



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, May 15, 2018

Day 30

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),
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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (NDP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (NDP)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP),
Alberta Party Opposition House Leader
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Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (NDP)
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
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Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (AP)
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Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (UCP)
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Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
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Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (UCP)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (NDP)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
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Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Conklin
Vacant, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake

Party standings:

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

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, May 15, 2018

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Good morning.

Let us each pray and reflect in our own way. May we always do the right thing unto others as we journey through this maze of life, where we are but servants chosen by others to bear the burdens, the challenges, and the duties of public life.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I request unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 3(1) to allow the Assembly to recess at this time and reconvene at 11 this morning.

[Unanimous consent granted]

[The Assembly adjourned from 10:01 a.m. to 11 a.m.]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 2 Growth and Diversification Act

Mr. Cooper moved the motion for second reading of Bill 2, Growth and Diversification Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 2, Growth and Diversification Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the government should pursue other measures to reduce the cost of doing business in the province, including introduction of legislation to eliminate the carbon levy, which, if implemented, would make the measures proposed in the bill unnecessary.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment May 9: Mrs. Aheer speaking]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, are any members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the chance to rise and talk a bit about our reasoned amendment. Of course, the reasoned amendment should be supported. It's totally logical and makes total sense because of what's happening in Alberta right now and what this three-year accidental government has done and what they haven't done. It's been said in here already that just repealing the carbon tax would do more to stimulate economic development in the economy than this picking winners and losers, this creating huge levels of bureaucracy to have yet another law.

I want to talk about the carbon tax for a sec and the number of people I bump into in coffee shops, restaurants, the number of people that e-mail me, text me, send letters to my constituency office that talk about the \$35 carbon tax on their bill when the electricity charge portion is \$50 or \$60. When they couple that with high administration charges, Madam Speaker, it's absolutely crystal clear that because this money comes out of so many hard-working

Albertans' pockets, so many family budgets, these people don't have enough left over to support the businesses in their community, to support their favourite charities, and to support each other. A reduction of the carbon tax, just in the everyday pocketbooks of everyday Albertans, everyone included, would go a long, long way to stimulate the economy.

Of course, when we realize that this money was transferred from the pockets of hard-working Albertans, from the balance sheets of successful and struggling small businesses to big renewable companies, to ideological phasing out of coal early, you just think of what we've got for this money, and it's absolutely huge, huge steps back. Madam Speaker, just the elimination of the carbon tax alone would ensure that Albertans can support their communities rather than support costly NDP lawsuits because of the early coal phase-outs, costly lawsuits that have absolutely destroyed our competitive advantage of cheap carbon.

Madam Speaker, of course, as we all know, the NDP expert that designed the climate leadership plan, the professor from the University of Alberta, mused about carbon leakage. He mused about industries, that instead of setting up in Alberta, instead of paying \$10 million, \$20 million, or \$40 million in carbon tax because of using a virtually clean fuel like natural gas, what they've done is that they've gone to Montana, Saskatchewan, Louisiana, and other jurisdictions.

Madam Speaker, in Medicine Hat we have a great company called Methanex, an absolutely great corporate citizen, a great company, a great corporation. About two weeks ago the announcement on the front page of the *Medicine Hat News* was that instead of expanding in Alberta, Methanex has picked Louisiana. Again, you see that when you talk to many of these people who were around the edges of similar boutique tax credits, their preference was: no, for government to get its spending in line, for government to get its taxation fair, for government to ensure that all businesses have an equal opportunity. Of course, they, like so many others, have voted with their feet.

Madam Speaker, I was in Beaumont last week, and I was meeting with three younger drilling executives, guys who had come into the coffee shop in their work clothes. I came up and I introduced myself and shook their hands, and I said, “Isn't it great news that oil hit \$72 a barrel?” The answer I got was: “It doesn't matter. We've just sent all our rigs to Texas. Taxes are too high here. Regulation is onerous.” It's unlikely they'll come back because – guess what? – the price of oil is also \$72 in Texas.

Then one of them talked about this government's huge spending ways, its \$8.8 billion operating deficit, its \$15 billion or 15 and a half billion dollars combined deficit, and how he knew that today's debt is just a future tax. He knew how businesses and younger people were likely to be the targets and the ones that faced the most burden of that huge debt. He knew full well that this government is headed towards \$96 billion, minimum, in debt in just three more years. Madam Speaker, and he was absolutely a believer that that was a future tax on him, a future tax on his kids, and a future tax on his industry, where other jurisdictions don't have that burden that has to be paid off by future generations.

Madam Speaker, that reminds me of that U of C report from about 10 days ago now. It's alarming – absolutely alarming – that a 16-year-old Albertan today is faced with a minimum of \$42,000 more tax just on the NDP interest on their overspending and their borrowing. I think it was a 32- or a 35-year-old that's going to be faced with \$50,000 in extra personal tax just on the interest – just on the interest – of this NDP government racking up huge debts. Of course, we know that interest rates have been rising a bit. Interest rates have gone up, and that problem may get worse. But, of course, that interest doesn't take into account the fact that today \$56 billion

of NDP borrowing has to be paid back, headed to \$96 billion in just three more years.

You know, Madam Speaker, these are the kinds of things where, if this government and this Finance minister would have the strength to get these things in order rather than kick the can down the road, rather than putting this on the backs of future Albertans, absolutely Bill 2 would not be necessary. We wouldn't need to pick winners and losers. That is why this reasoned amendment should be supported. It is not necessary.

The carbon tax and the debt are two other things that I have to touch on. I'm always amazed when I talk to oil and gas job providers, oil and gas executives, these great technological drillers that quite often stand 20 miles from the Northwest Territories border to make money and create wealth and create taxation for all of us, how they say that the layers and layers of NDP burden are bad enough – the carbon tax is terrible; the regulations are onerous – but the biggest reason that they're deciding to allocate scarce capital and create jobs in jurisdictions other than Alberta is what this government did initially. That was the 20 per cent increase in corporate taxes for Albertans.

Of course, that corporate tax rate, that 20 per cent increase, was on top of what the federal government already taxes these companies. When you compare it to other jurisdictions, when you have the opportunity to set up your firm and your jobs in other jurisdictions, the fact is that our biggest competitor to the south is just reducing taxes 40 per cent. That our government is increasing taxes 20 per cent while our major competitor is making it 40 per cent more affordable to do business there is absolutely unimaginable and that it was thought of as sound policy. It is obviously going to have serious consequences unless this government gets its house in order.

Let's talk about that for a second. Madam Speaker, I'm appalled that three years ago, when this government was elected, our good energy companies said that what takes a week to get approved in Texas and takes two weeks to get approved in Saskatchewan takes up to four years to get approved in Alberta. I'm appalled that I have seen no improvement on that. We had the Energy department at Public Accounts about two weeks ago, and there didn't seem to be any meat on the bone for ensuring something as simple as making sure that the regulations are proper, fair, and streamlined so that these people could allocate their capital and create their jobs in a timely manner. It appears that it's not even on this government's radar. My goodness. When Saskatchewan can do it in two weeks, surely to goodness we can at least beat Saskatchewan. Surely to goodness, we can put in the focus and the resources to make sure that when Albertans and other people have the opportunity to invest money, we haven't put barriers in their way.

11:10

You know, as some of the proof about how this government's plan of big spending, big taxation, not getting to regulations, and huge debt for our kids and our economy isn't working, let's talk about tax revenues, how tax revenues have fallen across the board even though tax rates have been increased. As I've said in this House before, people are voting with their feet. People are putting time and money and effort into professional advice and professional paperwork to ensure that their business affairs are as tax efficient as possible, something that used to happen considerably less, I'm told, when we had a 10 per cent flat tax, when we had a government that tried harder to look for value for taxpayer dollars.

I still remember a report from about a year ago that talked about how more oil sands leases, bigger than the entire province of Prince Edward Island, had been turned back. Now, buying an oil sands lease and when you have to drill and how you get extensions and

when you have to develop is a very, very complicated set of rules, and that's something that needs to be changed. But, Madam Speaker, I am absolutely amazed that companies would spend tens and tens and tens of millions of dollars to buy the right to develop a much-needed asset and then walk away from millions and millions of dollars because of this government's policies, this government's carbon tax, this government's 20 per cent hike in corporate tax.

Madam Speaker, we don't need little boutique tax plans, where the Minister of Finance or the cabinet get to pick winners and losers. We need an economy that's fair, that's vibrant, that gives every Albertan the opportunity to be involved, the opportunity to help each other, the opportunity to create choice in the services that are provided, and the opportunity to create jobs.

You know, another example, from a week or so ago, of the plan not working is Royal Dutch Shell, which is, like, the second- or the fourth- or the 10th-biggest company in the whole world, bigger than a lot of countries. Guess what they did? They, too, decided to vote with their feet. They said: we're not keeping our money in the Alberta oil sands. They put their shares in, I believe, a joint project with CNR up for sale. Almost \$4 billion. Madam Speaker, if that money was still in our economy, all the money that Total and Marathon and others have taken out of Alberta, think of the jobs it would provide, think of the tax base that it would create, think of the services that we could provide, and think of the opportunities for young Albertans.

If you're a young Albertan without the NDP carbon tax, without the 20 per cent corporate tax, without the big tax hikes, you'd have an opportunity to actually go out and create, you know, a family, buy a house, pay off some of your university debts. My goodness, too many young kids are coming out of school with huge university debts and without jobs. That's the real problem. They don't have the jobs to pay these off. Madam Speaker, instead, what these youth are faced with is \$40,000 to \$50,000 in additional provincial tax – additional provincial tax – just on the interest of this Finance minister's and this government's big-spending ways. It's a burden that families have to face or leave. I know that Albertans are extremely qualified and hard working. I know that our future is bright, and I know that our opportunity is there.

I want to talk about opportunity. Madam Speaker, I stood up at a meeting in Medicine Hat about two weeks ago, and I said that the demand for oil is increasing and what a shame that it's not coming from Alberta, with our strong environmental records, our strong social justice records. We're always improving. We're always getting better. I said that because the demand for oil is currently 90 million barrels a day, and I've read that it's going up to 1 million barrels per day annually. So a year from now it'll be 91 million, and two years from now it'll be 92 million. Then I got schooled. There was a financial planner in the meeting who had some financial data that showed that it's actually 100 million barrels a day now.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a real pleasure to rise and offer some comments in response to the statement that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat made this morning. First of all, let me just express my severe and ongoing disappointment that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has yet to bring doughnuts to share with the members of this Chamber. I hope that the good people of McBride's Bakery continue to ply him with doughnuts and that he is willing to share with the people of this Chamber.

I want to talk about some of the statements that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat made today. On this issue of taxes, he has about as much credibility as he does on the issue of climate change, and that's precisely none, Madam Speaker. You know, it's well known that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat funds climate change denial movies in his spare time. I really encourage him to get the opportunity to meet with the Governor General while she's here today because she's a very learned person in science and has seen through her own eyes that not only is climate change real and having severe and drastic impacts on the world but that the world is, in fact, round. She's seen it with her own eyes. I hope that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat takes the opportunity to learn something from such a learned person, who has the privilege of being the vice-regal representative here in Canada.

My initial point was that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has no credibility on the issue of taxes, just like he has no credibility on the issue of climate change. Here's why. I can't remember which member of the opposition it was who claimed that, you know, our tax rates were driving businesses out of Alberta. That is a patently false statement, Madam Speaker. In fact, he mentioned Methanex. Of course, I've conferred with some of my colleagues here on this side. Methanex hasn't actually made a decision about where they're going to invest in their next plant, so for the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to get up and say that they've already picked up and are moving to Louisiana is not entirely an accurate statement. I hope that the people of Alberta who are listening to this debate take that with a grain of salt.

More importantly, on the issue of taxes generally, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, of course, along with all of his colleagues in the United Conservative Party, has long complained about tax rates that have gone up under this government. Of course, our government has implemented a \$30-a-tonne carbon tax, and we raised the corporate tax rate from 10 per cent to 12 per cent, Madam Speaker. In my comments to another member from the opposition I had identified that Amazon had just opened a new head office of some kind – I can't remember which – in Vancouver a couple of weeks ago. The Prime Minister was there to celebrate. This was a great day for economic prosperity for the people of British Columbia. When I pointed out that the corporate tax rate in B.C. is also 12 per cent and that the carbon tax is \$30 a tonne in B.C., I was actually corrected by my hon. colleagues after the fact. The carbon tax rate in British Columbia is actually \$35 a tonne, \$5 a tonne more than what we're charging here in Alberta, yet Amazon chose Vancouver as the site to locate its new, splashy headquarters and develop the economy there. It's a shame that they didn't choose Alberta, which is why we need to move quickly on the legislation that is before us.

Madam Speaker, I wish the members opposite would stop selling this snake oil that our tax rates are driving investment out of Alberta, because it's not supported by the evidence. We maintain overall the lowest taxed jurisdiction in the country. We're competitive with everywhere in North America, and of course we have a lifestyle that's beyond compare here in Alberta. We have an incredible health care system. We have an education system that's second to none. If some company wants to pick up stakes and move someplace where their children are going to have a third-world education system, you know, where the children of the workers are going to graduate from high school being barely literate . . .

11:20

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity. I rise today to speak in favour of the reasoned amendment brought forward by my hon. colleague. Of course, I feel that some of the comments I will make today will be very reminiscent of a narrative and a conversation we keep having in this House about the destruction of the fundamental economics of this province, which has scared away so much investment. You know, I'm not happy about the song this government is singing nor the song sheet that they're singing from. We just seem to be getting that same story over and over again about the challenges we have with economic fundamentals and why we have to keep bringing forward other legislation, as I say, throwing candy at a situation after we've taken away the meal.

This government and this minister are continually looking for ways to position themselves as the great diversifiers, Madam Speaker, but as I just heard actually this morning in Public Accounts Committee, they have big plans, big strategies, big outcomes but very few measures to keep them accountable. In fact, I think there were 12 objectives and two outcomes to measure those objectives. I don't know how that equates in the real world. When you set objectives in the real world, you set objectives, you put measures by them, and then you achieve them. It's often said that if you can't measure, you can't manage, but I think that also, consequently, if you can't manage, you just don't get results.

Madam Speaker, from 1986 to 2016 Alberta's GDP did grow from \$59.6 billion to \$314.9 billion. During those 30 years oil and gas and mining decreased as a percentage of total GDP, decreased from 23.2 per cent to 17 per cent. That GDP number still represents – we talked about this in Public Accounts this morning – the third-largest economy by GDP in Canada, ahead of British Columbia. That's without the oil and gas industry. That doesn't sound like a failure of diversification in the past to me.

Alberta was able to grow in part because previous governments worked extremely hard to make Alberta the most business-friendly environment in Canada through fundamental economics, Madam Speaker. Fundamental economics attracted people from across this country and around the world, but it not only attracted people; it attracted investment. Last time I heard, you don't create a job until somebody puts an investment dollar at risk with the hope of some reward for creating that job. But you have to attract those people. You have to have them willing to take those risks.

Madam Speaker, we were one of the few debt-free jurisdictions on this planet, and that was attractive to investors and to businesses as well because there was an opportunity there. They knew that the burden of debt was going to be not only on their shoulders but on their employers' shoulders and their families' shoulders and the shoulders of future generations, their children and their grandchildren, on those who moved here. Over the years we saw so many people come from so many places across this country and around the world. They chose Alberta for those fundamental economics and the way of life that we generate and are able to sustain and for the social programs that we are able to sustain through the wealth that we were able to create by attracting that investment and attracting those businesses and then creating those jobs and creating the wealth thereby that came from that risk taking.

In the past we had corporate tax rates being reduced, we had personal income tax rates reduced, and the economy continued to grow. Actually, our provincial coffers prospered. Yet we've seen tax rates increase more recently. And what have we seen? A reduction in revenues. What does that tell you, Madam Speaker? I might add that the current government is all too happy to point out as a defining attraction for investment in Alberta that they opposed cutting those same taxes, but that attraction is really what we need to focus on. How do we attract people back here to grow that

economic activity, grow the GDP, grow that economic pie so that we can have an opportunity to succeed, to actually have a chance to pay off that debt, to balance the budgets, to pay off that debt, and to start doing that today, not pushing it down the road to future generations, onto the shoulders of future generations? I think many of us in this House worry that that's not going to be just our children but our grandchildren to come.

We've heard from ministers and backbenchers alike from the NDP side that because Alberta has not had these programs previous to this government, it left Alberta and Albertans at a competitive disadvantage, Madam Speaker, that they were doing so to level the playing field and that without that level playing field, that was so magically created by this government with their initiatives, somehow we couldn't compete on a national and global scale. Well, again, this is curious to me. If I recall correctly, in 2013-2014 Alberta created 87 per cent of all the new jobs in Canada, in fact 82,300 new jobs in that year, and all that with a supposed competitive disadvantage and an unlevel playing field before we had some of these pieces of candy, or Band-Aids, that we see coming into play.

I think some will remember this term. It's faded into the past, and hopefully we can revive it in the future. That unlevel playing field was once called the Alberta advantage. Fundamental economics, Madam Speaker. Fundamental economics attracted people with lower tax rates, a positive business environment, and an absence of what we're hearing, oddly, in today's world, the terms "political risk" and "Alberta" used in the same sentence. I don't think I ever heard that in my life, and I was born and raised in this province. I don't think I ever heard the term "political risk." Yeah, I've heard it in other places. I lived in Nigeria. We heard about political risk there. We hear it about Venezuela and Saudi Arabia. In the Middle East we hear about political risk. But I ask all the members of this House and all Albertans: did they ever expect to hear the terms "political risk" and "Alberta" used in the same sentence?

Madam Speaker, Alberta then had the highest median wages in the country, and these weren't skewed because of a few high salaries. They were skewed because of broad high salaries for most Albertans and the opportunity for work for many of those that are currently unemployed today. They actually had the opportunity to work and to make a good living and to build a good life in this province. Growing an economy isn't all that valuable every day if work-seeking Albertans are unemployed, is it?

They're unemployed not just in the short term, but for many I'm hearing from in my community, it's going on two years. I'm hearing about people not being able to make their payments on their homes, and I'm hearing about bankruptcies. We've heard stories in this House of people approaching them and telling them that they've lost their house. We heard that from the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon just yesterday. Losing their houses. These are hard-working Albertans who have lost one or two incomes, who are trying to live a frugal and modest lifestyle and have tightened their belts as much as they possibly can, Madam Speaker, and still to this day cannot find employment because of the lack of the attraction of that investment and those businesses to create the jobs we need.

We need to generate wealth, Madam Speaker. We need to generate wealth in this province to balance our budgets. Those tax revenues from generating wealth will do that because the businesses will pay taxes, and the individuals that are employed by them – but they have to be employed first – will generate those tax revenues to help balance our budgets without reaching deeper and deeper into the pockets of hard-working Albertans, on whose shoulders this province is built.

And our seniors, Madam Speaker. Many of the seniors of today thought that they would be living a comfortable retirement, but

many of them are not able to. Many of them hope to have part-time employment. We're seeing that. But you know what? Some of them are having to steal jobs from the youth that we once employed before we jacked up our minimum wages and things like that that made it attractive to hire youth without the experience. So what are they doing? They're hiring 65- and 70-year-olds who need that income just to survive. That's a sad reflection of the way our economy is today and how we are not generating the wealth to support not only our budgets and balancing our budgets but to pay off our debt and to generate the types of social services which a compassionate society will do.

11:30

You know, when I hear from the Finance minister that things are looking up, up, up, I worry again, because that's not what the Albertans that I talk to are telling me. They're expressing to me that they're having difficulties paying their household bills, yet we hear in this House that we want to put more through the PACE program, that we want to put more tax burden on people so that when they lose a job, they're more likely to lose their homes much more rapidly because their ability to reduce their burn rate through something that is a fixed cost on their tax bill will not be something that they can adjust. They can't go to their bank and say: I'm going to skip a payment here; I'm going to skip a payment; I'm going to reduce 10 per cent, working with the banks. I know the banks have worked hard with their clients to keep them in their homes, and I hope that that will continue in this province from a compassionate standpoint.

When we hear from the polls, pollsters and we hear from Albertans face to face telling us that they're still struggling, they're not saying: up, up, up. They're saying that they're worried, worried, worried. They're worried about the future of this province. Madam Speaker, some of them are worried about themselves, but I hear more often that they're worried about their kids not being able to find jobs. We know that the highest unemployment is in the youth segment of our population, who now are being deeply affected by taxes and deeply affected by the lack of investment, the lack of new businesses, the failures of so many small businesses, many in the service and hospitality sector, that just can't survive with the burden of the carbon tax, the burden of the minimum wage increases, and the burden of some of the employment and labour costs that have been pushed on them even though they're struggling today just to survive. That's sad for me, Madam Speaker.

So the government has decided that to turn the tide, they will introduce Bill 2, the Growth and Diversification Act. This bill builds on Bill 30, Investing in a Diversified Alberta Economy Act, which introduced two tax credits, the Alberta investor tax credit and the capital investment tax credit. As a whole, I think both Bill 30 and Bill 2 are focusing on the trees at the expense of actually nurturing a mighty forest, that we once had here in Alberta. Both bills are basically applying – I used the phrase earlier – a Band-Aid to a critical injury of bad fundamental economics, Madam Speaker. The throwing of that candy after taking away that attractive plate of meat and potatoes that Albertans have enjoyed for so many years, taking that away from them and throwing candy at them: that's great. It's going to rot their teeth at the same time.

Madam Speaker, choose your own metaphor. They all paint a bleak picture of trying to undo a failure of fundamental economics in this province and regulatory and taxation failure that have been wrought by this government. We wouldn't even need programs like these if the government had not so severely damaged Alberta's attractiveness for business and investment, business and investor confidence and put us in the realm of being a jurisdiction of political risk. By my last count – and that was now over a year ago – \$34.8

billion of foreign direct investment has left this province. I think I called it yesterday that they are the canary in the coal mine, again a very appropriate term given what's been done to decimate our coal industry in those towns that are attached to our coal industry in this province.

We heard just this morning in Public Accounts Committee that not only do we have that damaging effect but very little is being done. I think they've got \$5 million allocated. I think that might be just enough to buy all the shutters to shutter up all the businesses in those communities because we have not anticipated what the outcome was going to be, what I call a disorderly transition rather than an orderly transition, which brings me, Madam Speaker, to such things as the carbon tax. The carbon tax always comes to mind because it has layered another burden on top of Albertans, with all economic pain and no environmental gain. That is one of the reasons I am speaking in favour of this recent amendment.

Madam Speaker, the University of Calgary School of Public Policy issues a number of great documents. A recent personal favourite was by former Minister of Finance from Saskatchewan Dr. Janice MacKinnon. In that paper they state that to grow the economy, you need to consider important policy objectives like the creation of a positive environment for business. They say that to spur economic growth, you need to do certain things but that this NDP government in Alberta has abandoned traditional opportunities. In fact, in Saskatchewan back in the 1990s they did abandon traditional NDP policy, which normally "supported raising taxes on business and high-income earners in the name of tax fairness." They call that business-killing initiatives. "However," the paper notes, "raising corporate and personal income taxes discouraged investment and economic development." Discouraged investment and economic development.

When you tax them and then you try and throw some candy back at them, Madam Speaker, you really don't achieve anything. That bucket is still leaking even more. You're just trying to pick winners, and you're trying to pick losers. You're trying to fill up the coffers with other people's money and then redistribute it, all the while burning a bunch of that money up through administration and other costs.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to offer some comments, if I can, on some of the statements that were made by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. First of all, let me just start off by saying that I have never seen a group of people more resistant to facts than the hon. members over there. It doesn't matter how many times we stand up here and talk about the fact that our tax rates are not discouraging investment, that, in fact, we are the most competitive taxed jurisdiction in the entire continent, they get up and say the opposite. It's true for climate change. It's true for a whole host of things on which they are resistant to facts. They are so focused on their ideology that they refuse to look at the evidence and make decisions based on that, which is really disappointing. I think the people of Alberta deserve better, and they have been getting better from this government for the past three years.

You know, I want to talk about, first of all – I also want to address a phrase, "political risk." This is a phrase that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has used a couple of times recently in debate. He says that, oh, he's surprised that he's heard the words "political risk" used in Alberta for the first time, and they're only talking about it because of the NDP.

Madam Speaker, I want to confirm what the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has said because I, too, have heard the phrase "political risk," but it's in relation to the Member for Calgary-Lougheed and the United Conservative Party. I'm hearing the phrase "political risk" from women, and I'm hearing the phrase "political risk" from gender minorities, from LGBTQ people. I'm hearing the phrase "political risk" from ethnic minorities, from indigenous people. They are scared witless that those guys over there are going to win an election and take away their hard-earned rights, that have been championed by this government. So when the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek talks about political risk, he'd better remember that there are a lot of Albertans who are scared of the political risk that his own party poses to the good people of this province.

Now, on the issue of economic diversification, one of the key objectives of this bill is to enhance economic diversification in the digital realm, and in fact the interactive digital media tax credit is designed to do just that, Madam Speaker. This came from extensive consultations with video game designers, people working in the digital industry. They pointed at one jurisdiction that really got this right and has spurred development in this area better than any jurisdiction in the country, and that's Quebec. I wondered, as I do when I listen to the members opposite, what the tax rates are in Quebec, because apparently we hear nothing but the fact that our high taxes are driving out investment, that our taxes are so high that they're driving investment in the interactive digital media world to Quebec.

What is the corporate tax rate in Quebec, Madam Speaker? You'd be shocked to know that it's 11.9 per cent provincially, .1 per cent lower than the corporate tax rate here in Alberta. What are the provincial income tax rates? I was shocked. I was shocked to find out that a person earning \$42,000 a year pays 15 per cent in provincial income taxes. That is our highest personal income tax rate in this province. People earning \$300,000 a year or more are paying 15 per cent. What are people paying who are earning \$300,000 or more in Quebec? It's a whopping 25.75 per cent, more than 10 per cent higher than our highest provincial income tax bracket, and that starts at \$103,000 a year.

You know, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek isn't paying attention because, like I said, he is as resistant to facts as everybody else on that side of the aisle, Madam Speaker, and I'm sure that he's whiling away his time wondering how he can attack the rights of indigenous people and other minorities that that party opposite seems to be intent on attacking, but . . .

Mr. McIver: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

11:40

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

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. McIver: The hon. minister is out of line. Under 23(h), (i), and (j) he's imputing false motives to another member in order to create disruption, and the hon. member needs to apologize and withdraw his remarks.

The Acting Speaker: An hon. member wishing to respond to the point of order? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: I apologize and withdraw my remarks, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Would you like to continue?

Mr. Schmidt: Yes, I would, Madam Speaker.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schmidt: You know, my previous comments aside, I do have a question, though, for the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Why has the development of the interactive digital media technology sector in . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the reasoned amendment? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you. It's a privilege to speak in favour of this reasoned amendment proposed by my hon. colleague. The interesting thing, as I've been listening to the debate go back and forth here today, is that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar continues to indicate that this is all about comparing taxes. You know, I think that we've tried to make the argument very clear that this is actually not just about taxes but specifically about the environment that has been created in Alberta. So through you to that hon. member, Madam Speaker, I would like to just indicate to him that our argument is specifically about the environment that the government has set up that has chased away the investment in Alberta. This is very important for the members opposite to realize, that we're not actually attacking one specific thing but a whole suite of things that they have done in order to be able to chase away that investment.

Now, the way that the investment trickles down is that the investment comes in, and as the investment comes in, it creates the jobs that Albertans need. This is really what we're trying to fight for. I actually don't believe that the members opposite are trying to chase away investment or that they're trying to stop Albertans from having gainful employment. I don't believe that. In fact, when I talk to people, I say: you know, some of the nicest people I've met are from the NDP side. Here's the problem. The problem is that they might have the best of intentions, but, again, if you were to go to a mechanic, and the mechanic didn't do the job properly, you'd fire the mechanic. You would not go back. This is the concern that I hear from Albertans. They are very concerned about outcomes, not best intentions.

I think this government would get an A for best intentions, but the problem is that they continue to make a bad situation worse. Now, we know full well that with the collapse in oil, many jurisdictions throughout the world have suffered because of that, and Alberta's economy is very much dependent upon oil, and there's nobody arguing that. What we are arguing, Madam Speaker, is the fact that the policies that this government has brought forward have exacerbated the economic downturn in this province.

When I take a look at Bill 2, Growth and Diversification Act, this again is another response or reaction to, I guess, maybe best intentions that just haven't played out the way that they feel they should. This is why, you know, I believe that we don't need to have this bill, and this is the reason why I believe that the reasoned amendment is the proper go-forward strategy, because had we not introduced, first of all, the carbon tax, had we not introduced the increase in the tax burden, had we not increased minimum wage, had we not – and the list can go on. It may be the best of intentions, but the problem – and I've described this in the House before – is that this government seems to be the government of unintended consequences.

So we're in a situation now where the government is arguing for I guess we would call it maybe a boutique tax program, picking winners and losers. This is something that I've been very interested in as I've watched for the last three years. I'm not saying that they are arrogant, but there this an arrogance to the idea or belief that we know how to be able to micromanage an economy. There is an arrogance to the idea that we believe that we can actually mess around with supply and demand, which creates the equilibrium, and figure it out better. History has proven that when you allow those market forces to be able to float freely in free-market economies, as we call them, that creates a better outcome, because the markets know.

There are two forces in the market. There are those who supply, and there are those who consume, or demand. Those two forces have to come to an agreement about what is the right approach forward, and there are the best of intentions out there, and there are lots of businesses that fail. The problem is that this government, through programs like this, has determined that they know better, that they know how to micromanage this economy, and that they know what is the best, growing approach for the future. I have to say that there is an arrogance to that, that that's something that has never proven to be true as we have moved into the 21st century.

Again, I've listened to the arguments by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and you know what? I wanted to give him the benefit of the doubt, that perhaps he has an argument that I haven't already heard from members on the opposite side, but I haven't heard an argument that sways me to believe that this type of a tax boutique is something that we should embrace and use as a go-forward plan.

Now, one of the reasons why I think we see some of the problems in Alberta is because of the regulatory burden. I actually had a private member's bill, Madam Speaker, that I brought forward to try to address this issue. The NDP government voted that down and rejected the idea. In fact, the argument that they gave me was: well, we're addressing it as we go.

It sounds similar to when I talked to the Minister of Labour about the consequences of minimum wage. I said to her: "Listen, you know, this isn't the first time we've actually done this in the world. We think that if you just raise minimum wage, there won't be outcomes or consequences to that." I said: "Take a look at the plethora of studies out there, the peer-reviewed articles that are done. It shows that for every 10 per cent increase in minimum wage, people between 18 and 24 have an increase in unemployment of between 2 to 8 per cent, so it's a terrible trade-off." I said to her, "Well, have you done an economic impact study?" That's the first question I asked. Then the second question I asked was, "If you haven't done one, are you going to do one?" and she said: "No. We're going to assess as we go." Well, it's been three years now. Unemployment amongst young people is 13.2 per cent.

Mr. Schmidt: Historically low.

Mr. Hunter: You know, again, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar: I don't know if he knows anything other than angry, but he heckled out "historically low."

Mr. Schmidt: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called.

Mr. Hunter: Oh, he can dish it out, but he can't take it.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Schmidt: Yup, under 23(h), (i), and (j). I heard the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner call me an angry person, Madam Speaker. You know, I recognize that I get under their skin, that they don't like a lot of the things that I say. But under 23(h), (i), and (j) I think that to characterize me as angry and then to sit down and say, "Oh, he can dish it out, but he can't take it" is language that's abusive or insulting, and I request that the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner withdraw his remarks and apologize.

11:50

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to the point of order?

Mr. Hunter: Madam Speaker, I believe that the words I used were that he doesn't know anything other than anger. I didn't call him an angry person, just to make sure that the member understands what I did say, and that's what I said. But if I have gotten under his skin, I apologize, and I withdraw those remarks.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I believe that if we could just, you know, revert to discussion of the policy of the bill and the reasoned amendment and try to refrain from directly speaking to each other, maybe just through me, that would be the best way to do it. At this time there is no point of order.

Please continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Now, again, I was talking about the minimum wage issue and how it is a terrible trade-off to have 13.2 per cent unemployment among young people. The point, again, that I was making is that there is lots of evidence out there that shows that the increase in unemployment amongst young people is a terrible trade-off for those increases in the minimum wage. So I asked: "You know, have you done an economic impact study? What are you going to do about this, and would you ever stop?" The answer specifically was, "No, we are not going to do an economic impact study, and we will assess as we go."

Well, again, three years into this now, we're already seeing unemployment among young people at 13.2 per cent. When is it enough? When is it that this government is going to start to say that there is a terrible trade-off and that the unintended consequences were not what we expected? Again, I'm not saying that this government wants to see this unemployment or wants to see Albertans not gainfully employed, but I am saying that when they see the outcomes of these things, I wish that they would reassess and say: we need to be able to take a look at this process and move forward in a positive way. But I haven't seen that yet. I haven't seen that in their approach.

With this bill, the idea of having a tax boutique, as it were: even if it did work, have they measured? I was at a PAC, a Public Accounts Committee, meeting this morning, and the committee asked the Economic Development and Trade deputy minister and his team, you know, what kind of measurables they're using, whether or not they are measuring the success of these things. It was all anecdotal, the evidence that they gave, which is: well, our economy is increasing, in terms of GDP growth, fastest in the country, and it's projected to go the same this year. That was the evidence that they gave, but the question has to be asked, which is, once again: is the money that is being spent, these tax boutiques, the result of this increase or this growth? They could not give us an answer, Madam Speaker.

Again, if this is supposedly the answer to our woes, this concept, then there must be some way of being able to measure to say that, yes, this is actually working or that this injection of cash in terms of the Growth and Diversification Act is going to work or has worked. I don't know if there's any evidence that I've seen that shows that.

The other thing that I was concerned about with this is that it's unclear if the companies who have received the tax credits during the first incarnation of the program were in actual need of the tax credit support. You know, obviously, the question is: is there a private-sector vehicle that can provide the funding or the initial start-up capital costs that would help that organization or that group or that company to be able to get on their own two feet? I don't know whether or not even the first iteration or incarnation of this program can show that that is actually the case, that, again, these tax boutiques were actually of benefit or helpful to facilitating growth in the economy or in these areas.

The other question that I had that I was a little concerned about is that as of March 16, 2018, there was unallocated money to the tune of roughly 5 per cent of the first AITC funding. Now, that was a first-come, first-served funding pool, but the question is: was it undersubscribed, or was it not successful in its delivery? Was there too much red tape to be able to get it out in time? What were the reasons why it was 5 per cent undersubscribed or underutilized?

These are some of the things that, you know, I think any prudent government would take a look at and say: what have we done right, and what have we done wrong? This is really the major reason why I cannot support this bill, because I do not believe that this government, with the best of intentions, is going to be able to get it right.

You know, B.C. and Quebec supposedly have been doing this for a while. By us injecting and getting in this late in the game, how much of the market share can we actually access and get ourselves? Again, these are the questions that I think an economic impact study would actually tell us, yet again we've seen nothing from the government that says: "This is how it is going to roll out. This is what's going to happen if we inject this amount of money, that we will be in a position where we can see this number of jobs and this amount of growth in our GDP."

With that, Madam Speaker, I will just conclude by saying that I believe that this could all be fixed by having the government not do these tax boutiques and instead be able to provide an opportunity for Albertans to have that gainful employment or that gainful business opportunity by getting out of the way. In the olden days they used to call it salutary neglect.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members that want to speak under 29(2)(a)? I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to talk to the hon. member that was just on his feet about some of his remarks. He talked about how the government is making changes, these boutique tax changes, essentially trying to undo the damage that their other policies have done. I wanted to get his opinion on the fact that, well, in the past, under previous governments there have been several periods of time when we've been in a recession and several periods of time when energy prices have been low, but never before in history have we had those things happen at the same time as a tremendous outflow of capital. That has only happened under the NDP government. Never before, despite all the recessions in the past, despite all the low energy prices in the past, has 35-plus billion dollars leaked out of Alberta. Essentially, there has to be

another reason. Clearly, an obvious place may be the policies that the NDP has put in place. But I'd like the hon. member to have an opportunity to elaborate on this fact.

Mr. Hunter: You know, I think the member makes a very important point, and I think the point is this. Businesses want certainty. They want to have a belief that if they're going to play the game of business and developing business, the rules aren't going to change or that the umpire is going to be fair. It has been clearly shown throughout history – we've seen it in B.C. and Ontario – that when an NDP government gets in, it scares

businesses to death because they are absolutely not convinced that the NDP government will not change the rules midway through a project. They do not believe that the playing field is going to be fair, that they will have an opportunity to be able to provide for the people in their businesses.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2.1) the Assembly will now stand adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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