this West Country seniors' centre, that is so important to them and to people all across the community, may have to close the doors. He was very upset about it. We talked about this, of course, at a press conference. He'd been calling the Premier's office over and over and over. The response he got back from the issue management people of this government was: go and have a fundraiser to pay for your carbon tax. Go and have a fundraiser to pay for your carbon tax. They told that to senior citizens in our community, who are just trying to take care of each other and have somewhere to recreate. Go and have a fundraiser to pay for our carbon tax. That's shameful, Madam Speaker. That's shameful.

I noticed that nobody in the government is standing up to talk about that, to talk about the serious consequences and punishment that they're putting on our communities. They talked about AISH. What about the AISH recipients who are paying a carbon tax right now? Further to that, what about the nonprofits that are the social safety net of our communities right now, that are having trouble keeping their doors open because of this government's carbon tax? I noticed they didn't talk about how proud they were of that. I certainly hope they weren't. [interjections] You know, the government is heckling me right now, Madam Speaker. It's not funny.

We've got Meals on Wheels, a very important thing, I'm assuming, across the province. [interjections] The hon. Municipal Affairs minister is heckling, too. I hope he gets up and shares some of his thoughts later. Here is a government that brought forward a tax that is punishing people, that is damaging our social safety net, and that has the ridiculous audacity to stand up inside this House and say that they're proud of the carbon tax and what they have done but ignores . . . [interjection] The minister of postsecondary is heckling away. He's probably one of the ones who told the senior citizens to hold the fundraiser, the way he's acting right now.

Mr. Schmidt: You want to take the money, probably, and give it to billionaires. How's that?

Mr. Nixon: He says that I want to take money from seniors and give it to billionaires. No, Madam Speaker. This government is the one that is taking money from the seniors in my community. I am the one who is coming to this House and bringing it up. The hon. postsecondary minister's government is the one who's calling those senior citizens and telling them to hold a fundraiser to pay for his ridiculous carbon tax. That's what's happening right now. But when they stand up and they talk about it, they don't talk about it at all. They don't want to hear about the damage that they're doing to our communities.

I was talking to people from Athabasca the other day, when I was up in Two Hills. They were talking about how much their heating bill has gone up and how upset they were with their representation for not standing up in this House and defending them because

Albertans are not proud of what this government has done. They're disappointed in what this government has done.

I would like to hear the hon. member speak more about that, address the fact that his government's answer to the seniors in my community on this important issue is to raise the rates on fixed-income seniors. This is the place that they have to go recreate, and this government's answer is: go hold a fundraiser to pay for our carbon tax, or raise the rates on fixed-income seniors. This is the place that they can go recreate in our community.

As you can see, Madam Speaker, they're getting upset as we raise it today because this is the part that they don't want to talk about. They don't want to talk about the negative impact that their policies are having on people. They don't want to talk about the impact that their carbon tax is having on people in this province. They want to stand here and talk about all the things they're proud of but forget about the damage that they're doing. Now, Madam Speaker, I cannot imagine . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, just before we continue with the debate, I just want to remind everyone that we are on the debate for interim supply. I've allowed the dialogue to drift on both sides, and I think I've been fair now. If we could please go back to Bill 3, appropriations for supply.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It took every fibre of my being not to call a point of order in the last couple of speeches. I decided that I would allow you to run the show here. But I appreciate your comments, and I will restrain my comments here to Bill 3. I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill although I have to say that I wish I didn't have to. I wish we didn't have to be here because we don't have to be here.

8:00

There's a reason that the standing orders have us starting the spring sitting of the Legislature at the beginning of February. Standing orders have us come in on the second Tuesday of February, and that is to allow the government time to come in and get, quite literally, the House in order and put a budget before Albertans in time for us to get past the 31st of March, which is barely eight days away by the time the budget drops, and not have to bring in interim supply.

Notwithstanding the fact that we spent a scintillating three hours in Committee of Supply and had an opportunity to quiz the minister on the specifics of exactly what happens in interim supply, the lack of detail makes it very difficult for us to make comparisons. We recognize, of course, that not everything in the government operates in a perfect, linear, 12-month calendar. There are fluctuations in funding requirements at different times of the year, so we wouldn't expect to take a ministry's budget from last year, divide it by 12, and for the couple of months multiply again by two to come up with a number in terms of what we would expect to see in each department for interim supply. We've had some answers to what those allocations are here that are being requested in Bill 3, but there's a lot of information that's left out in the open.

When you do a year-over-year comparison from the last interim supply to this one, there are some differences, and that is cause for concern. It leads us to wonder if the government is trying to find ways of fudging this a little bit, finding ways to add a little bit of spending that may not otherwise have seen the light of day. It is quite challenging to do that when you don't have the opportunity to go into an estimates process and the very detailed process that we're about to go through here. Of course, that won't happen until eight days before the end of the fiscal year.

The challenge that that presents for the departments is that it makes it very challenging for them to plan, not knowing exactly what their budget is going to be until eight days before the end of the fiscal year. Even then, of course, there's always the possibility that things will change in the debate process although that doesn't seem to happen nearly as often as I might like, much as those of us on this side of the House will try. It does make it very difficult for departments to plan when fully one-sixth of their year goes by before they have their new budget formalized and in place. It is a tremendous challenge for the departments, and I know that from talking with people in a variety of different departments. They tell me that they would certainly prefer clarity and a budget sometime in the month of February, which is why standing orders are what they say they are.

This government loves to run down the prior government and all the terrible things they did and to say how this government is undoing all of that damage. Well, that government would do this quite often as well, and this is something, frankly, that I, unfortunately, see this current government emulating far, far, far too often. It's unnecessary, and it doesn't make for ease of planning within the departments.

Planning matters and governance matters. I would hope that those of us in this Chamber are here because we've a passion for governing our province well. Unfortunately, when we have to continually bring in interim supply, it does not represent good governance practice because it doesn't follow the standing orders.

It does also get in the way of other important business that I would hope government would be setting about tackling. How do we create more and more sustainable, full-time jobs in this province? How do we attract back that capital that's gone away from this province and doesn't seem to be coming back, certainly not in the oil and gas sector? I can tell you from talking with many of my constituents recently that there are grave concerns about companies moving capital out of this province. They look forward to hoping to have a new government in place after the next election that will help attract capital back into this province, not eliminating the carbon tax, as our colleagues here to my right would do, but fixing the carbon tax.

There are flaws within the carbon tax system. The Alberta Party very much believes that a carbon tax is an economically efficient way of reducing emissions. From the way this government has implemented that, though, I'm not confident and convinced it actually achieves those outcomes.

Of course, planning proper infrastructure builds – schools, everything from flood protection infrastructure to hospitals to roads and bridges and those kinds of things – and actually making sure that those projects are executed on time and that the dollars actually get out the door to get that work done.

Making our health care system sustainable. I was having some interesting conversations at an event earlier this evening with a variety of different stakeholders from an economics background, from a health care governance perspective just on what it's going to take to make our health care system sustainable. Unfortunately, I don't see enough creative thinking from this government. What I see is a lot of narrow thinking in terms of how things need to happen. I don't see the substantial change required that's going to change the structural cost problem we have in our health care system. One way we're going to do that, of course, is by unlocking the wonderful people who are within the system and working on the front lines in a variety of different aspects every single day.

It makes it very challenging to support interim supply. I understand that without it the government ceases to operate, and of course I don't think any of us want to see that. This government has put us in a position where we have no choice but to pass this

legislation just simply to keep things going when there's a perfectly reasonable way of this government doing that, and that is to come back to this House far sooner, bring a budget in time so we can debate and pass that before the end of the fiscal year, which is how the system is set up and is meant to be.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? Comments or questions?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for . . .

Mr. Hanson: Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, ma'am, the now defunct constituency of Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

I just want to talk briefly on a couple of issues, specifically Education. I was going to stick to Education and Municipal Affairs, but the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie kind of prompted me to comment on Advanced Education as well because he talked about freezing tuitions. Now, I see in the paper today that the Advanced Education minister is in an argument with the University of Alberta board of governors and the president over what they've seen as necessary cuts and an increase in the budget to student residences. It's fine to say that you're freezing tuitions, but these institutions still have to survive, and they have to find ways to do it.

Now, getting back to Education and Municipal Affairs specifically, I know that the government doesn't want to talk about it – and possibly the Member for Calgary-Elbow doesn't want to talk about it either – but the carbon tax is a very big part of what they do in Education and Municipal Affairs. Interestingly enough, I was just at a bit of a luncheon on Thursday evening, sitting with a bunch of school boards from all over the province. I was at a table with some folks from Hinton and area, up in the Jasper area. We were talking about it, and, you know, they were talking about different ways that they could cut costs in their budgets and try and cover some of these costs, the ever-increasing costs to them.

I suggested that there was a way that we could cut some costs that would benefit all the school boards in Alberta. It wouldn't discriminate against rural or urban school boards. One of the trustees asked me, "Well, what was that?" I said, "Well, we could make you exempt from the carbon tax." Well, the Member for Sherwood Park was sitting at the table, and she jumped up and said, "We're not here to talk about carbon tax." But, believe me, everybody in that room wanted to talk about carbon tax. You were the only ones that didn't want to talk about carbon tax.

Postsecondary and school boards: they want to talk about carbon tax. That's all part of their budget, which is part of this budget. My question is: how much of this interim supply goes to cover that? You know, I understand why they want to call it a levy, because if you didn't call it a levy, they wouldn't be able to tax school boards and municipalities. But how much of the money is the province putting in? We're basically taxing our own tax dollars or pulling out of our own tax dollars to pay for this carbon tax, which doesn't make a lot of sense.

8:10

I've got a meeting on Friday with a whole lot of very angry bus drivers from my community. They're going to come into my office and talk to me about carbon tax and how it's affecting them and what they can do. They used to have a program where, if fuel prices reached a certain level, they would get a rebate back from the province, but now on top of that, they're paying a carbon tax. That is a very big concern, so I ask the question: how much of the Education budget goes directly back into school boards paying into the carbon

tax? Do you think it's fair that we're penalizing some of these school boards that are already struggling with falling ranks? You know, does the government think it's fair that we not exempt them?

The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre was talking about seniors and Meals on Wheels. We talked about that when they first introduced the carbon tax, about exempting some of these folks, and we never got any response, other than no, from the government. Do you really think it's fair that we're penalizing all of these groups to cover your green slush fund?

Another thing that I heard with regard to Municipal Affairs was on the MSI funding, and I heard it on the radio. The Minister of Transportation was on the radio. He was talking about how they're going to tie a portion of the MSI funding to green energy projects, so basically you would possibly not get that funding. I'd like some clarity on that.

Mr. S. Anderson: It's facts and information.

Mr. Hanson: The Municipal Affairs minister is laughing about it, but I did hear it from the Transportation minister's mouth on 630 CHED, so I'd like some clarification on that. Is there something in the MSI funding model that is tying it to green energy projects? It would be interesting to know. I know that a lot of the municipalities in my area are interested to know that as well.

Again, really, I know that the government doesn't like talking about the carbon tax. They try to avoid it at every possibility, but those groups – and I know that the AAMD and C is going on this week. I would encourage the Municipal Affairs minister to stand up and listen to what these folks are saying about how the carbon tax is affecting everything that they do. You know, it's a tax on taxpayer dollars, which doesn't make any sense. It's like taking money out of their pockets, and they're very frustrated with it. They're trying their best to make ends meet in a tough situation. We talk about the situation in Alberta.

I do agree with the Member for Calgary-Elbow that we're talking about this bill because we didn't come back to the House soon enough and get the budget out in a timely fashion. We could be avoiding a lot of this discussion over that. I do look forward to budget estimates, though, and, you know, specifically picking apart some of these things. I hope that a lot of the questions are surrounding the carbon tax so that we can actually get some words in *Hansard* from the government when they're forced to answer our questions in estimates.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. S. Anderson: Just a clarification for the member; that's all. The MSI has zero to do with the carbon levy. I think what you might be referring to is the grant that I announced the other day to the AUMA, which is \$54 million from the climate leadership plan for the Municipal Climate Change Action Centre, which goes to programs that support municipalities across the province with renewable energy, community generation, municipal fleet greening, and community infrastructure. I think that's what you were referring to, so that's what that was.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Hanson: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the clarification. I may have misheard, but I thought it was tied to MSI. I'd have to look back at the transcript from CHED and see if that is actually what he said.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Yeah, I would like to just take a few minutes and talk about the interim supply bill. You know, I guess I was looking at things like Children's Services. Of course, I know the people on the other side want to talk about how heartless we are over here and that we don't want to see money spent on things like Children's Services and everything, and nothing could be farther from the truth. But what I do want to point out is things like the carbon tax and its effect on nonprofits. There are lots of nonprofits doing very good work in their communities, and of course this carbon tax has added costs onto all of them.

Another thing I wanted to point out is that I had kind of an interesting conversation the other day with a young lady that worked with Big Brothers Big Sisters. Of course, in their fundraising and different things that they do, she sometimes works late evenings and different things like that. Of course, her preference would be to be able to take time off in lieu of the time she worked extra. But with the recent labour legislation, of course, that opportunity isn't there anymore. Now Big Brothers Big Sisters has to pay time and a half on her extra time. I think it's one of the things that we brought up at the time. We asked the government to consider this a little bit more as far as how the labour legislation affected people's rights to choose how they wanted to be paid. Of course, this is a first-hand situation where this labour legislation is costing a nonprofit organization money that neither of them would want. I mean, the employee didn't want it to happen, and neither did Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Now, when we look at the interim supply here, this is billions of dollars. I mean, I think that sometimes we sit in this Legislature and we look at billions of dollars and we think: ah, whatever. I mean, I think we get somewhat numb to these big figures. But I think that Albertans aren't quite that numb to these numbers. I think that when they see us spending billions of dollars and talking about, you know, a few hundred million here, a few hundred million there, whatever, I think they have a reason to be suspicious as far as why we're spending the money and where this money is going, because this is their money; it's not our money. It's their money, that we're entrusted to spend, and we have to spend that wisely. Of course, there are lots of good programs that the government spends money on, there's no doubt. But there are obviously places where things could be changed and, I think, money could be redirected to better places.

The Minister of Advanced Education was heckling about a few things to do with his ministry. You know, we look at the cost of the carbon tax on these universities and colleges and how that affects them, the freeze on tuition and everything. I think these organizations are having a tougher and tougher time all the time making ends meet and trying to figure out how to adjust their budgets for things like the carbon tax and other legislation that this government brings forward.

Now, because of this government and the massive amount of money that it's spending and the massive amount of debt that it's racking up and the interest costs and everything, I think that creates a lack of trust, that Albertans have, that their money is being spent properly. I think Albertans are smart enough to know that when you have, you know, such a large budget, there has to be room for some savings and there have to be things where money could be shifted from one thing. It's all about priorities and where the money should be spent. We know that families in Alberta are hurting. We know

that small business is hurting. We know that a lot of these things that are taking place in this Legislature, the bills that are being passed here, the things that are being brought forward by this government, aren't making life better for Albertans. It's making it worse.

Now, we have problems here, of course, like that we've lost a lot of investment in Alberta. These investment dollars: it isn't like they just didn't get spent; they just got spent elsewhere. You know, when people have investment money, despite the nature of the term, they want a return on that money. It's an investment. They're not just coming to Alberta to give it away or taking it to Saskatchewan and giving it away. They're investing it, and they expect to have a return on that. Of course, if the return is greater somewhere else, then that's where that money is going to go. So we need to be conscious that money can be transported easily, that it can be moved to different jurisdictions very easily. That's why we have to be careful as we make decisions here in Alberta that we need to be competitive with the rest of the world.

Now, again I do want to say that there are some great things that the government does and that the government spends money on, but we just need to be a little more conscious, I think, of where this money is being spent and redirect it to the places where it's needed most. I just want to leave that, I guess, at this point and just remind everybody that, you know, again, these hundreds of millions of dollars that we look at in these budgets: it's not just money; it's Albertans' money, and we were elected to be responsible for it.

Thank you.

8:20

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I will now call on the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to close debate.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. Yes. After hearing numerous points of view with regard to interim supply, I do want to remind everyone – and I think it's been said several times – that the budget will be presented on Thursday of this week at about 3 p.m. I will have the opportunity then to make a budget speech, and then every member of the House will receive copies of the budget to pore through, and as they look at all of the important directions and numbers in the budget and the programs that are getting funded, they'll be able to better track the various issues that they have identified as concerns. Soon, in estimates, we will have the opportunity as ministers and members of this House to go through that budget in detail with respect to ministries. I look forward to that opportunity with respect to Treasury Board and Finance, and I know my other colleagues do the same.

Thank you very much for the opportunity, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

Bill 4

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2018

The Acting Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you again, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 4, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2018.

The supplementary amounts provided in this bill reflect the fiscal picture outlined in the third-quarter fiscal update released on February 28. These amounts are necessary for the government to conduct business and fulfill its commitments for the current fiscal year. The additional amounts mainly relate to support for the municipal sustainability initiative, wildfire disaster recovery and emergency assistance, child intervention, child care subsidy and supports, persons with disabilities and assured income for the severely handicapped, employment and income support, the provincial share of the agricultural insurance premium and indemnities, compensation increases for Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the justices of the peace, and the Alberta production grants.

I respectfully urge my colleagues in this House to support this bill, and I thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for letting me address this supplementary supply bill here. The government, as we are well aware in this House, over the last three years has passed three budgets, all of them with deficits, significant deficits. Budgets that this government has passed have racked up an accumulated debt that is into the billions of dollars. This government is shortly, as the hon. Minister of Finance just finished saying, going to be passing a budget. It's going to be coming to us this Thursday.

Mr. Ceci: Not passing, introducing.

Mr. Smith: Introducing. Thank you.

While I am not necessarily a prophet, I do predict that there's going to be another deficit, to the tune of billions of dollars, in this coming budget. I believe that by the next general election, we could probably have somewhere around a \$50 billion debt, that this province is going to have to address and deal with.

Madam Speaker, now we have the government coming to us with a supplementary supply request to cover additional costs, costs that are going to be added already to a deficit-driven, mismanaged budget. The government is asking Albertans to come to the table once again. As a member of the opposition we will not be supporting this government in the way that they spend the hard-earned tax dollars of everyday Albertans. It's hard to support a supplementary supply bill that asks for even more money, that will create even more debt, that will continue to spend our children's inheritance.

Madam Speaker, my decision is not built on any one program or set of asks in this supplementary supply bill. Rather, my concerns are for how this government has approached the entire economy, the spending of the government, and this supplementary supply ask. There are some requests in this supplementary bill that are reasonable and on an individual basis would have had my support, but when the supplementary bill is taken as a whole and when I consider its entirety, it will not have my support. When the government has so badly mismanaged the economy, when they've passed bill after bill and regulation after regulation that has negatively impacted the citizens of Alberta, I know that my constituents would not want to see me support an additional ask for money from this government.

It may have been different if the government had been willing to listen to the opposition and to the people in my constituency. If they had been willing to, for instance, admit their mistake and realize that the carbon tax had not purchased any social licence, was not going to have any real environmental effect, if they had been willing

to listen and perhaps revisit the carbon tax, if they had been willing to more strongly support the Trans Mountain pipeline, if they had been willing to reduce taxes and the taxation burden on Albertans, or if they had been willing to bring back an Alberta advantage, then perhaps our economy could have sustained an additional ask for money. But this government hasn't listened to the people of this province, and I will have to vote against this supplementary supply bill.

8:30

Now, as the shadow minister for Education in the United Conservative Party I had the opportunity to make sure that the minister received questions with regard to Education and his asks on the supplementary supply bill. I believe that the answers to many of the questions that were asked of the minister about why he would need additional monies in this supplementary supply bill were insufficient for me to support his requests.

We asked why the minister would transfer \$31.5 million from operational funding into capital investment. The minister responded that the \$31.5 million would go to painting and new roofs and new furnaces, and I have no doubt that's exactly where that money would go to. But he did not answer why his budget was \$31.5 million off. We see by the minister's own admission that the student population across Alberta is growing, yet we are taking \$31.5 million out of operational. I guess this also begs the question: why was his budget so off on maintenance and renewal?

The government rates school conditions. I believe the Department of Infrastructure has an index that they use to ensure that the schools are appropriately maintained. Since the minister is asking for more money for maintenance and renewal, one of the questions we were wondering was: well, what does that say about the school evaluation index? The minister in his answer admitted that the Department of Infrastructure conducts evaluations and that local school boards do as well, and he pointed out in our questioning that school boards are adequately compensated in terms of infrastructure supply and maintenance. If they're adequately supplied with infrastructure and maintenance, then why is he coming back and asking for more money? So we still have no real explanation for why the minister needs to put an additional \$31.5 million into infrastructure maintenance and renewal.

While the minister asks to transfer \$31.5 million from budget line 2.3 to budget line 3.1, he also asks in supplementary supply that \$4 million would be transferred back into line 2.3. So he's taking money out, and then he's transferring money back in. When asked why he would transfer money out only to put some of it back in, the minister referred to extraordinary circumstances. He did not bother to explain what those extraordinary circumstances were, so as taxpayers we're left wondering why he would do this, which once again provides very little clarity as to why this supplementary bill needs additional monies.

In the supplementary bill the minister decreased funding by \$3 million from the Education transportation budget and another \$1.7 million in funding for the small class size initiative. It left us wondering: how does reducing the transportation budget by \$3 million while at the same time burdening school boards with a carbon tax benefit education? It just doesn't seem to make sense. Taking out \$3 million from the Education transportation budget with no clear plan as to how you're actually going to address the shortfalls in transportation that the schools boards are facing is not, I would argue, going to improve education.

Taking \$1.7 million out of funding for the small class size initiative without a clear plan for actually addressing the Auditor General's concerns regarding the use of that small class size initiative and the fact that we have never met our targets: how is

that going to improve education? The minister even admitted in this House that he was not sure why he was reducing small class size funding by \$1.7 million and that he would have to get back to the Legislature about that.

In conclusion, it is for these reasons that I will not be supporting the supplementary supply bill. The budgetary decisions of this government over the past three years have placed the Alberta economy in danger. This supplementary supply bill does not move us off the path of continuing debt and deficit. The opposition did not receive convincing answers to our questions as to why the government needed the monies outlined in this supplementary supply bill, Madam Speaker, so this MLA will not be voting in support of this supplementary supply bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up here and speak to this bill. You know, we often hear a lot about opposition saying that – we've heard it before – they don't want to vote in support of this. They don't feel that there are enough details in it, keeping in mind, of course, that this is just purely to provide the government with two months of spending until we are able to pass the budget, where we will be able to thoroughly expand and thoroughly explore all the various spending levels in this particular budget.

I want to comment. The opposition often says, you know, that they want us to spend 20 per cent less. I think back to just this weekend when I visited Alberta Health Services, actually. I went and saw some doctors and OTs there in regard to my grandfather. Those hard-working individuals who work to help Albertans when they are in need of medical assistance, whatever that could be, those doctors and nurses and OTs and the various other specialists work very hard in order to make those hospitals as inviting as possible. I saw them putting up the display of the Easter Bunny. Where I was in particular there were children coming there to visit some of their grandparents. Some of those grandparents, being near the end of their lives, perhaps aren't doing too well.

I think of if we were to do 20 per cent less in those hospitals. Would that mean that there's going to be no free time for, you know, the nurses or the doctors or the OTs to take a spare second to liven up the hospital a little bit for those that need to be there, that there would be no Easter Bunny during Easter? I don't know. But I think it's important that we think about what those sorts of cuts would mean, what those cuts would mean to teachers, what those cuts would mean to policing in this province, which seems to be a bit of the topic du jour.

You know, often I hear noise from the back about the carbon levy. I remember that when we first brought that out, my grandmother did ask me about that. My grandmother and my grandfather live in a 1961 house with a 1961 furnace with 1961 windows and with 1961 insulation. It's probably nearing one of the worst-case possible scenarios when it comes to energy efficiency. Plus they also have three deep-freezes. My grandparents are from the Depression, and they enjoy not wasting any food.

8:40

So my grandparents asked me about the carbon levy. Of course, they remember that we promised to address climate change as part of our platform, which we did. We went out, had a group of experts

come back to us with what the best recommendation was on how to address climate change. Everyone agreed that the carbon levy economy-wide was the best way to do that, but of course we did provide rebates to individuals such as my grandparents who might be adversely affected.

Now, of course, my grandparents have many opportunities to take advantage of programs for more efficient furnaces and windows and light bulbs and such, to take advantage of, you know, the carbon levy and the rebates that it provides. I thought I would calculate it out. I asked my grandma: what was your biggest hydro bill in the last two years? Then I took that bill, and I extrapolated it for 12 months.

After the carbon rebate, assuming that they used the most amount of gas and electricity they'd ever used in a two-year period in that one month and having expanded it out for the whole year, do you know how much extra they would have paid, assuming they used that much power for the whole year? Of course, as we know, thankfully, here in Alberta winter does not last all year, although it sometimes feels like it does. It would have cost them somewhere in the neighbourhood of about \$150, which works out to a little bit more than 10 bucks a month, again assuming that winter lasted all year, which of course it doesn't. You know, my grandparents' response to that was: that's pretty much the price of a teen burger combo now at A&W, and we're not too concerned about it.

I think of the good work that we do here, you know. I think of my colleagues in the front bench, think of the hon. Minister of Community and Social Services, who's doing great work in regard to helping those on AISH and persons with disabilities.

I think of our hon. Minister of Status of Women, who's doing great work to encourage more women to run for office through the Ask Her campaign. Maybe it's just bias because I'm in politics, but I always like to see more people from more backgrounds involved in politics.

Of course, we have our Minister of Seniors and Housing, who's been doing great work in my riding, in particular. The riding of Calgary-Currie has a lot of government-subsidized seniors' homes and low-income housing that are definitely in need of some repair, and our minister has been stepping up to that. Passing interim supply helps that good work to continue.

Of course, our Minister of Advanced Education has frozen tuition fees, something that is – I surround Mount Royal University on two sides. Many of those students are constituents of mine, in my riding, as are many of the faculty and staff there, who appreciate a lot of the good work that our minister is doing.

Of course, we have our Minister of Transportation, who has repeatedly said in this House that the ring road in Calgary will get built and it will get built on time. Again, considering that that road goes around the riding of Calgary-Currie, that is going to be a key infrastructure project to help the constituents of Calgary-Currie and the citizens of Calgary get around. Same goes with our transit projects, the green line and other transit projects right across this province.

Of course, we have our Minister of Energy, who has gone out and proven that we can produce renewable energy in this province at a price that is cheaper than anyone else has seen in Canada, and we have made the commitment to make sure that our indigenous friends are a part of that.

When I go to the doors in Calgary-Currie, there are always two issues that come up. One is the \$25-a-day child care. I'm so proud of our Minister of Children's Services in getting that done. You wouldn't believe how many people ask me about that and how important it is to them that we are moving forward with that project. I am looking forward to having the first one of those open up in my riding.

The other thing they ask about, which is probably most relevant to today's conversation, is that somebody always asks me a question about the economy and the budget and how we are on the way back to balance. So for the hon. Minister of Finance: we have a plan to get back to balance by '23-24, and I'm so looking forward, when our next budget comes up, to being able to see that plan. Because I know we have been taking concrete steps to reduce costs but at the same time spend money on the services that matter most to Albertans and to help the constituents and citizens of Alberta through this downturn.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to the supplementary supply bill this evening. You know, I believe that other members of the loyal opposition have stated that supplementary supply bills can really be considered as overspending bills or lack-of-planning bills, which is really of no surprise to those of us on this side of the House. All of the funding in this bill is required because the government didn't commit enough funding at budget time last year. Let's hope that they can get it right this year although many of us are worried about what that's going to look like. These are among the reasons that I won't be supporting this bill as we move forward.

I understand that things come up during the year sometimes because of natural disasters or other acts beyond our control, but these things are under our control, the spending and supplementary budgets that we're being asked for now. So, yes, I understand there's the odd time that this makes sense and is justifiable, not just bad planning and potentially mismanagement. I would suggest that the lack of management skills is coming to roost with us here.

However, looking through the document, I can't help but think that the government could have done a better job at this time last year in committing the funding where it was needed even if that spending appeared to be fiscally irresponsible. I know that this is basically a series of four-letter words on the government side, but someone, anyone in the government could have made a tough decision and said: "You know what? We signed off on this budget. We told Albertans that we would spend X number of dollars. We made that commitment to the people. Therefore, we'll not spend more than that during the current fiscal year. We will not layer more debt on the shoulders of hard-working Albertans."

But, Madam Speaker, that's not what we're here to discuss; we're here to discuss this bill, supplementary supply. We could have heard: we are going to make a few tough decisions and stay within our allocated budget. You know why? Because the average person on the street understands what it means to have only a certain amount of money to work with in their daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly budgets. Every operating business that I talk to knows what it means to stay within their budget. Otherwise, they're not in business anymore.

Mr. S. Anderson: Do they have to deal with disasters?

Mr. Gotfried: Yeah. Businesses have to deal with disasters, too.

You might want to go on vacation this year as an individual or as a family, but if you don't budget properly, if you don't spend your money responsibly and demonstrate some restraint in other areas, it's just not going to happen. You have to make those decisions. You have to make tough decisions as an individual, as a family, as a business. That's what Albertans are being forced to do in this tough economy, where one member of the household is unemployed or

underemployed or their wages have been cut or their salaries have been cut or their opportunity to make money has been cut because of their business struggling. They understand what it means to tighten their belt and to ensure that they live within their budget. If this government were in that situation, they'd book the trip anyways, stay at an all-inclusive, and party like it's 1999 because, hey, someone else, in fact someone else's kids, will just pay for it later. Maybe another government that understands how unsustainable such behaviour is might actually be on the horizon.

This government has had not just one but three budgets to demonstrate a commitment to restraint in spending, and have we seen it? No, we have not seen it. We have not seen it. We've seen mounting deficits and mounting debt. Three times this government has failed not only our current population, but they've put in jeopardy future Albertans as well. Unborn Albertans will bear the burden of the debt that they're generating on the shoulders of unborn Albertans. How responsible is that?

The level of spending, as demonstrated by the supplementary supply bill, is just completely unsustainable in most Albertans' real world. Austerity, strangely, has gone from being not a nine-letter word but a four-letter word. It seems like government is going out of its way to rise to the challenge of how much money they can spend in any given year and then pile it on the next year and pile it on the next year and pile it on the next year until we end up with \$71 billion in debt.

8:50

Yet even with all that money ostensibly stimulating the economy, real Albertans continue to struggle. For example, there are 26,000 more unemployed Albertans than there were when this government took office. In February alone the province lost 10,500 full-time jobs. Calgary's unemployment is the second highest in the country among major cities, and Edmonton is tied for third. The CEO of the Edmonton chamber says that difficult times are not behind us and that things on the ground are still struggling as much as ever. Yet we hear other stories from that side of the House. Every time we come into this place and ask the government, "Why? Why are you spending so much money? How can you not find any efficiencies?" we're not asking for front-line cuts. We've never asked for that. Everybody always says: 20 per cent front-line cuts. No. We are asking for efficiencies, Madam Speaker. We hear: why do you continuously need supplementary . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, can I just interject? Sorry. My apologies.

Just a reminder to all of the members in the House that we're in second reading; we're not in Committee of the Whole. If you could please keep the tone down – the walking around, the turning around of the chairs, all of that – and listen to the speaker, I'd appreciate it.

Thank you.

Please continue.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Albertans expect a reasonable level of responsibility and accountability when it comes to government spending and government debt, the spending of their hard-earned tax dollars, while the government continues to choose not to listen to the overwhelming majority of Albertans when they say that they're getting it wrong on the economy, when they say that they're getting it wrong on debt and borrowing. I know that the people of Calgary-Fish Creek, whom I represent, the overwhelming majority of them, want me to come to this Chamber and advocate on their behalf because they understand the long-term ramifications of irresponsible, out-of-control spending. That's what we're facing here from this government.

They understand that by the end of the NDP's term we will be spending billions of dollars a year on interest alone, bigger than most of the budgets. That's \$385 per month for a family of four for them to pay that back, and that's for 25 years. That's 300 payments of \$385 a year to pay back what this government is putting them in debt for. Every time the government doesn't follow their own budget and they come back to this Assembly to add to that pile of debt, there are consequences for Albertans. The government would have us believe that there are no consequences, that they have no other choice, that the money never stops, that more and more debt is okay, and that you can just create a new tax or reach deeper into the pockets of hard-working Albertans to pay for whatever spendthrift idea crosses your mind. Wrong, Madam Speaker.

Well, unfortunately for them and for all Albertans who will now have to pay for this ever-mounting pile of debt, there are consequences. Government does not operate in a vacuum. Government debt is taxpayers' debt. The financial decisions made by the government through the Minister of Finance have real-world consequences which will be borne out for a generation, perhaps longer, perhaps two generations, for us to pay that back. The consequences aren't felt today when you keep pushing the inevitable down the road, but how long can you continue to write cheques, Minister, in bold red ink without having to at least think of the long-term and potentially financially catastrophic consequences? It's unfortunate that this NDP government is choosing not to acknowledge those consequences, the consequences that will be borne, again, by future generations of Albertans. Is this robbing from Peter to pay Peter, or is this robbing from Peter's unborn grandson to pay Peter? Patently irresponsible, Madam Speaker.

Of course, the government members will go to their usual talking points about whatever spending restraint is brought up. I'm sure there are a number that members are scrawling down now so that they can pop up and tell the opposition how we don't support this and we don't support that, how we don't support the carbon tax, which is true, or that we must not like health care and we must not like education. Well, we do, and we like it to be sustainable, and we like the spending to be done in a way which is efficient and that we can get to the front lines. That's what we believe in, Madam Speaker. To support them, I would say that, you know, I will support the supplementary supply for the government when you go through every dollar of every line item in the budget and say, "Yes, that was the most efficient way to spend the money to improve the lives of Albertans," when anyone in the government can sit down and say that hard-earned taxpayer dollars are not being wasted, that there is no redundant bureaucracy, no doubling up of efforts, no inefficiencies and no waste, and that we have true accountability to the people of Alberta.

Madam Speaker, I hate to tell you this, but that just isn't the case today. It's clear that the only way that Alberta's finances will move back towards balance is with a change where austerity is not a four-letter word; it's a nine-letter word. We would spend more money efficiently, effectively, and with accountability to everyday Albertans, yes, those Albertans, the ones who lack job security because of poor economic fundamentals, investment-repelling policies, overtaxation, and the burden of overreaching regulations. Oh, and did I mention the carbon tax? It's been mentioned a few times. That is on the backs of Albertans, hard-working Albertans.

Spending is spiralling out of control. We need a change in the way we do things while still delivering a high and perhaps higher level of service. Government resources are not infinite. No. No matter how hard this government tries to make it seem like they are,

we must pay for that. We must pay for what we consume. We must develop sustainability and public finance over the long term but not so long that we punt the debt ball down the field for future generations, Minister. Everyday Albertans are struggling no matter how many strained smiles the Finance minister puts on during his media forays, which I'm sure we'll see later this week. We need to focus on those people, their children, their grandchildren, why we are here and whom we must face with confidence that we have done the best that we can do each and every day. We need to create a fiscally responsible situation today and tomorrow for our province that does not sacrifice the future in order to pay for reckless decisions and out-of-control spending.

Supplementary supply is another perfect example of this government's inability to make any sort of spending decision that doesn't involve writing a cheque, as I said earlier, all written with bright red ink. Or maybe that's changed to orange ink. But you get the picture. [interjection] It's kind of like red, isn't it?

For the past three years we've seen an enormous deficit, unrestrained spending, and mounting debt, only to come back in March to watch the government vote themselves even more money for that same fiscal year. The people that I represent can't do that in their homes, Minister. Madam Speaker, the businesses that I represent can't do that in their businesses, or they would quickly be out of business, and we'd have more bankruptcies in this province. So why does this government think it's okay? That is a question for all Albertans to ask, but today I will be voting against second reading.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to take a couple of minutes. I have some things that I don't think I've heard yet tonight. I, too, will be voting against the supplementary supply bill. Fifty-six billion dollars this year and no plan to pay it back. No plan to pay back the 9 and a half billion, 10 billion dollars that we're putting on our kids' credit card just to cover our operating expenses. Again, I've said it before. I can't imagine. When we've seen this government raise personal taxes, corporate taxes, and then actual total revenues fall by 15 or 20 per cent, their plan is not working. A plan without a plan to pay back the operating portion is a huge disaster for credit ratings and for our kids and grandkids.

Madam Speaker, it applies to our capital borrowing as well. You know, the debate in this House used to be, through some of the Klein years and the '90s, when infrastructure money was paid for on an annual basis, and into the 2000s: do we borrow for capital? Well, my goodness, we have a plan now that doesn't even plan on paying back the capital debt that is borrowed, never mind – never mind – the operating debt.

I look at where we may be a year down the road. When I was talking to some financial experts about a week ago and said that my fear was that by the time we consider this minister's borrowing for operating, borrowing for capital, funded and unfunded pension liabilities, we could be \$85 billion in the hole just a year from now, the experts told me that I might be below by \$20 billion. When we think of the state of our economy, when we look at the layers and layers of burden that this government has added, when we look at the private investment they've driven away, it's going to be a tough job for our good job providers and our commodity producers. It's going to be a tough job to dig out of this hole. So, as my hon. colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek

just said, for us to stand up here and give the hon. Minister of Finance a blank cheque is ludicrous.

9:00

I sometimes get frustrated when the government crows a bit about saving here and there. I want to talk about two clear instances where the savings weren't there. I think of when the government decided that public ownership was where it was at for laundry in the capital region. Our estimates, Madam Speaker, were that that cost the taxpayer \$200 million. This side of the House believes totally in emergency response, money for fire-related costs, funding for sexual assault victims' services, money for additional police. When we see our government make a decision that appears to be based on ideology, not what is best value for hard-earned tax dollars, it's forcing a wealth creator to work harder, to give up more of their freedom of choice, or maybe, as the chairman of EnCana just did on the weekend, decide to leave our jurisdiction.

I think of one a little bit more local. The Medicine Hat diagnostic lab was the most efficient laboratory, I believe, in all of Alberta: a wonderful owner, wonderful employees, wonderful service, second-floor premises. You could have run in and out of there in five minutes. Madam Speaker, the importance of that is that it freed up our time to do our lives, our work, our time with our family, those kinds of things. This NDP government announced about a year and a half, two years ago that they were moving it to the mall area, the high-rent area, completely renovating a new place, and, of course, changing the employee structures from non-union to union. Here we are later, where I have no idea how much the costs have increased, but it's got to be 5 or so million dollars a year. When I talk to the people of Medicine Hat and Cypress-Medicine Hat and they tell me that what used to take five or six minutes to get a procedure done now takes 35 or 40 minutes in spite of good front-line workers, it's a lose-lose.

Madam Speaker, what I guess hurts me the most, deep down, is that when this was first announced, even though, just looking at it from the outside, it was clear that it was going to be a move to a much, much higher cost structure, I did everything I could to bite my tongue, and I just asked for the business plan. I said: "Okay. Prove to me, Alberta Health Services, that this is the right move." It took a year to get the business plan. Parts of the business plan were only two months old, meaning that this decision was another decision on ideology, not with respect for the taxpayer.

Madam Speaker, we take these dollars, these hard-earned tax dollars, that add up. You know, they don't add up to more dollars. What they add up to is more policemen, more funding for sexual assault victims, more funding for our families and communities. That's exactly what they add up to, and it's a shame that this government hasn't paid attention to it.

In the quarter 3 update last week was the \$771 million that this Finance minister, this government had taken to pay the first part of the Balancing Pool and the power purchase agreements. My goodness, \$771 million divided by – I don't know; what does a policeman make? – \$100,000, \$120,000 a year: how much of that money could have gone to help communities? How much of that could have gone to sexual assault victims' services?

Madam Speaker, we're not going to stand up here and give this hon. Finance minister a blank cheque to put our kids and grandkids a hundred billion in debt, to only look for efficiencies when it might suit them politically, and to continue to kill jobs and investment in Alberta.

Madam Speaker, before I sit down, I'd like to encourage the hon. minister and the government to have a little more transparency when they put these numbers out. Again, I think back to the Q3 update, to the \$500 million that they had, a nominal reserve, I think

it was, in case oil prices fell, and that he needed to transfer what we have left of savings to cover his high spending. When the government didn't do that, it got played as if it was a saving, an efficiency. No, it wasn't. It was just not the use of a nominal account.

Madam Speaker, it's time that we call a spade a spade. Let's say what the true direction of Albertans' money is and where it's going. That comes to nominal accounts. It comes to when we're going to pay our operating spending back. I hope that in the next year we see something from this government that legitimately comes up with a plan to start paying back the 5 and a half billion dollars plus of capital borrowing, yes, last year and the billions and billions of dollars of capital borrowing that this government has put on our economy's back.

Madam Speaker, in closing, you know, I can't accept that in three years this government needs to come back to us and ask for another I think it was a billion and a half dollars in supplement. My goodness, what's that? About 3 per cent, I guess, of our savings. A billion and a half dollars: what could we do with that? What could we do with that money if we'd left it with our hard workers, with Albertan families and communities? What could they do to create jobs and grow their opportunities and choices?

Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to say that I will be voting against this government's request to put us deeper in debt. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, I will now call on the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to close debate.

Mr. Ceci: Well, seeing that we have had a robust debate on this portion of tonight's work, Madam Speaker, the supplementary supply, of course, provides us – and when I say "us," I mean all of government and the services that government delivers notionally in Agriculture and Forestry, Children's Services, et cetera, et cetera. It provides that support so that that can continue.

At Q3 I stood up and talked about a number of these things, and I also talked about the reduction in the deficit this year of \$1.4 billion, Madam Speaker. That is excellent work by those same departments that require some additional funding to get the job done. For instance – and I know that the Minister of Community and Social Services has talked about this – those monies are to ensure that the statutory services that are in law for Albertans, namely in income supports and in other programs, are provided. To not provide that level of support for people would have been, frankly, wrong because they're a statutory service. Albertans should not be feeling like they shouldn't come forward and request the support of their government when they need it.

When I was a social worker many years ago, Madam Speaker, I can remember talking to many people who said, "You know, I need support, but I'm embarrassed to go and ask the government for it." I said: "You know, you have paid taxes. You have helped build this province. This is statutory, and it is your right to go forward and request the support and to expect the support." The Minister of Community and Social Services fulfilled that obligation that he has to Albertans with this additional supplementary supply, and that goes down the line in terms of other kinds of expenditures that are here.

9:10

As somebody on this side said, I'm very honoured to continue to stand up and represent the views of this government with regard to finance matters and government supports and government services

because those are in the interests of Albertans. Those have the backs of Albertans. Those supports are what Albertans have elected us to continue to do, and we'll continue doing that now and in the future, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

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

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. At this time, given the wonderful progress that we've made this evening, I'd like to move that we adjourn until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:11 p.m.]

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