



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 1, 2018

Day 22

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

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (UCP),
Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (NDP)
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),
Deputy Government House Leader
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (IC)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (NDP)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (AP)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (NDP),
Deputy Government House Leader
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (UCP),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
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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Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (NDP)

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Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
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Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (NDP)
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Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
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Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (NDP)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (UCP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (NDP)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP)
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Schneider, David A., Little Bow (UCP)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (NDP)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
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)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (UCP)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Vacant, 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 Conservative: 1 Vacant: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 1, 2018

[The Speaker in the chair]

Statement by the Speaker

Flag of Alberta 50th Anniversary

The Speaker: Hon. members, 50 years ago, on May 1, 1968, Bill 94, An Act to Provide for a Flag of Alberta, was read a third time. Lieutenant Governor J.W. Grant MacEwan made a special visit to grant royal assent on the same day, and miniature flags were distributed to commemorate that historic occasion. Proclaimed in force on June 1, the flag act established our provincial flag as a blue flag with the shield of the armorial ensigns of the province centred thereon.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you the amazing students from Eastview middle school in the awesome constituency of Red Deer-South. With them are teachers Ross Christenson, Bob Rutz, and Michelle Dyck along with four chaperones. Could I ask you all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly l'école Citadelle school in Legal in my constituency. There are 30 students with us today from grades 6 and 7 along with their principal, Lisa Magera; teachers Melanie Thibault and Christophe Page; and one chaperone, Annette Hammond. I would ask that they all please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups today? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 66 grade 9 students from McKenzie Highlands middle school. Their group is led by Mr. Stuart Rieger. I would ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is such a pleasure to be able to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the Edmonton Police Service northeast division community crime management team. I had the honour of hosting a safety town hall meeting at Evansdale Community League last week with four of the members of this team. I would like to thank them and all of our EPS officers for being heroes and for keeping each of us safe each and every day. As I call your names, I would ask that you please rise and remain standing: Staff Sergeant David Goodkey, Sergeant Roger Bellerose, Sergeant Trudy Shafer,

Constable Terry Cassells, Constable Myles Stromner, Constable Rikan Farhat, Constable Lee Martin, and Constable Steve Den Boon. Thank you so much for what you do for us. I would ask that these amazing officers receive the traditional warm welcome and gratitude of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome, and thank you.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise today and introduce to you and through you representatives that have been working with endless determination to prevent and address sexual violence. Would you please rise as I call your names: Meloney Patterson, executive director of Voice of Albertans with Disabilities; Kathleen Quinn, executive director of the Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation; Judilonne Beebe, executive director of the Association of Communities against Abuse; Roohi Dodd, public educator at the Saffron Centre; and Muriel Stanley Venne, president and founder of the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women. I ask all members to extend the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also honoured to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives of organizations working tirelessly to prevent and address sexual violence: Jill Green, counsellor at student affairs at Grant MacEwan University; Chrystal Ference, director of the Edmonton Sexual Assault Response Team; Elaine Sartison, program manager with the Edmonton Sexual Assault Response Team; Dr. Kristopher Wells, assistant professor, educational policy studies, Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta; Josephine Pallard, education program co-ordinator of Changing Together: A Centre for Immigrant Women; and Kimberly Clark, director, investigative partnerships and supports, Zebra Child Protection Centre. I'd ask that they would all rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you other members of this group. I will begin with Patricia Arango, executive director of the Central Alberta Sexual Assault Support Centre in Red Deer; Debra Tomlinson, chief executive officer, and Cheryl Wallach, communications specialist, from the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services; Maria Sarcauga, programs co-ordinator of the Lloydminster Sexual Assault & Information Centre. I thank all of our stakeholder organizations who are here today for the essential work that they do to prevent and address sexual violence. I ask all my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to introduce several guests who work to prevent and address sexual violence. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Cari Ionson, sexual violence response and awareness

co-ordinator at Mount Royal University; Carrie McManus, director of programs for Sagesse; Bukurie Mino, associate director of settlement at the Centre for Newcomers; Liz Gibson, program manager of Reset Society of Calgary; Paula Telfer, manager of programs at the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre. I ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Manal Alnajjar, executive director of the Indo-Canadian Women's Association, here for the proclamation of Sexual Violence Awareness Month. I would like to ask her to rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm here to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two outstanding constituents from Edmonton-Calder: Scott Harrison, who has lived in Edmonton-Calder since 2004 and is dedicated to supporting seniors and individuals with disabilities, and Richard Alderman, who was born in Calgary but now lives in Edmonton. For many years he was a professor at the University of Alberta with a passion for teaching, learning, and sports. I'd like to thank Scott and Richard for their contributions to both the cities of Calgary and Edmonton and ask them now to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to recognize guests from the Schizophrenia Society of Alberta who I believe are seated in both galleries today. The Schizophrenia Society of Alberta works to increase awareness of the illness and reduce stigma. Their advocacy and fundraising efforts are vital to improving the lives of individuals and families affected by schizophrenia and psychosis. May 24 is World Schizophrenia Day, and I look forward to declaring this day in Alberta. I now invite Rubyann, Heather, Ciara, Tanya, Len, and Amy to please rise and receive our warm welcome and our appreciation.

The Speaker: Welcome.

1:40

Members' Statements

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

May Day

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize to you and through you to everyone in the Chamber May Day. I'm honoured to rise today to acknowledge an important day for working people all across our province. Today marks International Workers' Day, or May Day as it is more commonly known, a day set aside each year to recognize and honour all of the work that the labour movement has done and continues to do for everyday working people and their families.

It is thanks to the labour movement that Albertans today all enjoy things such as an eight-hour workday, the weekend, overtime and vacation pay, basic safety standards, and the end of child labour. These are things that we often take for granted, but these are things that we have today because workers across the world fought and bled for these rights. Today I just want to thank the workers who fought for these changes and recognize the contributions they've made to our province. Our province and our country are better for it.

Today, on May Day, I'm incredibly proud to be part of a government that is continuing the work started by the labour movement and is committed to making life better for working people and their families each and every day. In just three short years our government has made the workplace more fair and family friendly. We've ensured that working people have the same protections as every other worker across the country. We've updated the workers' compensation system to ensure it provides the meaningful rehabilitation and fair compensation injured workers deserve. And we're ensuring that those Albertans who are working for minimum wage are being fairly compensated and no longer have to stop at the food bank on their way home to feed their families.

Mr. Speaker, our province was built by everyday working people, and it's because of them that Alberta is the prosperous place it is today. To the working people across the province: our government has your back, and we'll never stop fighting on your side.

Thank you.

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

Sexual Violence Awareness Month

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On January 10 in the Kathua Rasana village a little eight-year-old girl was taken from the world. Her death is a shame to humanity. Her little body was subjected to multiple rapes over many days. She was drugged, torn away from her family, and brutally murdered in a temple near her home. Her name is Asifa, and eight men – one retired government official, four police officers, and one minor – have been arrested at this time. The men planned the kidnapping for a month to scare and intimidate the nomadic herders of that area. Her family tried to get her back, but they were told that their little girl had run off and eloped.

This brutality on its own is more than enough to take our breath away, to make us pause and imagine for a moment the feeling of being helpless. The friends of these rapists protested that the men were innocent, and their lawyers gathered to protect them, but Southeast Asians of all religious backgrounds filled the streets demanding justice for Asifa. How do we rise above this horrific story as humans?

Today marks the beginning of Sexual Violence Awareness Month. As a woman born in Canada, a woman of Southeast Asian descent, I have a responsibility to speak out for my sisters, our daughters of Southeast Asians, and all victims who may not have a voice. We have a responsibility to stand up for them and to shine bright lights into these dark corners and say loudly: we will not stand for this, not in Canada, not in India, not anywhere.

We must continue to fight against sexual violence, honour beatings, honour killings, child marriage, female genital mutilation. We as a nation profess freedom. We must fight to teach what that freedom is, especially to our new Canadians, and protect new Canadian girls and women to make sure they understand their rights in this country. We as Canadians look at the heinous crimes like this one perpetuated against Asifa, and we think that we're immune. But it can happen here, and we saw this with our own little Serenity.

Let's fight for our sisters, for our daughters, for victims, and for survivors. We owe it to Asifa. We owe it to Serenity and to the women and girls everywhere.

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

Early Learning and Child Care Centres

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Wednesday I joined the Premier, the Minister of Children's Services, and several colleagues for an incredible announcement, the opening of 100 new early learning and child care centres that charge parents only \$25 per day. This is revolutionary for parents in our province.

This announcement took place in my constituency at Norquest College's 1000 Women Child Care Centre, and as we left the stage, I watched multiple women who work or have children in care there approach the Premier to thank her for this investment and tell her how much help it has given to them and to others.

When I arrived home, I saw many women on social media expressing the same, including a friend of mine who lives and works in Fort McMurray. She tagged me in a post saying: "It's insane how much of a huge difference this makes for families. We paid \$1,400 a month for quality child care and now pay about \$500. I know so many women that are forced to stay home with their children not because they want to but because they can't afford to pursue a career and a family." Several other women responded to her post with comments like, "It's about time" and "Wow; they should have had that years ago when we needed it."

Mr. Speaker, this is amazing, and it's part of our government's core commitment to making life better and more affordable for Alberta families. Through the Africa and Intercultural Child and Family Centre new Canadians are being empowered to upgrade their skills and education to pursue good careers here. Through the Bissell Centre low-income families are freed to increase their income. Across the province about 1,400 more people will be empowered to re-enter the workforce, contributing to our economy and improving their quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, this is what can happen when we work together through government for the common good, when we fight for Albertans, unlike the members opposite, who are focused on fighting for drastic cuts to finance massive tax giveaways for those who need it least. Thankfully, our government is listening to and on the side of women and families in Alberta as we fight to build a recovery and an economy that will last.

Government Services in Medicine Hat

Mr. Barnes: Since its founding by the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1883, Medicine Hat has been known by a number of different monikers, including the Gas City, the Hat, and Canada's sunniest city. Cypress-Medicine Hat is known as a place where your word is your bond, your family is your focal point, and community is always there to offer a hand up when you need it. Unfortunately, the government of Alberta has begun referring to my home as inconvenient and too far away.

Last week I met with a local entrepreneur who is working hard to get his business opened, but it sat dormant for two months waiting for an audit by Alberta Transportation. When he contacted Alberta Transportation about the delay, the person he spoke to told him that Medicine Hat is too inconvenient. It was only after sustained pressure that someone made the long, difficult trek from Calgary.

Sadly, this wasn't an isolated incident. Another local Medicine Hat group is working hard to get approval from the Minister of Community and Social Services for a service dog testing centre in

Medicine Hat so that people for whom travel to Calgary and Edmonton is actually difficult can have their dogs certified locally. Unfortunately, the minister's office and department officials have stopped replying to them altogether. It must be too inconvenient.

Yet another example of the NDP's disregard for Medicine Hat resulted in Medicine Hat losing critical investment to Louisiana when Methanex chose to expand their operations in the United States. Make no mistake. This is a result of the NDP government's big-spending, big-taxation ways, picking winners and losers in an escalating failed plan of corporate welfare. This government has ignored and largely forgotten Albertans' small and medium-sized centres as well as the rural areas of Cypress-Medicine Hat, where it is rumoured that even more services will soon be centralized. Instead of responsibly spending and responsibly taxing Albertans to encourage families and communities, this government has decided to leave rural Alberta and Medicine Hat in the dust by racking up billions in debt and billions in interest.

The United Conservative Party doesn't take anything for granted. An Albertan is an Albertan.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

First Responders

Mr. Westhead: This past week I had the honour of attending the 40th anniversary of the Redwood Meadows emergency services. The service has been staffed by dedicated, professional volunteers since the community was founded and has a rich history. During the dinner an emergency call was received, and it was incredible to watch these heroes spring into action at a moment's notice. It's an important reminder of what first responders across the province put on the line to keep our communities safe along with the sacrifices made by the family members and friends who support them. They never know when they'll be needed, yet they are always ready and always vigilant.

The draw of the mountains and the wilderness in the Banff-Cochrane constituency leads many adventure seekers off the beaten path and sometimes into harm's way. Emergency response in the backcountry provides a challenge, a challenge that skilled and talented first responders are well trained for. Just recently Canmore fire rescue's Deputy Chief Keri Martens and firefighter Mike Halprin successfully completed Canada Task Force 2's training boot camp and were selected to be part of Alberta's provincial disaster response team. This is an incredible accomplishment, and I'd like to extend my congratulations and thanks to them for their dedication.

Whether it's a helicopter high-angle rescue crew responding to a fallen hiker or a lookout observer scanning the forest for signs of wildfire, first responders help us rest easy knowing that they are watching out for us and that they are there for us in times of need.

To all the first responders in the Banff-Cochrane constituency and across the province: thank you for your dedication, thank you for your professionalism, and thank you for your perpetual vigilance in keeping our communities safe.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Pipeline Approvals

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the Premier prepared to admit that the reason we now find ourselves and our economic future so dependent on the Trans Mountain pipeline is because the

other coastal pipelines, Energy East and Northern Gateway, were killed by her friend Justin Trudeau? Is she prepared to admit that if those projects were still viable, we wouldn't be so dependent on the Trans Mountain construction today?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, as we discussed yesterday, the challenges with the Gateway pipeline actually arise from the decisions taken by and the process of decision-making of the previous federal Conservative government. Even with Energy East it is quite clear that there were a number of regulatory problems with respect to that caused by federal governments, both the current and the previous, as a result of having to start the whole thing over again because of an inappropriate NEB set of appointments. Long story. What we know is that they failed. We will succeed.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier bizarrely continues to make things up with respect to Energy East. It was cancelled . . . [interjections] The NDP are still heckling. The anger machine never stops over there. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, if I might, Energy East was cancelled by TransCanada after the National Energy Board forced them to take into account up- and downstream carbon emissions, and the Premier still covers for that decision. You know why? Because she's unwilling to call out her ally Justin Trudeau on this or anything else. Why won't the Premier stand up and speak truth to power and criticize . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what I'm doing is dealing with the matters that are before us at this point, and that is the active pipeline to tidewater that we are working with the federal government to get. I know it is very hard for the member opposite to accept that when that happens, it will be the first pipeline to tidewater in many decades, including the long period of time during which the federal Conservatives sat in Ottawa and the provincial Conservatives sat here and neither of them could get the job done. We will get the job done. We will stand up for Albertans, and we will get the job done.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, in April 2015 the Premier, the then NDP opposition leader, said that, quote, Northern Gateway is not the right decision. It wasn't until June of the next year that the Federal Court asked for additional consultations, and it wasn't until November 2016 that her close ally Justin Trudeau arbitrarily vetoed that project. Is the Premier willing to admit that she was wrong to lobby against the construction of the Northern Gateway pipeline, and, secondly, did she tell Justin Trudeau that Alberta would not object if he killed Northern Gateway?

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What we did was that we talked to the federal government, right after they were elected, about the need to get a pipeline to tidewater. We said that we needed one of those pipelines to go west and that we would work with them to get one of those pipelines to go west. We are now working with them to get one of those pipelines to go west. We are very pleased because – guess what? – one of those pipelines is going to go west to tidewater, and Albertans will benefit, finally, as a result of that.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Carbon Levy and Pipeline Approvals

Mr. Kenney: Well, I think that's as close as we're going to get to an admission from the Premier that she told Justin Trudeau he could go ahead and veto Northern Gateway, that had already been approved, Mr. Speaker. She said that she wanted one pipeline to a coast. There were three projects, two of them killed by her ally Justin Trudeau. Her carbon tax didn't get either of those built. Is she willing now to admit that she was wrong to oppose Northern Gateway and to oppose Keystone XL and to surrender to Trudeau on Energy East?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the member's interpretation of that is completely incorrect. What I will say is that our government has been very clear that we support getting the Trans Mountain pipeline to the west coast because that's what our energy industry needs. We also worked with the federal government to get line 3 approved. We also committed 55,000 barrels to Keystone to get that pipeline going forward. We understand that increasing pipeline capacity is exactly what the energy industry needs. We are standing up for Albertans. I wish the member opposite would start doing the same.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, part of the deal with the NDP's punitive carbon tax was that if we just made seniors pay more to heat their homes in the winter and working people pay more to drive to work, somehow we would get all these pipelines built. Now the NDP is prepared to raise that carbon tax by 67 per cent. But get this. A report has been released from Ottawa indicating that the federal government wants to raise the carbon tax to \$75 a tonne, not just \$50 a tonne. That would increase gas prices by 18 cents a litre. Has the NDP made a secret deal with the Liberals to raise the carbon tax to \$75 a tonne?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is daydreaming and making things up. The answer is: absolutely not. Our view on this matter is exactly as we have said all along. We are proud to be able to make progress finally on combatting climate change. We absolutely know that that's something that everybody wants us to do and that those in the energy industry themselves understand needs to be done. We cannot pretend it's not there. We cannot deny the climate signs around it. So we are moving forward exactly as we have been very clear with Albertans on all along.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: I think we just heard the Premier say that the NDP does not intend to raise the carbon tax to \$75 a tonne, but how can we believe them given that they did not tell Albertans about the carbon tax in the first place in the last election, the biggest hidden agenda in Alberta political history? Given that they didn't tell the truth about their carbon tax . . . [interjections] They're heckling again, Mr. Speaker. They can't stand the truth. Given that they didn't tell Alberta voters the truth about the carbon tax, how can we believe them now when they say that they're not going to raise it to \$75 a tonne?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite really just needs to stop asking hypothetical, made-up questions. This is really getting quite ridiculous. You know, what we said very clearly was that we were going to take action to address climate change. What we did was that we took action to address climate change. We also said that

we would fight to get a pipeline to the west coast. What we are doing is fighting to get a pipeline to the west coast. This is what Albertans need. The member opposite should stop throwing stones from the side and get onboard to stand up for our province.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we will get onboard and stand up for this province by repealing the NDP's carbon tax as the first act of a Conservative government, a carbon tax which they are now planning to raise by 67 per cent.

The Premier has told us that she won't intend to do that unless Trans Mountain is built. Yesterday we brought forward a motion asking for the Assembly to confirm the government's stated position – no increase in the carbon tax without construction of Trans Mountain – and the NDP wouldn't let it go to a vote. Why won't they reaffirm their position in a vote in this Chamber for no 67 per cent increase in the carbon tax . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know what? I have made my position on this matter absolutely clear on the record here as well as publicly in every possible setting. But you know what? I will not be lectured by a member of the Official Opposition who instructs his whole caucus to run away from this building when it is his job to talk about defending women's health. He won't talk about that, but he's trying to lecture me on parliamentary motions, on something where I've already taken a position publicly. Why won't he take a position publicly on that issue?

Mr. Kenney: Not only are we going to scrap their carbon tax, Mr. Speaker; we're going to stop the desk thumping and all the disrespect that we hear from the NDP caucus. [interjections] There they are, heckling again. The anger machine doesn't have an off button.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans want a government that will actually deliver a lower cost of living for them rather than making it more expensive for them to heat their homes and drive to work. But the NDP agrees with Justin Trudeau that we should continue increasing the carbon tax. Environment Canada says by a thousand per cent, to \$300 a tonne. Today the study says to \$75 a tonne. Given that they didn't tell the truth to Albertans in the last election, how can we believe their assurances now?

2:00

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have been very clear that we will move forward past the pricing which is in the climate leadership plan if and when we get full construction in place with respect to the Trans Mountain pipeline. We have also laid out a budget plan. I know it's hard for them to imagine because they haven't put down a draft budget or a shadow budget since they've been elected Official Opposition, an unprecedented dereliction of their obligation. Nonetheless, we've laid out a plan to 2024, and it does not include any of the things that the member opposite is throwing across the aisle just for fun.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that Environment Canada did this study just for fun. They did it because they're dead serious about continuing to raise the carbon tax. The NDP's hand-picked adviser on the carbon tax, Professor Leach, says that it has

to go to at least \$200 a tonne to achieve the Paris targets. Environment Canada says \$300 a tonne. Now this latest report is an interim \$75 a tonne. You know, the Premier doesn't seem to understand. The NDP has a credibility problem here because they were not transparent with Albertans in the last election, so how can we believe them now when they say that they will not raise the carbon tax to \$75 or \$200 or \$300?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said, we've laid out a budget which takes us to 2022. Those folks can't even lay out an alternative budget for today. But when it comes to believing people and believing in credibility, how can we believe an Official Opposition that runs screaming from the Legislature when it is their job to debate a bill that speaks to protecting women's health? How can we trust them to ever show up for their job?

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

School Transportation and Bell Times

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This past Saturday in Calgary hundreds of parents gathered to express their frustration about changes to school transportation that came about as a result of this government's Bill 1. The Minister of Community and Social Services will tell you that that meeting got heated. Parents are justifiably upset with having to send in some cases their 10-year-old children on two city buses, a C-Train, and then across a busy street just to get to school when last year these same kids were on a yellow school bus. To the Minister of Education: what do you have to say to these parents?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. Certainly, we have been seeing lots of room for improvement around student transportation. That's why in fact we are consulting right now on transportation for busing right across the province of Alberta. We have put significant investments into reducing school fees, and we intend to carry on by making life more affordable and of better quality for our students and for our families by furthering those investments here in the immediate future.

Mr. Clark: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very glad the minister mentioned that survey because I have heard from several parents in my constituency who took that survey. They feel the questions directed them to the answers the government wanted to hear and were frustrated that there were no questions about the impact the transportation changes have had on school bell times. I can tell you that a grades 5 to 9 school in my constituency starts their day at 9:10 in the morning, and the K to 4 feeder school that feeds into that school starts at 8:05. Many families have kids in both schools. It's a tremendous hardship. Again to the minister: why bother consulting parents when you already seem to know the answers?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the hon. member should try actually filling out the survey themselves to see that it is a very useful way by which we can gather information to make better decisions about busing across the province. If you fail to do those things, if you just simply overstep the boundaries of where school boards are making decisions, then that's simply not democratic. We respect school boards in this province, we respect

the decision-making process, and we are making sure that we invest in public education to make life better for Alberta families.

Mr. Clark: Having an hour between the time your younger child and your older child has to start and then finish school is not exactly making life better, Mr. Speaker.

Many parents, Mr. Speaker, choose to put their children in alternative programs like French immersion or traditional learning or many others. These are the kids that have been impacted most by the transportation changes that came about as a result of Bill 1. Now, once more to the Minister of Education: Minister, will you reconsider these changes and end the discrimination against kids in alternative programs?

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 allowed us to put more than \$54 million, up to \$60 million, into Alberta families' pockets to make life more affordable. If anybody wants to argue against that, then certainly they are trying to extend the bounds of reality. What we are trying to do here is make sure that busing is reasonable, it's safe, and it's timely for students. School boards make those decisions, and we will support that with proper data from the survey that we're taking. People can take that survey up until June 15. We encourage everybody to do so, not discouraging as this member opposite is trying to do.

Thank you.

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

Economic Recovery Initiatives

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's try a couple of questions here that are based in reality, unlike the first three questions.

Mr. Speaker, previous governments left Alberta workers vulnerable to fluctuations of world oil prices. Can the Minister of Economic Development and Trade tell us how this government responded to one of the deepest and longest recessions in Alberta history?

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for his very important question. Our government set into motion immediately when the economy was starting on its downturn because of the global collapse in the price of oil. We presented our plan, investing in infrastructure, in fact the most historic infrastructure investment the province of Alberta has ever seen. Part of the reason for that is because previous governments failed to adequately invest in critical infrastructure: roads, bridges, schools, hospitals. So our government invested in that. That's part of the reason that we see the economy starting to pick up. There are a number of other different tools that we've been using, and I'm happy to expound on them in the next response.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how has our economy performed since we began undertaking these initiatives?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, what we have seen and what we do recognize, first of all, is that, you know, the economic

recovery that we're starting to experience in the province hasn't yet been felt by every small business and every business throughout the province. That's why our government is committed to continuing to support job creators, businesses, and entrepreneurs throughout the province through a variety of programs. I can tell you that our two tax credits that we introduced a couple of years ago in this House have been working very, very well. Our capital investment tax credit has leveraged more than a billion dollars of investment in projects, creating thousands of jobs right now, when Albertans need them, helping our companies to grow and expand.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The opposition has put forward their own ideas of how to manage the economy. Can the economic development minister tell us what their plan would mean for Alberta jobs and Alberta workers?

Mr. Clark: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of the plan that our government has put forward. I can tell you that economists have said to us that had we listened to the advice of the opposition, brought in an austerity budget, fired thousands of teachers and nurses, our economy would still be in a recession. We wouldn't be experiencing the recovery that we now are experiencing. We are focused on supporting job creators. We know that 90,000 new jobs have been created in the past year. We are on track to lead the country in economic growth once again this year. We led the country last year. We're going to continue supporting our job creators, and we're not going to be taking advice from the opposition.

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

Dental Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm still hearing many concerns about access to affordable dental services for low-income and vulnerable families, roughly 1 in 6 Albertans, many of whom develop complications and end up in the emergency room. A fee guide was introduced almost six months ago. It may or may not be doing anything because it's optional for dentists, especially given their high staff salaries and office expenses in Alberta. To the minister: how are you monitoring dental fees, and what indication do you have that the fee guide is making any difference to vulnerable and low income?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. Albertans told us very clearly that they were concerned about the high costs of dental services in the province, that under the former government the dental fee guide had been taken away 20 years ago, the only jurisdiction in Canada that didn't have one, and that, in turn, our fees were far higher than in any other jurisdiction in Canada. In other jurisdictions where they have a fee guide, about 90 per cent of the dentists' bill in line with that, and we of course took that into consideration when we brought a fee guide forward here in Alberta. For those who are low income, there are low-income benefit opportunities as well. If there are specific individuals you'd like us to follow up with, we'd be happy to.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Swann: Well, precisely, Mr. Speaker. There's been no substantial increase in the public health dental services for lower income Albertans. I don't mean low, low income. I mean medium to low, and the services are now straining to the breaking point, I'm hearing from cities that are providing these services. When will your ministry adequately fund these public health dental services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:10

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. I'm really proud of the dentistry programs we do have, including those in Edmonton's Boyle McCauley. Calgary has Chumir and CUPS and so forth. The Alex has a mobile bus that goes and works with – I met many families who receive those services, and those are continuing to be expanded as well, and we are also working to make sure that those Albertans who don't have coverage today have reasonable fees. That's why we brought in a fee guide. The other government removed it 20 years ago. Our fees skyrocketed, and we are working with the college of dentists to make sure that we get those in line and that they're fair and reasonable.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Swann: The Alberta Dental Association still does not require dentists to post their fees online. Will the minister take steps to ensure that all dentists post their fees online?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The most useful tool that we have is being able to say: do you charge in line with the fee guide? I have to admit that I felt a little awkward doing that when I made my first dental appointment for this year because we didn't have a dental fee guide for 20 years, so it takes some time to get back into the practice. I'm proud to say that my dentist's office immediately said that yes, they did, and that they were proud to be able to do so. I've seen a lot of advertising where people advertise that they charge even below the fee guide, advertisements coming in my own mailbox, for example. Certainly, dentists have the ability to do that. We're making sure that Albertans have the tools through an abridged version to be able to exercise their rights as consumers as well.

Provincial Debt Repayment

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the outgoing Auditor General released one final report prior to the end of his distinguished career as AG. Putting Alberta's Financial Future in Focus stresses the importance of long-term fiscal reporting for Alberta's fiscal future. On page 21 this report of the Auditor General stated that "a surplus of \$3 billion per year . . . for 25 years would be needed to pay off the debt expected to be accumulated by 2021." To the Minister of Finance: are you committed to 25 years of \$3 billion per year surpluses to pay off the debt that you have so recklessly accumulated?

Mr. Ceci: First of all, let me say congratulations, and I hope the AG has the best time in retirement. He served the government of Alberta and this Finance minister well for the time that I've been here. You know, Budget 2018: Mr. Speaker, for the first time ever we offered Albertans a six-year plan to carefully and prudently return to balance. That's what we are hearing, that that was important. We've

done that. It's in our budget this year, and it's something that we've put there and that side never did.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister just chose not to commit to that balance and given that if we go further into the future it would take surpluses of \$4 billion per year for 25 years in a row to pay off this debt this government has promised to accumulate by 2023 and given that a vast majority of Albertans are seriously concerned that this government is on track to rack up \$96 billion by 2023, again to the minister: what is the expected date that you will pay off entirely your forecasted debt of \$96 billion?

Mr. Ceci: Back to the AG's report that was just released, you know, that reinforces our position that Alberta needs to get off the resource revenue roller coaster. We are doing that, Mr. Speaker. We're diversifying the economy. We're taking a balanced approach to look across the sectors of this economy and building those up so that we're protecting programs and services for Albertans and working families. You know, the Conservatives: they would give tax cuts to their rich friends and blow a \$5 billion hole in the budget. That's not going to get us back to balance.

Mr. McIver: Given that the speaker has twice not committed to balancing the budget in the last two minutes, given that Albertans are seriously concerned about the government's lack of concern for the debt they are accumulating, and given that the hard-working people and families of this province expect and deserve a government with a realistic plan to pay back any and all provincial debt, to the minister: how can you expect any Albertan to take your financial plan seriously when you have no realistic plan to pay back nearly \$100 billion and you refuse to give one?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, that side couldn't balance a budget at \$100 a barrel. This side has struggled. We struggled with \$26 a barrel in January of 2016, and we are on track to balance in 2023. We're on track to make sure the programs and services Albertans require are solid and stable. That side would cut them all. That side would cut 20 per cent of the budget and fire thousands of teachers and nurses.

Electric Power System

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, yesterday in response to a question about electricity the Minister of Energy said, "our government is on the side of regular Albertans." I found this quite interesting given an article that I came across about electricity transmission in our province. This article states that transmission companies receive a guaranteed 8.75 per cent return on equity bills. My question to the government is whether they think these guaranteed returns to utility owners like billionaire Warren Buffett are truly taking the side of regular Albertans.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the previous government left our electricity system in tatters. It was falling apart. They were jeopardizing the viability of all the major power producers in this province. We're fixing the problem, and we're guaranteeing that electricity prices will not go up in the way that they did in the past because that side, the Official Opposition, would have us go back to a deregulated system that would cause huge price spikes. We're going to make sure that that doesn't happen.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, the only one that would actually agree with him is Warren Buffett.

Mr. Speaker, given that we have heard time and again this NDP government trying to shift the blame for some of these problems to others and given that Albertans elected us to this Legislature not to cast blame on the past but instead to address the issues of the present, will this government stop with the blame game, stop shirking its responsibility, and tell us how it intends to address escalating transmission costs for Albertans, seeing as they have seen a threefold increase in these transmission costs?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the transmission costs are a direct result of the massive building of transmission infrastructure by the previous government. Again the hon. member is attempting to shift the responsibility for his party's decisions when they were the government onto our government. We're the ones that are trying to fix the mess that they left Albertans, and that's what we're going to do.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given this NDP government's ambiguous agenda to force and accelerate the transition to green energy and given that the renewable generation sources like wind will require the construction of additional transmission lines, can the government tell us how much the ratepayer and taxpayer will have to pay owners like Warren Buffett in order for these construction projects to go forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this government is committed to a transition to a substantial amount of electricity generated by renewable sources, and that's something the people of Alberta support. This hon. member keeps going on and on about all of the things that are allegedly wrong with the direction of this government, but in fact we're the ones that are moving the system forward. We're protecting prices for homeowners and for small business, and we're making sure that we have an electricity system that works for all Albertans whereas they would cause the collapse of the entire system, had we not stepped in.

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

Student Test Results Reporting

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a former educator I understand the complexity of assessing the trends of diploma exam results. However, I have a relatively simple question for the Minister of Education. Minister, do you believe that reporting the test scores and aggregate academic success of Alberta's various schools plays an important role in holding the entire system accountable to ensure that our children receive the best possible education?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, we are currently engaged in a substantial development and reform of the curriculum in all subject areas and all grade levels, and of course when you're building new curriculum, you need to make sure that you're building assessment. You can't use the old assessment with new curriculum. Certainly, it's important to have assessment that gives you the information in terms of surety and so forth, and we did that. And you know what? We're going to assess the system, and we're going to find that putting that investment into education that we did over these last three budgets will result in a better

education for all of our students while this side of the House voted against that same budget, that had actually invested in education.

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the provincial executive council of the Alberta Teachers' Association has asked ATA members to reaffirm a resolution asking your department to instruct media on how they should be reporting the results from province-wide achievement tests and given that Thursday is World Press Freedom Day, again to the minister: if passed by their members, will you follow the ATA's directive and tell the Alberta media how to do their jobs?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, last time I looked, myself and this government work for the people of Alberta, and we work for the children of the people of Alberta. We make investments in education for those children of the people of Alberta, and we will continue to do so. Over these last three years we have put in budgets – I'm so proud of our caucus – that funded for enrolment, for increases in education because education is growing, while these guys will choose to make massive cuts, laying off teachers, leaving kids in the lurch. I think I know which side I'm going to choose.

2:20

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that all public entities should strive for the highest levels of openness and transparency and given that for parents in Alberta to have full faith in our education system, they need to have confidence that all partners in the system are committed to these ideals, again to the minister: do you think this is an appropriate ask for the ATA to make of your government?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, once again, Mr. Speaker, we are, in fact, the government of Alberta here in the province of Alberta, and we are doing a very fine job in building and strengthening education across this province. We have more than 200 school projects, the biggest infrastructure build in the history of this province, and we are making sure that we make the proper investments in education even during an economic downturn, making sacrifices in other areas to make sure our children get the very best education not just in this country but one of the very best education systems on the entire planet.

Carbon Policy Economic Impacts

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, during Economic Development and Trade's estimates I asked the minister if his department had completed an economic impact study prior to shutting down coal-fired electricity. The answer was obtuse, and he chose to deflect blame on the previous government. I would like to ask him again for the record if he or any of the government departments did an economic study of the impacts of shutting down coal-fired plants prior to enacting their crippling carbon tax.

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for the question. Let's take a little stroll down memory lane. Back in 2012, when Stephen Harper was the Prime Minister of the country, the Leader of the Official Opposition was one of his

cabinet ministers. They brought forward regulations that would close 12 of 18 coal-fired facilities in Alberta. Guess what? They had no plan for a transition, no supports for the community members or workers, and no supports for the communities. I'm very proud of the work our government has done. We have the backs of workers and families and communities, and I'd be proud to expound on that answer shortly.

Mr. Taylor: It sounds like a stroll down fantasy lane. No answer.

Given that no study was undertaken by this government and given that simply blaming the previous federal government is just a cop-out to deflect from this government's short-sightedness, Minister, will you commit here and now that prior to the increases of punitive carbon tax, such as the 67 per cent increase proposed by Justin Trudeau, you will undertake a fulsome economic impact study and publicly release it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud of the work that we've been doing with communities and workers. I'm proud of the work the Minister of Labour has done introducing a fund of \$40 million to help workers transition, whether that's transition to retirement, whether that's education or retraining, because the world is transitioning away from coal. We have laid out a plan very clearly to 2030 that provides the opportunity for our power companies to phase out coal or convert to natural gas. The reason that those plants are able to convert is because of the work that this government and the Minister of Environment and Parks have done, because the previous government wouldn't even allow . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Taylor: Well, we still have a massive PPA settlement to have to deal with.

Given that we now know that this government has plans to use any surplus money derived from their federal pal Justin Trudeau's punitive carbon tax to help pay down the debt this government has racked up, Minister, will this government finally admit that using money from consumers to pay down debt and to bankroll their green slush fund is simply a backdoor PST and in no way a levy, as they claim?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? I'm proud of our climate leadership plan, the fact that that plan has led to the approval of the Trans Mountain pipeline, that our government has worked diligently – and we'll ensure that that pipeline gets built. We've said it time and time again. The opposition has heard the Premier speak to this. The opposition would roll back our climate leadership plan, jeopardize this pipeline. It would throw away the green line in Calgary. I'd love for the Leader of the Opposition to explain that to the city of Calgary, that their green line will no longer be funded if they become government. I wonder what other projects would be cancelled around the province if the Official Opposition were ever government.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

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

Naloxone Kit Availability

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The AHS website says: "Naloxone kits are available free of charge to anyone at risk of opioid overdose . . . If you get a kit at a community walk-in clinic

or Pharmacy you do not need ID or a prescription." I've spoken to someone who last week had trouble getting a kit at one pharmacy that wanted ID and approval but had no problems at another pharmacy that didn't require these things. To the Minister of Health: what steps have been taken to ensure that all pharmacy staff across the province are trained to consistently issue naloxone kits without ID or prescription?

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very important question. I'm really proud of the work that our government has done to make naloxone kits free and available across the province through harm reduction agencies, through family medical practices, and through pharmacies. We are working with the College of Pharmacists in particular to make sure that the message is clear with their membership that any time that any Albertan walks in to a pharmacy and requests a kit, they are given one free of charge. It is up to that individual whether or not they wish to leave their name with the pharmacist, but those kits are available. I'd be happy to follow up with the member about the specifics.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Ms McPherson: Given that the purpose of supplying naloxone is to save lives and given that naloxone is proven to buy crucial minutes in the case of an opioid overdose, to the minister: what metrics are being collected to ensure that the naloxone program is saving as many people as possible from overdose, and how is the program ensuring that people aren't being excluded?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I think the best way that we can make sure that people aren't excluded from access to naloxone kits is to make those free of charge and as widely available as possible. To date, we've given out more than 49,000 naloxone kits across the province. We're working with partners in the nightclub and entertainment industry on how they can support their staff and other workers in diverse industries who might be at risk of seeing someone who's at risk of an overdose so that there's that widespread accessibility of those kits across our province so that if they're needed in an emergency, they are available.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms McPherson: Given that thousands of people use public transit and services such as taxis and ride sharing every day and given that these modes of transportation can often be the way to get help in the case of an overdose, the question is: if the naloxone kit program is to have the intended effect of saving as many people as possible from dying of opioid overdose, will you work with local transit authorities and taxi commissions across Alberta to ensure that naloxone is available on trains, buses, and in taxis?

Ms Payne: Thank you to the member for the important question. That's a great suggestion. We are working on a number of fronts in that respect, and I'll make sure to raise it with the commission. But I would ask that the hon. member maybe raise the issue with the leader of her party, who, when he was Health minister, declined \$1.4 million in no-strings-attached grant funding from the federal government at a time when one Albertan a day was dying in the overdose crisis.

Southern Alberta Flooding

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, this year's flooding is not a new occurrence in southern Alberta. Now, several of my colleagues have had overland flooding in their constituencies, including First Nations land. In 2013 the Siksika Nation experienced some destructive flooding and spent upwards of \$4.5 million to fix needed roads and other infrastructure without reimbursement to date, and of course they're battling flooding now. What Chief Weasel Child asked me is: what has the Alberta minister of indigenous affairs done to help his band recoup those expenses from whichever federal agency is responsible? Sir, have you advocated for Siksika Nation in this regard?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've been working very closely with Siksika band to ensure that the build that was required subsequent to the 2013 flood did proceed ahead. Unfortunately, the previous government made some terrible mistakes in terms of declaring that people could build back in the flood plain if they chose to do so, and that resulted in some delays in the move from the flood plain up onto the hill, which has now been completed. Now we are on track to fix something that they left broken.

Mr. Schneider: Given that numerous counties and MDs have now experienced spring overland flooding and given that many local states of emergency have been declared, I have a follow-up for the government ministers. Yesterday the Minister of Municipal Affairs stated, "We do have some programs through us in Municipal Affairs, which are the disaster relief programs, which come after." My municipalities have road and irrigation infrastructure and bridge destruction. Can you tell me or get back to me with what programs are available specifically, and are these all programs that reimburse for cleanup and repair costs after the fact?

2:30

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very, very good question. You know, without a doubt, the unseasonably cold spring and the unseasonably warm temperatures – they got 50 per cent more snow than they usually get in southern Alberta – have caused some hardships for families and communities. We as a government recognize this, and we'll do whatever we can to ensure that the systems are in place, as they have been, to ensure that the assistance that they get will be there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Schneider: I appreciate that, Minister.

Now, given that flooding claims can be a little dicey when it comes to homeowners dealing with insurance claims and given that dealing with insurance recovery can be a long and stressful process, Minister, what recourse do these community members have if their insurance is inadequate, nonexistent, or simply their claim is refused? What recourse do they have for an event for which they are not at fault and can't be reasonably expected to control?

Ms Hoffman: You know, I'll be really happy to get back to the member about specific questions around insurance, but I have to point out the fact that here we are standing in our Chamber, where they just voted mere days ago against a budget that allowed for increased investment in these areas to protect Alberta families. I have to point out the fact that I feel like the contrast couldn't be

more stark, Mr. Speaker. You guys need to decide which side of your mouth you want to speak out of because, really, nobody can understand what you're saying because you're not speaking straight with Albertans. Time is up. Tell us what your plan is, and tell us where you want to see the cuts so that you can increase these investments. I have a pretty good feeling it's teachers and nurses.

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

Motor Vehicle Registry System

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has the weakest vehicle registry system in Canada and the highest level of auto thefts. It is a system built on trust, where untrustworthy people steal, sell, and transfer autos illegally. This weak registry system promotes criminal activity. While people should act responsibly and lock their valuables, the government must do their part and protect the registry system. Minister, your part is to act responsibly and fix the registry rules. What is your plan, and when will we see it?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. Obviously, registry agents are very much on the agenda for Service Alberta. They play a very important role in delivering a wide array of services, and we are constantly looking at how to make that product better. It's an important part of the job we do, and we know that as we go into the future, we have that on our agenda while the Conservatives would just give tax breaks to their rich friends. Our priorities are helping to improve systems. Theirs are helping to give breaks to their friends.

Mr. Orr: Given that constituents in Lacombe-Ponoka are concerned that in Alberta no proof of ID is needed to buy or sell a vehicle – a simple handwritten bill of sale exchanged on the street or fabricated is all that's needed – and given that you can register a car with that and that no one confirms the VIN or verifies the vehicle even exists and given that criminals steal and sell vehicles to auto wreckers with false or even no ID, why is no proof of ID required to buy or sell a vehicle? Are you going to change that going forward, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope that what I'm hearing is not advocating for more red tape, but I'm assuming it isn't. Moving on, certainly always happy to take suggestions forward to Service Alberta, and we would be happy to make sure we look into the member's concerns.

Mr. Orr: It's advocating to clean up the criminal activity.

Given that scrapyards or auto wreckers are on the honour system to check the VIN of an auto to see if it is stolen before buying and demolishing it – the reported vehicle just disappears – and given that the police can't track it and given that a simple change to always require the VIN to be searched and recorded would help police, Minister, this requires your leadership. Will you require the VIN to be searched and recorded every time a vehicle is sold to a scrap dealer?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. You know how we reduce crime? We don't vote against budgets to help deal with crime in this province. So I would say that if you're really intent on helping deal with crime, whether it's rural or

whether it has to do with vehicles, you would not vote down a budget to increase supports to those areas. Just a suggestion, Member.

Thank you.

Electric Power System Oversight

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, the NDP Whac-A-Mole electricity policies keep driving up power bills, and these changes are being done without key people in charge of key institutions. The watchdog, the Market Surveillance Administrator, still does not have a permanent head seven months after the last one left. Does the minister think that the government will get off the hook when mistakes are made implementing their ideological policies without the watchdog in place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I take issue with the member's characterization of the government's policies. They're very practical policies. They're designed to make sure that we have reliable electricity prices, and those prices are capped to protect consumers, whether they're homeowners or small businesses. This government is in fact following a very, very sensible approach to electricity regulation.

With respect to the appointment of the oversight, Mr. Speaker, there is a process in place, and it is being followed.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that the Balancing Pool's CEO, Bruce Roberts, left the same day we debated this year's Energy budget estimates and given that the power purchasing agreement debacle had also triggered the departure of the previous CEO and numerous board members, can the minister elaborate on why he can't keep the leadership of the Balancing Pool in place? Would it have something to do with the NDP government's political interference in voice mode?

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member throws around allegations and conspiracy theories. You know, pretty soon I think we're going to be talking about whether or not aliens are driving up prices for the electricity system. In actual fact, the relationships that he's trying to forge between different events are in his own mind and don't represent the fact that the government is on the right track in making sure that we put our electricity system back on track and protect consumers. That's what we're doing.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that the Alberta Electric System Operator has to prepare the provisional rules for the capacity market and given that the Alberta Utilities Commission has to adopt those provincial rules being prepared, to the Minister of Energy: does the pending retirement of Willie Grieve, chair of the Alberta Utilities Commission, impact the timelines for implementing the capacity market?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be glad to look into this in a little more detail and get back to the member with some specifics, but I want to suggest to you that the government's program with electricity and implementing the capacity market does not depend on one individual. It's a government policy. It's being implemented by many, many very qualified professionals in our system. I don't expect that there will be any effect on the timelines.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Agriculture and Forestry Minister's Trade Mission to India

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every member on this side of the House understands the importance of trade missions. Building relationships is the way to open markets and building a diversified marketplace. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: can you inform this Assembly of the goals of your most recent trade mission to India?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. This past winter I travelled to India in order to promote the high-quality products that Alberta produces and that India consumers value. The India market holds vast potential for Alberta agriculture, particularly in the areas of pulses, pork, and canola oil but also food processing, fibres, irrigation, and machinery. There may also be opportunities for Alberta's forestry sector as Meghalaya is a major grower of soft- and hardwoods and would benefit from Alberta's knowledge.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: were the goals of this mission accomplished?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. This mission has helped further establish Alberta as a significant producer of high-quality agriculture and agrifood products as well as a partner in research and technology. Alberta has renewed and expanded its MOU with Meghalaya to cover co-operation in all agriculture areas. The West Bengal government is interested in partnering with Alberta to develop their pork industry. Throughout Pulses Conclave as well as during meetings with state governments I was able to highlight Alberta's favourable investment climate and address issues of pulse tariffs and fumigation.

2:40

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can you elaborate on the MOU and the incoming missions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The MOU will see the creation of the Meghalaya-Alberta centre of excellence for piggery, creation of a Meghalaya-Alberta agriculture working group, and the creation of a strategic plan to articulate and guide specific activities. The MOU also reinforces the relationship between the two regions, which will help identify existing trade barriers and advocate for a reduction to these barriers. As well, the MOU provides incentive for continuing targeted and focused reciprocal visits.

Members' Statements (continued)

Rural Crime Prevention

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, a few weeks back an incident occurred in the small rural community of Chauvin, Alberta. A group of

approximately six or so men and women were suspected of committing property theft throughout the small town. A group of citizens had noticed some suspicious activity near some vehicles at around 6:30 a.m. Using WhatsApp, members started relaying their suspicions throughout the town and calling the police.

Eventually the group was spotted again. They had succeeded in convincing a town local to give several of them a ride to Lloydminster. Noticing this, several dozen locals surrounded the vehicle, telling their oblivious friend to exit the vehicle and take out the keys as they had doubts that he would have ever reached Lloydminster. After several of the males inside tried to leave the vehicle and dump some of what they suspected were stolen items, they became aggressive and tried to get physical with the locals. When that proved futile, they returned to the warm vehicle, and when the police arrived, they were apprehended.

Mr. Speaker, we don't condone vigilantism. This type of scenario is likely going to play out more and more as our government dithers on this important issue. Although the police have described this as a textbook example of community involvement done right, it could have gone very, very wrong for the unsuspecting citizen. While everything went right in the instance, I can't help but wonder: what if? That scares me.

We all know that the UCP have been bringing up this issue over and over, holding town halls and asking for emergency debates dating back to last year. The government has done little to help the immediate situation and has accused us of fearmongering.

Mr. Speaker, it's time to make Alberta safe from those that would prey on them. Know that the courts and the cops can do little to deter them under the current situation.

Notices of Motions

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

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

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government of Alberta to intervene in the government of Saskatchewan's reference to the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal concerning the constitutionality of the proposed federal Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act and oppose the federal government's attempts to impose a carbon tax on provinces.

I have the appropriate copies for the pages.

The Clerk: Tabling Returns and Reports.

Tablings to the Clerk.

An Hon. Member: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You're actually in the wrong place. You should have done that before. This is Tablings to the Clerk. I'll allow it today. I need to remind members, though, that in the Routine it should have been before this time. Tablings were called for. I'm going to allow it.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Calgary-Foothills, you have something to table. Is that correct?

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a press release from HSBC bank, who announced on April 20, 2018, that they are withdrawing from financing coal-fired power plants

globally. In addition, HSBC has pledged to not provide financial services for "new offshore oil and gas projects in the Arctic" and "new greenfield oil sands projects."

Mr. Speaker, I also rise to table five copies of HSBC's energy policy, which further clarifies that HSBC will no longer be providing financing for oil sands mines in situ or new pipelines dedicated to the oil sands sector. Mr. Speaker, HSBC is the second global financial institution to attack Alberta . . .

The Speaker: Keep it as a surprise for them to read.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, it's time for Albertans to boycott this bank. Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you for the opportunity to be able to table this. I made reference to this article in my question, and so I wanted to make sure that I tabled it today. The article is entitled Why Warren Buffet Is One of the Very Few Making Money off Alberta's Mostly Unprofitable Electric System. I have all of the copies.

The Speaker: Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During my question today I made reference to page 21, where it says that a surplus of \$3 billion would be needed for 25 years to pay off the expected debt by 2021, and I'd just like to table that.

The Speaker: I'd just remind members again that it's Tabling Returns and Reports, if you'd in the future use it at the right location.

I believe we have a point of order. The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Point of Order

Questions outside Government Responsibility

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to start my point of order referencing the second supplemental question from the Member for Edmonton-Decore. I'm going to start with the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, 2017. On page 497 there's a very, I think, important quote from Speaker James Jerome. It says, "If the essence of Parliament is Government accountability, then surely the essence of accountability is the Question Period in the Canadian House of Commons."

Now, the reason I quote that, Mr. Speaker, is that the role of private members in this Assembly is to hold the government accountable. When I explain to my constituents what quote, unquote, government is, I explain that it's the front bench of the Assembly, and each of us as private members, whether we're on the government side or whether we're on the opposition side, has a solemn duty to hold government to account. Their job as private members on the government side is not to hold the Official Opposition to account.

Now, I have no great affinity for the policies of the Official Opposition such as they are. I don't know many of them yet, but we'll leave that aside for another day. Regardless of that, Mr. Speaker, I will quote a couple of things here from *Beauchesne's*. If we go to section 410, "In 1986 the Speaker put forth views in light of . . . recent conditions and precedents" of what question period ought to be and the role of oral questions, of course noting that "time is scarce," section 410(3); 410(5), "The primary purpose of the Question Period is the seeking of information and calling the Government to account," and 401(10), "The subject matter of

questions must be within the collective responsibility of the Government and the individual responsibilities of Ministers.”

If I turn now, again, to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 508, in talking about the principles and guidelines for oral questions it says here, chapter 11, page 508, “While there may be other purposes and ambitions involved in Question Period, its primary purpose must be the seeking of information from government and calling the government to account for its actions.”

I certainly could go on, Mr. Speaker, but at this point you’ll remember two occasions that I can recall very fondly, I will add. On December 5, 2016, you made a ruling on page 2281 of *Alberta Hansard* and again on page 1613 of *Alberta Hansard*, October 30, 2017, when I raised this issue of puffball questions. At the time you cautioned the government because those questions strayed into the territory of, let’s call it, exuberant celebration of the wonderful things that government is alleged to have done.

2:50

While you found at that time that there was no point of order because you, I think, rightly, much as I find puffball questions to be disagreeable, said that, you know, we ought to have the greatest possible latitude in asking questions in this House. I would agree with that, but if I look at *Erskine May*, 24th edition on page 363, subheading 13 – and I do think this is probably the essential point here given the question that Edmonton-Decore asked – it says: “Questions are out of order if they relate to opposition party policies rather than to the Government’s responsibilities.”

The question that was asked as the second supplemental by Edmonton-Decore was: Mr. Speaker, can the minister tell us what dastardly things would happen as a result of this Official Opposition’s policies, should we all have the tremendous misfortune of having them as our government? Now, that may not be a direct quote because I do not have the Blues in front of me, but I would suggest that was broadly, thematically what the member was asking. I would ask, please, that you find there is a point of order and that the government backbench refrain from asking such questions in the future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Member, to the last quote that you indicated, what was the source?

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The source is *Erskine May, Parliamentary Practice*, 24th edition, page 363, subheading 13: “Questions are out of order if they relate to opposition party policies rather than to the Government’s responsibilities.”

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member put a great deal of effort there in researching his point of order. He might have saved himself the trouble. I’m glad that he understands the difference between questions that he considers puffballs, which are requests for information from the government, and questions which attempt to hold the opposition to account, which are clearly not in order.

Accordingly, the second supplemental is:

The opposition has put forward their own ideas on how to manage the economy. Can the economic development minister tell us what their plan would mean for Alberta jobs and workers?

This is clearly attempting to get the minister to comment on the policy of the opposition and is not a request for information with respect to government policy. Therefore, I concede the point of

order, and I will undertake to discuss this with our members and the staff that support them.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I, too, thought the member had made a good case.

Motions under Standing Order 42

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

Federal Carbon Pricing

Mr. Nixon: On the 42, Mr. Speaker? Okay. Thank you.

Very briefly, Mr. Speaker, the reason we moved this motion is that the Saskatchewan reference raises an important question, and that is: can the federal government selectively impose a tax on one province but not on another based on whether or not they like the province’s climate plan?

Canada has constitutional divisions of powers, as you know, and this is a question of jurisdiction. Alberta has had a proud history of standing up for provincial jurisdiction. Former Premier Lougheed stood up for Alberta and fought for section 92A of the Constitution, which says that the province “may exclusively make laws in relation to . . . development, conservation and management of non-renewable natural resources.”

Now the current federal government is trying to impose a job-killing carbon tax on provinces, one that will have serious economic consequences. Alberta’s government shouldn’t just rubber-stamp this raised carbon tax that Alberta is imposing on us. Alberta was once a leader in standing up for provincial jurisdiction, and Alberta should once again be a leader. I call on all members of this House to support this motion and make that clear.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 6

Gaming and Liquor Statutes Amendment Act, 2018

[Adjourned debate April 12: Ms Goehring]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-West

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I’d like to rise to speak to the second reading of Bill 6, Gaming and Liquor Statutes Amendment Act. The media is reporting that the Alberta gaming and liquor and cannabis commission has received about 450 applications to open a marijuana retail store so far in the province of Alberta, and the applications, of course, are still coming.

Bill 6 is the second phase of the government’s attempt to ensure it has laws in place for the legalization of marijuana. It is, however, a bit of a hodgepodge, Madam Speaker. The bill was brought in to deal with this oversight and the use and retail of the soon to be legal recreational drug. It includes marketing restrictions and enforcement as well as provisions to assist the commission in order to handle higher caseloads of appeals. Now, Bill 6 also fills in some holes in the act introduced during the last session, and as legalization comes closer and also when it becomes a reality, there is little doubt that we may see the government introduce other

amendments to the statutes to fill more holes that may be discovered. We hope that does not mean the government is simply writing legislation as quickly as it can to get it on the table. This, of course, is a very complex issue, and due diligence needs to take place.

This government claims that its top concern is, of course, the safety of children and public health, but in reading Bill 6 it is clear that this is not entirely true because the NDP has chosen for the most part to align its public consumption rules with tobacco rather than alcohol. At this point when marijuana does become legal, people will be able to walk down the road smoking marijuana unless, of course, municipalities come into play and they invoke some bylaw. Now, I've said before that you cannot, of course, walk down the road with a beer, but certainly the NDP have created modest rules for public consumption in regard to marijuana. That's why so many municipalities are scrambling to consult with their citizens to pass bylaws with stronger restrictions.

Now, in the end we'll see a patchwork of consumption rules around the province, making it hard for citizens to know if they can or cannot consume marijuana in public in any given place depending on the location and jurisdiction that they may be in, whether it's parks or festivals, and that goes, again, to something I've been talking about for a while, which has to do with consistency. We're not seeing that consistency throughout the province. Clearly, from my perception, the NDP appears to be fine with this. We in the Alberta United Conservative caucus have been trying to highlight this problem for months, and the NDP certainly have not listened to the words that we've been saying.

Now, Bill 6 does contain some positive enforcement sections, most particularly allowing prosecution based on evidence that a substance had an odour of cannabis or appeared to be labelled or packaged as cannabis. This section aligns with the rules of liquor. It means that peace officers can determine the presence of marijuana without having to go through a lab test, which would clearly be time consuming and potentially costly. When the federal government legalizes edible cannabis products, allowing officers to identify it through packaging and smell, this, of course, will prove very, very important. The addition of this section is the common-sense amendment, likely inadvertently left out of last fall's Bill 26, and will be important when enforcing the minor ticketed offences of youth possessing cannabis in proper transport in a vehicle and consumption in public in the restricted places identified, of course, in Bill 26, Madam Speaker.

Now, I just mentioned youth possessing cannabis, and that brings me to a question about possessing marijuana in schools. Albertans aged 18 and over can possess up to 30 grams of marijuana on their person. As you know, Madam Speaker, I mean, there are many kids that are in high schools that are the age of 18, so what does that mean for the schools? Bill 26 prohibits smoking or vaping on school property, but it does not deal with possession, so students aged 18 will be able to possess the marijuana. That, of course, in my opinion, is a concern.

3:00

Now, perhaps it is the intention of the province to leave it up to the school boards to make rules about bringing marijuana to school. What about consuming medical marijuana on school grounds by students or even staff? Are schools also dealing with this on an individual basis? I'll put those questions out there and hope that at some point the minister will be able to address them. You know, if it's a hole in the act that needs to be plugged, this of course is the time to do it.

There's a lot more that I, of course, can address in regard to Bill 6. I want to take a few moments to point out that it addresses the

need to amend a number of other acts, including the Drug-endangered Children Act. Now, under that current provision of this act, children cannot be exposed to any kind of indoor grow operation. Well, when cannabis is legalized, Albertans are to be allowed to grow up to four plants in a household as per federal legislation. If Bill 6 doesn't adjust the Drug-endangered Children Act, we would have a strange contradiction in law, and of course we would have conflict. Still, it's curious that one day indoor marijuana grow ops are deemed a serious danger to children and the next they will be allowed up to four plants, at least four plants – this is how the act reads – whereas children exposed to illegal manufacturing of drugs, indoor cannabis grow operations, et cetera, are victims of abuse. Well, we'll see if there are any further changes to the wording of the act as marijuana becomes more prevalent in the homes.

Now, this is not a criticism, of course, of Bill 6. I'm just pointing out that society is changing and is evolving, and the federal government's decision is to legalize this controlled substance.

Now, Alberta United Conservatives will continue, of course, to monitor marijuana use in our province and deal with the concerns as we can. We cannot take for granted that the laws enacted today prior to legalization will take care of all the issues that may arise. While this government has told us its priorities are children and public health, we want to see those assurances reflected in legislation.

Statistics Canada has released new data as early as yesterday that noted that Albertans are already using cannabis. In fact, our medical use is the highest per capita in the country, just here in Alberta. It will be interesting to see if these figures are also reflected in recreational use when marijuana is legalized. We certainly need to prepare for it, and I think, judging by Bill 26 and Bill 6, that we're likely to see the government bringing forward more bills in the future sessions as well. This, of course, as you know, Madam Speaker, is a very fluid and ongoing process.

Now, I do not discourage this government from doing this. If it doesn't get it right the first time or misses some aspects that need provincial laws, at least it appears willing to go back and plug those holes. That's always a good thing, Madam Speaker. Of course, the Alberta United Conservatives take this issue very seriously, and for that reason we want to work with the government of Alberta to make sure that our province has a cannabis framework that works for all Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, for your time.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was kind of hoping that maybe we could have some 29(2)(a), but I guess that's not appropriate at this time.

I rise today to give my thoughts on Bill 6. Madam Speaker, you might remember a previous version of Bill 6 that caused quite a lot of consternation in this Chamber and outside for some extended time, but we're here today to talk about the Gaming and Liquor Statutes Amendment Act, 2018. [interjection] Yes, I'm hearing some comments from the government side saying that this is a different Bill 6. I'm quite aware that it is a different Bill 6, just to reiterate that. Hopefully this legislation won't be as contentious as that. To the members opposite on the government side, they may remember the fact that there were 1,800 Albertans on the Legislature steps to comment on that. I don't hear any voices from those people out there today, so obviously there is not this contention.

This act seems to be designed to primarily deal with the shortcomings of previous legislation, of the previously described Bill 26, An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis. It deals with some unrelated regulatory changes that also fall under the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. I guess that I should refer to that entity as the Alberta gaming and liquor and cannabis commission as that is one of the proposed changes, a change that makes absolute sense as it leaves no uncertainty about what government entity has the power when it comes to cannabis legislation and enforcement.

There are other aspects of this Bill 6 that make sense to me as well, Madam Speaker. While I personally am quite content with a cold glass of a beverage brewed with the freedom that Alberta farmers have to sell their barley to the marketer of their choice unreined by former federal legislation, and the acronym of that will not pass my lips. Just for the members opposite to realize, there are some 73 small private enterprises of small craft breweries created in the province because of the freedom of certain federal legislation and some of us who made certain commitments to achieve that. I understand the frustration that some other establishments experience when it comes to some of the more archaic rules governing the sale or production of alcohol here in Alberta.

Since I've mentioned beer, I'd like to start with the changes that will allow some home brewers and winemakers to actually go outside of their homes to make product for their own consumption. Prior to this change it was strictly, as the name implied, homebrewed. In some cases, some people used that product for gas-line antifreeze, but others drank it. Under this act homebrew fans can finally go to commercial breweries and in collaboration with other home brewers batch brew using those premises' professional equipment as long as the product is for personal consumption and in no way sold commercially. This puts us in line with numerous other jurisdictions that already allow this. It has been a long sought-after change by numerous homebrew guilds and will be a welcome change.

Another aspect that has been in other jurisdictions and has been discussed by frustrated staff and patrons is the change that will allow for the alteration of liquor products. This will mean that fans of the cocktail movement will be allowed to consume infused and premade cocktails at their favourite licensed establishments. This allows bartenders the freedom to infuse liquor with other flavours, barrel age some quantities of liquor, and premake some popular cocktails such as pitchers of sangria for the upcoming patio season. Once again, this will bring Alberta in line with other Canadian provinces.

While I have discussed primarily the changes of two liquor regulations, I want to point out that this act also closes a loophole in previous legislation that wasn't made clear. That was the question of commercial establishments allowing for the on-site consumption of cannabis. It was asked several times if the new regulation would allow the set-up of cannabis bars or vaping bars for cannabis use. This act closes that bit of ambiguity and makes it clear that this is prohibited.

Madam Speaker, not everything in this act is, at least in my view and humble opinion, completely positive. I understand that while this act has no immediate plans to allow for government markups on cannabis similar to that provided for alcohol in Alberta, I've been told that currently the medical market for cannabis is about \$10 a gram. Much of the talked-about benefits of legalization was to get rid of the black market and illegal sales of cannabis. My concern is that should government use markup as a cash flow similar to that placed on alcohol, we run the risk of prices rising above a sustainable market price, leaving the black market as a viable alternative. Similarly, I wonder about the rise of

interprovincial trafficking. Out there where I live, within six miles of the social experiment known as Saskatchewan, there are lots of back roads and there are lots of areas where various culpable products transmit across the border. I find it easy to say that some people find the price prohibitive in Alberta, bringing product in from neighbouring jurisdictions due to price and running afoul of our laws simply as a matter of economics. I hope this has been considered and accounted for.

3:10

Another concern I need to raise is with the new AGLC board structure. It will increase the board's size from seven to nine members. Now, to me, at least, that indicates that taking on cannabis as well as liquor and gaming may prove onerous. I have to mention that this section of the act will also extend the time frame of board hearings from 60 to 120 days. As the AGLC is also the enforcement arm of this act, I have concerns that businesses that may or may not run afoul of cannabis and liquor and gaming laws will have to wait that much longer, double the time, in fact, to get a board hearing. Madam Speaker, that's a bit concerning, and I hope that this gets dealt with in a timely manner as justice delayed is justice denied.

Madam Speaker, I understand that this act will come into effect once the federal government enacts its legislation. While I may be tempted to fault the government for not foreseeing these problems with their previous act, I can acknowledge it's a changing reality with the impending federal laws so that it won't come as a surprise if subsequent governments are compelled to make other modifications and regulatory changes to account for the unforeseen or unintended consequences.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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 Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to speak to this bill today. The bill put forth today, the Gaming and Liquor Statutes Amendment Act, 2018, brings some valuable additions to the existing act that regulates cannabis. As legalization of cannabis is approaching, we will be analyzing more of the gaps in our system and discussing with stakeholders about how these regulations are affecting them and if there have been any unforeseen effects. As every decision made in this Chamber has a long-reaching impact on Albertan workers, employers, and families, we have a duty to consider how every decision in which we have a hand will affect the safety of Albertans moving forward. As legislators it is our responsibility to seek the input of those who our decisions affect and dig deeper to consider how effective, efficient, and helpful these bills are. We must prioritize the safety of the public and the health of our children and always work with this in mind.

Bill 6 is consistent with laws that currently have been governing the consumption of alcohol and tobacco in cases of minor ticket offences thus far. This bill allows for peace officers to determine the presence of marijuana through smell or packaging when they come across it illegally in the possession of youth or illegally transporting it in a vehicle and having this evidence be permissible in courts without the need for lab testing. This beneficial amendment will help the court system. Rather than seeing it clogged with challenges to minor public consumption offences, it will free the system to serve rightfully and more effectively in the manner to which it was intended. This specific point falls in line

with the spirit of legalization, and that is to allow the court system the ability to focus more thoroughly on all nonminor marijuana related challenges.

However, Madam Speaker, this bill will continue to show us that the NDP have chosen to mirror their public consumption laws with tobacco rather than alcohol, and that forces me to ask: have they considered how mimicking the tobacco laws will affect the public health? I can't help but wonder if that's not a little bit short sighted. When marijuana becomes legal and the consumption begins to be widespread, it will be up to municipalities to put in place a bylaw to restrict public smoking. Have Albertans been consulted and consented to being exposed to marijuana smoke in parks or walking down the street? How will this affect the children or an asthmatic? Has this effect been considered, and if so, why is this bill not reflective of the restrictions necessary to ensure that no Albertan must jeopardize their health or their family well-being for the choices of others?

I might take into account the smoking laws around, well, public smoking. We have to understand that when someone smokes marijuana, the smoke that comes out of it, that is exhaled, still has qualities of that drug as it floats in the air, and people can receive those inebriating effects just by inhaling that smoke. For many people that is not their thing. It is not their desire to be inebriated, and we have to be careful of such things. By leaving a blank space in this respect, we will have a patchwork of bylaws across the province not consistent with one another, causing confusion for citizens. Again, each municipality is going to try to address these issues of this second-hand smoke in their own way. Not only this, but it will make enforcement a challenge with inconsistencies that police must try to follow. It begs the question of why this difficulty was not considered and if the consultations were done properly.

Madam Speaker, another point I'd like to touch on is the sale of the cannabis. This area was vague in the bill, and it has left me with some questions. As per the bill "the board may, in accordance with the regulations, issue a cannabis licence that authorizes the sale of cannabis in a location where things other than cannabis accessories or prescribed things are sold." Assuming this means that the sale of marijuana will be permitted in rural Alberta locations that are not stand-alone locations, it strikes me as uneven, inconsistent, and unfair that businesses in cities are not being allowed the same relaxed rules as rural Alberta. If cities must abide by stricter regulations when performing the same job than they would have to do in rural Alberta, are we relaxing any sort of rules for these vendors? I would be intrigued to hear why different parts of the same province are having different rules applied to them once again.

These inconsistencies across the province are consistent with your government. You know, your wait times in Calgary are 10 months for a hip surgery versus seven months in Edmonton versus Medicine Hat. They're all over the place. In one province we have so much diversity, and it makes you wonder why in a centralized model we don't have consistent wait times, where they take best practices. In this case it is the same thing. It's about ensuring that there are best practices right through the entire province and not putting the burden of creation of bylaws on these municipalities, who have to spend a lot of time and effort on this.

Furthermore, the enabling regulations for this subsection are contingent upon demand. If the demand is apparent in cities, will the regulations be implemented there?

Madam Speaker, it seems that multiple aspects of this bill have called for uneven distribution of legislation across the province, but in terms of bylaws and subsections being enacted in various parts of Alberta, although I support the notion of ensuring Albertans' health and safety with the upcoming legalization of marijuana, I

fear that the bill might create as many problems as it solves. We want this legislation to take a look at what the most common and imminent challenges will be and create effective solutions.

As such, I'm cautiously optimistic that we are on the right track, but we will need to keep a watchful eye on what comes up as legalization rolls out. It is inevitable that unforeseen obstacles will arise, and we will be closely listening to families, ensuring that they have their voices heard in the direction of their province.

Now, another topic I wish to touch upon, still following on sales, is the AGLC, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. Inherently there will be increase in workload for the board once marijuana is legalized. With this legislation we can see that they are preparing for an influx of additional work to oversee cannabis sales. Expanding its mandate is not without cost. It seems that the unforeseen costs of legalization are already piling up. The AGLC board will be increased from seven to nine members, and that's reasonable under the circumstances. However, the time frame for the board to hold hearings is also increasing quite dramatically, doubling from 60 to 100 hearings.

I suppose this is a mere indication of how much work they will be taking on with the legalized cannabis sales. It would be a challenge for the board to predict the incipient work upon the beginning of legislation, and we will be closely monitoring the level to which they are equipped to handle this unprecedented territory. I'm certain that as legislators we are prepared to adapt and mould the legislation to address the specific difficulties we see in our jurisdiction and not stick to a one-size-fits-all model. Nevertheless, we will be determining that as this legislation proceeds.

3:20

Madam Speaker, another section of this bill goes to reinforce its similarities with tobacco legislation. A previous bill, Bill 26, included a restriction on individuals smoking in businesses. However, that bill failed to implement anything regarding the responsibility of the business itself to prevent this from occurring. Bill 6 fixes this gap by placing the onus on the business, and with this bill the responsibility will be placed on the business to ensure that people are not allowed to smoke or vape on their premises. A beneficial section, it will ensure that enforcement of laws is understood and the responsibility of every party involved as well. This was an important change to make as it emphasizes that we must all stay vigilant to uphold the law.

Madam Speaker, part of the preparation to the upcoming legalization of cannabis is ensuring that our existing legislation is updated to reflect the upcoming needs of Albertans. I'm glad to see that this bill also updates some existing regulations to stay in tune with our province's new direction. One of the updated bills is the Drug-endangered Children Act. Whereas households will soon contain marijuana plants, this legislation has a provision that allows children to be in the same premises as where four cannabis plants are being grown. It means that any premises that has more than four cannabis plants is considered a grow op, and it's still considered an offence for a child to be in the presence of one.

Now, although this bill has included provisions to reflect upcoming legislation, I wonder if the safety of children was considered, especially in the case of young children, who like to get their hands on anything within reach. Does this clause have the potential to jeopardize their safety? We will need to look closely and to monitor the feedback not only from Albertan families on this but, again, also with law enforcement that will likely be involved if this amendment causes a situation to arise where a child's health and well-being go awry.

Bill 6 also contains a couple of additions unrelated to marijuana legalization. One of these that I believe will be interesting to see in

action is allowing you brews and establishments to alter liquor products. This could be in terms of premixing cocktails, adding flavouring, infusing food with liquor, and creating barrel-aged liquor. This surely will cause a lot of excitement in some sectors but also concern with ensuring the safety of the public. When mixing drinks there's a challenge in ensuring proper quality control. This could cause some worry in the public on the safety of the drinks themselves such as in respect to questionable alcohol content. However, this bill doesn't clarify that no retailer may alter marijuana products in the way that this bill allows for alcohol drinks to be altered.

Madam Speaker, I wonder about marijuana in schools. I wonder about how it coincides with the tobacco laws. If I understand correctly, I mean, a minor can have cigarettes on them – a teacher can't do anything about it – as long as they smoke these cigarettes off the grounds. But, you know, I can't help but wonder if kids are going to be bringing marijuana into the school with the intent of smoking it during lunchtime or something like that or, worse yet, even distributing it within the school. That's something that we have to consider, where we should be mimicking liquor laws, quite honestly. It is about consumption and possession, and that is something to consider for this government.

You know, I've read a lot of studies and you read a lot of the anecdotes, and there are a lot of people that think that they can, for example, operate a vehicle. My concern is still that a person is inebriated, and from my personal experiences as a paramedic I have great concerns around this. I mean, a lot of people say that marijuana is not nearly a harmful drug, and to their credit I've only done a couple of calls that dealt directly with marijuana. But it was the third call that really triggered me, that we have to address the lowest common denominator, Madam Speaker.

We had a fellow that came off night shift from whichever plant he worked at – this was several years ago now – and he was driving home. It looks like he might have ingested something. Whatever it was, he went off the road, and he sheared off a light standard, you know, the big light post on the side of the highway. I did not know a vehicle could take one of those down. I thought the vehicle would fold before the light standard did. But he took down the light post. It was one of the highway ones. It was a big one. Yeah, the guys saw that there was marijuana on the side seat. It's a pretty obvious conclusion that we can come to that he was inebriated from marijuana.

Again, when I hear all these people say that, yeah, these guys can drive, they can operate, they can do all sorts of things even while under the influence of marijuana, I have to go back to that one person that sheared a light standard. What if that wasn't a light standard? What if that was a sidewalk, and he went veering down it? We had a very bad experience in Toronto, where it was a deliberate action on their part, but there's nothing to say that someone couldn't experience that same event, where they're ingesting marijuana and then fall asleep, black out, whatever it is, lose his train of thought, and he's off the road.

Again, when we are looking at a lot of these laws and discussing these issues, we do have to address a lot of these things. I had someone say to me: well, Tany, how can you address the laws for that one single person?

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to just have the member kind of continue on there. It seemed like he was in the middle of, you know, his thoughts and comments. I thought it was

very interesting to bring a little more personal story to this bill and these actions, legalizing cannabis, and some of the dangers and the problems that we could see. I think it's good that we have some of those stories told so we can have that opportunity to reflect.

You know, legislation like this is necessary legislation. The federal government is passing this into legislation, passing into law that it will be legal, so we have to do something. As we go forward here, we need to have this open discussion with the government on Bill 6 and how it's going to affect people in Alberta and how it's going to affect how cannabis is distributed in Alberta and how it affects our families, our communities, and that sort of thing.

Yeah, I'd like to hear the member continue on.

Mr. Yao: Why, thank you, my good man. Madam Speaker, this is a serious issue, so we must discuss this thoroughly. Again, it is about that lowest common denominator, that person that can't handle their inebriation or takes it too far and operates machinery. They operate a vehicle, and they could hurt or impair somebody. It's sad that we have to address that one person, if you will, or that very few.

We have to recognize that all of our laws surround very few people that would actually commit such a thing, whether it was murder – I mean, in an ideal world no one here wants to murder each other, but there's always one. There's always one that would go over the edge and push those limits. That's why we have those laws, that someone cannot murder that other person. And we have to consider that when we are doing such laws that deal with inebriation and with marijuana consumption and how it's slightly differently from cigarettes and how it deals differently from alcohol.

Madam Speaker, I cautiously support this bill in filling the gaps that the upcoming legalization of marijuana will create. But I do want to reiterate that the lack of foresight has created a situation where municipalities will be forced to create bylaws, thus causing a patchwork of legal oversight that causes nothing but confusion for Albertans and difficulty for law enforcement.

Many communities here in this province are covered by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and they are going to encounter, going from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, where the laws might be slightly different based on the consumption of marijuana. The government could do the proper thing and make sure a lot of these laws are standardized and that this province, which is bringing this in, is leading the way in ensuring that municipalities don't have to invest more time and money than they have to and not recreate the wheel but allow some sort of standardized laws to be put in place.

3:30

There's still a lot of work to do, and we are off to a good foundation in terms of legal framework in anticipation of the legalization of cannabis. However, again, we do have to stay vigilant, we have to seek feedback, and we have to consult. You guys are learning consultation, and that is a good thing. Thank goodness you're taking lessons from us. We will continue to help you with that consultation.

Mr. Mason: What have you been smoking?

Mr. Yao: Oh, my goodness. The Minister of Transportation's accusations over here are really disappointing, Madam Speaker. He may think he's quick witted.

Again, we have to stay vigilant because of people who might take this a little bit lighter. It is a very serious issue. I truly recommend that all members of this House look into all these aspects and truly consider it and the implications of such things. I mean, the good news is that we can look internationally and see some places where

a lot of this has succeeded and there have been no major incidents. We consider Canberra in Australia. That's the capital city, so their Ottawa. They put a border around that city, made it its own state, and they legalized it many, many years ago in Canberra, Australia.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to speak to Bill 6, Gaming and Liquor Statutes Amendment Act, 2018. As mentioned, it proposes to amend both An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis, still awaiting proclamation, and the Gaming and Liquor Act to help prepare the province for the impending legalization of cannabis, coming sometime this year I think is all we can say, perhaps in the fall. The legislation builds on the two previous cannabis-related bills and An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving. A large focus of this bill is on granting the renamed Alberta gaming, liquor, and cannabis commission new tools to oversee and enforce the province's fledgling cannabis market. The bill also proposes consequential amendments to the Conflicts of Interest Act, the Corrections Act, the Drug-endangered Children Act, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, and the Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions Compensation Act.

The bill would prohibit cannabis retailers from naming themselves or employing signage, symbols, or graphics that are commonly associated with medicine, health, or pharmaceuticals, including, without limitation, the terms "pharmacy, dispensary, apothecary, drug store, medicine, medicinal, health, therapeutic or clinic." This is important, I think. These are not pharmacists that are dispensing this, they're not physicians necessarily, and it's important that people understand that this is not under the aegis of a health professional.

The act will empower the gaming, liquor, and cannabis commission to make policies respecting the advertising, display, and promotion of cannabis and cannabis accessories. It will also prohibit cannabis retailers or any employee or agent from altering in any way or permitting others to alter in any way cannabis that is offered for sale at licensed premises. The importance is obvious. Part of the problem today is that people don't know what they're buying. It may or may not be pure. It may or may not be the strength that is advertised or promoted by the individual pushing the drug. We're seeing already signs that in some cases it's cut with fentanyl and ending up with tragic results.

This act would also make it an offence for the owner or operator of a premise to allow smoking or vaping where it's expressly prohibited and currently anywhere that's not allowing smoking. This enables enforcement against the owner or operator of a premise similar to those existing for alcohol and tobacco. Eminently sensible. It also permits a court to rely on a law enforcement officer's ability to infer that a product is cannabis based on its packaging, labelling, and smell for the purposes of dealing with offences under the act, mirroring the current practice for alcohol and tobacco.

This act authorizes the Alberta gaming, liquor, and cannabis commission to destroy or dispose of or order cannabis retailers to destroy or dispose of cannabis that is returned or otherwise deemed unsaleable or unsafe.

Finally, under the Gaming and Liquor Act this enables bars to blend or infuse alcohol with flavouring to create store specialty drinks. Such drinks, however, cannot be infused with cannabis, appropriately. The combination of these two drugs is not well

researched. It's certainly expected to cause more impairment and should never be allowed.

The act also permits adults to make their own wine, cider, or beer up to a quantity permitted under the regulations in places licensed for that purpose or in the adult's own home.

It increases the maximum administrative fines for infraction of the Gaming and Liquor Act and regulations from \$200,000 to \$1 million.

Madam Speaker, it's estimated that approximately 250 private retail cannabis shops will be operating in Alberta after the federal government legalizes cannabis on or about July 1 of this year. You-brew operations currently exist in seven other provinces. The Alberta government has opted for private bricks and mortar cannabis stores and public online sales. About 60 Alberta communities have combined liquor-grocery stores, but provincial officials expect online sales to cover much of the cannabis demand in remote locations.

Budget 2018 projected a \$90 million loss to the provincial government over the next two years while the fledgling cannabis industry is set up in Alberta. I hope that reflects the fact that we're going to try to keep taxes as low as possible to undercut the black market. That's very appropriate and responsible, in my view. Let's find out how it works in the first two years and see what's possible in terms of return on investment. Hopefully, that return on investment will go into mental health and addictions support services. In 2021 the cannabis industry is estimated to generate a profit of about \$37 million, so not a big cash cow as some have anticipated.

As a physician I support the naming and branding restrictions that Bill 6 seeks to impose on recreational cannabis retailers. These licensees are clearly not pharmacists, and to allow them to suggest that they're offering anything in the way of health care and medicine would be outrageous and unacceptable.

I also support any and all efforts to make cannabis unattractive to young people. In keeping with the recommendations of the Canadian Paediatric Society and the Canadian Medical Association, anyone under the age of 25 is probably playing a risky game if they're using cannabis on a regular basis or even a semiregular basis. There's growing evidence that there's no safe dose of cannabis in a developing child's brain, a youth's brain, and it has all kinds of negative impacts where it's being used in the young, developing brain, not least of which is an addiction potential or, certainly, a dependency potential.

I still think that the government has missed the boat by establishing 18 years as the minimum age. I think there's lots of evidence that this is not safe under the age of 25. I would have preferred 21, as I've argued in this House. Recognizing that alcohol and tobacco are legal at 18, I think we could have made the cannabis legal age 21. For those majority of young people that try to follow the law, it would have delayed some young people's access to and use of the drug.

3:40

In relation to allowing the court to rely on a law enforcement officer's ability to infer that the product is cannabis, I think we have to rely on increasing investment and research to help define what impairment looks like, to help define what tests – whether it's a spit test, blood test, or behavioural measures – can be used to help us keep our streets safe and keep people driving heavy machinery or on the roads out of harm's way. I think it behooves, I guess, all of us as citizens to identify signs of impairment, to confront it, to refer it, and to indeed challenge those who might be impaired. And the definition of impairment means that people don't necessarily recognize they're impaired. If your senses are impaired, if your

mental functions are impaired, it by definition means that you're not necessarily able to identify that impairment by virtue of the impairment itself.

I'm very pleased to support this bill. I don't have any other particular amendments apart from those concerns I have about age. I dare say that while people complain that this is going too quickly, my strong argument is that it is high time we got this out of criminal hands, stopped the criminal convictions, standardized the doses so that people know what they're dealing with, treated it like alcohol and tobacco, which cause much more damage than cannabis in any of the research that I've read, and that indeed we come to grips with the rules around that, which we wouldn't necessarily do unless it was becoming legal. You set a date when it's going to become legal, and you work towards that. Everybody redoubles their efforts when they realize that the time is getting shorter and shorter, and we actually get serious attention to an issue that I think is long overdue in being attended to.

As many know, Canadian youth are the highest users of cannabis of any population, that I'm aware of, per capita. For whatever reason, Canadian youth are interested in and are using cannabis, and we need to have in place some good, strong guidelines, standards, limited advertising and promotion, and ensure that we do this as well as we can given that it has both positive and negative impacts.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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 Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd just like to speak today on Bill 6, the Gaming and Liquor Statutes Amendment Act, 2018. Obviously, it's a good thing to see Bill 6 because it closes some of the holes in Bill 26, and it amends the Gaming and Liquor Act. It does, you know, amend some of the other acts, too, in small ways. I guess in that respect, it's good to see this bill come forward to close some of those holes that were left in the last one, and it's good to see the government working to make sure that these things are done and that they are trying to fix things that maybe were missed in the first go-around.

Now, of course, this is kind of a companion piece to last fall's Bill 26, An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis. Again, it's good to see this coming forward and getting some of these other things taken care of. There are still concerns, of course, with this bill. There are, obviously, some other concerns with, you know, the speed at which the federal government has been working on this. Of course, we would like to on this side of the House kind of keep monitoring how this implementation goes forward, how the legalization comes forward from the federal government, and how that is going to affect Albertans and stakeholders and the public at large.

Of course, paramount is public safety and the health of children. That needs to be our priority here as we look at these different things that come before us and how we can deal with them. It makes me think of the situation with impaired driving and how, when it comes to cannabis, there really hasn't been anything that's really solid as far as some way to test, you know, the driving on the street when the police stop a driver. That's obviously a big concern.

I remember reading in the past year that somebody had done a study on THC levels and how it affects impairment. It was interesting to see that in that particular study – of course, I'm sure there are lots of studies out there – the THC levels didn't necessarily match the impairment level. In fact, I remember that one was ahead of the other in kind of a curve going up, and then the other one

followed. When we look at things like that and think how complicated this is going to be for roadside testing and even testing once you get somebody to the police station and have lab work done, it's going to create a lot of problems until this gets all sorted out, especially if the main way that you would think that we'd be using to test it may not fully capture the actual impairment of the individual. When you see situations like that and studies like that, it makes you wonder if this was maybe done just a little too quickly without figuring out all the details first. That's probably one of my greatest concerns, how that's going to affect public safety, especially on the roads.

Now, one thing Bill 6 does do is allow police officers to determine the presence of marijuana through smell or packaging when they come upon people that are smoking it illegally or maybe youth possessing it or illegally transporting it or anything like that. That's similar to alcohol in similar situations as far as the peace officers having a little bit of an opportunity to use their discretion and determine what it looks like. If it looks like it, then it gives them the opportunity to investigate further, and this evidence will be acceptable in the courts without the need for lab testing. You know, I guess we have to have a certain amount of leeway for our officers and their discretion to deal with this as they come across it in the streets and in vehicles. This is consistent with the laws for alcohol, like I said, and in cases of minor ticketed offences.

Now, we do want to make sure that the courts don't get clogged with challenges to minor public consumption offences and stuff like that. I mean, obviously, all issues of criminality need to be dealt with, and they need to be dealt with properly, but we don't need to clog up our court system with things that just don't make sense to do so. Obviously, we have a situation in our court system right now where we seem to be running out of resources to take care of criminals. We've even seen recently where hardened criminals had to be let loose because we didn't have enough resources in our courts to take care of them properly or the resources were misguided or put in the wrong area. So there are problems there, and obviously with minor offences we need to make sure that they don't take up time that is better used on something else.

Probably one of the most controversial things to me – when I talk to people in my constituency about this, it's one of their biggest concerns, too – is that it only makes sense that cannabis is treated the same as tobacco as far as where it's smoked in buildings and close to entrances of buildings and that sort of thing, but the government has chosen not to make it the same as alcohol as far as public consumption and everything. I think that's one concern that I've heard in my constituency quite a bit.

This is about protecting public health and keeping our streets safe and our public areas safe. You know, it's not legal to walk down the streets or be in a park consuming alcohol, but of course now we have the situation here where it's legal to do so with marijuana. Obviously, if we treat it the same as alcohol when it comes to transporting it, driving under the influence, and that sort of thing, I would think it would make sense – like I say, one of the concerns that I've had expressed to me is that it would be treated the same as far as the public areas. I don't know if the public really expects that people can be in a playground, a public park, or whatever, using marijuana. The people that I've talked to have said that that doesn't make sense to them.

3:50

Of course, what that'll do is cause the municipalities to make their own rules in those regards, so it puts the onus on the municipality to do some of these things that with alcohol they don't have to. If you've got different municipalities across the province, you know, different MDs, counties, towns, cities, whatever, making

different rules for the consumption of marijuana in public places, then when Albertans travel to different places, they'll have to be guessing. I'm not sure how it'll be signed or whatever. It could be a little confusing to them to try to decide: "Okay. Am I allowed to do this, or am I not allowed to do this?" Or if they see somebody else doing it and they're from a community where that's not allowed, they're going to go over and say, "What are you doing?" and it could be perfectly legal there. You have a lot of situations that could happen when the onus on this is put on the municipalities to make rules.

Now, what it'll do is that with this kind of open consumption idea, it doesn't matter where Albertans go; they're going to be exposed to this everywhere. Again, it's not so with alcohol consumption. Many of the people that I talk to think it should be likewise with marijuana. Of course, by having kind of a patchwork of rules that different municipalities and towns and cities might have, it could be challenging for police to enforce, too. I mean, everybody will have an excuse. It's like: "Well, you know, I can do it in the other town. Why can't I do it in this town?"

Another thing that Bill 6 does is that it opens the door to permitting cannabis sales in existing businesses such as a separate section of a rural general store in communities too small to support a stand-alone cannabis store, which is similar to liquor sales. I guess the idea is to allow some form of retail sale for marijuana in rural Alberta rather than solely through online systems. When we get into this part of the bill, it just seems a little bit vague and maybe not quite clear to me. Anyway, I'll just read from it. It's on page 2 of the bill.

(3) Despite subsection (1)(b), the board may, in accordance with the regulations, issue a cannabis licence that authorizes the sale of cannabis in a location where things other than cannabis accessories or prescribed things are sold.

I don't know. That paragraph there just doesn't make sense to me as far as, you know: "a location where things other than cannabis accessories or prescribed things are sold." I don't know if there needs to be something cleared up there as far as making it clear how that actually works with the legislation. That's one of the issues that I see in here, too.

Now, it adds a section to place the onus on a business not to allow people to smoke or vape on their premises. Bill 26 included restrictions on people smoking in businesses, but it failed to include the responsibility of businesses, which is consistent with tobacco. So the onus is on the business to make sure that this doesn't happen on their premises.

Now, Bill 6 amends a number of other sections in other acts such as the Drug-endangered Children Act. What it says in there basically is that any premise with more than four plants is still considered a grow op, and it remains an offence to allow a child to be present in one. That's another section that's changed, and I think that's obviously a good idea to have that in place.

The AGLC board, which provides oversight to liquor and soon cannabis sales, is seeing an increase in its membership from seven to nine, and the time frame for the board to hold hearings is being doubled to 120 days from 60. Obviously, it's going to create a little more work for that board. That only makes sense that there'll be some more help with that. Like I say, this adds a whole new level to the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission as far as what they have to do. Obviously, this longer time frame gives an idea of the volume of work that the board is expecting due to legalized cannabis sales. There's going to be quite a bit more work.

Of course, this is yet another cost, you know, to society, the legalization of marijuana. I mean, the federal government is putting this through, and it's up to us as legislators in Alberta to deal with this. I think it's important that we work on this and, I guess, keep

the communications open on this. As Albertans see this come into effect and everything, they're going to have ideas. They're going to see things that they don't like or that they do like about the system. Hopefully, we can react to those things and make better legislation.

Now, Bill 6 did include a couple of things that were unrelated to marijuana legalization. One of them is allowing you brews and establishments to alter liquor products such as premixing batches of cocktails, adding flavouring, infusing food with liquor, and creating barrel-aged liquor. Of course, that has nothing to do with marijuana legislation, but it's been included in this bill, too. Another thing is that altering liquor products, you know, prompts some public and consumer safety concerns due to quality control, questionable alcohol content of premixed and blended products. Obviously, there are a few concerns that could happen because of allowing the you brews to alter liquor products, so hopefully the government will have some regulations and everything will be in place to have a bit of control on that.

This bill makes it clear that no retailer can alter marijuana products, which is good to have that clarification.

You know, it just seems like we have to keep working as legislators in Alberta on this situation. Again, the federal government is coming up with this. We have to deal with the regulations within Alberta and work with that.

Again, it seems like the biggest concern for me is the impaired driving and how the police are going to enforce that on the highways and be able to test for it and having something that we can have confidence in that that actually is working as far as when the police stop someone and they do a roadside test. You know, we need to have some confidence that what they're doing is working and that we know that when they do this roadside test, they'll be able to pull people off the road that are impaired, that are a danger to our streets and to our families on the highways. I think that's obviously one of the biggest concerns.

Then, of course, it seems like it might even be tough to properly gauge the impairment even once you bring somebody back to the station and have a proper test. Like I say, there are some studies out that would show that even a blood test may not be accurate as far as showing the effects of marijuana on the body and on the mind and on the ability of a person to drive and react properly in driving situations. With those kinds of difficulties it makes it tough to have confidence that we are going to be in a situation where the streets will be safe. Like I say, I just want to caution people on that.

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?

Mr. Nixon: Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the House for unanimous consent to revert quickly to introductions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

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

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd just like to take the opportunity – and thank you to the House for your permission – to welcome Albert and Karen Kamps from my riding. Albert actually sits on the board of Alberta Milk and represents the dairy producers of Alberta. He just informed me a few minutes ago, too, that 12 per cent of the dairy production in the whole province is in my riding. I didn't know it was that much. I knew there was a lot of it. Anyway,

Albert and Karen also actually represent a large and very industrious Dutch community that lives in my riding as well. Welcome.

Also, I'd like to introduce my wife – she doesn't like me doing this, so I kind of snuck this in; I didn't tell her I was going to – my beautiful wife, who has stood by me for more years than I can count.

An Hon. Member: You should know.

Mr. Orr: I think it's 43.

If you could give them the warm welcome of the House. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Welcome.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 6

Gaming and Liquor Statutes Amendment Act, 2018

(continued)

The Acting Speaker: Is there anybody else wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Perfect. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up and speak to Bill 6. It's a lot more fun speaking to this Bill 6 than the last Bill 6 although we did speak about Bill 6 for a long, long time and definitely got the attention of a lot of Albertans. Anyway, this is indeed just a very, very important bill.

4:00

You know, I understand the need to push this forward because it was kind of pushed onto us by the federal government, but my concern is that we're kind of pushing off a lot of the responsibility onto municipalities that may not be geared up right at the moment to do so.

I understand that the uptake of licensing around the Edmonton area especially has been quite active other than, I believe, only one application out of Sherwood Park. But the ones in Edmonton have been quite prolific, and my understanding is that the city of Edmonton council is right now looking at licensing fees. I think they're starting somewhere around \$8,100, but some speculation from the police is that the cost to the municipality might be upwards of, like, \$100,000, so it may be very difficult for them to recoup some of the extra costs.

Now, that being said, when it becomes legal, unless a municipality passes a bylaw restricting it, people can walk down the streets smoking a joint. That's, I guess, one of the biggest concerns that we hear – I don't know if you're hearing it here in Edmonton, but we definitely hear it out in rural Alberta – that, you know, you can't walk down the street with a beer in your hand, but you can walk down with a joint in your hand, so there's kind of that little bit of discrepancy. And a lot of people say that it stinks. I mean, even if it's illegal, you can still walk around and smell people smoking it, and you don't know whether there's a skunk in the area or someone smoking pot.

That being said, we were over in Amsterdam a couple of years ago, and, you know, it's been legal over there for quite a while. Of course, when you visit Amsterdam, you have to go to the old downtown and have a walk around there. There were quite a few of the coffee shops, as they call them, and we didn't see a lot of it spilling out onto the streets. Mostly people just stayed in there, so we really didn't see that much of an issue. Yeah, the odd partygoer sitting around at a coffee table out in the street was getting a little

rambunctious, but overall the people there didn't seem too concerned about it.

One of the things I'd like to just get some clarification on, though, is that when it comes to section 86 of the bill – let me just flip over to that. Just some clarification on it. I started making beer in Edmonton about 35 years ago, and at that time there were only two places around where you could buy beer- and winemaking supplies. Those were the old Army & Navy downtown and one private operator over on the south side. Now – I don't know how many – probably hundreds of different brew places around town supply them.

Some of the places I've gone into and talked to the owners. One of the concerns or questions that they have – and maybe we can address it in this bill if I can get clarification on it. Maybe it's already existing in here and covered; otherwise, possibly put an amendment forward during Committee of the Whole. Some of these operators that are supplying beer and wine have a lot of people walk into the store and say: "Well, you know, I live in an apartment, or I live in a condo, and I don't have a lot of room, but I'd sure like to get into making my own beer and wine. Is it possible to make it here at your facility?" I understand that in most of the other provinces we do have that. Anyway, the question is that a lot of these places do have room, and they have warehouses, and they would like to set up a place where people could come in, buy a wine kit, buy a beer kit, make their own product at their facility, pay an extra fee to the supplier, and then take their product home when it's all done. They'd have the experience of making their own beer and wine.

Section 86 says, "An adult may make wine, cider and beer, up to a quantity permitted under the regulations, in a premises licensed for that purpose or in the adult's residence." So my question is: does that clause open the door for, say, Wine-Kraft downtown to apply for a licence that they could make beer or wine on the premises and have people come in, buy a wine kit, and make it on their premises? It is something that a lot of these guys have asked for, so I'm hoping that if it's covered in that clause, I could get some clarification on that. Otherwise, I would possibly put an amendment forward, so if I could get some clarification, that would be great. I think it would be something that would be well accepted by a lot of the suppliers in town and in the province.

Now, the other question that I had. Some clarification again, because that section is a little bit vague. It says, "Despite subsection (1)(b), the board may, in accordance with the regulations, issue a cannabis licence that authorizes the sale of cannabis in a location where things other than cannabis accessories or prescribed things are sold." My understanding from previous discussions and debates in the House was that it was quite specific that a marijuana dispensary had to be a stand-alone facility. Now I'm seeing that this is kind of going the other way. I wonder exactly what the regulations and criteria are going to be for that, whether it's only for, like, a small-town, isolated little general store that could attach that onto it and doesn't sell liquor as well. Or is it liquor? Why would we be giving concessions when a lot of other places, liquor stores that would also like to be in the marijuana business can't do it, right? That's my understanding. So I'd just like a little bit more clarification exactly on what the regulations are going to be or the criteria around that so that businesses will have a better understanding of what their options are.

The bill also amends a number of sections under the act such as the Drug-endangered Children Act. The above-mentioned amendment allows children to be on premises where four cannabis plants are grown as per the new legalization laws. Now, there was a write-up in one of the papers just the other day about property values and resale and the damages to houses even with four plants if you're

increasing the moisture in the home. I don't know exactly what is entailed in that, whether it's due to hydroponics or what it is. Now, the concern there is access to kids. I mean, kids will tend to eat plants, little kids. We had to take our son in when he was just a toddler because he grabbed a piece of I think they called it dumb cane. It was a big, leafy plant, but it can actually paralyze your mouth and your throat. We had to bring him in, the poor little guy. They had to give him ipecac and make him throw up three or four times before they let us go home. So that is a concern with that section, that, you know, unless there are some restrictions on keeping it out of the reach of kids, it will be accessible to children.

That being said, if I could get clarification, I guess, on a couple of those areas: the brewery section and the home-growing and whether there are going to be some regulations there regarding small children and then the vagueness of that section where it allows cannabis to be sold in a location where things other than cannabis accessories or prescribed things are sold. Those would be my questions to the government. If we could get some clarification on those two issues, I'll be happy with that.

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 to Bill 6? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank you for allowing me to rise and to speak to Bill 6, the Gaming and Liquor Statutes Amendment Act, 2018. We've heard some wise words today. We're well aware that this is a companion piece to last fall's Bill 26, An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis. I will suggest that as we progress and we move through this piece of legislation, the United Conservative Party will be monitoring the implementation of the cannabis legislation. We'll be seeking feedback from stakeholders and from our constituents and from the public in general as we move forward. I have received feedback consistently since last fall on this issue of the legalization of marijuana and how we're going to deal with it in Alberta.

4:10

Madam Speaker, I can confidently say that I believe that everybody in this House wants to see the public safety and the health of our children become paramount in this piece of legislation and in the implementation of the marijuana laws as we go forward in this province.

Madam Speaker, I had an opportunity – that's not a word I want to use. I had the chance to work with a family in my constituency who were very concerned about their son and the mental health issues and the addiction issues that this young man was dealing with. They were convinced that this young man's addiction and his mental health issues could be drawn and a straight line could be made through the young man's dependency on marijuana and his addiction to marijuana. Unfortunately, over Easter this same young man, after battling with his own demons, took his own life. I met with the parents. I went to the funeral, and I met with the parents a week and a half later. They were convinced, after many years of struggling to deal with their son, that marijuana was the core of the problem.

I would echo the comments by many in this House that whatever legislation we pass, we're going to have to ensure that we deal with the dependency and the addiction issues that come with adding this drug as a legal substance to our society.

I would agree with many that have stood up and talked about the fact that marijuana, it would appear, is unsafe for anyone under the

age of 25 as we look at the brain development as we grow. Madam Speaker, I am very concerned about how we move forward and how we deal with schools and with the children in our schools. I believe that this is going to be an issue that I'll address in a few minutes.

Madam Speaker, Bill 6 allows peace officers to determine the presence of marijuana through smell or packaging so that they can begin to address people that are smoking illegally or address youth that are possessing marijuana illegally or the illegal transportation of the substance. That's a good thing. I'm glad to see that we're starting to fill in some of the gaps that were necessary to be addressed and that this piece of legislation starts to address that.

It's important that the evidence that is collected by peace officers is going to be acceptable in the courts, and Bill 6 helps us to take a step towards that. It is consistent with other ticketed offences that deal with minors and cases of minors having alcohol and tobacco, so I believe that this is a wise step and a good step. I believe that it's done in such a way that our court system isn't going to be clogged up with minor offences.

Bill 6 also reminds us, though, that the government mirrored the public consumption laws of tobacco and not alcohol when they addressed the legalization of marijuana and how we're going to address it. It does leave a question as to whether or not this allows us to be able to protect the public health. That is one of our duties as legislators.

It's clear that municipalities are now going to be taking on a new burden, that municipalities are going to be faced with the need to pass bylaws that can restrict where marijuana can be consumed, where it can be smoked, and where it can be sold. Albertans will by necessity be exposed to this on a much greater basis than we have in the past. As has already been said, while we cannot carry a beer down a public street and be consuming alcohol in public, we will be able to smoke on the public sidewalk. You will be able to smoke in your backyards, where it will become an issue for your neighbours. We will begin to have a patchwork of smoking laws and bylaws across this province as people go from community to community to community, which could be confusing. But that may be the best that we can do. It is going to be hard on our enforcement, our police officers and our peace officers.

Madam Speaker, in section 90.12 of Bill 6 it addresses cannabis sales. It opens the doors for permitting cannabis sales in existing businesses. I was driving to the Legislature today only to hear – and I believe I've got it right – that the establishment called the Second Cup is going to be opening up a place for the retail sale of cannabis. In rural areas where you might only have one general store in a community, now as you go into that general store, you will also be able to see and be able to purchase marijuana.

I'm glad to see that in this bill there is some consideration given to signage and to how we will advertise for the sale of marijuana, that any business signage must not use any term commonly associated with medicine or health or pharmaceuticals and that no licensee or employer or agent may alter in any way the cannabis that is offered for sale. I believe these are good, wise restrictions to be placed on business.

I want to spend just a minute or two on my concern with regard to schools. I have spoken with the RCMP in my constituency, across the constituency, and they have grave concerns about how schools and police are going to deal with the consumption and rather the possession of cannabis when it comes to schools. I have talked with educators, and I have had educators tell me that not one school board across this province is prepared for the legalization of marijuana and how to address the possession of marijuana in the schools. Not one.

I've even had, as of today, discussions with the Minister of Education, asking both in budget estimates and today: how are we

going to start to be prepared to deal with the fact that an 18-year-old student can legally purchase the substance? While they might have to smoke it off the school grounds, they have the capacity to bring it legally into the school. We have schools that go from K to 12, and when I sent my five-year-old son and my five-year-old daughter off to school, it was not with the expectation that they would be going to a place where marijuana would be possessed by the students around them. This is an issue that we're going to have to deal with.

I'm waiting as we go through this bill to see if the government has the capacity to address this huge concern. The police are concerned about it. The school boards openly admit that they are not prepared to deal with this. This falls on our plate. Because we have chosen to treat marijuana through the tobacco laws rather than through the alcohol laws, we have created a problem for the schools across this province. This falls on our shoulders. We have a duty and we have a responsibility to address this.

4:20

Dr. Swann: How do you suggest we proceed?

Mr. Smith: Well, I believe that we might want to consider referring it to a committee. We might want to consider asking the committee to do more legwork on this. Let's bring the school boards in. Let's bring the police in. Let's ask them: how can we best address this issue? I know that when I brought it up in budget estimates to the minister, he was a little surprised by it, yet we should be able to address it.

Now, if the government can come forward as we go through this bill and show me how we can wisely address this, then my concern will be abated. That's what this Legislature is supposed to be about at its best: the give and take of ideas, the capacity to listen and to work together. So if the government can come forward and show me as we go through this bill that we are going to be responsible in addressing this issue and this concern, that we can give guidance to municipalities and to school boards – remember, school boards can't make laws. The best that school boards can do is make policy. We need to give them some direction, and we need to give them the capacity to deal with this issue.

Madam Speaker, I am glad that I've had the opportunity to bring some of my concerns before the House, and I would move to adjourn debate on Bill 6.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 7

Supporting Alberta's Local Food Sector Act

Mr. Schneider moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 7, Supporting Alberta's Local Food Sector Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 7, Supporting Alberta's Local Food Sector Act, 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.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment April 12: Mr. Stier speaking]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am happy to be able to stand and to speak to the amendment to Bill 7 and to the referral

motion on Bill 7, Supporting Alberta's Local Food Sector Act. As we know in this House, a referral motion asks the Legislature to place a bill under discussion before a committee, and there are some very good reasons why we do that.

We ask the government and we ask the people in this Legislature to refer it to committee so that a bill can have broader and further discussion, so that the ideas of that bill can be placed before a committee and free up the valuable time that is in this Legislature to move on to other business and then to bring that bill back before the House once we've had further consideration of the pros and the cons, once we've had a chance to potentially call stakeholders to come before the committee to ensure that there's been a proper consultation with regard to the bill and to make sure that at the end of the day, ultimately, that bill, in this case Bill 7, Supporting Alberta's Local Food Sector Act, actually serves the people of Alberta and that it does so in a way that moves our province forward.

Now, Madam Speaker, we understand that Bill 7 proposes that we would begin to develop and to encourage a successful local food sector throughout the province and that we would begin to regulate agricultural products that are produced or processed in the province and that will ultimately be marketed and sold as organic products within the province.

We understand that Bill 7 is three parts. It's got three parts. It's designed to support Alberta's local food producers. The first part establishes organic standards, that the local food produced in Alberta that wants to be labelled as organic must now meet the Canadian standards established by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency; the second part of this bill, Madam Speaker, deals with local food week and brings and allows this act to coincide with the Open Farm Days celebrations, that are usually held in the third week of August; and the third part establishes a local food council to help promote and to support local small producers. That might include groups like farmers' markets.

In Drayton Valley we have a farmers' market, and this might fall under that umbrella. The U-picks: I spent a wonderful night last summer going to a U-pick outside of Drayton Valley and getting all the saskatoons that we would need for the pies that I would love to be able to consume over the course of this past year. They would fall under this.

This Bill 7 moves towards starting to allow and to present the legislation that's going to be needed for the province of Alberta to have organic food products. Presently the province of Alberta has no standards for food to be called organic food. Any goods sold outside of Alberta or Canada would and have to meet standards set federally, standards that are set by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Presently any food product that is labelled organic, including food for human consumption or livestock feed or seeds, all of that is regulated by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency standards ensure that organics or organically labelled products actually demonstrate that the organic claims are truthful, that they actually are organic, that they're not misleading, and that all of the commodity-specific requirements that need to be met have actually been met. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency oversees and monitors and enforces the requirements of the Canada organic regime.

Now, Bill 7 sets out regulations dealing with the standards of labelling, and it provides for regulatory offences, which will give teeth to the legislation.

Madam Speaker, when you go into something for the first time, you better make sure you've done your consultation. You better make sure that you have asked the people that are going to be most affected by this piece of legislation that indeed they are in support of this legislation. By sending this bill to committee, we can ensure

that the Alberta legislation and the potential regulations truly will harmonize with the federal standards that are set. We can study them. We can make sure that the people and the stakeholders that are involved have the capacity to agree with the bill as it moves forward, and it's going to be important to ensure that all regulatory pieces resulting from Bill 7 meet the criteria set out by the Canada Food Inspection Agency in order to be certified organic.

There has been some concern expressed that the certification process for identifying organically grown food could take up to three years, and for anyone involved in that business, that's got to be a concern. This committee would be the perfect place to ensure that we study this issue. We certainly do not want to proceed down a path that is going to stymie food production that Albertans obviously choose and desire. We do not want to burden them with a certification process that is too cumbersome for them to be able to actually move through and to be able to support Albertans with the food products that they obviously desire.

By sending and referring it to committee, this is the perfect opportunity to bring some of those stakeholders in to be able to get their input into the process of certification, how to best streamline that process for certification, and to be able to ensure that the food grown meets the CFIA and the Alberta standards without taking an inordinate period of time.

Now, Madam Speaker, I'm sure that we would all agree in this House and you would agree with me that there's actually a very significant demand for locally produced food and that that demand continues to grow in Alberta as more consumers become interested in knowing where their food comes from and how it's produced.

4:30

I can only speak to the buying patterns in my own family. For at least the last 30 years, since we've lived in Drayton Valley, we have always made the conscious decision to purchase our meat locally. We have always purchased our beef from a local farmer, we've always purchased our pork from a local farmer, and we've always purchased the lamb that we buy from a local farmer.

[Mr. Dach in the chair]

Just a month and a half ago I purchased from a local farmer out near Thorsby, a friend of mine, a man by the name of Vince Holwa. He was just in the process of slaughtering some hogs, and we purchased a complete hog from him, and now we have a freezer full of some amazing meat. Why did we do it that way? Not only do we want to support the local farmers in our community, and we have for 30 years, but we know what they put into the meat, we know how it's butchered, we know how it's prepared, we have a relationship with that farmer, and we believe that that provides us with a higher quality of meat. For my family it's never been an issue of whether that's more expensive or less expensive; it's a decision that we make because we understand that we want to buy locally.

Bill 7 moves that forward. Alberta's local food industry is a key part of our economy. Farmers' market and direct farm purchases exceeded \$1 billion in 2016. That shows you that there's a demand. According to a 2016 survey 92 per cent of Albertan households have bought local food from supermarkets and 80 per cent have bought local food from farmers' markets. We Albertans support the idea in many ways of buying local food products, and the number of Albertans spending more than \$1,000 per year at farmers' markets has doubled since 2008, so it's becoming a trend. It's clear that Albertans desire locally grown food, and often they choose to purchase locally grown food that is organic.

Referring Bill 7 to committee would allow local stakeholders and farmers to provide input into the bill to ensure that it meets their needs as well. We do not want any unintended consequences to

interfere with the production of locally grown food. We need to make sure that as we move forward on Bill 7, it actually has the intended consequences, the intended goals for which it is being put forward before this House.

This bill, Bill 7, chooses to establish a local food council to help promote and support small producers, local small producers. It establishes the council to provide a report no later than 12 months after establishment of said council "containing advice and recommendations regarding provincial policies, programs, pilot projects or initiatives to support the continued growth and sustainability of Alberta's local food sector."

Well, we have some questions on this side of the House. Who will be on that council? What stakeholders should be represented from Alberta's local food sector that would sit on that council? This is a great avenue for discussion, one that I believe the committee would be very well equipped to be able to have and one of the reasons why this Assembly should refer this bill to committee. What are the costs associated with this marketing council? Do we even need a marketing council? Is there perhaps not an existing group that could receive this task? These are the kinds of questions that we could be asking at the committee level, that would allow us to be able to ensure that Bill 7 is indeed the best piece of legislation that we can present to the people of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this bill needs to be referred to committee. I believe that it needs to be studied and that the present government, while it is reviewing agencies and boards and commissions and has eliminated, and sometimes justly so, some of those agencies, boards, and commissions, we need to be very careful before we add another one in the establishment of the local food council. I'm not arguing that we don't need it. What I am saying is that before we create it, we must make sure that we actually do need it, and by referring it to committee, this would allow us the capacity to do so.

Bill 7 also has some concerning parts when we think about the scope and the power that Bill 7 is going to give to the minister and to the government. You know, I realize and I believe that all of us that serve in this Legislature do so out of a sense of duty and of public service, and I believe that all of us want to see what is best for Albertans. But I do believe that in a democracy we believe in this concept of limited power, that no one individual, no one government should have the capacity to ignore the will of the people or have an inordinate amount of power. Power must always be checked, must always be balanced.

Bill 7 gives power over all agricultural products produced or processed in Alberta. That's a lot of power. Bill 7 gives tremendous power to the minister under regulations, section 20(o). If I look at the bill here, Bill 7, Supporting Alberta's Local Food Sector Act, it says:

Regulations

20 The Minister may make regulations, and if you go to the very last one:

(o) respecting any matter the Minister considers advisable for carrying out the intent and purposes of this Act.

That is an awful lot of power, and I'm not sure that it's needed. By referring it to committee, we could have that conversation. Maybe at the end of the day it is, but at least the committee would have the capacity to have the debate, to ask the people that are going to be actually affected by this piece of legislation whether or not they feel comfortable with that kind of power being provided to any minister.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any hon. members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?
Seeing none, the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you. Now, I just want to take some time today and speak on Bill 7. I think, you know, overall, Bill 7 should be lauded for its purpose, which is to support locally grown food. Obviously, that's something we would all like to see, more industry and more, I guess, local products being produced and being consumed by the people of Alberta. It helps having this part of the economy stay in Alberta, so I think that that part of this bill is really good.

Obviously, for the things that we can produce in our climate here, what we grow here is a great benefit, again, not just economically, but it does reduce the need for trucking across the country or across North America. Of course, that saves money, it saves the environment, it gives us fresher food, and we have a little better idea of what went into these products that are grown.

We know that when we buy local, we're buying from our neighbours and are directly supporting our local communities. These are the people that we see every day on the streets, that we meet at different functions in our communities, so it's nice to be able to support the people that we live and work with. Again, then we know where these things are produced. We can often drive by the field where some of these things were produced. We know what's going on there, and we can have confidence that what we're buying is good produce.

This demand for locally grown food is growing. You can see this by stopping at any farmers' market. I know I quite often go to the farmers' market and buy fresh produce there. I enjoy the fresh baking of course – that's always good – and saskatoon pies and fresh bread and buns and that sort of thing. One thing I do enjoy is a vegetable called kohlrabi. A lot of people maybe don't know what it is. It's an excellent vegetable that I can't often find in a grocery store, if ever. I grow it myself in the garden, and if I go to the farmers' market and they've got some good kohlrabi there, then I'm going to be buying it. It's something that I really enjoy, a nice, crunchy vegetable. It's something that grows well in our climate here. Again, the one place that I can consistently find it is in a farmers' market.

4:40

Of course, U-picks. You know, I have a cousin that has a U-pick strawberry farm. He does all sorts of vegetables and stuff like that, but he specializes in strawberries. He has raspberries, saskatoons, and has a good business there and employs quite a few people in the community, having that U-pick farm. Again, that's something that's getting more and more popular all the time. People enjoy going to these places and picking their own vegetables and berries right off the tree, right off the vines, or whatever, so that they know exactly what they're getting.

It's also interesting that when you go to the grocery store now, if you watch labels, you can find locally grown products. You can see the eggs that were produced locally. You can see the vegetables and that sort of thing that are grown locally, so it is good to see that locally grown product right in our grocery stores. It's an important part of our economy. In fact, reports show that it's over a billion dollars a year. I'd say that that's a lot of green right there, a billion dollars a year.

This bill, Bill 7, will do three main things. The first is establishing organic standards, and this will be done by creating Alberta standards that align with the Canadian standards that have been established by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. This could be advantageous for producers that export their products outside of Alberta or even Canada because if these purchasers from outside of

Canada, outside of Alberta know what the standards are, then they'll know if they want to purchase it or whatever. So there is some kind of benefit to having those standards.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

But one of my concerns is that the process of inspection and certification may be costly or burdensome for some producers. I'd be concerned that there'd be some producers that could easily qualify but either don't want to or can't take the time or energy or whatever to go through that process to have the inspection done and have the certification done. Of course, if people are in that situation, this bill could be negative to them because even though they fully qualify to the standards, they won't be able to use that label on their product. So I can see this being, you know, negative to some people that are in that situation, people that are living in farther out areas, where to have somebody come and inspect and go through that process is going to be burdensome. You know, I've heard that certification may take three years, so that'll put some of these producers at a disadvantage as they go through this lengthy process.

There's no information on the cost of certification. We don't know if that's going to be a cost to the producer or how that all works. There are a lot of questions, I guess, that need to be answered within this bill so that the producers can make the decision whether they would like to support a bill like this or not. Like I say, if there's any kind of cost, this could be, again, burdensome on producers.

Now, another thing this bill will do is to establish a local food week. This allows for promotion of locally grown produce during the same time period of other farm recognition days. I think it's always good to recognize our agriculture producers in our communities. I think they're a very important part of our community, of course. Again, when you look at any small community in Alberta, almost every one will have a farmers' market at least one day a week, where local people can go and buy produce from other local people that has been grown right there. I think it's good to have an opportunity to recognize the people that produce the food in our communities.

The third thing this bill will do is establish a local food council. Now, the details are kind of vague on this council. At first blush it sounds good, but without the details it's really hard to say. It would be nice to have the producers that would be affected by this bill involved in working out the details on it. The best opportunity for that would be in a committee setting so they could present to us as legislators and we could listen to their concerns and ideas directly. It would allow the direction of the bill and the regulation that follows to be guided by the people that will be directly affected. I think that's important.

I know we've seen many times this government push through legislation without proper consultation. Each of these times we've given the government the opportunity to put the brakes on and allow for further consultation and input. One of the ways to do that is to have this go to committee so that people can present to us directly. In the Legislature here people can't present to us, but in committees they can. That gives the opportunity for people that would be most likely affected by this legislation to come and directly have input to us. But it seems like when consultation is needed most, that is when this government kind of bulldozes ahead with their plans, and the government actually often suffers for it when they don't take that time to listen to their constituents and listen to the people that are most affected.

You know, that's what we want to do on this side. We want to be helpful. We want to make good legislation for the people. That's why we come through with these amendments like this, to give that opportunity to have more input, to make sure that we get the

legislation right from the start, because when we do consultation after a bill is presented, it's usually considered damage control, and when we do consultation before, that's the proper way to do consultation. Of course, at this point here we're in a situation where the bill is already on the table. We should have had more input before on this, but now we're past that opportunity, so now the opportunity we have is to take it to committee.

Some of these changes to some of these bills would be pretty minor changes, but the results could be big, and they could make a really big difference to Albertans. We need to take that into consideration, that even the smallest changes can make a big difference in people's lives.

Now, just further on this proposed council, it's a little disconcerting to see that the minister will be appointing the members of this council. It says here in the bill:

The Minister shall, in accordance with section 7 of the Government Organization Act, establish a Local Food Council to provide a report containing advice and recommendations regarding provincial policies, programs, pilot projects or initiatives to support the continued growth and sustainability of Alberta's local food sector, including the following matters.

These are the things that this council would be responsible for.

- (a) potential barriers and challenges for local food producers and local food processors, including specific challenges faced by small producers and processors;
- (b) local food aggregation and distribution;
- (c) risk management tools for local food producers and processors;
- (d) increasing access to local food;
- (e) consumer awareness of local food;
- (f) certification opportunities for local food producers and local food processors.

Again, those are some of the things that this council is going to be responsible for.

Like I say, I'm not sure that the minister appointing each of these people on this council is really the best way to go. I would think that there would be better ways to choose members of this council, by going to the groups that are already available, that are already in place right now, that are representing different parts of the agriculture economy, and getting them to propose people or put people on this council.

Again, we're not even sure if this council is necessary. Maybe if we had this consultation with the ag producers, they would say: "No, we don't need this. A lot of these things are taken care of in our local farmers' markets, bringing awareness and different things like that, you know. I mean, we can take care of this stuff, so why have this council that the minister appoints to oversee some of these things?" Again, those are some things that we could learn in committee if we had the opportunity to take this bill to committee.

Now, it says:

The Minister shall designate a chair of the Council.

So he's going to be appointing all the members, and then he's going to be appointing the chair, too. I'm not sure why, for instance, the members of the council couldn't appoint a chair themselves, but I guess the minister maybe wants to be involved as much as possible. Again, I'm not certain that that's necessary or even desired by the people in the industry.

Not later than 12 months after a Council is established under subsection (1), the Council must submit a final report to the Minister providing the advice and recommendations of the Council on the matters referred to in subsection (1).

It goes on to say:

The Council is dissolved on the date the Minister accepts the Council's report or such later date determined by the Minister.

So, again, just kind of some guidelines for this council that the minister would appoint and appoint the chair for, too.

Now, we get into this part where it comes into, I guess, kind of the regulations and enforcing regulations. I'm just going to jump ahead to section 12, where it says:

The Minister may, on terms and conditions specified by the Minister, designate any person or class of persons to act as an inspector for the purposes of this Act.

So what we have here is the minister determining who would be an inspector for the purposes of this act and designating any person or class of persons to act as an inspector. Again we have the minister making these decisions here and no real guideline for us to go by as far as passing this legislation, as far as, you know: what kind of qualifications is an inspector going to have?

4:50

I mean, it says here: "any person or class of persons to act as an inspector." I would think that people in the industry would probably have a pretty good idea of what kind of person they would want to have as an inspector. Again, if we had that opportunity in committee to listen to these people and understand what they want, they might have some really good ideas of what kind of person should be appointed to be on these councils.

I just want to go into the complaints part here, section 10:

A person may, in accordance with the regulations, make a complaint to the Minister regarding the advertising, labelling or offering for sale of an agricultural product that the person suspects is not certified in accordance with section 8.

Of course, that allows that any person could make a complaint to the minister on any of these issues.

It goes on to say in section 11:

On receipt of a complaint under section 10, an inspector must verify that the producer or processor of the agricultural product that is the subject of the complaint holds the appropriate certification in accordance with section 8.

Here again we have the inspector come into play. After the ministry gets the complaint, the inspector is sent out to verify what the complaint was.

It goes on in subsection (2) under section 11:

If the producer or processor of the agricultural product holds the appropriate certification, the inspector must notify the complainant of the producer's or processor's certification status and conclude the inspection.

Obviously, if the person is properly certified, then it ends there.

It goes on in subsection (3):

If the producer or processor of the agricultural product does not hold the appropriate certification, the inspector must conduct an investigation.

So all of a sudden we're getting to the point here where if the inspector feels that there's something wrong, then the investigation starts.

Now I'm going to jump to section 13 here. It says:

(1) On receipt of a complaint under section 10, an inspector may conduct an inspection or investigation to determine whether a person is complying with this Act, the regulations or an enforcement instrument.

(2) In conducting an inspection or investigation, an inspector may do one or more of the following:

- (a) subject to subsection (4), enter, at any reasonable time, any place, including any means of conveyance or transport, where an inspector has reason to believe that ...

Okay. Let's just look at that a little more carefully. When an investigation starts ...

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 referral amendment?

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 15 Appropriation Act, 2018

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'll just begin here by saying thank you very much for the opportunity. It's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 15, the Appropriation Act, 2018.

This act will provide funding authority to the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government of Alberta for the 2018-19 fiscal year. The schedule to the act provides amounts that were presented in greater detail in the 2018-19 government and Legislative Assembly estimates tabled on March 22, 2018. These estimates were subsequently debated by standing committees and voted on in Committee of Supply.

Madam Speaker, after the worst recession in a generation our economy is recovering, and things are looking up. In fact, in 2017 Alberta led the country in economic growth, at 4.5 per cent. We saw 90,000 new, full-time jobs created, primarily in the private sector. With more than 2.3 million jobs now in this province, there are more Albertans working today than ever before in this province. Exports are up. Manufacturing is up. Housing starts are up. We're expecting to be near the top of economic growth in Canada once again in 2018.

That's all good news, but there is still a lot of work to do to make sure that each and every Albertan and business feels the positive effects of this recovery. That's why we continue to fight for new pipelines and better market access. In recent days this has been demonstrated through our government's Bill 12, Preserving Canada's Economic Prosperity Act. Through Bill 12 we would ensure that the interests of Albertans are optimized before authorizing the exports of natural gas, crude oil, or refined fuels from this province. By maximizing the economic benefit of our natural resources, we are defending Alberta's workers, our provincial and national economies, and protecting the funding that is aiding our transition to a greener economy. We are committed to getting this pipeline built. Workers from every corner of our country would stand to benefit from this project, creating prosperity that makes all of Canada better through schools, hospitals, roads, transit, and ports.

This brings us back to Budget 2018: A Recovery Built to Last. This budget is built on three pillars: diversifying the economy by fighting for market access, adding value to our energy products, and supporting new and developing industries; the next pillar, protecting vital public services by making sure loved ones get the care they need, young people get the best education possible, and no one is left behind in this province; and the third and last pillar, returning to balance by investing public dollars where they are needed most, eliminating waste, and controlling spending to return to balanced budgets by 2023.

Madam Speaker, a growing and diverse economy benefits all Albertans. It supports job creation and helps move Alberta off the

resource revenue roller coaster. Budget 2018 includes a range of initiatives to add value to our energy products and support developing industry. We recognize that overreliance on energy revenue leads to boom-and-bust budgets, and Alberta is well positioned to build on our natural strength in the energy sector. Initiatives included in Budget 2018 will help to make the energy sector more resilient to this cycle and will boost provincial resource revenues. For example, this budget enhances the competitiveness of Alberta's oil sands industry with \$1 billion in loan guarantees and grants over eight years to support up to five new partial upgrading facilities. This plan represents up to \$5 billion in private investment and more than 4,000 jobs in construction.

Budget 2018 also includes \$500 million in royalty credits to initiate a second phase of the successful petrochemicals diversification program, or PDP, which will grow investment in Alberta-based natural gas processing. The intended outcome of the program is up to three world-scale petroleum facilities in Alberta, resulting in approximately \$6 billion worth of new investment and also the creation of approximately 4,000 construction jobs.

Finally, in terms of diversification within the energy sector Budget 2018 encourages the construction of new extraction facilities on major pipelines with \$500 million in loan guarantees and grants to the new petrochemical feedstock infrastructure program. These facilities recover natural gas liquids like ethane and propane that can then be used to manufacture a wide range of products, and like the other programs I just mentioned, they represent incredible economic opportunity for this province.

Going on, Budget 2018 does so much more than just diversify the energy industry. It takes concrete steps to help grow other sectors of the economy and create exciting new opportunities for investors, business leaders, and other entrepreneurs. The Alberta investor tax credit and the capital investment tax credit have already supported more than \$1 billion in private-sector capital projects, and this success will continue as Budget 2018 will provide \$60 million a year for these two programs through to 2021-2022. This funding will help foster new investment, encourage innovation, and accelerate growth and new industries.

5:00

In addition, our government is providing \$20 million a year by 2020-2021 for a new interactive digital media tax credit. This tax credit will make it easier for existing companies to bring on more employees and encourage Alberta entrepreneurs to launch new companies.

To help ensure that forward-looking, tech-focused Alberta businesses and entrepreneurs have access to a labour force that is prepared to fill the jobs of the future, Budget 2018 will create 3,000 new postsecondary technology spaces over the next five years. Budget 2018 also creates new scholarships to attract students in areas such as life sciences, clean tech, and health innovation. Drawing more great minds to our province and labour force and keeping more bright young Albertans here so we can continue to diversify and push our economic growth into new areas is an important aspect of ensuring our recovery is built to last.

I should also be clear about something Budget 2018 does not include. It does not include new taxes, and it's also contributing to Alberta's country-leading growth when we do not include new taxes. Our incredibly favourable tax system has attracted a great deal of economic activity to this province. Budget 2018 holds the small-business tax rate at 2 per cent, and we remain committed to an Alberta free of a provincial sales tax. Both factor into Alberta's tax advantage, with that growing to \$11.2 billion this year. This means that Alberta businesses and families would pay \$11.2 billion

more in taxes and carbon levies if they were in any other province in Canada.

The second pillar of Budget 2018 is protecting vital public services. Madam Speaker, during the economic downturn government supported Albertans by investing in health care, education, and social services and taking steps to make life more affordable for families. While some voices in our province called for massive cuts to Alberta's services that we all depend on, we have chosen a different path, one that provides stable funding of essential services while controlling spending growth. Budget 2018 includes several actions that protect the public services that Albertans rely on. This includes supporting the delivery of publicly funded health care with capital investments in high-quality health facilities such as the Calgary cancer centre and the new hospital in Edmonton. It includes shifting to better community-based care by adding hundreds of continuing care beds.

It also includes supporting the rapidly growing population of young Albertans by fully funding enrolment growth in the K to 12 education system and reducing school fees, keeping education more affordable by extending the postsecondary tuition freeze for now the third year, and helping working parents by creating an additional 4,500 affordable child care spaces through the early learning and child care development centre program and making life more affordable for lower and middle income working families with continued support for the country-leading Alberta child benefit and the Alberta family employment tax credit.

In addition, funding for our core capital plan in this province is \$26.6 billion over the next five years. While this funding is returning to normal historic levels after significant investments during the depths of the recession, we will continue to deliver on critical public infrastructure projects.

Just like businesses and investors need some level of certainty to plan for their future, so do Albertans. Through the actions I've just mentioned, Budget 2018 provides Albertans with this certainty. By providing stable funding growth, targeted below the growth in population plus inflation, Albertans will have the certainty that their kids will receive a great education, their loved ones will have access to top-quality medical care when they need it, and the most vulnerable in this province among us will have the supports they need when they need them. And it means accomplishing all of this while keeping growth in operations costs down while our population continues to grow. After all, if our recovery were based on hollowing out public services and leaving vulnerable Albertans behind, it would in fact be no recovery at all.

With regard to Budget 2018's third pillar, a return to balance, we are charting a course to balanced budgets by 2023. This has not been an easy task, Madam Speaker. The recession hit Alberta and Albertans hard, and revenues are not expected to surpass prerecession levels until 2019-20. Alberta's economic recovery and a growing population are certainly helping increase revenues, but these factors alone are not enough. A recovery built to last with a return to balance means finding savings as well. That's why through Budget 2018 our government is focusing tax dollars where they need to most: eliminating waste and controlling spending and finding efficiencies. We're managing public-sector compensation, which makes up over half of our annual operating budget, with practical collective agreements, salary freezes for non-union employees, and by keeping the size of Alberta's public service flat.

As the economy recovers, we're reducing government stimulus and returning capital spending to more normal levels while still taking on critical infrastructure projects. I'm incredibly proud of this plan because it protects the things that matter to Albertans while still taking a responsible fiscal approach. Even with the debt that

will be accumulated as we reach balanced budgets, Alberta is still projected to maintain the lowest net debt to GDP ratio in all of Canada.

Madam Speaker, to summarize, Budget 2018 helps ensure we are in the midst of a recovery that is built to last. We are taking steps to further the diversification of our economy while still protecting vital public services and charting a path to balance. Things are beginning to look up, and I expect 2018 to be the continuation of the broad-based economic growth we experienced last year. Budget 2018 maintains our commitment to support and protect the services that make a difference in the lives of all Albertans, and it is our pledge to return to balanced budgets but do so in a manner that supports Albertans by continuing to invest in health care, education, and social services.

I along with my government colleagues look forward to implementing Budget 2018 and continuing to make the lives of all Albertans better. I urge my colleagues and all members of the House to support this bill today.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other speakers? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and talk about the 2018-2019 budget and Bill 15 and the intent of the bill. Before I dive into the intent, I want to talk a little bit about the unfortunate situation that Alberta, Albertans, our next generation, and our economy find ourselves in. It starts with \$56 billion in debt. Just three years ago that number was \$13 billion. Today it's \$56 billion and \$1.9 billion in annual interest – \$1.9 billion in annual interest – making it Alberta's fifth-biggest line item in our expenditures, that the Alberta taxpayer has to pay, that Alberta families, communities, and citizens have to do without some level of services. That's \$1.9 billion in interest. Incredible. Incredible.

5:10

Because the second reading stage is about the intent of the bill, allow me to talk about our NDP government's three stated pillars and exactly how wrong this Finance minister and this government got it. Protecting public services is a stated goal. Madam Speaker, what has happened here is that this government and this Finance minister have put every important priority of Albertans, of Alberta families and Alberta communities, at risk. That risk is because of overspending. That risk is because of not looking for value. That risk is now the interest – the interest – that Alberta taxpayers have to pay to the rich, whether it's bondholders in Switzerland, New York, or Toronto. That's \$1.9 billion that is leaving our economy. It's leaving the pockets of middle-class, average Albertans and headed to the wealthy, that \$1.9 billion.

Let's compare this to Seniors and Housing. I mean, there's so much to love about Albertans, but one of the things that maybe makes me smile the most is that when I ask Albertans what's important to them, of course, it's helping those that need it, it's helping those that need a temporary hand up, but usually the first thing that Albertans say is that they want to help our seniors, the people that built our province, the people that made it possible for us to enjoy the standard of living that we do and the services that we do and all they've built. To me, the main comparison is \$700 million to Seniors and Housing in this budget; \$1.9 billion to rich bondholders in Toronto, New York, and Zurich. What a contrast. What a difference.

Of course, we know that this Finance minister has been the benefactor of six credit downgrades. So far this one has just almost had universal bad news and some issues from credit agencies of a serious miscalculation and serious errors. But we've seen interest rates bump up a little bit in the last two or three months. There are a lot of experts that are talking about half a point to three-quarters of a point, or from 25 to a 75 basis point increase in the next little while.

Madam Speaker, as this \$1.9 billion in interest increases by the \$7.9 billion that this Finance minister is planning on overspending by next year, not counting the \$6.4 billion in capital spending this year for our roads, our schools, and our hospitals, with \$5.9 billion for next year – in three budgets and three cycles we've seen this Finance minister and this government be over budget three times between a billion and a billion and a half dollars. We are going to be another \$17 billion, \$18 billion, or \$19 billion in debt at this time next year, and if interest rates are a bit higher, the projected debt-servicing costs: two and a half billion dollars. My goodness. Two and a half billion dollars. I maintain that that interest puts every single important priority that Albertans have in jeopardy. And what we've seen, to me, is that it looks like this government's plan is a permanent wall of debt.

We see we have an estimate in 2024 of a surplus of \$700 million. But, Madam Speaker, I want to remind you that in the government's campaign documents it was projected and was promised: a \$25 million surplus. That was promised this year. There is a huge difference between \$25 million in Albertans' bank account and \$8.8 billion and paying interest to rich bondholders around the world. The credibility of that number. Does he mean that number? This government, if they're successful and re-elected: do they really mean that?

I would suggest to you that when we look at the capital plan dropping from \$6.4 billion down to \$4.8 billion at the same time as this government talks about the Calgary cancer centre, which we need, and the Edmonton hospital, which looks like it's essential as well, how are they going to balance even more of their big spending promises without going deep on the backs of our kids and our grandkids and without putting every single important priority of Albertans in jeopardy? Pillar 1, protecting public services: this Finance minister, this government have done exactly the opposite and put them all at great risk.

Diversifying the economy. Sad news in Medicine Hat yesterday: Methanex, one of our great companies, one of our great job providers, announced that Louisiana in the United States is the place to be. Everywhere I go, when I talk to our wealth creators, our job providers in Alberta, they are terrified of this government's big spending, of the 20 per cent increase in corporate tax that this government has already delivered, of the huge increase in personal taxes, of a carbon tax that has greatly increased the cost of everything. They know that for their success, which in business, as we all know, isn't easy, which in all business takes tremendous skill and tremendous commitment, this government's reward will just be taking more and more and more of their hard-earned wealth.

That's why this recovery is not being felt. That's why, when I talk to Alberta families, Alberta communities, especially those that are focused on building our province in the private sector – Madam Speaker, too many are still working in northern B.C., too many are working in Saskatchewan, and too many are investing their money outside of Alberta. With this happening and with your goal being to diversify the economy and with the 20 per cent increase in Alberta corporate taxes having driven out so much of our business, exactly the opposite is happening. Again, like with protecting our public services, where the Finance minister and the government have done exactly the opposite, that's what they've done again.

You know, sometimes when you get talking to somebody who's in this every day, somebody who's working on the front lines, you hear it the most accurately. I was talking to my chartered accountant a short time ago, and he said to me that before this government raised corporate taxes 20 per cent, before they raised personal taxes from our 10 per cent flat tax to now 15 per cent on top of their ally Justice Trudeau's 33 per cent tax rate – it's actually 48 to 49 per cent that we're paying – it was rare that Albertans would come in and say: "Look at my tax planning. Make it as efficient as possible. Get my money out of Alberta." He said that that is a regular occurrence now, where Albertans are coming in and saying: "This government is not trying to find me value. This government doesn't care about me and my wealth-earning potential and the jobs I provide. Although I don't want to do this, look for some tax efficiency." Madam Speaker, this government has done more to hurt diversification of the economy than to help it.

Return to balance. I believe this government's plan is a permanent wall of debt. I think that if they're re-elected, \$96 billion will be on the low end. When I look at the numbers, in their first three years they've increased spending 16 per cent, and they're planning in the next five years on only increasing spending 16 per cent. I don't believe it. I don't think Albertans believe it. Albertans know it's time to start caring about how hard some people work to earn wealth and create jobs. The best proof I have of that was three years ago. When this government wanted to be elected, they said that by today we'd have a \$25 million surplus. Madam Speaker, \$8.8 billion in the hole is one long, long way from \$25 million to the good.

Madam Speaker, this Finance minister, this government have absolutely failed on all three of their pillars. They have done more to hurt diversifying the economy, they have jeopardized every single important priority of Albertans, and they have no intention of returning to balance. It's about a permanent wall of debt, a permanent wall of interest for our kids and our grandkids and our economy.

5:20

I want to talk about some of the other risks that this minister hasn't addressed. First of all, the interest rate risk. If rates go up half a point, if rates go up one point, if instead of borrowing at around 3 per cent, we start having to borrow at 4 per cent and we owe a hundred billion dollars, Madam Speaker, that's a billion dollars. What can we do with a billion dollars to help Albertans instead? What could we do if we left that billion dollars in Albertans' pockets so they could help their families, so they could help their friends, so they could help their communities? That is why this Finance minister and this government have put every single important priority at risk.

Credit downgrade. We've already seen six since this last budget and almost universal criticism of it and some other credit agencies talking about how bad it was. If we face more credit downgrades through this government's overspending, through this Finance minister's big plans of spending other people's money, through maybe a downturn in our economy, what is that going to do on the backs of our kids and our grandkids?

I want to talk about the utility risk. This government is headed towards a market of 70 per cent natural gas, 30 per cent renewables, but we all know that if you have a renewable, you have to have a backup. The sun doesn't always shine; the wind doesn't always blow. So it will pretty much be a hundred per cent natural gas market based on capacity.

Madam Speaker, we are enjoying historically low natural gas rates. Can you imagine if these rates double? Can you imagine what the Alberta taxpayer is going to have to subsidize the Alberta

ratepayer? There's a cap on our rates at 6.8 cents even though under the old system we were as low as 2.5, 2.7 cents. There is no cap on how much these people will go back to the taxpayer for, so how much of that risk is factored into this? If a budget is truly a plan of where we may be in the future, I am concerned. If we face an increase in the price of natural gas, if we face an increase in interest rates, if this Finance minister gets his seventh downgrade, can you imagine what that's going to do to our economy? Can you imagine what that's going to do on the backs of our children?

Madam Speaker, there's great risk, other risks, in this plan that this government and this Finance minister put forward. Even though it was told to Albertans that the carbon tax was revenue neutral, even though that was stretching the definition of revenue neutral in every possible, conceivable way, we're not even going there anymore. We have a government that now is admitting that by 2021 their 67 per cent increase in the carbon tax will be diverted to general revenues.

Keeping in line with their ally Justin Trudeau, keeping in line with a carbon tax that we've heard from around Alberta has been a hardship for seniors, for communities, for agriculture, for pharmaceuticals, for any utility user, Madam Speaker, the tax is going to be greatly increased, and that money is going to go into general revenue in 2021 so that this government can continue its high-spending ways without looking for value.

Another element of risk that this risky budget has baked in it is the Trans Mountain pipeline. I believe the numbers are 2021, 2022 where the increased revenues are based on additional revenues that might or might not be attributable to extra access for our good, our great oil and gas producers through more access to markets through the Trans Mountain pipeline.

Well, the May 31 deadline is looming large. There are no shovels in the ground. There is opposition, of course, in British Columbia even though, thank goodness, it seems like overwhelmingly the average British Columbian, the working families in British Columbia see all the benefits for Canada, see all the good reasons for this to happen.

You know, I'd be remiss if I didn't talk about the safety. When I was Energy critic a short time ago, some people in Calgary took me to a new company that has developed fibre optics that can go in the pipeline, on the pipeline, or within a metre of the pipeline that instantly – instantly – tell the operators about any changes in compression. It's amazing how good our producers are, amazing how safe we've made this industry, amazing that with all of these things happening, we're still looking at a situation with Justin Trudeau, the federal Liberals, the Leap Manifesto, the NDP in power here, the NDP in power in British Columbia, and a pipeline that costs us I think it's \$41 million a day. The lack of access, Madam Speaker, is costing all Canadians jobs, social programs, and those kinds of things, and those kinds of things are very important to us.

Madam Speaker, with this risky financial plan that this government, this Finance minister put forward, they are already counting this even though it's already greatly delayed. Of course, we hope very, very much that it happens. We hope it happens soon. But, again, if these things don't happen, we're looking at probably another credit downgrade. We are certainly looking at more debt, more interest costs, and less in services.

Madam Speaker, I just want to close. When I'm out talking to people in Cypress-Medicine Hat, when I'm out talking to Albertans, you know, one of the things that concerns them almost as much as \$1.9 billion in interest this year, \$56 billion of debt, and a government that has a desire to have a permanent wall of debt, where we'll pay interest to rich bondholders forever and ever, is the

fact that this government, this NDP government, never seems to look for value.

I'll just give you some examples. Everyone remembers the laundry situation here in Edmonton, where the desire to publicly own and publicly be involved in the delivery of an essential part of our health care maybe cost \$200 million.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to rise and speak on Bill 15. Now, the hon. Finance minister is looking for the House to sign on to his fiscal plan. I understand why, because that's his job, but he's had lots of opportunities to convince the opposition, people on this side of the House, that his plan is good, and he keeps rebuffing and ducking and diving with his words when we give him a chance to explain why we should support this fiscal plan.

As recently as today in question period a reference was made to the last Auditor General's report, where it said that by 2021 this Finance minister would have Albertans in so much debt that the Finance minister and his government would have to have a \$3 billion surplus for 25 years in a row in order to pay off the debt that was accumulated by then.

5:30

So I asked him what I thought was a pretty obvious question then, you know, the question being: "This is what the Auditor General said that you need to do. You say that you're going to balance the budget. Are you going to do it?" He had a perfect answer, to say yes, but he didn't say that. He talked about anything else he could think of. So I gave him a second chance. I said, "Well, if you can't commit to balancing the budget at that point, what about the promise you have made, balancing it in 2024, after you've got Albertans" – and remember, Madam Speaker. I know you know this. It's all Albertans.

But when I think of this, I think mostly of young Albertans because if this government was to stick around that long, I wouldn't live long enough for this government to pay off a substantial part of this debt if they would even get to dollar one. I figure I'm going to be dead in 30 years, but our children and grandchildren, who are going to have a lot more future than I do to be in Alberta, to think about, and to be concerned about, could end up in chains for 40, 50 years, paying off a debt that this government has put them in, that they will be unable to get out of if this government is given permission to go on that long. It's not criminal, but I wonder if it ought to be. Here's the sad thing about it. Twenty, 30 years from now young Albertans will be paying for 2018 light bulbs that the money was borrowed for. That is astounding.

Now, I understand the government's need to borrow for infrastructure. It makes sense. You know, to a certain degree, building infrastructure and paying it all off on the same day is really the opposite side of a wealth transfer. Everybody in 2018, for example, would pay for a road. People would drive on it for the next 20 years and not pay for it. So you know what? There is actually a case to be made, if you build something like a road or a school or a hospital, for paying for it over 20 years because you can really make the argument that the people paying for it over those 20 years are the same people that might get to have kids in that school, that might get to drive on that road, that might get to go to that hospital when they're sick. That makes sense.

But when you've got a government borrowing billions of dollars a year for the groceries, for operating expenses, they're going to

have Alberta's children paying for 20, 25 years for things that were bought and consumed in 2018, 2019, gone, either recycled or in the landfill, never to be seen again except for the payment that our children and grandchildren will be making for decades and decades and decades to come because of the financial mess, the deep financial hole, the financial abyss. This government and this Finance minister are driving our province off a cliff. It's so obvious. It's so obvious that Albertans are getting it. Albertans are getting it.

I know that the government likes to say: well, if you don't support our budget, you're against schools and roads and hospitals and social services. Nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is that we're against burdening future generations with massive amounts of debt for things that will be gone and consumed within the next year or two or three.

Let's even say that some of those light bulbs are 10-year light bulbs. Let's say that they're the best. Our young people, our children, and grandchildren, through their Alberta taxes, will be paying for those light bulbs 20 and 30 years from now. Let's just say that all those 10-year light bulbs can be fully recycled then, and I hope they can. Even then, under this government's guidance our children and grandchildren will be paying for those light bulbs, that have been in the landfill or have been recycled 20 or 30 years ago. There will be no light coming from those light bulbs anymore. By that time I'm not even sure whether the world will use light bulbs. We'll obviously need light. Who knows what the technology will be? But our children and grandchildren, under the leadership of this government and this minister, will be paying for things that are consumed right now 20 and 30 and, if this government is left in control, 40 years from now. Ridiculous.

Here's what I'll give the government credit for. They admit it. You know, these numbers that I'm talking about come out of the government's documents, the government's own documents. Their budget that they're so proud of, that they're looking to have the money approved for today, says that by 2024 they'll have us \$96 billion in debt. That's not something crazy – and it's crazy; it's crazy as can be. But it's not something crazy that I'm saying; it's something crazy that I read in the government's budget documents. To their credit, they're admitting how bad their plan is, how indefensible their plan is, yet they have the courage to come into this Chamber and ask us to support it. For us to support it would be a complete betrayal of Albertans' children, grandchildren, certainly anybody of low income that will suffer, paying for years on end for things that have been long consumed and long gone by this government without a decent, without any plan to pay it back.

Now here's where it gets worse. What they call a plan is not a plan at all. Their plan is to hope that no one figures this out and notices before the election next year, but, Madam Speaker, Albertans have caught on. I think the jig, as they say, is up. Albertans have figured out that the gang across the aisle, that is in government, can't shoot straight. They have no plan, and in fact the plan that they have won't balance. They'll need at least two pipelines to get this budget balanced, and they're putting all their eggs in the basket of Justin Trudeau, which, I've got say – now, there's a high-risk manoeuvre if ever I described one. You know what? To our Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, their very close ally, in lockstep with this government, with this Premier, with this cabinet – Justin Trudeau: they're in lockstep with that person.

Here's the problem. You know what? The government, to their credit – again I'll try to give credit where it's due – has taken some advice from our leader and brought forward some ideas that they borrowed from our leader, first after saying that his ideas wouldn't work, ridiculing them, making fun of them, and then waiting a couple of weeks and adopting them as if it was a brand new idea

that they cooked up in the NDP kitchen. But they're not even actually committing – at least they're saying that they're going to do that, which is good, except they're not actually taking any action. They had a temporary wine ban for B.C. That got the government's attention. That was our leader's idea long before they did it, and we actually praised them for that. But then they folded their tent three weeks later, or was it less than three weeks?

An Hon. Member: Less.

Mr. McIver: Less than three weeks.

They folded their tent in less than three weeks on the one good idea they did take action on. At the first sign of an excuse to go from doing something to doing nothing, they took that excuse, and they went straight to the speed of zero.

What have they done since? Well, they say that they've talked to some people. Very good. They've put Bill 12 on the table. Very good. They've said that – you know, after following our leader's lead, they talked about being tougher, about turning the taps off. This is all good except they haven't acted on it yet, but at least they say that they might. At least in here they say that they might. But the problem is that if they need these two pipelines to balance their budget – apparently, the Premier told the Premier of B.C.: oh, don't worry about that legislation; we're not going to do it. I guess that when it comes down to survival, even sometimes NDP teammates, it's everyone for themselves, so the Premier of B.C. is throwing our Premier under the bus, saying: didn't even try to convince me, promised me they wouldn't even take action, so we've got nothing to worry about in B.C., at least not from the current Alberta government, not from the NDP government.

They're certainly concerned about action should our leader be the Premier after the next election. We don't know whether that will happen or not. That's up to the voters. I don't know. If I could predict the future, Madam Speaker, I'd be a lot wealthier than I am today. Predicting the future is not my business, so we're certainly hoping to have our leader as the leader of Alberta after the next election, but of course we don't know whether that will be the case. I'm sure the Premier of B.C. is more worried about that.

5:40

My point is that the financial underpinnings in this budget are dependent on at least one pipeline, I think, probably two, and even if the federal government agrees to help finance this pipeline, how is it going to get built unless the Prime Minister, this NDP government's bestie, close personal friend, lockstep partner in all of this is, is willing to have the courage to push the protesters back to where they're legally protesting? Everybody in this House is in favour and supportive of legal protesting, but when you actually break the court order and stop people from doing the legitimate work that they ought to be doing, at that point you need some leadership from the Prime Minister to get the illegal protesters to stop delaying the work that is required to actually get the pipeline built. Without the courage to do that, I'm not sure if it matters who owns the pipeline – the government of Alberta, the government of Canada, some partnership between them, some private business – because if you can't actually stop people from chaining themselves to the heavy equipment, I don't think you're going to get anything built.

These people across the aisle know about chaining themselves to heavy equipment. Some of them carried signs in the past, cheering on those people that would chain themselves to heavy equipment, so they actually could teach me quite a bit about that. I'm sure they could teach me way more than I know about it. But I know enough

to know that this budget is underpinned by a partnership with Justin Trudeau, and that's just to get the first pipeline built.

The budget documents don't indicate how they could balance the budget if the pipeline does get built, so even if the best thing that could happen to this fiscal plan, something that we are certainly hoping for – if there's one thing that we definitely want this government, this Premier, this Finance minister to be right about, it's that that pipeline will get built. That's what we want. We don't want anything more than that. That's what Alberta needs. That's what Albertans want. That's what the Official Opposition wants, and I think that at this point it's even what the government has come around to wanting, so we're on the same page as them.

But here's the problem, Madam Speaker. Even if we continue to give suggestions to the government – and as I said, I give them credit. They've taken some of our leader's suggestions and promised to put them into action and at least given themselves a fighting chance of being successful. Let's just look at the best possible scenario, and if that happens, we can all high-five each other: congratulations, government. We'll be cheering you on. You got this done. This budget still won't balance the way this government is running it because they haven't a blessed clue on how to do it. They don't appreciate how expensive the debt is for Alberta families. They don't appreciate that the people they're hurting the most by driving jobs and investment out of Alberta are the people that they promised most to support, the single moms, the families of low . . .

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 to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to speak on Bill 15. Appropriations: an issue that exercises all of us and should as it sets the tone for our financial future as well as the present, what we can do now and in the future, and what our families in the future can do. We talk about financial management, assets and liabilities, and the need for a balanced approach, a recognition that expenditures require sustainable revenues, and how those can be spent in the most constructive and sustainable way.

I've been influenced by the economist Paul Krugman, who is very much a supporter of countercyclical spending. When the economy is down, you spend, you borrow, you build, you keep people employed, you maintain services that people really very much need during an economic downturn. I recognize this government for valuing those principles.

In fact, as Dr. Trevor Tombe of the U of Calgary has indicated, debts are not all bad. We have to borrow to make provision for things and for people that are needed at the time, especially when we are looking at long-lasting investments such as, of course, our children, our institutions, education, health care, and so on, capital investments that are much needed and were badly neglected by the former PC Party, which left us, in fact, in a very vulnerable deficit position, if you want to talk about deficits. A pretense that we were balancing the budgets, but of course we weren't. We were racking up higher infrastructure deficits, maintenance deficits, social deficits, and environmental deficits, most profoundly in relation to our management of groundwater and surface water in some cases but also in relation to our climate change inaction under the former PC government.

At some level I support what this government has done in terms of borrowing, employing, diversifying, and moving us towards a clean energy future. I think they have been bold. I think they have been addressing the real issues of Albertans in a meaningful way. I think that while I may differ in the pace and scale of borrowing and

the pace of the infrastructure build-out, that might have been done in a little more paced fashion, I fundamentally believe that this has been the appropriate approach for Alberta at this time. It has protected both people and institutions. It has begun to address some of the climate change negligence, I would call it, by the previous administration, which increasingly appears hypocritical and disrespectful of decent public accountability for at least the last 15 years of their reign in terms of our management of institutions, services, and the revenue-expenditure balance.

Propagating fear and distrust is easy in politics. It's always been used to gain public attention. Sometimes it even gets support from people who don't watch the show too carefully and don't recognize that asking for increased spending on the one hand and then criticizing spending across the floor is such an easy game to play. Unfortunately, for the majority of Albertans, who don't watch this Legislature, it's easy to befuddle people and to bring them into a sense of uncertainty, distrust, and fear. Given the deficits left by the PCs on all these fronts – infrastructure; social, including housing and mental health; and environmental – the big holes had to be filled to some extent.

If there is one critique I have, it's the lack of careful, thoughtful ministry examination of their own portfolios, especially Health, in my view, which has a notorious overspending problem of waste, excessive executive salaries, excessive management. We're talking between 42 and 45 per cent of our budget today. I haven't seen any evidence that there are serious efforts to find efficiencies and to shift management priorities and focus increasingly on prevention and early intervention, that would not only save money but would actually reduce demands on the emergency room, which is inundated, on hospital beds, which are always over capacity, and reduce the morbidity and mortality rates, in fact, if we could get more money than 3 per cent of the Health budget into early intervention and prevention.

I guess I don't know. I will be looking at each of the particular portfolios to say whether I can support it, but I'm quite sure I won't be able to support the Health budget and the lack of serious attention to reform and improved efficiencies and effectiveness in our health care system. But in the main I find that the approach has been positive. It has been countercyclical spending, which I believe most international economists are now saying is appropriate at times like this and necessary to protect people and the long-term viability of our institutions.

5:50

My other addition, I guess, is: let's talk as adults here, an adult conversation, about revenue and talk about a PST, talk about a sales tax that will share the load of our need to reduce our dependency on borrowing and begin to pay our share in this generation so that we, in fact, do not leave major, significant spending on interest rates to our children and grandchildren. Let's talk reasonably and responsibly about a 1 or 2 per cent sales tax, that would bring in a consistent \$2 billion to \$3 billion a year, that everybody pays and that everybody shares in because we want to move towards balance. That is, to me, a responsible approach to the fact that we've had years and years of unsustainable financial management, and now we have gone gung-ho on institutional and service spending without a clear plan to start to address that in a responsible way, which has to include a PST.

I don't understand why in Alberta we have this allergic reaction to all paying our way. Yes, there need to be efficiencies and change, especially in the Health budget, but, yes, we also need a more reasonable revenue stream when we are the lowest taxing province in the country and we are the lowest in terms of, well, an absolute absence of any consumption tax, which is one of the fairest taxes

that I know to bring everyone into the picture and ensure that we all pay our share in terms of spending and the implications of that spending on our total financial capacity.

Those are some of the comments I have, Madam Speaker. Certainly, this government was left a mess. They have gone very quickly, very boldly. They have racked up a massive debt, that I think we all recognize. We want to see a more clear plan going forward. I think that includes the UCP opposition. Where's your plan? I haven't seen that. It's easy to criticize. Again, I hear a request for funding on this side and then criticism of funding. It strikes me as quite hypocritical to not even have an alternative plan except cut, cut, cut, I guess, which is what one is left with.

My plan is to start talking about a PST as the only viable and responsible way to face a future that otherwise is going to be, as we've all recognized, many years of debt servicing and uncertainty and questions about our viability. But given the fact that we have the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the country and we have the lowest taxes by billions, I think we have some margin to work with. We have some margin in terms of a sales tax and particularly a harmonized sales tax, which wouldn't cost us anything to administer, to fall into line with the rest of the country, start to pay our share in this generation, and, I guess, just be more honest – yeah, more honest – with ourselves and our children and our grandchildren about what needs to be done rather than the posturing and politicization of a situation that's increasingly serious and that none of us wants to leave to chance.

Debt servicing at 2 and a half billion dollars to 3 and a half billion dollars a year is not anything to laugh at. Let's all start working together on finding a common solution, which, to me, is staring us in the face but nobody wants to talk about and that everyone calls political suicide. Well, with all due respect, that's BS. We know that every province that has it has started to bring their finances into some kind of balance.

Those are my comments. I think that's why the Liberals are considered the centrist party. We see both sides of the issue. We want to see balanced, honest debate. We want to see reasonable thought about the longer term future, not just the next election. We want to see less fearmongering and more acknowledgement that we all are benefiting from the infrastructure build-out, the human services that are there, the maintenance of roads and bridges, the concerns that are being addressed with respect to emergency measures.

Let's try and minimize the politicization of a situation that is obviously not ideal since our oil prices have dropped through the floor. But let's be honest about how we got into this position and how we collectively can find a way out if we're prepared to have an adult conversation about revenue as well as more responsible management of our institutions, again, particularly the health care system, which has not been brought under reasonable control, from my perspective.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll end there and potentially adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Mr. Nixon: Madam Speaker, I don't want to speak, but I would like to move for unanimous consent to move the bells to three minutes. I suspect that if you seek it, you will get it.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Minister of Treasury Board and Finance, would you like to close debate?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. You know, there have been some interesting presentations and discussions here. I can just reiterate that the government of Alberta, this side of the House, is firmly committed to addressing the needs of Albertans today and in the future. We're doing that by providing good-quality services and programs, investing in the future, and diversifying our economy.

I'd like to close debate.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:58 p.m.]

[Three minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Bilous	Goehring	Payne
Carlier	Gray	Phillips
Carson	Hinkley	Piquette
Ceci	Horne	Renaud
Connolly	Kazim	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Kleinstauber	Sabir
Dach	Littlewood	Schmidt
Dang	Luff	Schreiner
Drever	Malkinson	Sucha
Eggen	Miller	Turner
Feehan	Miranda	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Nielsen	Woollard
Ganley		

Against the motion:

Barnes	Loewen	Strankman
Cooper	McIver	Taylor
Gotfried	Nixon	van Dijken
Hanson	Schneider	Yao
Kenney	Smith	

Totals: For – 37 Against – 14

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The Assembly will now stand adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:05 p.m.]

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