



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 5, 2018

Day 45

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Fourth Session

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New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 3 Alberta Liberal: 1 Freedom Conservative: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 5, 2018

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us reflect or pray, each in our own way. As today marks the beginning of Veterans' Week, may we take a moment to consider the remarkable service, women and men who so unselfishly protect our nation. Also, let us listen to the voices from the past about the pain of war, lest we forget.

Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. R.J. Chambers.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature quite a number of the Alberta Education interchange teachers. This is a group of school administrators and teachers from across the province who are supporting Alberta Education to develop and implement curriculum. During their two-year interchange with the ministry they gain knowledge of new curriculum, where it will take us back, and then how we will implement it in the classrooms across the province. It's a very valuable program. It allows us to keep our rubber hitting the road and to make sure that we're building what's very best for our children in education. I'd like to ask them to stand now, please, and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 34 students from Kim Hung school today. I was proud to have been there to open their school last year, when they had great dragon dances and line dances. That's how I know that they're in the greatest constituency in the entire province. The students today are accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Jeff Webster, along with their chaperones, Ryan Crackston and Kim Brix. If they'd please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other school groups, hon. members?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and the Armistice 100

Committee. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly distinguished guests from the Loyal Edmonton Regiment. When the First World War broke out, in August 1914, the 101st Regiment, Edmonton Fusiliers, was charged with recruiting and forming several battalions for the Canadian Expeditionary Force. The 49th Battalion, now known as the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, was the only battalion that was to remain a fighting unit. As we mark 100 years since the end of World War I, our thoughts go to remember 977 soldiers from all ranks and 2,282 soldiers wounded from the Loyal Edmonton Regiment. This afternoon it was my great honour to receive an honour roll from the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, presented to the Alberta Legislature. I would ask that our distinguished guests from the Loyal Edmonton Regiment stand as I call their names: Captain Rick Dumas, adjutant, Loyal Edmonton Regiment, 4 PPCLI, Jefferson Armoury; Honorary Colonel John Stanton, Loyal Edmonton Regiment; Chief Warrant Officer Jay Reinelt, regimental sergeant major; and Colonel, retired, Don Miller. I would now ask the Assembly to extend the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome, and thank you.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Oh, another introduction. I'm sorry.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For my second introduction I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group dedicated to preserving and celebrating the memory of the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I, the Armistice 100 Committee. Please join me in thanking this committee for sharing their time and talent to mark this significant anniversary in such a meaningful way. Please stand as I say your name: Carolyn Patton, chair; Lieutenant-Colonel Mark Beare, chief of staff, 3rd Canadian Division Support Group; Captain Rick Dumas, adjutant, Loyal Edmonton Regiment, 4 PPCLI, Jefferson Armoury; Dave Ridley, executive director, Edmonton Heritage Council; Deborah Brandell, volunteer co-ordinator; Tanya Camp, technical support; Jill Wright, military liaison support; and last but certainly not least, our Sergeant-at-Arms, Lieutenant-Colonel, retired, Brian Hodgson. I would now ask that all members of the Assembly extend the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Now the Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you some very special guests who are seated in your gallery. It's my pleasure to introduce three St. Albert firefighters who are also trained as primary and advanced care paramedics. I would ask that they stand as I say their names: Jay Howells, Derek Ellicott, and Kyle Nobles. Please join me in extending these Albertans the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you a friend of mine and a constituent, Josephine Pon. Josephine was a banker for 25 years. Currently she's the vice-president for a chain of five restaurants in Alberta. She was a three-time board chair for Immigrant Services Calgary, a group that has helped over 200,000 new Canadians settle in Calgary. For 10 years she was the chair of the immigrants of distinction award. Josephine sought the UCP nomination in Calgary-Beddington and lost by just nine votes. She handled this tough loss with much grace, and I feel so fortunate that she has volunteered to help me on my next campaign as she did on our leader's leadership campaign. I would ask all of

you to extend the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly to my friend Josephine.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions this afternoon. My first introduction is of two champions for central Alberta and Red Deer College in particular. Joel Ward is Red Deer College's president, and Brenda Munro is their dean of the school of continuing education. Our government was pleased to announce that Red Deer College is on the path toward university status, and I've been proud to celebrate with them as they begin to offer their own degrees. I want to thank Mr. Ward and Ms Munro for their tireless advocacy – I can personally attest to how tirelessly they have advocated for this; I'm glad they don't have my personal phone number – and I invite them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Schmidt: For my second introduction, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce Dr. Melanie Peacock. Dr. Peacock is the president of the Mount Royal Faculty Association, which represents approximately 800 faculty at that university. Dr. Peacock's work and academic background are in human resource management, and her fourth textbook regarding this subject matter is about to be published. Dr. Peacock's doctoral research focused on adult education and the importance of interpersonal relationship development in postsecondary settings. As well, Dr. Peacock is a sought-after media contributor at the municipal, provincial, and national levels. I ask that Dr. Peacock please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to be able to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a great friend of mine, Perri Garvin. Perri has been the co-ordinator of labour programs for the United Way of the Alberta Capital Region for the past 18 years. His role is unique in educating union members about community resources and how they can help their members access them. His involvement in domestic violence and mental health issues has contributed to a better understanding of unions working with their members. I must say that there is some truth to the allegations that Mr. Garvin 26 years ago might have had something to do with shaping my path and where I've ended up today. I'd ask now that Perri please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two dear friends of mine and of many people in this Chamber, from the great city of Lethbridge, Mr. and Mrs. Zielke, who are two of the most compassionate, nicest people that you could ever meet. Mrs. Zielke is the only . . .

Mr. Kenney: Dr. Zielke.

Mr. Nixon: Dr. Zielke, I should say. Thank you.

. . . cardiologist in the city of Lethbridge, fighting every day to save many Albertans' lives. Recently many of us got to visit them

in their home, and they introduced us to cardiologist-friendly pizza, Mr. Speaker. If you're curious as to the recipe, make sure to give me a call. I ask them both to stand up – they won't let us eat bacon, though; it's another issue – and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you members of my staff at Municipal Affairs. Specifically, these folks are responsible for much of the work done on An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta, which I will introduce in a few minutes. I know this has been a tremendous effort by this very capable team, and I want to commend them for the work they have done. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I ask that they rise as I call their names: Cathy Maniego, LaRae Ellis, Angela Markel, Laura Klassen Bullock, Marie Overell, and Alexander Witt. I want us to please give them the warm welcome of the Chamber and thank them for all of their hard work.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other guests to introduce today? The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the members of this House the community advocates project team. This is an incredible team of advocates who build awareness about family violence and effect positive change. I'm pleased to introduce Johanna Baynton Smith, Chris McCaw, Amanda Fletcher, and Mary Turner. With them are Heather Morrison and Michelle Holubisky from the city of Edmonton. I want to commend this group for the work they do, and I ask them to rise – they already have – and ask the House to give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

St. Albert Emergency Service Providers

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Jay Howells is a St. Albert firefighter and paramedic. People in St. Albert and across Alberta may know Jay as the firefighter who delivered two babies this past spring within a two-week period. Jay also assisted in the home birth of one of his three children. I had the opportunity to spend time with Jay Howells and the other firefighters during a ride-along this past summer. This was my second ride-along, and I was once again able to see the remarkable skill, professionalism, compassion, and camaraderie of the St. Albert firefighters, who are also trained as primary- and advanced-care paramedics. And, yes, the rumours are true; they are very skilled in the kitchen.

St. Albert residents also know Jay Howells as part of a team of four firefighters who took to the roof of station 2 fire hall last winter to raise funds for Muscular Dystrophy Canada. This small but mighty team pulled in approximately \$75,000 during last year's four-day and -night winter fundraising campaign. Muscular Dystrophy Canada is supported by 800 fire departments and associations across Canada. Their mission is to enhance the lives of those diagnosed with the neuromuscular disorder by providing

resources for mobility, seating and breathing aids, access to equipment, and vital research.

A few months ago MD Canada named Jay Howells as the 2018 provincial firefighter of the year. Naturally, Jay always says that he wishes all of his team's names were on the award, so I will share them with you in this Chamber: Derek Ellicott, Kyle Nobles, and Lee Monfette, who couldn't be here today because he and his wife just had a child this weekend.

I feel comfortable saying that all St. Albertans are grateful for our amazing firefighters and paramedics, who are always there when we need them the most. They are part of the fabric of our community, and we rely on them daily. Their jobs are incredibly demanding and require skills and courage I cannot even describe. So for all of this and more, I thank the St. Albert fire department and EMS for all that they do.

Thank you.

Anti-Semitism

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, Richard Gottfried, my name almost to a T, was mentioned in this Assembly and at a synagogue vigil as a victim of the anti-Semitic attack in Pittsburgh. I would be lying if I said that this was anything but unnerving.

I was raised as a good Presbyterian, my Jewish heritage but half of my DNA. But in Hitler's Germany that would have destined me for work camps and ultimately the gas chamber. In the fall of 2016 I learned that the fate of over 68,000 Polish Jews from Lodz, the birthplace of my father, was eventual liquidation. Among those families were all of the relatives I will never know. Shockingly, perhaps miraculously, just 877 Jews survived in that city at liberation, with lives, bloodlines, stories, and history lost forever to anti-Semitism, racism, in one of its historically heinous extremes.

Mr. Speaker, can we live in a complacent world in today's society? Elie Wiesel once said, "The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference." Can we afford to be indifferent in the face of discrimination and hatred? Last night I spoke at a screening of the documentary *Above the Drowning Sea* at the Beth Tzedec synagogue. Ho Feng-Shan, the Chinese consul general in Vienna at the time and known as the Chinese Schindler, single-handedly saved over 20,000 European Jews – this at a time when Canada said that none was too many – 20,000 lives saved, embraced by the Chinese people in what became the Shanghai ghetto, rescuing them from the plight of 6 million members of their faith. My personal bridge to China began when Shanghai became a safe haven for my father, a Polish Jew, over 100 years ago. That quite literally saved the only surviving bloodlines of my family.

We must all be vigilant, and we must be strong and principled and fiercely defend against any resurgence of anti-Semitism, racism, and hatred in all its forms across Alberta and around the world. We must all do our part, each and every day, in not being complacent or indifferent to words or acts of hatred in our midst. Mr. Speaker, let's ensure that "never again" is more than just a phrase of conscientious reflection.

Thank you.

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

School Construction in South Calgary

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to update the House about the steps my constituents, myself, and our government are taking to make life better for students in south Calgary schools. Last year we opened Ron Southern elementary school and Holy Child school in Silverado to help service the growing southwest

communities. Both cases included the funding for two new playgrounds.

1:50

We followed through with two new high schools in south Calgary that opened in September. Because of these openings, we've seen a drop of 100 students at Centennial high school this year, and we see a forecast reduction of 200 students over the next couple of years, greatly reducing classroom pressures. The parent council there hosted a dialogue with the minister that brought parents from all over Calgary, who shared feedback about curriculum review and life in south Calgary. The opening of All Saints high school in Legacy means that Bishop O'Byrne is down to levels of students that the school was built for, reducing the count by over 200 students this year alone.

Two new playgrounds opened in my riding, including at Midnapore school, and with amazing work from the parent council at Samuel Shaw middle school this spring, we cut the ribbon for their new playground, both supported by government CFEP grants. Now we've set our sights on a new pilot project, with the leadership from the parent council at St. Teresa of Calcutta school, that hopefully will see a build of a new playground.

I will continue to seek further supports for expansion of schools in south Calgary. Currently there are no K to 9 schools in Legacy and Walden, and that needs to change. However, I'm concerned that with the UCP forecasting 20 per cent cuts for their budget, those cuts will come at the cost of students in south Calgary and those new schools.

I ran in the last election because of the lack of schools in Calgary, and I have worked hard with the minister to follow through on almost over a dozen builds in south Calgary, which has had a positive impact on all of the communities in that area. Now and in 2019 I will run to ensure and preserve and build on the great work that our Premier and our government have done for these students.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Unemployment

Mr. Kenney: Thank you very much. Last week new unemployment stats confirmed a six-month-long trend, six months of higher unemployment in Alberta, 2,700 more jobs lost last month. Mr. Speaker, 184,000 Albertans are looking for work. Is the NDP government proud of this record of growing unemployment, and what is its message to the 184,000 unemployed Albertans looking for work?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that very important question. Of course, our government has been very, very focused on the need to create jobs in Alberta and to have the backs of Albertans as we come out of this most recent oil-price-induced recession. Now, the member knows that, yes, there were some jobs lost last month. We're aware of that, and we think about those people each and every day in the work that we do. He also knows, however, that in August there were 16,000 jobs created and that from month to month the numbers bounce around. Year over year we've created over 90,000 jobs and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, in May of this year the unemployment rate was 6.2 per cent. Now it is 7.3 per cent. The NDP seems to think that that's going in the right direction. Most Albertans believe that more unemployment is going in the wrong direction. In fact, Professor Tombe at the University of Calgary says that if we had the same labour force participation rate that existed in Alberta before the NDP came to office, the current unemployment rate would actually be 8.1 per cent. Does the government actually think that its economic policy of higher taxes, job-killing regulations, and more debt is working for these unemployed Albertans?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, we know that there is more work to be done as we continue to focus on creating jobs. We also know that we actually have more Albertans employed in this province than we did before. The reason the unemployment rate is coming down is because more people are coming to Alberta looking for jobs, including people from Saskatchewan, who are not benefiting from the kinds of programs that the member opposite suggests that we adopt. What we decided to do was have Albertans' backs and to invest in growth. That's exactly what we're doing. What we won't do is cut 4,000 teachers or 4,000 nurses.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the Premier just said that the unemployment rate is going down. That is exactly the opposite of the truth. I won't use the unparliamentary language to describe that. I'll just refer to the StatsCan statistics. In May unemployment was 6.2 per cent. It's gone up every month for six months now to 7.3 per cent. In fact, there are 45,000 more jobless Albertans today than when the NDP took office in 2015. Is their recipe more of the same: more high taxes, more high debt, more job-killing red tape?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, in fact, I did misspeak. What I meant to say was that the employment is up. More people are working than they were before, and the difference is that more people are coming in who are looking for work, people from places like Saskatchewan.

We know there's more work to do, Mr. Speaker. We know that as a result of the drop in oil prices in 2016, we hit bottom. It was hard, and it was hard for many, many Albertans. That's why we have invested in Alberta. We have had Albertans' backs. We are working on creating more jobs, 90,000 since last year. We know there's more to be done, but what won't help is cutting jobs for nurses and teachers and . . .

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

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the Premier corrected herself to say that unemployment isn't going down but that the employment rate is going up. On that, she's wrong again. In fact, the employment rate before the NDP came to office in April 2015 was 69.2 per cent, and last month it was 67 per cent. A smaller percentage of Albertans are actually employed. She clearly doesn't understand the statistics nor the lived reality of Albertans who are struggling to find work. The question is: does the government expect to deliver more of the same – higher taxes, higher debt, and more red tape – to address this jobless crisis?

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

Ms Notley: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. What I said, to be clear, was that employment is up. The number of jobs in Alberta is up. What we will not do is cut. We will not give a \$700 million tax break so that we can support the 1 per cent. We will not roll back spending to 2015 levels, throwing 4,000 teachers out of work, throwing 4,000 nurses out of work. We will not do what the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills wants us to do, which is: make it hurt. I didn't get into politics for that; nobody on this side of the House did either.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, Halloween was last week, so the fear campaign can end. None of that is the policy of the United Conservative Party, but let me talk about the record of the NDP. There are 42,000 young Albertans who are out of work, and this is shocking. The youth employment rate the month before the NDP took office was 62.3 per cent. It's now down to 55.7 per cent, still, three and a half years later, a dramatic decline in youth employment in Alberta. Is the NDP's response yet higher taxes?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what we will not do is make it hurt for Albertans, which the member opposite's MLA for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills said in a moment of transparency. That is not our plan going forward. The member opposite is playing around with numbers. He knows full well that the price of oil dropped \$30, \$40 after we got elected. He knows full well that we were handed an economy that was not ready to deal with that. We have been working with Albertans, investing in Albertans ever since. The dial is moving. We know there's more work to do, and we will be standing there fighting for Albertans every step of the way.

Mr. Kenney: Well, it didn't take long for the Premier to blame oil prices. Isn't that curious, though, Mr. Speaker? In the U.S. states that see a dynamic, growing oil and gas sector, states like North Dakota and Colorado and Texas, the unemployment rate is 3 per cent on average versus over 7 per cent in Alberta, the highest unemployment outside of Atlantic Canada, Calgary with the highest unemployment of any major city in Canada. Does the Premier plan to make that bad situation even worse by continuing to raise taxes on Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, first of all, the member opposite knows that there is about an \$8 billion a year tax advantage for people in Alberta. We still have the lowest taxes in the country. Moreover, since the summer of 2017 our economy has created 90,000 jobs, so we are on the right track. The member opposite doesn't want to acknowledge those things. However, we're going to continue fighting for Albertans. We're going to continue investing in their schools, continue investing in their hospitals, having their backs so that everybody comes out of this recession together.

The Speaker: I think we're at the third main question.

Mr. Kenney: For the record the Premier is telling us that in the sixth straight month of growing unemployment, of more people on the jobless lines, this isn't going in the right direction. She told the *Edmonton Journal* recently that you can, in quotes, expect more of the same. That's what concerns Albertans. When she talks about employment growth, it's overwhelmingly, Mr. Speaker, being paid for by deficit financing: 55,000 jobs in the state sector but 29,000 fewer jobs in the private sector. Is the government's plan to create jobs in the private sector based on yet higher taxes and yet more red tape?

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, what is not our plan is to fire 4,000 teachers and fire 4,000 nurses so that we can give a \$700 million tax break to the richest 1 per cent of Albertans. I understand who the members opposite support, but we are on the side of all Albertans, and we are going to fight for all Albertans. We're going to make sure that they all enjoy the recovery, not just their friends and their donors in the top 1 per cent.

Mr. Kenney: What recovery? Mr. Speaker, 7.3 per cent unemployment, unemployment up for six months, 184,000 jobless Albertans? This is the problem. Those people are listening to their Premier say that happy times are here again, this great recovery where unemployment is going up. I've never seen a recovery like that before. What is the government's plan apart from more of the same, which from the NDP means higher taxes, more red tape, and more debt? What is their actual plan?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, what we're not going to do is what their friends over in Saskatchewan next door did, and because of that our province is leading the country in economic growth. We led last year. We're leading this year. We're leading next year. There are 2.3 million people working in this province, the highest number of people working in this province's history. Average weekly earnings are, again, higher than they were before the last election. That being said, I'll be the first to admit that we have more work to do to make sure that every Albertan feels this recovery, and that is what we are committed to making sure happens.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, one of the most tragic aspects of the NDP's economic disaster is the long-term unemployed. Alberta used to have the shortest average duration of unemployment. People might lose a job, but they'd quickly find a new one. Now for the last couple of years we've had the longest duration of unemployment, reaching as long as 23 weeks in this province. You know what that does to people's self-confidence? Their skills atrophy. Often it leads to mental health challenges. What is the Premier's message to those long-term unemployed who feel like they can no longer get a fair chance in NDP Alberta?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, our message is that we understand how challenging it is for them and their families, and that is why our government has made the choice to have their back from day one. We were not going to throw them out of work. We were not going to cut the services that they and their families rely on. We were not going to pull back on police services and municipal services and all those things that communities need. We were going to have their back, and we were going to invest in growth. As I said, we know that there's more work to do, but we are committed to doing it because we are committed to making sure that all Albertans ultimately feel the effects of the recovery.

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

Alberta Works

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every constituent who's called my office about Alberta Works has mentioned ill treatment, disrespect, and bullying. Constituents have described how caseworkers make them feel like garbage, dirt, not even human, like it's all their fault. Three constituents recently said that they fear giving their names to anyone offering them support with this because they're afraid of investigation and retribution by Alberta Works. To the minister of human services: what policies prevent intimidation of vulnerable clients from bullying by Alberta Works?

The Speaker: The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. All Albertans, when they walk into an Alberta Works office, can expect that they will be treated with the utmost respect, and these allegations are very concerning. I would want the member to forward those details, and I commit to following up on these concerns. All allegations of such nature are looked into with due seriousness.

Ms McPherson: One constituent was left out of work because she faced multiple surgeries, and she can't pay her bills. She only receives \$700 a month to live on. Her phone is being cut off. She's had to go without heat, and it's wintertime. Alberta Works has demanded several audits of her personal bank account and told her to take budgeting classes at the Kerby Centre. Can the minister please share the budgeting tips that would make it easier for her to live on \$700 a month?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have heard from Albertans that these rates were kept low even when oil was trading at \$90. What we have done instead of making that situation worse is that we have maintained stable funding to that. I have heard from Albertans about these rates, and we are absolutely committed to making sure that we improve these programs so that Albertans can live with respect and dignity.

Ms McPherson: Another constituent was laid off from the oil industry recently. On Alberta Works' advice and request she provided details of employment retraining, an itemized list of training costs, and proof of an offer for work after she completes her training. Her caseworker denied funding without reason, refused to take her calls, and made a snide comment that truck drivers aren't needed. My constituent's additional requests for information went unanswered; they still are. How many complaints has the government heard from Albertans about Alberta Works' hostility and disrespect for those trying to get back on their feet?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said before, all such concerns are looked into seriously. I would ask the member to share those concerns with my MLA contact, and we will follow up on all these concerns to make sure that Albertans are getting services with respect and dignity.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Rural Crime Strategy

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In March the Minister of Justice and the RCMP commissioner announced a \$10 million, seven-point rural crime reduction plan. Can the Minister of Justice give us an update on that plan and tell us if it is working?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the incredibly important question. Rural crime is an issue that's been on the minds of Albertans, and it's an issue that's been on the minds of our government as well. It was not quite a year ago that we announced our rural crime strategy, which included investing in front-line services and investing in Crown prosecutors. The RCMP

has now reported a decrease in property crime in rural Alberta by almost 11 per cent in the first half of the year. We know this hasn't extended to everyone yet, but we are starting to see the effects, and we're very proud of that.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how does this plan keep police in the community instead of behind a desk?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Well, of course, we know that one of the concerns that rural Albertans have is that they like to see police officers out on the streets safeguarding the community rather than sitting behind a desk. That's why our rural crimes reduction plan includes funding for civilians who will input basic investigative things into computers, and that allows those officers to be back out on the street. Comparing July 2018 to 2017, there have been 366 fewer break and enters, 648 fewer vehicle thefts, and 2,358 fewer vehicle thefts across the province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Is the minister working with the new RCMP commissioner on continuing to implement the rural crime reduction plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll start by correcting my last answer. It was 2,358 fewer thefts, not vehicle thefts specifically.

Mr. Speaker, I've had a great relationship with our previous commissioner, and I thank him for all his work on this strategy. Our new RCMP deputy commissioner, Curtis Zablocki, comes to us from Saskatchewan, where he shared our focus on this sort of proactive policing. In fact, my early conversations with him indicate that he is very supportive of this strategy, and we will keep moving forward on this issue together. [interjection]

Government Caucus Voting Practices

Mr. Fildebrandt: Gesundheit, Mr. Speaker.

Today the hon. Member for Calgary-East showed incredible courage and conviction when she stated that under this Premier's leadership, quote: every power that MLAs are supposed to have to represent their constituents in the Legislature has been taken away and denied from the start; MLAs must vote the direction of the leader at all times. End quote. Madam Premier, is what your Member for Calgary-East has to say about your leadership and government true or not?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I can say – and I know that the Premier believes this – that we are incredibly proud of our hard-working and very representative caucus. Very proud. Beyond that, the member knows that he can ask questions about ministerial responsibility, about government policy, but it is

not in order for him to be asking about party or caucus matters, and therefore I respectfully decline to answer that question.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, the minister respectfully declines to answer every question not written by themselves for their own backbenchers.

To enforce party discipline, the Member for Calgary-East goes on to say, quote: there is also a fear that they'll be isolated and that their political career will be finished and that their nomination papers will not be signed or opportunities given. End quote. I would say to both the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition together: sound familiar?

Mr. Mason: The Premier and I and all members of the government share a deep appreciation for our wonderful, hard-working caucus. The tremendous range of skills, backgrounds, and ideas that come from that caucus is an inspiration to this government every day, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Fildebrandt: When the Tory caucus was whipped into abstaining over a dozen times over the Bill 9 attack on free speech, the Premier rightfully condemned the Tory leadership for whipping their MLAs into silence. We now know beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Premier does the same to her own MLAs. Meet the new boss, same as the old boss. Will the Premier admit that when it comes to democracy and free votes in this House, her party is no better than the government that it replaced?

Mr. Mason: On the contrary, Mr. Speaker. This government is very much committed to the principles of democracy and openness. We have opened up services and policy-making to people that the previous government ignored for decades. We are bringing in people that were shut out of government, shut out of policy, and ignored by the previous government. That's one of the shining accomplishments of this government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Victims of Crime Fund

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in February of 2016 the Auditor General identified concerns with the victims of crime fund, which had tens of millions of dollars in a surplus that was not making its way to victims. Since then multiple opposition members have asked multiple times about the money in this fund. For years we have been asking about it in this Assembly, in committee, and in the media. The minister kept telling us to wait. Minister, why did you wait so long to make a decision to use those available funds to assist victims of crime?

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, as the member correctly points out, the Auditor General had some recommendations on those files. Those recommendations stem from the fact that those folks over there ignored this file for more than a decade. Our government stepped up and did the work necessary to put these funds in place, and we're very proud of that.

Mrs. Pitt: Three and a half years, Mr. Speaker. Given that it took so long for this government to act and that the fund's accumulated surplus has continued to grow upwards of \$70 million, given that the minister finally announced a plan for a mere \$4.5 million of that surplus, and given that this is not money in general revenue – it comes from fines and levies – and is earmarked for victims:

Minister, why is this government still withholding from victims 90 per cent of the surplus?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, as I said in response to the last question, part of the concern was that the previous government, the folks over there, left this file to languish for over a decade. As a result, no work had been done around what sort of money needed to be in reserve for the fund in case money stopped coming in, which is always a consideration. We have done that work now. We've worked with the associations that represent victims. As a result, we have a plan to put in place, and we're very proud of that.

Mrs. Pitt: Ten per cent of the fund over three years, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the government only announced funding for Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and Wood Buffalo and given that there are invaluable victim support organizations all throughout Alberta – there are other places – including one in my constituency of Airdrie, and they're not included on that list and given that these guys are fundraising in the hopes of just keeping their doors open to support victims: Minister, why are you leaving out so many victim organizations across Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to say that in addition to the fairly lengthy list that the member listed, this also goes to support survivors of domestic violence on specific new problems, aiding victims in court when they're testifying, helping to make sure that indigenous communities have access to the same supports, and creating opportunities for restorative justice. That's just some of the work we've been doing on the victims of crime fund. I'm very proud that we were able to move forward on this file.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Provincial Debt

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to news reports Canada and Canadian households lead the world in debt, something that the Bank of Canada warned is a huge risk. Unfortunately, Albertans also lead the country in consumer debt. According to a poll conducted by MNP, 46 per cent of Albertans say that they are within just \$200 of not being able to pay their bills should they lose a paycheque. With layoffs continuing and Albertans receiving only \$20 a barrel for oil, why is your government focused on making it harder for Alberta workers and families with higher taxes, more bureaucracy, and more interest expense?

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for the question. I'd like to begin by pointing out the fact that Albertans pay the lowest taxes in the country. Albertans pay \$11 billion less in taxes than the second-lowest tax jurisdiction, which is Saskatchewan, and that's because we have no payroll tax, no PST, no health care premiums. What I can tell you is that in our province we are focused on diversifying the economy and supporting businesses, and we're starting to see the benefits of our government's policies: over 90,000 new jobs created, mostly in the private sector, last year. Let's look at Saskatchewan. They created . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that Ron Kneebone, economist at the University of Calgary, has said, I quote, a fiscal crisis doesn't happen overnight; you need to build a foundation to get there, and a foundation is based on accumulating debt, and given that the NDP has turned a \$12 billion debt into \$50 billion and that this minister is racing toward \$100 billion in debt and given that the department of debt servicing has become your fifth-largest department, putting all of our priorities at risk, why has your government failed to address increasing debt and skyrocketing interest?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, as I said many times in this House, we have a path back to balance. That'll be in 2023. We'll do that without firing thousands of teachers and nurses. You know what? What I won't take advice around from that side is debt. For instance, the Leader of the Opposition's record while he was in Ottawa was six straight deficit budgets, \$56 billion in one year. He added \$145 billion to the national debt, and there were \$309 billion in interest payments when he was there. That made things far more difficult for all the people. He cut services, and other people suffered.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Barnes: Given that the NDP in their most recent budget claimed revenue from the Trans Mountain pipeline, that now sits unbuilt, and given that the pipeline won't be operational until well past 2020, if it becomes operational at all, and given that the Finance minister made no mention of the impact of the stalled pipeline on his growing mountain of debt for this and subsequent years in his recent quarter 1 update, Minister, will you commit to releasing the updated numbers reflecting our loss of revenue tied to this Trans Mountain pipeline and do so by Thursday?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we've cut the deficit by \$3 billion already. Our path to balance relies on 2 out of 3 of those pipelines, but we're going to see all three pipelines built. We will get TMX, we will get line 3, and we will get KXL. We will balance in 2023.

PDD Program Review

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, the government's persons with developmental disabilities review was announced last January, and I know that key stakeholders want to ensure that the voices of families are not just heard but actually have a seat at the table. Now, I'm not sure that's what the minister wants. The panel does include some great Albertans, all very accomplished in their own right, but virtually no representation from families around that table. To the minister: why have you limited the voice of families currently being affected by PDD services?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. We are very proud of our government record for protecting and improving the services for persons with developmental disabilities, and we have put together a panel which represents families, service providers, and all those who have concerns, and nothing can be further from the truth that we have silenced families or advocates. There is representation. I can talk to the member afterwards about who is coming from where.

Mr. Cooper: Well, Mr. Speaker, if you look at the panel, you'll see that the vast majority of them represent service providers and not families.

Given that those receiving PDD services speak about Nothing about Us without Us and that the vast majority of those on the panel aren't actually families, to the minister: why haven't more family members or stakeholders dedicated to families been invited to provide feedback outside of the surveys on the PDD website?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. What we have done is a panel which represents the PDD sector, and it's different than what it used to be in the past. They're putting an accounting firm to do the PDD review. They are going across the province in all seven regions to reach out to the families, to reach out to Albertans and all of those who are receiving these services to make sure that we live with that Nothing about Us without Us, and we are absolutely committed to having those voices included in our review.

Mr. Cooper: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that one thing is the same with this PDD review, and that is that families are being left out from being around the table, and while many of these families are grateful for the wonderful work that service providers have offered and provided, we consistently hear from them that they are concerned that they aren't being included with the Nothing about Us without Us when the panel is clearly proceeding without the key voices of families around the review table daily. What does the minister have to say to these families who are raising this concern?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I was looking for a question. I'm glad you slipped it in right at the end.

Mr. Sabir: I think I will not agree with how the member has described it. The panel is going across this province. There is already a schedule out to consult with the families. When it comes to PDD, I will put my record against theirs any day. We have kicked off the PDD review, filled a vacant appointment for Premier's council, cancelled the support intensity scale brought forward by that side, repealed safety standards regulation, added \$150 million, and we don't think, as the Member for Calgary-Hays would describe it, that these supports are giveaways to disabled people.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Sherwood Park.

Sherwood Park Freeway Speed Limits

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's really a pleasure to ask a question that I wrote for myself on behalf of my constituents. Sherwood Park residents have asked me over the last few months the reason why the speed limits of the Sherwood Park Freeway have been changed. This road is a major connector to Edmonton. This topic is a hotly debated topic in letters to the editor, Facebook posts, Twitter, and calls to my office. To the Minister of Transportation: why were the speed limits changed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I must compliment the hon. member on her question today. Speed limits on provincial roads, including the Sherwood Park Freeway, are based on national and provincial standards. These standards take into account, among other things, the design of the road, traffic volumes, and the spacing between interchanges. Changes to speed

limits occur frequently when additional lanes or interchanges or nearby roads are added to ensure safety. Speed limits are regularly reviewed by Alberta Transportation and will continue to be.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: my residents are also wondering why the speed limit was lowered near the Anthony Henday interchange.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for that really solid follow-up. As the member is aware, a section of the Sherwood Park Freeway was expanded to include additional lanes as part of the northeast Anthony Henday Drive project and 17th Street on/off ramps and the Wye Road interchanges. As a result, a speed reduction to 70 kilometres an hour was required for safety reasons. [interjections]

Thank you.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really sorry that everybody is laughing about this because this is a very important issue. It's a safety issue, and I think some of the members might be surprised as to who has brought this issue to the forefront in my office. But I understand that there's a review under way of the speed limits. I'm wondering: when will the results of the review be released, and how will constituents be informed of potential changes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, based on ongoing feedback from Albertans we are conducting another review of the speed limits on both directions of the Sherwood Park Freeway. This review is expected to be completed early next year, at which point they will be shared with the public. When the review is complete, the ministry will have a better sense of what, if any, changes may be warranted. Safety is always our top priority. I want to thank the hon. member for her ongoing advocacy on behalf of her constituents.

Grain Drying and the Carbon Levy

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, last week I asked the Minister of Agriculture if the NDP had any plan at all to counteract the disastrous impact that their carbon tax has had on farmers working hard to dry their grain and save their crops this fall. First he said that it would be covered through AFSC, something farmers have told us offers no additional help to deal with this situation. Then the minister said that energy efficiency programs for farmers would be the magic solution. Could the minister please tell this House how farmers are expected to afford the massive capital costs of such upgrades while shouldering the immediate costs of drying their grain and carbon tax with the promise of slightly reducing costs for future years?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We had some good news recently. We had a very cold September with some snow, but we had some very warming temperatures in October. Mother Nature did her part in making sure that we get our crops in. Pleased to report that 95 per cent of those crops are in, so for all intents and purposes we are done harvest this year, which is good news. It is also true, though, that this is the third September in a row that we've had unusual, wet conditions, so from that we're looking at what efficiencies we could find for farmers in lowering their energy costs right across agriculture, wherever that may be.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Loewen: Given that farmers have to pay their gas bills that contain the carbon tax now because they can't risk gas being shut off and given that a lot of bills come due during this time of the year, like fuel and other expenses, and given that costs and booking purchases are already being expended for next spring, how can this government expect farmers to pay this carbon tax now when it hurts the most?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Depending a lot on the commodity and on conditions, many, many, many different factors were taken into consideration of what the actual cost might be. On average, you know, to dry a bushel of crop, oil seeds or grain or cereal, would be about two cents a bushel. Yeah, that is an expense, but we recognize that there's also efficiencies to be found as we have introduced through the climate leadership plan money devoted to agriculture specifically, \$81 million, that farmers are able to use to find those efficiencies, to lower their greenhouse gas emissions and actually become more profitable.

Mr. Loewen: Given that some farmers have told me that it costs 60 cents a bushel to dry their grain, I think the minister's numbers are way off, and given that the government lauds its energy upgrading and retrofit programs and given that these programs require farmers to come up with capital to initiate the programs and given that the financial impacts on farmers are occurring as we speak and given that even after upgrades farmers will still have to pay the carbon tax for the crime of drying their grain, why won't you just admit that the carbon tax on grain drying is an excessive burden and do something about the problem instead of talking around the issue and making excuses?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I for one would never call farmers criminals. I think that was a very poor choice from the member. I know that farmers do some really good work in this province. We're proud of them, proud of the work they do, proud of the backbone that agriculture is in this province, and we're looking for finding those efficiencies. When I talk to farmers and ranchers, they want to find those efficiencies as well. As we know, we've had opportunity to work through Canadian agricultural partnership to find retrofitting and new dryers, to find those efficiencies. We'll find those efficiencies, lower the greenhouse gas emissions, and at the same time save them money.

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

Rural Crime Prevention and Law Enforcement

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that in recent years crime has become a growing problem across all of Alberta. In a recently released analysis from *MacLean's*, the city of Cold Lake in my constituency was ranked number 6 in Canada in terms of increasing crime over five years. Can the Minister of Justice tell the people of Cold Lake and the surrounding areas what the government is doing to rectify this unacceptable problem?

2:30

Ms Ganley: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to the member for an incredibly important question. Absolutely those statistics are of incredible concern to us, and those statistics are from 2017. That's why, on seeing those statistics, our government

acted expeditiously to make sure we brought in a rural crime strategy. I wonder whether the members opposite, now seeing the statistics, regret voting against it.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This crime is a problem, and it's not just isolated to the city of Cold Lake. It is a fact that this is reflective of our entire province. Given that Alberta holds the top three spots for a five-year increase in crime, what further measures, in addition to those that have already taken place, does the minister plan to implement to effectively combat criminal activity in my constituency and the constituencies across Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, these statistics being from 2017, they absolutely were a concern and are a concern for the government. That's why we acted expeditiously to bring in a rural crime strategy, unlike the members opposite, who wanted four more months to study the issue before making very similar recommendations. In addition, this government has stepped forward not only to fund our rural crime strategy but to fund additional RCMP officers. In both instances the members opposite voted against it.

Mr. Cyr: Given, Mr. Speaker, that too often we see criminals enter the justice system, get convicted, walk out without serving a full or adequate sentence and given that punishment and deterrence must be an integral part of our justice system and given that instead of getting tough on criminals, we see the NDP's allies in Ottawa proposing to reduce sentences for serious crimes, can the minister tell us specifically what actions she has taken to keep dangerous criminals off our streets in Alberta and in prisons, where they belong?

Ms Ganley: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think the most important thing, particularly in the post-Jordan era, is that we are working not only to find efficiencies in the criminal justice system in terms of getting police out from behind desks and ensuring that prosecutors are able to focus on the most serious and violent offences but we're also making sure that we fund that system not only in terms of police, that the members opposite voted against, but also in terms of prosecutors, in terms of judges, in terms of all of those things that make the system run better so that we can focus on protecting all Albertans.

Oil Production, Storage, and Transportation

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, to reduce the oil price differential there are several options, including devoting transportation by pipe, by rail, by road or putting the product in storage or restricting the production. The NDP government has failed Albertans on moving their oil to market. What other options is the Energy minister considering now and at what cost to the taxpayers?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, our government focuses every day on pipelines, on the jobs that energy brings, and on diversifying our economy. We've worked very hard on a number of fronts for that, and the differential absolutely has highlighted the need for access to market.

Mr. Panda: Given, Mr. Speaker, that last week some CEOs came out asking for oil production allocations and production cuts and

given that it is easier to adjust minable oil sands truck and shovel production than SAGD in situ production, was this the nature of the Premier's meeting two weeks ago with the CEOs? If so, what criteria will be used to allocate production quotas, and how many jobs will be lost?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we know that fighting for this sector matters. We're doing that every day with market access for not one but three pipelines. We are holding Ottawa's feet to the fire when we talk about getting the pipelines built. We're fighting Bill C-69 right now because as it is, it is not acceptable to Alberta and to our energy sector.

Mr. Panda: Given, Mr. Speaker, that last November the Minister of Energy was given the power under the Petroleum Marketing Act to commandeer tank farms and pipelines for the storage of bitumen, bitumen royalty in kind, BRIK barrels, and given my understanding that we are still receiving royalties in cash, not in kind, is the Minister of Energy considering displacing the oil storage of private companies to store the BRIK barrels due to the delays in completing the bitumen train at the Sturgeon refinery?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we've had a number of meetings with a number of different folks talking about the importance of energy, market access, and the differential. We've had the crude by rail group. We've had a group talking about natural gas and markets for that. We always engage our industry, as we did in this matter, and we will continue to do so because it matters on this side of the House that we stand up for Alberta workers and for our energy industry.

The Speaker: Lacombe-Ponoka.

Bighorn Area Land Use

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In January a copy of a government of Alberta e-mail about the North Saskatchewan regional plan provided a timeline with September as a date to – and I quote – establish the Bighorn wildland provincial park and final Bighorn park management plan. Is it the government's intention to proceed with turning the Bighorn into a park, and if so, when?

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

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is quoting from an internal options document. Clearly, September has passed, and that thing didn't happen, showing that it was an internal options document. In the spirit of Kananaskis Country we're looking at proposing a mix of land designations that will conserve and protect natural landscapes while accommodating a wide range of economic, recreation, and tourism opportunities in the Bighorn.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the NDP resolution E5 from the recent convention called upon the government to create a Bighorn park, purportedly because it supplies water to Edmonton. Given that the North Saskatchewan water quality at Devon upstream of Edmonton is good and only deteriorates until downstream of Edmonton itself, is it the government's plan to create a park based on this misconstrued logic?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Leave it to the members opposite to not care about the drinking water quality for Alberta's capital city. That's actually shocking to hear, but maybe not given the random promises for deregulation and other activities coming from the other side. Listen, we're looking at a number of different land designations. Bighorn has a number of different options and opportunities associated with it for economic development, for tourism, for economic diversification, and there are a number of different ways that we can achieve those goals and protect the environment.

Mr. Orr: The city of Edmonton has great water, and in fact it's only the NDP fearmongering about bad water.

The quadding community was assured that quad trails in the new Castle park would stay open, but actually many have not. Many areas were closed. Given that the government promised stakeholder engagement but then proceeds with its predetermined plan, on what grounds should Albertans trust what you say now about the Bighorn?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the folks opposite undertook a lot of consultation on the North Saskatchewan regional plan. They held 21 town halls to come up with advice on regional planning, which included unanimous support for increasing protection for parts of the Bighorn backcountry. As for the OHV folks, we provided \$200,000 in grants to the Bighorn Heritage ATV Society for OHV trail development, promoting responsible recreation in the area.

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

Domestic and Gender-based Violence Prevention

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Family violence and domestic abuse continues to devastate communities across Alberta, which is why it is so important that during this month of November, that has been designated as Family Violence Prevention Month, we build awareness and demonstrate support for survivors and look to municipalities like Fort Saskatchewan who invest in a family violence prevention officer that helps to support families, including women fleeing domestic abuse. To the Minister of Community and Social Services: what is the province doing to actively address this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Family violence prevention is a key priority for our government, and we believe that no Albertan should live in fear for their safety. We stand with survivors, and have made improvements through our \$33 million investment in family and community safety programs and \$15 million investment in women's shelters. We know that there is more work to be done, and we are committed to taking action.

Mrs. Littlewood: Mr. Speaker, given key work that organizations like United Way undertake to partner with community-driven groups like the Jessica Martel Memorial Foundation and Families First in Fort Saskatchewan to bring awareness and knowledge around domestic abuse, including the Cut It Out initiative, Minister, what work are you doing to address gender-based violence and to support survivors?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member. Our government stands with women who face violence and harassment. We have taken action to address gender-based violence and sexual violence. This includes removing the legal time limit for survivors to bring forward civil claims, making it easier for women to get out of a dangerous situation by allowing them to break their leases without penalty, and making an historic investment to combat sexual violence through sexual assault centres.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that rural and remote communities are often challenged with limited resources and isolation, that present unique challenges in providing family violence supports and service, what is your ministry doing, Minister, to support the critical work of these organizations in rural and urban Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. We know that rural communities have unique needs, and we are committed to working with them. Our \$25 million investment in the family and community support services program, FCSS, supports prevention efforts across this province, including rural communities. We have also invested, as I said, \$8.1 million in 12 sexual assault centres across this province, and with that money they will be able to extend their services to 15 new communities in rural Alberta as well. Besides that, we have also invested \$6 million in emergency supports.

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

Municipal Funding for Cannabis Legalization

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In an October 27 address to the AUMA the Premier said, and I quote: we are committed to putting the safety of people and families first in policing and public education and enforcement. She wanted to confirm that, quote, all these things affect you at the municipal level, and we heard your concerns loud and clear. To the Premier: if you heard the municipalities, why did you dash their hopes two days before marijuana became legal?

Mr. Ceci: Well, I think we're talking about the revenue that is coming in from cannabis. You know, our priority number one is to make sure with our partners, like municipalities, that it stays out of the hands of kids and we protect public health. We have provided \$11.2 million over two years to municipalities to help with the enforcement costs that they have, and for the ones that are under \$5,000, we're providing that enforcement cost, so the province of Alberta, of course, pays for those policing costs. Mr. Speaker, this is a two-year agreement, and we're going to be following . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, the AUMA said that 5 and a half million dollars a year is far below the municipalities' needs, especially considering that their local bylaw services will pick up a large burden of enforcement costs. Given that the Premier told municipalities: we will be working together as partners; we would

not have it any other way, unquote, to the Premier. Your government has put municipalities in a position of begging for funds. Is this truly how you define and how you would treat partners, by leaving them on the hook?

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you to the member for the question. We do treat them as partners, and we do a lot of consultation with them. We do know that cannabis has come in federally, and Alberta is way further along than any other province or territory. I'm glad to work with people like the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance to help municipalities. We've said to them since day one that this isn't a cash cow, but we will look at the data coming in as it goes forward to make sure that we can adapt as it goes along. They know that. I think that when it got instituted, people were a little worried about things. We've seen that that hasn't come to fruition, but we will be there for our municipalities.

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, given that the federal government provided tens of millions of dollars to provincial governments with the direction to share with the municipalities and given that the federal government is providing 75 per cent of the excise tax collected on cannabis, so it's shared with the municipalities, to the Minister of Finance: why are you letting the municipalities down? Why are you letting Ottawa down? It is because you are the only one that I know in the free world or any world that can actually lose money selling cannabis.

Mr. Ceci: You know, there has to be a program set up to sell that cannabis, Mr. Speaker. It wasn't here before. They didn't have that responsibility. We've set up warehouses, we've set up an online system, we've set up contact with retailers and contact with licensed producers. This is a two-year funding agreement with the provinces and territories and the federal government, and we will review after two years.

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

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Economic Recovery and Northeastern Alberta

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When we proudly use the term "Canada's oil production," it's important that we acknowledge the players that make up that production and their contribution to our economy. I'd like to give an update on my region in northeastern Alberta.

The Cold Lake, Bonnyville, and Elk Point oil sands produce 730,000 barrels per day, making up 22 per cent of Canada's oil sands production. That is also approximately 15.5 per cent of Canada's total oil production. My area is a major player in oil and natural gas and deserves to be recognized for its ongoing contribution. I am proud that we are part of what has made Alberta so prosperous for so many years.

However, Mr. Speaker, the recovery that the NDP has been boasting has yet to be seen in northeastern Alberta. As I drove to Bonnyville to visit my granddaughter, I counted eight previously thriving businesses that have closed their doors and are sitting

empty, and that is just along the highway 28 corridor entering into Bonnyville. Each and every one of those business owners is wondering where the recovery is. Those workers who have managed to keep employment through this shutdown continue to see a 20 to 30 per cent drop in the value of the largest investment, their homes. They would also like to take a peek at this recovery that the Premier brags about.

Mr. Speaker, it's simply not enough to put the words on paper and accept them at face value. You have to leave the dome and get out and actually talk to the employers, the workers, the unemployed, and the failing businesses. From Fort McMurray to Lac La Biche to Bonnyville, Albertans from across the northeast part of our province are still waiting to get their piece of their recovery as businesses continue to close and job creators and investors flee to more inviting jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, how can the NDP possibly keep telling the 184,000 unemployed Albertans that we are in recovery?

Homelessness

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, there is a challenge in our province that I feel doesn't get enough attention in this Assembly, and that is homelessness. Now, several of my colleagues have spoken about the homeless count in the big cities and about the various organizations that offer services in those urban areas, but we know that this is not the full story.

In 2015 the St. Albert food bank estimated that there were 98 known homeless people in the city, up from just 35 in 2011. These numbers are likely too low as most of the local homeless population are couch surfing or sleeping in cars. Many are young, and many more would not identify themselves as homeless; therefore, they don't reach out for help or access services.

Numbers don't yet exist for Spruce Grove, but a number of organizations throughout the region, including my office, have been working to come to an estimate based on who accesses the various services available. The hope is to then develop a more co-ordinated plan identifying gaps in services and advocacy priorities to all levels of government.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of reasons someone might end up homeless. For some it's addictions or mental health. For many young people it is a result of an unsafe home. Regardless of the reason, openness, honesty, and understanding are the best tools for getting people back on their feet and can often prevent homelessness before it even begins.

I am proud to be part of a government that is taking real action. We are investing \$191 million in the front-line services that vulnerable Albertans count on. We introduced the Alberta child benefit, which will provide \$175 million in benefits to families right across Alberta this year alone. Meanwhile, Mr. Speaker, a rural member of this House acknowledges that the opposition wants to make massive cuts, cuts that are going to hurt.

We will continue to take action to combat homelessness and poverty and to fight for Albertans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

Heart and Mind of Alberta

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, on Saturday we said goodbye to Mary Elaine Vandeveld, my cousin's daughter. She died at the far too young age of 42. Mary was born with spina bifida. Mary didn't take her first step until five; however, once she did get going, with braces on her legs and arm crutches clasped in her hands, she achieved speeds that belied her condition. Mary had a smile that could brighten any room. She exuded a zest for life that was contagious

for all who were privileged to be in her presence. She will be missed.

But Mary's life sheds light on another success story, the story of Alberta's wraparound support services that helped Mary live a fulfilling life. Mary was able to receive some of the best health care around. She was able to receive some of the most compassionate care from support workers. This was what I call the heart of our society.

The heart of Alberta is made up of the dedicated teacher that stays up late into the night trying to figure out a way to reach a student whose grades are dropping for no apparent reason. The heart of Alberta is made up of firefighters who willingly run into burning buildings while others are running out. The heart of Alberta is made up of the tens of thousands of other support workers that work night and day to champion the compassionate side of our society. Mr. Speaker, that is the heart of our society.

But with any living organism, a mind is also needed. I see the mind as a strong, robust economy. Without that strong, robust economy our support workers would not have the funds needed to do this important work. Our province is a great province to live in when both the heart and the mind are working in tandem. We have seen in Ontario how when the economy is neglected, the heart is not able to do its all-important work.

Mr. Speaker, in the spring of 2019 Albertans will have the opportunity to choose between a plan that balances our society's heart and mind or a plan that continues to neglect and hinder our society's economy. I believe Albertans will make a healthy choice.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Bill 23

An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Merci, M. le Président. I'm honoured to rise and give first reading of Bill 23, An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta.

The first bill that this government ever tendered was An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta. Then in 2016 my colleague the hon. minister responsible for democratic renewal introduced the Fair Elections Financing Act. Both of these acts legislated getting big money out of elections and ensured that Albertans are the ones who decide who gets elected, not those with deep pockets.

Now it's time that we come full circle on election reform by bringing some of these changes to the municipal level. After consulting over the summer with Albertans, we have taken their feedback and are proposing these updates to get big money out of local elections, make it easier for Albertans to vote, and create a more transparent election process. If passed, this bill will ensure that all Albertans have a fair, democratic, and modern electoral system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had referenced an article in my question period questions today, Canada's Most Dangerous Places 2019. Alberta has made that list 7 of 10 times. Here at the front: Wetaskiwin, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Cold Lake, Whitecourt,

Spruce Grove, and Sylvan Lake. We monopolize the top of this list. It's shameful. I table this.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member For Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table two documents that I was remiss in tabling last Thursday. The first one is a CTV News Calgary article, Study Finds Alberta's Employment Growth Numbers Buoyed by Government Hirings.

Secondly, I rise to table five copies of a Fraser research bulletin from the Fraser Institute, The Illusion of Alberta's Jobs Recovery: Government vs. Private Sector Employment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, last week I referenced a researcher, engineer, environmental scientist in Calgary at the University of Calgary, Dr. David Layzell, who's proposed an innovative approach to the challenges of melding climate change, energy, and environment. He set up an institution there called the transition pathways research institute. He is suggesting that we broaden the discussion to include collaboration in understanding a range of systems that all have to change if we're going to meet the first requirements of a new and low-carbon future. I have five copies here of his proposal, and I hope people will take a chance to breeze through it. It's not a heavy document, but it really gives us a new perspective on how we might work together in moving towards a lower carbon future.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Acting Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the Hon. Minister Hoffman, Deputy Premier, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act Alberta College and Association of Opticians 2017 annual report, Alberta College of Combined Laboratory and X-Ray Technologists 2017 annual report, Alberta College of Occupational Therapists 2017-18 annual report, Alberta College of Optometrists 2017 annual report to government, Alberta College of Social Workers annual report 2017, College of Alberta Dental Assistants annual report 2017-18, College of Alberta Psychologists annual report 2017-18, College of Hearing Aid Practitioners of Alberta annual report 2017-18, College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta 2017 annual report, College of Registered Dental Hygienists of Alberta 2017 annual report, College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta annual report 2018; pursuant to the Health Disciplines Act Health Disciplines Board 2017 annual report.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

[The Acting Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

Coal Phase-out Costs

Q1. Mr. Panda:
How much money has been spent by the government from April 1, 2015, to March 31, 2018, on the phase-out of coal-

generated electrical power in Alberta, and what costs are forecast for the next 10 years?

Electricity Capacity Market Costs

Q2. Mr. Panda:
How much money has been spent by the government from May 1, 2015, to April 30, 2018, setting up the electricity capacity market, and what costs are forecast for the next 10 years?

Electricity Litigation Costs

Q3. Mr. Panda:
How much money has been spent from May 1, 2015, to May 4, 2018, reaching settlements arising from the litigation concerning the power purchase agreements with the electricity generating companies and the Balancing Pool?

Motions for Returns

[The Acting Clerk read the following motions for returns, which had been accepted]

Rockefeller Brothers Fund Correspondence

M1. Mr. Panda:
A return showing copies of all correspondence between the government and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund from May 1, 2015, to April 30, 2018.

Tides Canada Correspondence

M2. Mr. Panda:
A return showing copies of all correspondence between the government and Tides Canada from May 1, 2015, to April 30, 2018.

Tides Foundation Correspondence

M3. Mr. Panda:
A return showing copies of all correspondence between the government and the Tides Foundation, also known as Tides, from May 1, 2015, to April 30, 2018.

350 Correspondence

M4. Mr. Panda:
A return showing copies of all correspondence between the government and the organization known as 350 or 350.org from May 1, 2015, to April 30, 2018.

CorpEthics Correspondence

M5. Mr. Panda:
A return showing copies of all correspondence between the government and CorpEthics, originally known as Corporate Ethics International, from May 1, 2015, to April 30, 2018.

William and Flora Hewlett Foundation Correspondence

M6. Mr. Panda:
A return showing copies of all correspondence between the government and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation,

also known as the Hewlett Foundation, from May 1, 2015, to April 30, 2018.

New Venture Fund Correspondence

- M7. Mr. Panda:
A return showing copies of all correspondence between the government and the New Venture Fund, also known as New Venture, from May 1, 2015, to April 30, 2018.

Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative Correspondence

- M8. Mr. Panda:
A return showing copies of all correspondence between the government and the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, also known as Y2Y, from May 1, 2015, to April 30, 2018.

3:00 Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society Correspondence

- M9. Mr. Panda:
A return showing copies of all correspondence between the government and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, also known as CPAWS, from May 1, 2015, to April 30, 2018.

Love Your Headwaters Correspondence

- M10. Mr. Panda:
A return showing copies of all correspondence between the government and the organization known as Love Your Headwaters from May 1, 2015, to April 30, 2018.

Edmonton Community Foundation Correspondence

- M11. Mr. Panda:
A return showing copies of all correspondence between the government and the Edmonton Community Foundation from May 1, 2015, to April 30, 2018.

Calgary Foundation Correspondence

- M12. Mr. Panda:
A return showing copies of all correspondence between the government and the Calgary Foundation from May 1, 2015, to April 30, 2018.

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders

Motion to Concur in the Report from the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Bill 201

Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the House today to speak on Bill 201, the Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018. Bill 201 is my private member's bill which I introduced last spring sitting. This bill would have amended the Employment Standards Code to protect part-time, casual, or volunteer firefighters from loss of employment because they are or have become a part-time firefighter.

Currently employers can and in some cases have terminated employment for missed time due to fulfilling duties as a part-time firefighter. The reasons for me introducing this bill are simple. As I've stated to this House before, I'd been an MLA for less than six months when I received a phone call from a young man from southern Alberta. He had been a volunteer firefighter for one of the municipal districts or counties. I say "had been" because his regular, full-time employer had recently given him an ultimatum. His ultimatum was: quit your job or quit firefighting, because as long as you work here, you aren't a firefighter.

At the time I wanted to rectify the situation and decided to introduce a private member's bill to try to prevent this from being allowed to happen again. I consulted with fire officials in my constituency, who are supportive of this bill, and I imagine fire chiefs across the province would also be supportive of the goals of this bill. Emergency services in Alberta are stretched pretty thin, especially in rural areas. Code reds are a common occurrence. Firefighters, especially firefighters in rural areas, do more than just respond to fires. They also respond to everything from medical emergencies to chemical spills and traffic collisions. Some municipalities in rural communities cannot afford to fill the firefighter hall roster with full-time employees. They rely on part-time and volunteer firefighters in their communities to meet these sometimes life-threatening situations.

Mr. Speaker, as legislators we need to respond to the issues that are affecting Albertans and create solutions that remedy or could potentially remedy the problem. I heard a concern from an Albertan, and I responded by introducing this private member's bill. That was the goal of Bill 201, to help volunteer firefighters have job security. It was also the intent that this bill would have helped rural detachments recruit and retain firefighters.

Bill 201 was referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future, where members were able to study the bill in depth. This is a plan that all government legislation should follow instead of ramming legislation through, as this government has done previously. They need to take the proper time to study their legislation with all – all – stakeholders. Maybe then they would have been able to avoid some of the legislative mistakes they've made previously.

However, Bill 201 was sent to committee, and we were able to look at all of the impacts of this bill at length. Part of the committee's job was to consult with stakeholders and get input from those who would be most affected by this legislation, so input, consultation. Now, a few stakeholders came forward with concerns about some of the possible ramifications of this bill. That's great. That's consultation. That's what the committee's job was to do.

One major concern was that Bill 201 would handcuff businesses and would create an adversarial relationship between fire departments and local businesses. Rural fire chiefs and their departments have been working hard for a number of years to work with local businesses to improve recruiting. It's very beneficial to business if they have a fully functioning fire department. It makes sense. It makes sense that they would work together to solve community issues, issues in mostly rural Alberta. It's a valid concern, and I know that fire chiefs have the best interests of their departments and their staff and the community at heart and in mind.

Another consequence that was brought up was that businesses wouldn't hire firefighters if they felt they would be handcuffed by this legislation. This, of course, would be the opposite of the intent of this legislation. The opposite. It was never intended with Bill 201 to handcuff and make it difficult for volunteer firefighters from the business community to become volunteers. However, it's important that we understand all the consequences of this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding these concerns, I believe it is important to state that the work that firefighters do in protecting our communities, the hard work done, is unparalleled. These men and women put their lives on the line to ensure that their communities, their families, their neighbours are safe. Even more significant is the work of volunteer firefighters, who are hard-working, contributing members of their local community. Oftentimes they are small-business owners, tradespeople, farmers. And, more importantly, they're our neighbours. They have decided that they want to serve their community and have made many sacrifices to do so. I have a great deal of respect for these men and women, and we have a duty to represent their interests and find ways for governments to serve them better.

The Foothills county fire department, which is located in my constituency, represents the spirit of volunteer firefighting through their vision statement. It states: "Where there is no line between our firefighters, our community and our family." I will repeat: "Where there is no line between our firefighters, our community and our family." The reality is that, especially in rural areas, communities are tightly knit. You have your neighbour's back, and your neighbour has yours. That's part of what makes Alberta great. Those that are volunteering to be firefighters know the dangers that they could face, but they have the best interests of their communities in mind.

Mr. Speaker, when I think of the dedication of the firefighters in my riding, I can always think of the 2013 floods that hit High River. My good friend Fire Chief Len Zebedee was co-ordinating the response in High River. Chief Zebedee, who has since retired, and his team were working 24-hour shifts to protect the people and their property. Many of those firefighters had flooded homes of their own, but they still answered the call to serve their town.

A more recent example I can bring up happened in Okotoks. In my riding over the Thanksgiving long weekend a call was received by the fire department regarding a fire in a residential neighbourhood. By the time the firefighters arrived, the flames had engulfed the roof of the house. Crews worked quickly to ensure residents of the neighbourhood were safe and battled the blaze to protect the property. Luckily, nobody was at home at the time of the fire, and the Okotoks fire department was able to battle the blaze and keep the damage to only one home.

These are only a few of the countless examples of firefighters demonstrating bravery and putting their safety on the line for the service of others. Mr. Speaker, again, our job as legislators should be to support these first responders, listen to their concerns, and respond with legislation appropriately. I don't think anyone in this House doubts that we need support from those on the front lines, so we should continue to consult and listen to first responders and have their feedback help us determine the best course of action.

3:10

That is what we did with Bill 201. Stakeholders came forward with their concerns with this bill, and we were able to listen. That is why consultation is so important. I believe the government needs to continue this consultation and continue to listen to firefighters as there may be a legislative response that may be needed in the future. We'll see if that happens.

We've seen previously with this government that they've lacked proper consultation with stakeholders. We've seen that with them raising the minimum wage without listening to small-business owners; introducing Bill 6 without listening to farmers, my friends, my neighbours; and imposing a carbon tax on Albertans without campaigning on it. Hopefully, moving forward, the government will be able to commit to consulting with first responders, and as the Official Opposition we will continue to hold them to account.

Mr. Speaker, I believe Bill 201 had good intent as I was attempting to address an issue that I had heard from some of the volunteer firefighters.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 201 and the motion. I would first like to thank the Member for Highwood for his passion, compassion, and diligence in doing what he felt was right for some of the rural communities across Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, volunteer firefighters are truly the first line of defence in many communities too small to have a fully paid fire department and thereby very, very important to not only the safety but the sanctity and the protection of not only lives but the property in our communities. These are enthusiastic, courageous men and women who can be called on virtually at any time, day or night, to respond to fires, medical emergencies, chemical spills, accidents, and more. We truly rely on them in this province because of the breadth of the lack of ability for many jurisdictions to be able to afford those full-time firefighters in the communities.

Naturally, it's difficult for many to be working regular jobs while being on call as a volunteer firefighter, and the terms of employment can become contentious. Obviously, the intent here was to take that barrier, to take the conflict of that out of this very, very vital and important role across Alberta. This bill was clearly intended to protect volunteer firefighters from reprisal or dismissal based on their volunteer duties.

Of course, we've had an opportunity – and I think that opportunity was a positive one – for us to go to committee and to consult with Albertans and stakeholders broadly to ensure that we had all of the information. I think it's been mentioned before here that the opportunity for us to consult is something that has not always been done well by this government. This bill, as a private member's bill, created that opportunity for us to engage stakeholders in a more robust manner. After consulting with stakeholders, we have come to realize that there are more implications and that more work is needed to be done to adequately both protect the volunteer firefighters without – and here's the balance, I think, that we should always take into account in all pieces of legislation – unduly burdening their employers and ensuring that there's fairness and a balance there.

It is important in all things learned – and it is, again, something that we've learned – that we need to move boldly forward sometimes, but we also need to be clearly aware of the unintended consequences of legislation, Mr. Speaker. We have seen that happen all too often in the last three and a half years, where the unintended consequences of legislation do come back sometimes weeks, months, or even years later, and we realize that there were some flaws to the approach in the first place or the execution of some of the best intentions in many cases.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Bill 201 proposes to amend the Employment Standards Code – that's a good thing – to protect the part-time, casual volunteer firefighters from loss of employment, quite frankly, for stepping forward within their communities to become a part-time firefighter, a volunteer firefighter. Currently employers can and in some cases have actually terminated employment for missed time due to fulfilling the duties of a part-time firefighter. Madam Speaker, again, balance between community protection and the best intentions of those individuals and the interests of local small businesses is something we always have to take into account, "balance" again being the key and operative word here.

The pros of this bill were very clear. We wanted to ensure that there was an opportunity for local communities to take care of themselves in a way that they could sustain. Again, we've heard that the financial burden on many of these communities would be overwhelming, to the point that they would not be able to meet those budgetary requirements to have paid firefighters do these duties. So what do they do? Do we let property be damaged? Do we take a risk with people's lives? No. We have to do what we have to do in those communities to make ends meet but also to balance those different interests.

It was there to close a bit of a loophole preventing volunteer or casual firefighters, part-time firefighters, who spend valuable time protecting their communities and responding to emergencies, from losing their jobs. This is a very, very difficult time. Madam Speaker, we hear many, many times and I hear daily from people that are very worried about their jobs. Because of that, they're working longer hours, they're putting in extra time, they're very much dedicated. Some of them are even worried about going on holidays because there might be a pink slip waiting for them on the Monday. So here we have a situation again where we have hard-working, dedicated, and very community-spirited Albertans concerned that through their volunteerism they may be putting their livelihoods in jeopardy.

We also have to make sure, as was mentioned by the hon. Member for Highwood, that they're not refused employment because of the duties that they may have from prior commitments to do those part-time and volunteer firefighter duties. If somebody is changing a job, is that an impediment to them being hired by a new employer or possibly taking a higher paying job opportunity or one with more responsibility? You know, it truly would take the worry out of losing employment because of trying to achieve this balance in considering when or when not to become a part-time firefighter, which, again, is very essential to the communities where they live and where they serve and where they are focused on not only being a part of the community but on protecting that community, Madam Speaker.

It would also help the fire departments fill their rosters by having a larger pool of people that they could draw from in terms of doing that, again, the focus being saving lives and protecting property. That's something that I think we have to thank all the volunteer firefighters across this province for doing.

Again, we have to think about the small businesses, struggling small businesses – they are going out of business every day – some of them small mom-and-pop shops, but they have a few employees; some of them more mid-sized employers who have to manage their workforce extremely cautiously and extremely carefully in a very, very difficult economy. Some of them are teetering on the edges of business failure, and sometimes those tipping points can be very fragile. It's within the economic climate that we're living here, which, sadly, has been the result of not only the economy but of some disastrous government policies, that we overlay this issue.

Some of the concerns around this issue are: how, in fact, do we create that balance to not overburden struggling employers, that are struggling to make ends meet, that are struggling to stay in business in many cases, struggling to pay the bills? In many cases what we hear from small business is: not even taking a salary themselves and working extra-long hours. Their employees become extremely important in that formula.

Madam Speaker, you know, I reflect on this. I ran into a former colleague this morning who is a military reservist. I guess one of the things we maybe can look at – and I see we've compared it to that in the past – is the whole issue of reservists and how they're treated in not only Canadian society but in many different countries around the world. I worked with many that were with the British

Armed Forces when I was with Cathay Pacific. It was considered not only an obligation for the company but an honour for these individuals to do the reserve services.

I see that the reservists' leave in Alberta is tied to specific duties. To be eligible for reservist leave, they must be employed for 26 consecutive weeks with the same employer as opposed to only the 90 days proposed in Bill 201. So there is some balance that maybe we need to have a look at there as we move forward.

The reservist can take the reserve service leave if they are deployed to a Canadian Forces operation outside of Canada – I think you could argue that the service of a volunteer firefighter is in service to the community in a way that's different but comparable to the type of service that we expect our military personnel to do – and inside Canada if assisting with an emergency or aftermath of an emergency, which, I think, is again key here. In many cases they are responding – they're not going because somebody's cat is up in a tree; they're going because there's an accident, there's a spill, there's a fire in a neighbour's home. There is something which demands immediate attention from that community, and that is done and fulfilled by those volunteers.

3:20

But they also have 28 days of annual training per year, which military reservists can do. They're allowed to train – and that's something we haven't talked that much about here – but the training requirements for that volunteer service as well, I'm sure, are in many cases done on their own time, which is again a personal commitment, a personal donation of their time and energy to the communities that they live in and that they serve.

So, Madam Speaker, there are many different implications here. We have to take a look at these balances. We have to achieve, I think, a reasonable balance based on the best information we can get. Of course, what we heard in committee was that there were other implications and there were some concerns, both from the volunteer firefighting departments, from the employers that were consulted as well.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to speak to Bill 201, the Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018. This bill has gone to the committee that I had the privilege of sitting on, and it's been a privilege to meet with members and chiefs and leadership that deal in this area of work in the province. I know that the intentions of the bill were definitely noble, but we learned from those that are right in the middle of it that it could lead to serious and negative consequences. It's important that we were able to do that consultation with fire chiefs and ask everyone that has an interest in the subject to share. But really what we heard was that there would be serious unintended consequences that the bill would cause.

I want to thank all of the members that sat on the all-party committee to discuss this and everybody that put forward submissions and that came to support, to give their expertise on this bill and talk about their recommendations. We were able to hear from individuals, including Peter Krich, president of the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association; Al Kemmere, president of Rural Municipalities of Alberta; Drayton Bussiere, chief, Lacombe county fire service; and Henry Thomson, deputy chief, training and operations, for the St. Paul fire department.

What we heard often was that the hope, through the bill, was that there would be gained employment flexibility and that it would

allow more members to respond, but what we really heard from these members that came and presented to the committee, some of whom actually have owned small businesses – that was one of the questions, whether any of them had any business experience, which they, in fact, did. There was concern that to have forced compliance would damage the relationship between volunteer firefighter recruitment and the businesses that they are of course relying on to provide the employees to give that service. The actual owners of these businesses are sometimes generous enough to give of their time to help communities respond to vehicle collisions and assist with structural fires.

We did hear that there were some ideas on having better approaches like having tax exemptions or credits or something like formal recognition. That might be a better approach, something that helps build the relationships together.

Of course, we did hear that this could have serious impacts on small business, especially on farms, where sometimes you have intense periods of activity like calving or harvest. So to force the farm owner to release all of their employees at the same time could have some serious and damaging effects on the farm.

Of course, it's important to establish these positive working relationships, and what we heard, again, from people like the deputy chief of the St. Paul fire department was that what we need is a collaborative approach between the fire service, the municipality, the employers, and the employees. Having things like employer recognition to thank the businesses that actually engage and volunteer their very scarce time to help with this important service would be something that they would support. But there were some issues. There were issues around the terminology, and there was concern that it might not change anything but would actually hurt the potential of having good response times because, of course, everything is built on relationships. That was one of the quotes that was given to us.

We heard from them that there is a program in place, something called Answer the Call, which now apparently enjoys national recognition. What it does is that it helps educate employees and employers and families on what the requirements are of someone that does this very selfless endeavour and sacrifices themselves and their time on behalf of all of our communities. It's that sort of collegial approach that is really necessary. We were provided with some of the material that is handed out to talk about it, and it's really about showing that a firefighter could look like you – you know, on one half of the person they're wearing their firefighter gear, and on the other half it's them just with their normal work attire – doing that sort of building and education that a person that actually goes and faces these dangers head-on can be someone that looks like any one of us.

We did hear that it would be burdensome on employers. The need for protections for workers, of course, is very important.

I just want to share some of the quotes that came from them during this process. Peter Krich, who is the president of the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association, said:

Your family, then your job, and then the fire service. That's how you build a fire service in your community . . . in order to build a fire service . . . you have to have good working relationships with people in your community, that being, number one, your employers.

He also said that employers in our community are the backbone of our fire service and that if we put legislation on employers, it will harm and damage the potential for recruiting and retaining those volunteers.

Mr. Bussiere was quoted as saying:

I don't believe that employers are not allowing their employees to leave for fire calls for any other reason than that it could be

detrimental to the operation of their business . . . at the end of the day the volunteer firefighters and their employers need to make money to support their families, and I don't think that we can ask them to put that at risk.

I just want to take a moment to thank all of the volunteer fire services across Alberta, across rural Alberta, that we rely on. They are called on not only for structural fires and grass fires, but they often are the ones that come first on to scene when there are vehicle collisions on the highway. So anything that we can do to help support them in that work and make sure that they're getting home safely to their families is incredibly important. I want to thank all of the families that are still at home and waiting for their loved ones to come home after those calls, because it is quite the sacrifice. These people are amazing, and they are embedded in every part of our communities. Anything that we can do to support them better, I think, we should absolutely make sure that we are endeavouring to do.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak with regard to the motion to concur with the final report on Bill 201, Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018. I had the pleasure of participating in the work that the committee took over the last few months to get a better understanding of how the bill might impact our volunteer firefighting services and if it was going to help or hinder the ability of those operations to attract and retain their firefighters and to get a better understanding of how they perceived the consequences of the bill coming forward, if it would be good or otherwise.

3:30

It was a very good process that we went through, I believe, as a committee, the Economic Future Committee. I believe many of us at the beginning of the process believed that the bill came with very good intentions and that this was possibly a good thing moving forward, but as we collected written submissions, as we heard oral submissions, more questions started to arise within our deliberations. It became evident to the committee that the work was not quite finished, that we needed to continue to consult and to work with the firefighter service, the members there, that we can do better and can improve upon what is actually in place at this time.

Throughout the probably four- or five-month process – it was also good for myself – we were able to consult with local volunteer firefighters and the people in our communities that are on the front lines of the service to the community and to ask those questions. Some of the written submissions came forward from fire chiefs within my constituency and also family members within my constituency. It was good to touch base with them and get a better understanding of their perspective.

In our written submissions we received some general support for Bill 201, but then we also received some general opposition to Bill 201. I think the support was recognizing that the bill could provide firefighters employment flexibility and job security. Firefighters need to have the flexibility to answer calls at any time of the day or night, and this bill would ensure that employers would allow firefighters the time and flexibility to perform their firefighting tasks without fear of reprisal.

Another theme that came forward in the general support for Bill 201 in our submissions was that the bill would allow more firefighters to respond during the day, during typical working hours, and many volunteer firefighter submissions responded that they

were unable to respond to a fire during normal weekday business hours due to employment commitments.

Then also in the written submissions that the committee received, we saw a couple of themes in there that were in general opposition to Bill 201, that the bill had the potential to upset employers and create an adversarial working environment because the employers would feel forced to comply with imposed legislation. Another theme was that the bill may be detrimental to the recruitment of new volunteer firefighters. It had been suggested that employers would be hesitant to hire volunteer firefighters in fear of human resource issues. If employers are reluctant to hire, the recruitment of more firefighters would become more difficult. Therefore, that would be a negative consequence of Bill 201.

One thing that we did learn also and that I think really, really became evident to me during our oral submissions from members of the Fire Chiefs Association and the Rural Municipalities association – during those oral submissions we got a really good understanding of the work that the Fire Fighters Association does in their recruitment efforts and also in their communications to their community and families, the education efforts that they've done to try and help people within our communities to understand how to have a healthy firefighting organization. It's largely built around building relationships, building relationships with the employers in the communities and building relationships with families in the communities. Part of the training of the volunteer firefighters looked at recognizing that the volunteer firefighters' priority 1 had to be their family, and priority 2 then would be their job, their career. They are trained and educated to understand that their work as a volunteer firefighter must be priority 3. Their family and their jobs would come as priorities 1 and 2 and their volunteerism as priority 3.

What came out of the deliberations is evidenced in the recommendation. The committee decided, I believe unanimously, that Bill 201 not proceed at this time. Largely it was based on the concern that the firefighters felt that it could be detrimental to the relationships that had been built over the years with employers and employees and the good working relationships that are there currently and that they continue to work on going forward. The associations fully understand the challenges that our employers face when men and women need to leave their place of work in order to go on a call. There's always a good dialogue, a healthy dialogue, amongst those stakeholders to ensure that they can continue to be healthy organizations going forward.

We did as a committee also further recommend that the government of Alberta continue to consult with stakeholders to investigate the feasibility of developing comprehensive fire protection and prevention legislation in Alberta that is similar to other Canadian jurisdictions. We had discussions on whether or not that was within the scope of the mandate of the committee and whether or not this was part of what we would have in our final report, but the committee came to the agreement that it would be necessary to recommend that or that it would be good practice to recommend part of the findings that we heard from stakeholders. The Fire Chiefs Association spoke with regard to the fact that they really don't have a template legislation in this province to work from. They work with standards that are developed within the industry. They had asked for possibly more work to be done towards overarching legislation towards the firefighters. We recognize that the government of Alberta is working on this and continues to work on having those discussions with the firefighters.

We felt that it would be prudent to include the recommendation that the government of Alberta continue to consult with the stakeholders and continue to try and find a place where we can land that will be acceptable to all stakeholders within our communities

– the volunteer firefighters and the employers and the families – and come up with some legislation to help guide that going forward.

So with that, I am very much thankful for all the work that the committee did but also very much thankful for all the submissions that came forward, both written and oral, from people that decided to take the time to let us know their feelings.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to the motion to concur with Alberta's Economic Future Committee's recommendation that we not proceed with Bill 201, the firefighters amendment act. The work of firefighters, of course, is extremely important. We can never underestimate that. They play a valuable role in the protection of property, but far more than that, in the protection of life. As has been said, they are first responders to many kinds of situations in our communities around the province, so their work is extremely important. That's why I think it's essential that we get this legislation right, that we don't make mistakes, and that we take the time to really think this through clearly and get it right, as it should be.

3:40

Volunteers, of course, are the very backbone of Alberta's fire suppression. I did some checking. Just in one county, Lacombe county, for instance, there are six different fire departments and 160 volunteers. If you were to multiply that out over every county in the province, it's a lot of volunteers. Without volunteers we simply would not have functioning fire departments. We simply would not have the protections that they provide.

The Lacombe county fire chief, Chief Bussiere, is in this particular case, actually, a relevant person to reference. I'm very thankful that he had the opportunity to speak to the committee, address them. I think that one of the reasons that he was either called or appointed by the fire chiefs is because he holds a very unique role. He's not just the chief of the Lacombe fire department. He is also the Fire Chiefs Association chair of the recruitment and retention committee, so he has a very, very unique perspective on all of this. I've had the opportunity to speak with him numerous times, and I actually even called him this morning just to confirm that nothing had changed from his point of view, that his testimony to the committee was as he still sees it, and that is the case.

The concern, really, for the Alberta fire departments is over recruitment and retention. I think that's probably the biggest challenge that was brought to light by this bill. The issue of the recruitment and the retention of firefighters is a huge challenge for the fire chiefs; obviously, they have a committee dedicated specifically to that. I think that it's important to understand that the recruitment of firemen from the fire chiefs' point of view is really about encouraging an open conversation, as has been said here numerous times, to build relationships in the community with the municipality and the employers and the volunteer firefighters themselves. The recruitment and retention committee actually strongly encourages any new volunteer firefighters to first go and have a conversation with their employer to talk about it, what the implications for the employer and for their family might be.

There's a really important ongoing relationship-building piece that needs to happen here for the community to function well. You can't legislate a relationship very well; it has to be built through personal engagement. The concern was that this bill as it stood was probably too restrictive, probably even just too legalistic, too restrictive for the opportunity for relationships and co-operation, to have a conversation about creative solutions. When you add that

together with other labour code changes that have occurred in recent times that restrict the ability of employees to trade hours and time, it just becomes too restrictive.

It is a very real problem, particularly across the smaller communities of Alberta, and I'd like to just share an example from the Lacombe county fire department. The little village of Mirror needs a minimum of eight to nine members for their fire department to operate safely. They've had a fire department for many years, but unfortunately they've had a struggle maintaining the number of volunteers that they need. Without eight to nine members they're not able to cover absenteeism, they're not able to maintain equipment properly, and they're not able to back each other up safely on a call. It's mostly the safety issue that comes to the surface.

Over the last couple of years their volunteer force has declined to three and four individuals. As a result of that, they have recently been forced to actually disband that fire department. They can't maintain the equipment, as I've said, and they cannot operate safely to back each other up. So there now is no fire service in that community except for the county bringing in fire services from two other communities nearby if and when there is a call. The reality is that in that particular community, yes, lives may be at risk, property certainly is at risk, and insurance costs will escalate. Schools, the retail outlets, the library, the hall: all of these community infrastructure pieces are at risk because they have been unable to get the numbers of volunteers that they need to maintain a functioning fire department.

Fire volunteer recruitment and retention is an extremely difficult challenge across Alberta. We hear that from multiple fire departments, and when that doesn't happen, quite frankly, the community suffers. That's the challenge that we are facing. We need to make sure that we're actually able to support both the fire chiefs and the volunteers that work with them.

With regard to this bill while I think that the purpose and the intent of it was good – it intended to close a loophole with regard to protecting volunteers in terms of being able to have a job, being able to continue to work so that casual and part-time firefighters, who spend valuable time protecting their communities, would not be refused employment or be at risk of losing their job if they're called out too often, too many times – the reality was, though, from the point of view of the fire chiefs, that in fact the bill might make the situation worse rather than better, so it's important that we take into account their consideration.

The reality is that many fire halls across rural Alberta are finding it harder and harder to find people in their communities who are willing to sign up. Quite frankly, many of these communities cannot afford to hire full-time firefighters, and their inability to fill their rosters really is due to, in recent times particularly, our economic challenges and the difficulties that volunteers are having to find regular work, to maintain regular work. They're afraid to create any issues over this, and as a result they back off from volunteering.

There's an article in CBC, May '17, about the difficulty of recruiting and retaining fire volunteers during the recession, and the article reported, as I've kind of already hinted at, that 80 per cent, actually, is the number of Alberta's firefighters that are volunteers. Eighty per cent of our firefighters are volunteers. Without that 80 per cent we would not have fire departments across this province. It went on to explain how the economic downturn really has hit recruitment hard. Rocky View county, for instance, faced a 16 per cent reduction in their fire brigade each and every year. I mean, it's a massive attrition rate that voluntary firefighter organizations are facing. Their fire chief is quoted as saying, "We'll do our training and then we'll print out our roster sheet and we'll already start losing people." These communities just can't afford full-time

firefighters, and their inability to fill rosters in many cases makes it impossible for them to function, as I've already said about the village of Clive.

While many employers are often happy to accommodate volunteer and part-time firefighters, who often need to leave their primary employer when they get a call, many prospective volunteers themselves are actually concerned about causing disruptions. Ultimately, if the fire hall can't find the people they need, they can't fight the fires, they can't respond to the emergencies, and the result is longer and longer dangerous wait times for firefighter response times. That's part of the challenge, I think, that Chief Bussiere and others have pointed out.

The Deputy Speaker: Other members wishing to speak to the motion? Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

3:50

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's with privilege that I stand today and speak to the motion to concur for Bill 201, the Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018.

I want to begin by sincerely thanking all the firefighters in this province, both volunteer and full-time, for all that they do in keeping this province safe. They risk their lives in their duties as first responders, being first on the scene in events of emergencies and in combating fires to keep our communities safe.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the changing roles especially in our small communities that happen to be along major highways and routes through our province. You know, specifically there have been issues over the years with the Wandering River volunteer fire department being in close proximity to highway 63 and some of the terrible accidents that they've had to deal with on that highway as well as up in my area, the highway 28 corridor, all the way from Smoky Lake through Vilna, Spedden, Ashmont, and the Bonnyville regional fire department that includes Bonnyville and Fort Kent. These folks, they do as much training as they possibly can, but on those major highways, when we do get a wreck, a lot of times there are fatalities. I just commend those folks for being able to go out there day after day, not knowing whether it's a friend or a relative that might be involved in a collision, not knowing until they get there what exactly they're up against.

I do reach out to all of them and thank them for their service. It really is awe inspiring to witness the firefighters putting down their own lives and putting their lives on the back burner and sacrificing so much for us and our families.

Just north of my constituency of Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills the fires have ravaged forests and towns, most memorably the Fort McMurray fire in 2016 and, of course, the Slave Lake fires. This terrible disaster decimated the community and burnt through many, many homes and businesses, but what we saw in those trying times was that Albertans banded together, neighbour helping neighbour, and our brave firefighters worked tirelessly and successfully to defeat the fire and avert any loss of life.

You know, from my own community of St. Paul and some of the volunteer firefighters in that area that went up there, they left their families and their homes for days and their jobs as well. A lot of these guys are also small-business owners or self-employed as well, but for those that are working for an employer, I can see where that would put an excessive stress on that employer.

One other thing, you know, when we talk about the Fort McMurray fire and these volunteer firefighters, is that we have no idea what the long-term effects of that exposure are, the multiple days of exposure. Those guys volunteered, ran up there. Like the saying goes, there are people running away from the fire, and

they're running toward it. We're going to have to be very cognizant about monitoring those volunteers that went up there and seeing to the long-term effects of that fire.

I'd like to thank the firefighters involved in battling that fire as well as every fire of all calibre that have threatened our beautiful province.

However, the last thing we want is to affect the lives of those volunteer firefighters by making them less employable or damaging their relationship with local businesses. Now, personally, in my involvement in the oil and gas industry up in the Bonnyville-Cold Lake area and St. Paul, we had many guys that worked with us that were members of the volunteer fire departments. Sometimes they would have to leave at the drop of a hat when their pager went off, and I don't recall any instances where anybody was reprimanded or chastised for their duties in that regard, so I would be curious for my own personal benefit to just see what the stats are on how many volunteer firefighters have actually faced reprimand in the performance of their duties.

We have listened to stakeholders express their concerns over how this piece of legislation has the potential to force employers into a corner with firefighter leave. We want to make sure that the businesses do not feel that their hands are tied when they hire a volunteer firefighter and, along the same lines, that volunteer firefighters are not painted as less employable due to the sacrifices they make in keeping our towns safe. It's very, very important. You know, as an employer, when that employee gets that call to go to a fire or to an accident on a highway, you don't know, especially in a small town, whether it could be your neighbour's place or a family member that's involved there.

The intent of this Bill 201 was to ensure the job security of volunteer firefighters when they leave their work and are called to an emergency situation. Oftentimes casual, part-time, and volunteer firefighters risk loss of employment when they must leave work. Again, I can't speak from personal experience because I have not heard that out of any of the volunteer firefighters that I've dealt with. Next time I stop into the fire halls – sometimes they have a social event – I will check with them and see if any of them have had any personal experience in that.

What we have heard from stakeholders, though, is that there is an existing relationship between fire departments and local businesses, and the very last thing that we want to do as legislators is undermine that relationship by handcuffing them with any sort of legislation. We're very happy that stakeholders have brought forth to us these concerns, and it is important for us to take this very seriously and act in accordance with them.

My understanding, not being involved in that committee, was that this bill did actually make it to the committee stage, which we've been trying to push over the last three and a half years on many very, very important pieces of legislation that we felt could have benefited from consultation with stakeholders and the people on the ground that are actually dealing with these situations on an everyday basis. Unfortunately, what we've met with most of the time is being voted down from getting this legislation put forward to committee. Unfortunately, as can be seen by this Bill 201, if it had been just simply passed through the House, the unforeseen consequences can be quite devastating, especially to small businesses and the relationship between the business and the firefighters.

As legislators it's our duty to behave in the best interests of Albertans and those who will be affected the most by the legislation, and therefore consultation is very important. In this case we have heard from those who will be affected that they feel this piece of legislation would not be beneficial to them. Therefore, as per their wishes, we support the motion to concur on this bill.

As I've said before, we've seen what happens time and time again when this NDP government acts without considering the implications for those that hold a stake in their legislation. They deny that their duty is to listen to Albertans, and then we end up with a fiasco like we had with Bill 6, where we had thousands of farm families coming to the steps of the Legislature, sitting up in the galleries, and so many of them watching at 1 o'clock in the morning that they crashed the Legislature live streaming site.

You know, when important pieces of legislation come through and you don't properly consult, you will face the consequences. Bill 6 was a prime example of the government's negligence to consult with those towards whom the bill is addressed, that even when Albertans tell the government exactly what they think of a bill, the NDP's top-down, paternalistic government tells them that they know best. Farmers of Alberta with relation to Bill 6 should have been listened to and should have had a say in a bill that ultimately caused a mess. Then again, we've seen many instances in which the NDP did not consult.

A quick glance at their carbon tax gives another example. It would not be possible to consult with Albertans on a tax that affects everyone but that they did not run on in their campaign. How could Albertans have given their thoughts and feedback if they were not consulted? Would Albertans have signed on to a tax that simply makes life more expensive and drives investment away into other jurisdictions? I doubt very much whether NDP door-knockers during the 2015 campaign had asked individuals at the door whether they would have seen fit to accept the carbon tax with no benefit and no reduction in GHGs, whether they would have actually accepted that and voted for it. I guess we'll see in 2019 what Albertans actually think of this government and the carbon tax. I do believe that the carbon tax will be a major issue in the coming election.

Farmers are saying that the carbon tax is driving agriculture out. We talk about . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and speak on Bill 201. I see by the notes that I have here that my aide wrote down the word "honour" using the old English verbiage with "u" in it. Madam Speaker, in this case, there's a lot of honour with "u" in it that these volunteers have in the jobs that they do. I commend the Member for Highwood on his presentation of this bill. It's certainly a valuable thing.

4:00

Madam Speaker, last spring, when the session broke, I had an opportunity to attend a place in the constituency where a 28-year volunteer was receiving his award. The little community is named Donalda. I can't remember the gentleman's last name, but I do remember standing there giving the award, and my phone was just vibrating excessively in my pocket. At the same time that I was honouring this long-term volunteer, volunteers right at our home, right at our farm, were saving our farm from a prairie fire that had initiated or would appear to have initiated off the local road allowance. My son and others kept us from actually losing our farm. I was able to make note of that to the volunteers, also in another little community, on Saturday night in a little place called Veteran. It's a pleasure.

It's certainly been an interesting process to get to this point, Madam Speaker. I'd be remiss not to thank those firefighters, particularly those volunteer firefighters, who keep us safe. They keep us safe throughout the year every year. These men and women, who make up some of the most selfless volunteers anywhere, risk

their lives, their health, both mental and physical, so that we – and I have personal experience of that – can be safe.

When I saw Bill 201 come to the floor for first reading, I thought: “Great. A bill that I would hope all of us, across the bow here, could support.” I read it over, and after first reading I didn’t think there was anything that could be contentious about the bill. There were no concerns or any that I’ve heard around my constituency. It’s been discussed with a variety of firefighters, and we heard their impressions of the bill. To the folks that I’ve talked to, there seems to be nothing contentious. However, the bill has been sent to committee, and discussions have continued.

Madam Speaker, as you well know and as I previously described, I come from an area of small and sometimes remote rural communities that rely on these volunteer organizations and these fire departments to keep our area safe. What I’ve seen is that it takes a lot of these good people willing to take and give of their time to provide protection. It takes a lot more than people; it also takes a great community to stand behind these people. These rural, sometimes remote towns throughout my riding are great communities and have thus far stood behind their firefighters.

Everyone knows that the radio calls can and do go off at any time, day or night. Whenever these volunteers can, they will go out to those calls. Most firefighters are on the road to the call and often in the hall before they even know what they are going to or what the incident is. Perhaps it’s an accident, a structural fire, a grass fire, a medical lift assist. Madam Speaker, the list goes on. You never know what is going to happen, yet these brave men and women go nonetheless. As the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner and the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills have also described, these people are unusual in that they run towards the fire; they don’t run away from it. In my personal life experiences on the prairies I, too, have run to assist to try and extinguish prairie fires.

What I hear around town is that during the day there are fewer firefighters that are able to answer the call because of employment commitments. Some, frankly, cannot make it to the call because they are out of town with their jobs. Some are teachers. In one case I heard of a fellow that taught shop who was limited in his ability to respond because he just could not go and leave the band saws and table saws with unsupervised students working while he went out. He had to make the hard decision to simply turn off that radio when that call came.

Others, Madam Speaker, work daily in the patch or on area farms, others in health care at the hospital, but whatever the case, many for whatever reason simply cannot make the call. Consequently, I understand that, especially in daytime working hours, some halls have issues getting out very many responders to go to a call but usually find enough for a small team. Often the same people are at the calls during daytime hours, and I’m sure that this is a strain on the employer-employee relationship.

Madam Speaker, some felt that this was an important bill because we need to ensure that there is protection for our communities, especially our more rural and, in many cases in our riding, remote rural areas. In our remote rural areas some people are aware of what’s known as the Suffield fire or the Hilda fire, which even your office or representatives from your office attended to visit with those people. Those areas cannot afford to hire a full-time staff or full-time positions other than the senior officers. The cost to hire and staff a full-time fire department is vastly different than that of a part-time or volunteer organization. There are many small communities that, frankly, cannot support this because of their size.

Madam Speaker, it’s believed that this bill has maintained a good balance. For example, the employee needs to have been employed by the same employer for at least 90 days, and that creates employer-employee stability. The bill would give part-time

firefighters employment flexibility to answer calls at any time of the day or night, and it would give part-time firefighters job security without fear of reprisal when they leave to answer those calls. Again, the bill would have potentially allowed more members to respond during the day, especially between the hours of 0800 and 1630. Many firefighters, according to our submissions on the bill, stated that they were unable to respond to an emergency during normal weekday business hours due to serious employment commitments. I would personally hate to think that members didn’t respond because they were afraid that they would lose their job, and I would hope that that would never come to pass.

Now, the upside of our continued discussions was that we have a great chance to sit down and talk to others about this issue and other aspects of this proposed bill and to consider other relevant points of view. This bill did not entitle the employee to have pay for the occasional unpaid leave when they need to assist in fire services. From my understanding, though, Madam Speaker, and from some I know, part-time or volunteer firefighters are paid to be out on calls. Hence, the employer didn’t need to pay while they were gone, but the employee was still able to make a meagre wage through that fire department, and it provides proper incentive to the employees to still have a wage and help have the community kept safe. In short, this bill would close a loophole that would prevent any volunteer, casual, or part-time firefighter who spends valuable time protecting their communities in emergencies from losing their job and, with that, job security.

Recruitment and retention are already a huge concern for some fire chiefs. This bill, in some people’s view, helps local fire chiefs with both of these issues, recruitment and retention. Some chiefs told our members that it takes resilient people to do the job – and I can certainly testify to that, Madam Speaker – and people have been able to come out. This bill, I believe, strikes that balance. This bill has looked at several things such as flexibility and job security in an attempt to allow more members . . . [Mr. Strankman’s speaking time expired]

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers to the motion? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin.

4:10

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an honour to rise in the House today to speak to Bill 201, Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018. I would sincerely like to thank my colleague for Highwood for bringing up this important issue. The work of firefighters is truly outstanding, and that’s precisely why we need to make sure that we get this bill right.

Having grown up in Fort McMurray, forest fires and car accidents along highway 63 were almost a way of life, often having volunteer firefighters responding to those calls. This bill also hits really close to home for me for so many reasons. In 2016, when a fire ravaged Fort McMurray, destroying over 2,500 homes, countless firefighters put themselves in harm’s way to save our community. These courageous women and men fought day and night to save our community from one of the costliest disasters in Canada’s history. While Fort McMurray is served by a full-time fire department, the rural communities within the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo operate by volunteer departments. It was these volunteer departments that stepped in, stepped up, and helped save countless homes in the region.

For example, Ron Quintal, the deputy fire chief of Fort McKay, one of the many volunteer fire departments that responded to the fire, said that this was the first time in the 10 years that he’d served on the Fort McKay fire department that they’d been asked to make

a call in Fort McMurray. The brave men and women from the Fort McKay volunteer fire department drove south on highway 63, heading away from safety and towards the massive fire. Within minutes of Quintal and his team arriving in Fort McMurray, they were dispatched to a neighbourhood and worked for the next 36 hours straight. They saved much of that neighbourhood. Thank you.

There are countless stories of volunteer fire departments providing the much-needed manpower to help fight this massive beast of a fire. This includes many of our industry partners' volunteer firefighters and volunteer fire departments from across the province, including that of Lac La Biche, St. Paul, Westlock, and many, many others. We credit so much to the intensely hard work that was done by the firefighters, including our many volunteer firefighters. None of them quit. None of them backed down. No one fled the flames. They stayed, they fought, and they saved our community.

In total, there were 88,000 people that were evacuated from the area, and in total 1,100 firefighters came to help my community during the fire. The Canadian military was even deployed to help support our region's first responders. The blaze destroyed almost 600,000 hectares and almost 2,500 homes, causing nearly \$10 billion in direct and indirect damages, making it one of the most expensive disasters in Canada's history.

Madam Speaker, two weeks ago it was my honour to attend the grand opening of the new Anzac fire hall. The Anzac fire department is one of the many volunteer fire departments within my riding of Fort McMurray-Conklin. This volunteer fire department is also one of the busiest within the region, taking up to 300 calls a year, almost a call a day. The new fire hall offers significantly more space for training for these volunteer firefighters and much more space for their equipment, giving them the ability to better respond to their many calls. I am truly grateful that I am friends with many of the volunteer firefighters from the Anzac fire department. It was quite an honour to see them in action and see them have the new hall opened up. As has been stated, these volunteer firefighters protect many of our rural communities not just within my riding of Fort McMurray-Conklin but right across this province. Their service should be celebrated and recognized.

This legislation would have closed a loophole, preventing any volunteer, casual, or part-time firefighter who spends valuable time protecting their communities and responding to emergencies from losing their job. It also would have prevented part-time firefighters from being overlooked by employers because of their obligation to leave work and fulfill their volunteer duties. It also would have helped communities by increasing the number of firefighters available to respond to fires, which could also decrease response time.

While I truly appreciate the spirit of this bill, upon further consultation with various stakeholders we discovered that this bill would have also had some pretty negative, unintended consequences. Specifically, it could negatively affect rural businesses. We heard that it could create an adversarial relationship between businesses and volunteer fire departments, and in many of our rural communities we cannot afford to have a negative relationship developing between our neighbours. Fire departments have worked tirelessly to build these relationships with local businesses, and they felt like this bill would force the hand of many businesses. While the leave the firefighters would have taken would be unpaid, there would still be serious economic impacts to businesses due to an ever-increasing load of disastrous provincial government policies. We heard that the burden on many of these businesses would be far too high. We truly need to find a balance that reduces some of these unintended consequences.

We need to work on increasing collaboration to build relationships and improve the overall safety of our rural communities, and that's what it's truly about. It's about safety. There is so much value in consulting with subject matter experts when drafting bills and policies to avoid these unintended consequences. Unlike the current NDP government, on this side of the House we welcome and listen to stakeholders from across the province. This bill was not supported by the community and by the stakeholders, and we accepted that feedback.

Being a firefighter means so much more than just battling blazes. Firefighters save people. Firefighters walk into the fire when everyone else runs out, and we are so grateful for our firefighters, who work tirelessly to make a difference in our communities. I would truly like to thank my hon. colleague for bringing this bill forward, focused on making sure volunteer firefighters were treated with the respect and dignity they deserve.

Many stakeholders expressed concerns over aspects of the bill, and I will not be voting in favour of it. We cannot put forward legislation that will hinder our volunteer fire departments. Most of our everyday heroes are volunteer firefighters, and our rural and remote communities are truly indebted to these selfless volunteers who rush into fires while everyone else seems to run away.

Comprehensive firefighting legislation is something that we can look into studying in the future as we continue to consult with stakeholders on this important matter. We have received wonderful feedback from countless individuals across this province, and we will continue to build on these relationships in order to develop the best possible legislation for supporting everyday heroes.

As I grew up down the street from a fire hall, I'm quite familiar with firefighters and it's truly something that is a passion to me. It's very great to see that this bill had the wonderful spirit to protect our volunteer firefighters.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to speak to Bill 201 also. When you look at this bill, of course, at first it looks great. You know, we need to have volunteer firefighters. So many small communities in Alberta depend on a volunteer fire department, and I think it's something, obviously, that we need to protect. We need to have those people in place that are willing to do that. It's obviously not a job that's for everyone, but of course the people that are willing and able to do such an important job in our communities: we need to be able to take care of them. Of course, the importance of their job and their duty makes this bill so important to get right. By getting it wrong, I think we have a lot of risks to have the whole system fall apart that we depend on so much.

Now, this was sent to committee, and I think that was a great opportunity to have this reviewed and have it looked at and to listen to the different groups that came in and stakeholders that came in and talked to the committee so we could get a better understanding of the full impacts of a bill such as this. I think that by having those presentations, we all learned something and some things that we didn't know before as far as the implications of a bill like this.

Of course, the volunteer firefighters, I mean, volunteer to do a job, and it's such an important job in our communities. They volunteer. They take time out of their lives to do this great work.

4:20

Along with the firefighters we have the businesses that the volunteer firefighters work for. Those businesses, of course, give

up something, too, in order to support the local firefighters, by allowing their employees to go off and help the community when needed. So I think it's important to recognize the important part that the local community businesspeople play in the role of volunteer fire departments.

Now, my community where I live, the community around Valleyview, is served by a volunteer fire department, too. Of course, I know those volunteers. They are people in our community. They're hard working. They're good people. They're dedicated to the cause. I guess, being as I know most of them, I know how often they meet. They have regular meetings where they get together and they discuss the issues and how they can better support the community. They also train a lot, too. They go to different courses outside of town and travel, too, so that they can learn the techniques and the different things that they need to do to do their job properly.

Of course, that's all volunteer time. That's all time they take out of their lives, away from their families, away from their jobs, to serve the community. These people are actually – let's face it – local heroes. These are the people that instead of running from a fire, run to a fire, that go to horrible accidents on the highway, that a lot of times are the first people there because they're ready to go at any time. They drop everything and run as soon as the call comes. We often see our young children – I see my grandchildren sometimes, you know, and they want to wear the fire hat. They want to dress up like firemen for Halloween. That's what these people are. These people are dedicated. They're very giving of their time and their energy, of course, and they feel it's important, and it is important. I think we have to respect that.

I think it's also – again I want to mention the businesses that these people work for, the men and women that are firefighters. These businesses that they work for are willing to take that time when, let's say, they have a firefighter that works on the floor of a store or something like that. They know that when that fire call comes, they're going to lose one employee off the floor, you know, immediately, and they're willing to accept that. When we talk about volunteer firefighters, we have the firefighters that volunteer but we also have the businesses that volunteer, and I think it's important to have that idea that they volunteer that to the community, their employee, knowing that that employee may be lost for a few hours or the rest of the day.

Some of these jobs, of course, that these people have, I mean, are critical jobs. If they drop everything right then, that could cost the business thousands of dollars. You know, that all has to be taken into consideration, and I'm sure those people have to make those decisions each time that fire call comes: can I in good conscience take this call, or do I need to stay at work? But, of course, something like this bill would kind of take away from that opportunity for businesses to have that kind of involvement, to be able to volunteer the part of their business to help the community, too.

I know that our local fire department each year has a hockey tournament. I want to say that it's been 35 years in a row, I think, that they've been having a hockey tournament and raising money. They've raised tens of thousands of dollars to help the community and help the victims, people that have had house fires and that sort of thing. I think it's great that these fire departments are not just a group of people that show up when there's a fire or when there's an accident or anything, but they're actually active in the community and trying to do more than just that job of helping in the time of need.

I spent some time in Fairview with the volunteer fire department there. They had a function there and were fund raising and stuff like that for different things in the community. It was great to see that kind of activity and the community involvement there.

Of course, in Valleyview we have the same thing, and I know that, for instance, the DeBolt fire department is very active. DeBolt is a couple of small communities – we've got DeBolt, we've got Crooked Creek, Valley Ridge, and that area in there – and they have a very active volunteer fire department there, and I know they work hard and they show up when they're needed to. Highway 43 runs right through that area, and at times there are a lot of accidents in that area. The volunteer fire department is quite often the first one there because they are right there. The nearest hospitals are in Valleyview and Grande Prairie for ambulances to come from, but of course that volunteer fire department is right there. I think that it's just a huge blessing to have in our community there, to have those men and women willing to drop everything and be there for the community when something goes wrong.

I spent some time in Bezanson here this fall, too, talking to some of the volunteer firefighters there, and they've got a very active volunteer fire department there, too, and it's great to see that taking place. These small communities that do so much: you know, those are the communities that are in between the centres, where they fill a pretty big gap in services when it comes to emergency services.

Getting back to, you know, the committee's work on this, that allowed for more consultation. I think what came about is realizing that there were some unintended consequences that could happen because of a bill like this. I think it's important to have even more consultation and really get this right because it is something that is critically important for rural Alberta in particular. If we get it wrong, then I'm not sure what could happen. But we do want to make sure we get it right because we can't afford to get it wrong. I don't think these communities can afford to not have those volunteer firefighters, that are willing to come out and do that important work that they do.

Of course, at times I think it can be hard to recruit volunteer firefighters. By having difficulty to recruit – I mean, we don't want to do anything that'll make it harder to recruit. We want to make sure that the people that want to volunteer are there and ready and willing to do it. We also want to make sure that the businesses that these people work at are supportive, too. I think that's an important balance to have.

I think that during the consultation they found out that a number of stakeholders did not support the bill. They're worried that it would damage the relationship between employers and the volunteer fire service, making it adversarial. Of course, I think that's an important relationship that needs to be kept in balance. We need to have that balance both ways there. They also expressed concerns that maybe businesses wouldn't hire volunteer firefighters because they would be kind of handcuffed by this legislation. They wouldn't have that opportunity to say no sometimes if it's, you know, a critical thing at work.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak on the motion to concur on Bill 201, Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018. I thank my hon. colleague the Member for Highwood for bringing this bill forward and raising this important issue in this House and in the committee. The work of the Member for Highwood will not go unnoticed, and we are saddened that he will not be returning to this House after the next election.

By bringing this bill forward and having the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future examine the legislation and call witnesses in to hear testimony, the Member for Highwood managed to spark a discussion among the firefighter community across

Alberta. We heard from the fire chiefs. They indicated that Bill 201 was not good enough. They wanted more. They want their own act, not to be part of several acts scattered all over the law books.

Bill 201 proposes to amend the Employment Standards Code to protect the part-time, casual, or volunteer firefighters from loss of employment because they are or have become part-time firefighters. That's a good thing, Madam Speaker. We already allow reservists in the Canadian Armed Forces military leave so they can attend annual training or be deployed on missions abroad. The Canadian Forces Liaison Council recognizes the best employers across Canada for their commitments to military leave. Why couldn't we do the same thing for firefighters?

4:30

I have heard that even in the Canadian Forces a firefighter is a trade where people can sign up, train, and be employed. When one is on an air force base, those firefighters need to respond to aircraft crashes on takeoff and landing. When on a ship at sea, everyone is responsible for fighting a fire on the boat or when a helicopter crashes on the deck or when munitions prematurely explode. Sadly, military leave might be two to four times a year whereas firefighter leave might be two to four times a week.

I was surprised and disappointed to hear volunteer firefighter can lose their jobs for leaving their jobs to respond to emergencies. Firefighters are essential to communities. How can we ever recruit additional firefighters for volunteer brigades all across rural Alberta if they are forever faced with this sword of Damocles over their head if they leave their job to go fight a fire? Volunteer firefighter rosters have been dwindling in rural communities due to the economic downturn. When people feel they are not protected through legislation, they choose work over their prospect of not being picked for a job due to their volunteerism.

Now, funnily enough, colleagues in Quebec have a law like this protecting first responders so that they can carry out their duties as a first responder and know their other job will still be there waiting for them. The NDP tried to bring in legislation like this at the federal level to amend the Canada Labour Code, but the bill died on the Order Paper in August 2015. Amending the Canada Labour Code would only protect 4,420 federally regulated firefighters among the 85,000 volunteers across the country.

We heard from the fire chiefs that came in that firefighting develops a brotherhood and that some volunteer firefighters would rather be down at the station training or waiting for a call than be at their own jobs. Firefighting is just one of those jobs where you can develop a passion for the work. Sadly, some municipalities cannot afford to indulge passions and have people sitting around all day.

Parkland county needs 40 volunteer firefighters to manage the new state-of-the-art fire hall in the Acheson industrial park. Otherwise, they have a \$6.5 million bill in order to have the firefighters on full-time. This is a large burden for the industries and residents to make up in property taxes.

Most stakeholders at the committee meeting expressed their strong support to have a single fire services act similar to the Police Act and would rather see one larger piece of legislation to encompass all the areas of fire services. You see, Madam Speaker, firefighters don't just fight fires. Firefighters respond to motor vehicle accidents. They use tools called the jaws of life to break open automobiles to rescue trapped accident victims. Many firefighters are trained as paramedics and can administer more than just advanced first aid while waiting for an ambulance to arrive. Firefighters are also the local hazardous materials team and respond to accidents involving dangerous goods that require respiratory equipment in order to handle the cleanup. Think of the material-handling training for all the types of things that our firefighters need

to take. Yes, you'll see firefighters out there in haz-mat suits responding to certain incidents.

But, Madam Speaker, because we took the bill to committee and because we got feedback from the firefighting leadership, that's why we will not proceed any further with this piece of legislation. I'll be voting to concur with my NDP colleagues that we can and will do better with the legislation.

Now, if only we could take so many other pieces of legislation to committee to consider and bring expert witnesses to testify and help us do our jobs better. Madam Speaker, I'm hoping that the Government House Leader will consider this suggestion, that we should do the same thing with many other contentious bills that come in front of us, that we take the opportunity to take them to committee and do thorough due diligence and get all the stakeholders to give their input and make those bills better.

With that, Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to speak on this motion. I would also like to thank my colleague the Member for Highwood, who brought this bill forward. Unfortunately, as we all know, he won't return to this House after the next election. I happen to work with him. We both actually ran as Wildrose candidates in the 2012 election, so we've worked together since then. I'm so sad to see him not returning to this House. He served his constituency with so much commitment and dedication.

I actually look forward to the Minister of Municipal Affairs bringing a new bill as soon as possible to meet the needs of the stakeholders heard from in this committee.

I thank you, Madam Speaker, for granting me the opportunity again to address this piece of legislation. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to stand in the House this afternoon and speak to the Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018. Now, I know that I sit on Alberta's Economic Future Committee, and I know that we agreed to send over to the House an agreement as a vote by the committee that we would not at this time support Bill 201, and I agree. I was there to be part of that vote, and I stand beside what the committee decided.

I just wanted to talk about the bill for a few moments. Bill 201, of course, proposed to amend the Employment Standards Code. The intent was to protect part-time, casual, or volunteer firefighters from loss of employment because they are or they have become a part-time firefighter. Currently employers can and in some cases have terminated employment for missed time during fulfilling duties as a part-time firefighter.

Now, I spent a lot of my youth in a small town that at the time probably wasn't much more than a thousand people. I certainly knew all the firefighters and all of their families. I think probably the fire department was a lot smaller at the time because, certainly, the population of the town was a lot smaller. As the fire department grew, the county determined to add a Vulcan and district rural firefighting crew, so they would come in and train with the folks that were on the town of Vulcan fire department. They were two separate entities, but they ended up getting more members, more people to volunteer by doing it that way.

4:40

What this legislation proposed was to close a loophole, preventing any volunteer, casual firefighter from losing their job, as I said. It was also doing its best to protect part-time firefighters from being refused employment just because they must leave work from time to time to fulfill their duties. That's the part that I remember

about a small town fire department, that it was strictly volunteer firefighters. At that time, of course, many, many years ago, the employers and the employees all understood that firefighters were an important part of that fire department. The volunteers and the folks that were employing them, a lot of them understood that from time to time volunteer firefighters may actually have to leave. Those things I certainly remember. Like I said, I knew every one of them. The people that served plus their families all seemed to serve as time went on, so it was quite an affair.

The legislation also talked about taking the worry of losing employment out of the equation on considering becoming a part-time firefighter. These guys that volunteer to become firefighters don't expect much. They have a passion built right into them, something that is admirable for the rest of us to understand. They pretty much put themselves aside when an emergency comes along, and they become the heroes that we know each and every one of them are.

I think that previously the Member for Highwood did bring forward Bill 212, an Employment Standards Code amendment act, in 2016, which died on the Order Paper. Bill 201, of course, then became the resurrected and updated version, which was to define that a part-time firefighter was to include "a casual, volunteer or part-time member of a fire protection service of a municipality or Metis settlement." That was all done to broaden the scope of the bill.

Now, interestingly – and I think it's been said before – in October of '14 an article was written by someone from Parkland county. The question that he asked in that article was: who pays the cost of dwindling volunteer numbers? When you live in an area that strictly has volunteer firefighters, as maybe you do yourself, Madam Speaker, volunteering to be part of a volunteer fire department is very important, and we're lucky to have those folks.

Each year in Coaldale I'm invited to the Coaldale emergency services Christmas dinner and awards night along with the MP from the area. We do go, and we honour those volunteers that spend their time. We honour the time they spend. We honour the amount of time that they spend. We honour the families of those people that actually are just as much a part of that volunteering as the very person that is out there doing the job.

I was there in 2017, and we talked about the fact that the Coaldale fire department – I just speak of Coaldale because it's the biggest municipality in my riding, and I seem to end up doing a lot of things with the fire department. Anyway, they took their volunteers and went out to the Kenow fire that was at Waterton, and they were charged with protecting the Prince of Wales Hotel. When some of these folks got up to speak about that, tears came to their eyes. They knew what they were charged with. They knew that people were depending on them. They knew that they were doing this for people that they had never met and probably never would meet. But they were prepared to do their duty, and they understood what their duty was as a volunteer firefighter.

I looked on the website of the Coaldale & District Emergency Services fire department, and their credo is to Respect the Tradition, Embrace the Culture, Live the Life. They also talk about integrity being part of what they do at the Coaldale fire department.

Doing the right thing for the right reason, even when no one is watching.

Those are bold words.

Professionalism – In our training, service and how we present ourselves.

Respect – Treat others how you would want to be treated, with respect and dignity, on and off the job.

Compassion – Caring for the people you are serving and your co-workers through compassion and tolerance.

Teamwork – Working together with each other and outside organizations.

Pride – In our community, in our job and in our department.

So these guys have a bit of a code of honour that they determine to live by as they are volunteering for their local fire department.

The Coaldale awards night, that I end up going to every year: the sheer number of service bars and medals and documentations that are presented at that place – I had the opportunity to present a lot of those medals – indicate the steadfast professionalism and dedication that this team takes seriously in assisting others in their time of need. Whether full-time, part-time, or volunteer, their commitment, service, and sacrifice for their community are apparent.

Volunteer firefighters all across this province deserve to have our recognition at all times. They step up when – I think my colleague from Fort McMurray said that when people are running out of a burning building, they're running into it, and those are the kinds of people that I always respect.

I will be voting as the committee suggested. We certainly listened to stakeholders. I actually gave my seat to the Member for Highwood at one of the meetings because I felt it was important that he was able to be part of the conversation with the stakeholders. He did take that opportunity, and he got to ask questions of the folks that were there.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion? Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 201, the Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018. Imagine this scenario. You drive into a town for a few groceries, and before you have a chance to park your vehicle, the fire hall is suddenly a bustle of activity. Vehicles are hurriedly arriving, men and women race inside the fire hall, and before long, fire trucks and rescue vehicles are racing out. You know some kind of emergency has occurred, a fire or a serious crash, and that your fellow citizens are jumping to duty. It happens quickly because it has to.

The arriving residents were volunteer and part-time firefighters. They are well known to their fellow citizens for they are the type of people who help out with so much else that goes on in their communities. This community service, though, is of a higher level because they are saving lives while also putting theirs in danger.

When the siren, or today their PDA, alerts them, volunteer firefighters leave their dinners, their farms, or their children's gymkhanas, and their workplaces to save a home, a life, a barn filled with animals. Minutes count, and they are trained to react. And thank goodness they do. Rural villages, towns, counties, and MDs cannot survive without volunteer and part-time firefighters. That's why I'm proud to speak today on Bill 201, introduced by my colleague the Member for Highwood.

This is one of those pieces of legislation that might simply be overlooked. And that is a key point about volunteer firefighters: we often do take them for granted. It's not that we do not appreciate them in this Legislative Assembly; of course we value them, and those of us who live in small communities know how critical they are. Let's face it. What would we do without these volunteers? If we didn't have highly trained first responders heading out on a moment's notice to emergencies, what would happen? Think about it for a moment: what really would happen? It is truly impossible to imagine.

4:50

This bill proposed to close a loophole in the Employment Standards Code to prevent any volunteer, casual, or part-time firefighter from losing their job when they are doing this important

work on behalf of their community. Clearly, the intentions of this bill were superb. When it was being debated in the House, some valid concerns were raised, and for that reason it was sent to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future for review, once again a good course because the committee can perform far more thorough reviews of legislation than we can do in the short time that bills are before us.

The committee did a great job reaching out to stakeholders, a number of whom raised red flags. The two main red flags noted concern about affecting the relationship of volunteer firefighters and their employers, usually small businesses. The second, of course, was concern that enacting this change might affect the prospects of employment for the volunteer firefighters themselves. We don't want to cause any of these problems when the purpose of the bill was to make everything better. The committee, in its collective wisdom, chose to recommend that the Assembly abandon this well-meaning piece of legislation.

I thank my colleague the Member for Highwood for bringing it forward and raising these issues. By introducing this private member's bill, he has sparked an important conversation in communities about the great value of volunteer firefighters.

Employers may well adopt the proposed change on their own. They could make it company policy, or they could simply welcome a volunteer firefighter to their team and acknowledge their pride in the tremendous service they provide to their community. Let's face it: that's mostly what occurs now. In the communities that rely on volunteer and part-time firefighters, it is stores, lumberyards, hotels, and many other businesses that fall prey to the flames, so most business owners greatly value any employee who performs this important service.

I believe the positive debate we have had in the House, followed by the committee discussions, especially with stakeholders, has served a great purpose. Another positive move that has come from Bill 201's journey is that members of this House have now heard loud and clear the need for Alberta to create a single fire service act. It is important now that we do not lose this recommendation. We must continue consulting about a fire service act, what that might look like, and how it might serve firefighters, municipalities, and citizens.

For Bill 201, though, the focus was on Alberta's volunteer firefighters, and I would like to end on that note. So let me say to any current or former firefighter, and there may even be some here today who could become firefighters in the future: thank you for your service to Alberta and to your community; you jeopardize your time, your health, and even your life to serve us; we do appreciate it.

Now, Madam Speaker, on a more personal note, I'm not sure if there are any other volunteer firefighters in this House. Perhaps there are, but just so you know, I was a volunteer firefighter for many years in my little town of Grovedale. My son also became a volunteer firefighter, my daughter became a volunteer firefighter, and her new son-in-law became a volunteer firefighter. My brother ended up being the chief of our small fire service. Once I became elected as municipal councillor, they deemed it a conflict of interest, so I had to step down from the volunteer position, and my brother became the chief. So I understand, you know, very well the value in being a volunteer fireman. My brother and my son were also first responders. It takes a lot of time and training to become a first responder. I don't think people realize how much training it is. It's kind of like an EMT or a nurse but not quite. Some of them with lots of experience are just as qualified.

From the employer side, one story I can remember. I was already on council when we were harvesting and combining, and some of my colleagues would understand that. I had the job of driving the

truck, and I took a load in, dumped it, came back to the field to get another load, and here's my combine sitting there running, the threshing equipment going, the door wide open. I'm thinking: oh, man, somebody is hurt, or somebody is gone. I couldn't find anybody around. So eventually I jumped in the combine and started combining and filling the truck on my own. I was surprised later when my brother came back. He had gotten a fire call. He was driving the combine. He had jumped out of the combine at the end of the field and left the door open. I said: well, at least next time maybe shut the thresher off so it's not sitting there running. I was a little surprised by it, but I understood his dedication and what it meant. He went to a neighbour's place, where a trailer had caught on fire. There were no lives at risk, but they helped to save a lot of valuables for the neighbour. After that, I kind of got used to it. He had kicked out the thresher when he left, but when I came to the field, the combine was running. No big deal; you jump in it and go. So I know what it's like kind of on the employer side or trying to run a business and somebody has to leave, but it was pretty understandable.

I know also that my wife one Christmas morning was a little upset because our son wasn't home. He quite often stayed out late, but this was the next morning and he wasn't home yet. He finally came home at about 9 o'clock in the morning, and she wasn't very happy. But soon he told her that he was on his way home at a reasonable hour and that, of course, on his way home he got a fire call. It was a first responder, and he was in the truck. It was about 30 below on Christmas morning and snowing and very cold. He happened to be the first one on the scene. Somebody had reported lights in the bush, so he went down the bank and found a young man that was impaled.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion? Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and speak to Bill 201, the Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018, presented by my hon. colleague from Highwood. First of all, I just want to say that earlier today I had the opportunity in my member's statement of talking about the heart of our society. One of the things that I had mentioned – and I'm sure you'll remember this – is that the heart of Albertans is made up of the firefighters who willingly run into burning buildings while others are running out.

You know, having the opportunity of being able to speak to volunteer firefighters in my riding of Cardston-Taber-Warner, when you start talking to them, you start to realize and recognize the kind of people they are: committed, compassionate, caring people that have the best interests of the community at heart. When I first heard about this bill coming forward by my colleague, at first blush I thought: absolutely. For everybody that I can think of, all the businesses, this would be a no-brainer. This is something that they would be wanting to have as legislation. We seem to develop legislation based upon the worst-case scenario. I imagine that a large majority of employers would be good employers and would be able to provide that kind of flexibility for volunteer firefighters. But there are situations sometimes where you'll get a bad egg in the crowd, and then we have to take a look at this possible legislation.

One thing, though, Madam Speaker, that I believe in is the goodness of Albertans and the ability for us to be able to work together collaboratively to come up with a common-sense solution. The nice thing that we've seen . . .

5:00

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but the time allotted for that portion of business has now elapsed.

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Mountain Pine Beetle

506. Ms Sweet moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to work with municipal and federal government counterparts to address the impact of the mountain pine beetle on our national parks and tourism and forestry industries.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today and speak to Motion 506. As you know, life in many parts of our beautiful province revolves around forests. Many industries depend on our forests, from tourism and recreation to the forest product industries. Mountain pine beetle is a serious threat to our forests, affecting a quarter of Alberta's pine forest, with the most severe concentration being in the west-central pine belt. The mountain pine beetle is threatening our economy and our environment. If left unmanaged, mountain pine beetle populations could kill large amounts of Alberta's pine resources, up to 6 million hectares of pine valued at more than \$8 billion. This would have a large impact on the forestry industry. Of 25 major forestry companies operating in Alberta, 14 rely on pine to continue operations. Infestation also threatens watershed health, fish and wildlife habitats.

Since 2006 the province has controlled the mountain pine beetle spread by cutting down and burning more than 1.5 million infested trees. Mountain pine beetle infestation is also controlled through a number of best practices such as timber harvesting and prescribed fire. We know that without aggressive control, an estimated additional 564 million trees would be infested and killed.

Our government is committed to minimizing the spread of the beetle north and south and preventing them from spreading further east. Removing infested trees is the most important tool to control the spread. Another strategy is to have the forest industry harvest susceptible pine stands in order to decrease the spread in the long term. Our government is taking this fight seriously. Last year alone the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry allocated more than \$25 million to manage the infestation and impact of the beetle.

A main area of concern is the Hinton and Edson area, where mountain pine beetles from Jasper national park are moving to Alberta's forests in great numbers. Of the approximate 95,000 infested trees being controlled this past winter, more than half are in the Hinton area. The Jasper park area has also created increased safety concerns not only for the residents of Jasper but also for those who visit the park. Due to the damage caused by the mountain pine beetle, many of the trees in the national park have died and are now standing matchsticks. We have seen over the past few years the devastation and safety risks that are associated with forest fires, and Jasper national park is the epicentre of the most potential wildfires.

Due to this, our government has provided significant funding for the mountain pine beetle related to research and to impacting municipalities. We provided \$500,000 for mountain pine beetle related research in 2017-2018, and in April our government announced it would be investing \$600,000 to communities across the eastern slopes to combat mountain pine beetle. Our government also has an agreement in place with Saskatchewan to help prevent the spread to other parts of Canada. Alberta is the main front in preventing the spread eastward.

The huge problem of the mountain pine beetle can only be combated by working together and working co-operatively hand in hand. I've heard from groups like the Alberta Forest Products Association and the mountain pine beetle advisory group in Hinton and the municipalities, and they are saying that more work is needed

to contain the spread in our national parks. We need to know more about how the spread can be slowed down. We need a thorough assessment as to how much damage has already been done.

The federal government must look closely at their management of the mountain pine beetle, especially in our provincial national parks, not only to ensure the park can continue to be accessed for generations to come but to also address the safety concerns of the residents that live and visit these areas. I know that Alberta mayors from the affected areas and provincial ministers have sent letters to the federal government in support of our government's ask for this assistance. I know that the Hinton chamber of commerce developed a new policy resolution on the mountain pine beetle that has since been adopted by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

One of the key pieces of this policy is a request that the federal government reinstate the federal mountain pine beetle program with funds equivalent to the scale of \$200 million. Funds for such a program would support provinces like Alberta that are already infested with the mountain pine beetle and provide resources for communities and economic diversification and resiliency to communities that are affected by the mountain pine beetle. The policy highlights that federal involvement is needed to support national mitigation plans, community safety initiatives due to the higher risk of wildfires, and of course research and education initiatives.

Simply put, Alberta needs assistance from the federal government to support the good work we are already doing on this front. Since 2004 Alberta has invested nearly a half a billion dollars in order to control this pest, and I know, for example, that the town of Hinton has dedicated efforts to this fight as well. I also know that the Member for West Yellowhead has been a great advocate for this issue and his constituents' needs in this respect. He has been working with municipalities and industry on this issue for a long time.

Earlier this year the province provided Yellowhead county and Hinton with funding to control, suppress, and eradicate the mountain pine beetle on municipal and private lands. The funds are part of the mountain pine beetle municipal grant funding program, which helps Alberta communities minimize the spread of the mountain pine beetle infestation in their areas. Clearly, Alberta has done its part for quite some time. We now need collaboration from our federal counterparts to effectively combat the spread of the mountain pine beetle and the devastation it's caused. Co-operation is essential if we're going to create an effective strategy regarding the mountain pine beetle. Together is the only way we'll win this battle.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to stand up and support this motion. As you know, life in many parts of the province revolves around forestry, and the industries depend on our forests for tourism opportunities and, of course, recreation opportunities and the forest product industries. We talk about the industries, for example, in West Yellowhead. Edson has three forest companies operating. Hinton has one, one pulp mill as well. Grande Cache: one forestry company. We also have a forest contractor working in Jasper national park working on the removal of pine trees and stuff, plus the park has said that they were going to be dealing with Whistlers campground, as I spoke of before under Bill 8.

The thing is that a strong, sustainable forestry sector is very important to our provincial economy, and it's important that we continue to work and deal with this issue with the mountain pine

beetle. When we look at the issue we see that was coming to us from B.C., it followed the highway 16 corridor, and it started west of Jasper national park. It gradually worked its way into the park, and now it's beyond. We saw how it was affecting the area, so a whole bunch of us decided that we needed to have a better say and input, so that's why we ended up putting together the pine beetle committee. It's made up by local mayors, towns and county, Jasper federal park, forestry workers, forestry companies, the Chamber of Commerce, firefighters, governments, Agriculture and Forestry, plus the federal member of Parliament was involved. Of course, my office was involved along with FRI Research, which is operated out of the Hinton Training Centre.

It's very important that we support the operation of this committee because they were dealing with the fact that we'd know that this could affect us going forward. The thing is, too, that what we need to realize is that it's not only the forestry sector that could be affected by this; I had mentioned earlier the issue of tourism. We look at the federal park: of course, the tourism that goes to that park every year is huge.

We were fortunate of the fact – not that it's a good thing, but when I talked to the chamber of commerce, they said: well, the smoke that we're getting this summer is actually hiding the view, but it's also hiding the red trees. He said: well, it might be a good thing, but what are we going to do going forward with that? It certainly is an issue that is a problem.

5:10

When we look at the whole issue of the committee mandate, when we got going with the committee, the mandate was pretty clear: we're continuing to ensure a thoughtful and sustainable approach to forest management that balances the economic, social, and environmental needs of Albertans and our communities. This, in fact, was a large part of why we put the committee together, that we needed to deal with that in that context.

The other part of it was that we needed to develop emergency procedures. We all knew full well what had happened in other areas in B.C. and of course, like I'd mentioned under Bill 8, the smoke and everything that we're dealing with in our communities. We were looking at those issues. We needed to make sure that we have an emergency plan in place in the event that that should happen.

We tried to urge the federal government to help us throughout this whole process and, of course, it was an issue that they really didn't step up to the plate. They still haven't. We've got to continue to put pressure on them to fully understand the scope of the problem that we have, what is happening in West Yellowhead in particular and the devastation that we're looking at. A lot of people would be shocked about what's going on there. When we look at some of the destruction, the area affected is, say, an 11,000-square kilometre park and is approximately doubling each year. That's how badly it's spread.

The resource conservation manager with Jasper national park, Dave Argument, said in an interview: sections of the forest have turned red as larvae feed on the phloem in the tree trunks and kill them. About 93,000 hectares of the park, 200,000 hectares of pine forest, were affected in the federal agency's most recent survey. Well, I'll bet you the survey this year is going to be even more devastating. And where has the federal government been all this time? Nowhere. They haven't been there. They haven't done anything, really, to really account for and try to prevent the beetles' spread from the park, leaving the park and coming into our area in Edson, Hinton.

In 2017 the beetles that came out of the park literally rained in our community. That's how bad it was. Disgusting. The fact is that the federal park didn't do anything, failed to recognize that it was a

problem, didn't put in any ask for federal money to help deal with it there, which they could have, but they didn't. Now, you look at the mess that we've got in the Edson, Hinton area. It is huge. I don't know what the survey this year has produced, but early indications are that it's not good.

An epidemic of pine beetles moved in from British Columbia. Like I said, their survival in higher elevations: they never thought that they would survive up near the treeline. They figured that, no, it would stay in the lower valleys. Well, no, they were mistaken because it's red as high up to the treeline as you can find. The survival rate in the higher elevations around Jasper is enabled by warmer winters resulting from climate change. Climate change is real. The pine beetle is a result of climate change, whether you choose to ignore it or not. That's why we haven't got cold enough winters to keep them in check.

The past practice of extinguishing wildfires in the park has allowed the forest to become denser and older, accelerating the beetle's spread. Of course, that's pretty evident. Researchers now believe that forest fires should be allowed to burn except where lives or property are threatened.

The pine beetle infestation has moved beyond the national park's eastern borders into forest near Hinton, Edson, northern Alberta, and the Lac La Biche area. The beetle had never been seen in these areas before 2006. Caroline Whitehouse, the health specialist with Alberta Agricultural and Forestry, said that the spread could affect 14 logging companies that harvest pine in Alberta. That's huge. It's going to be a huge impact on our economy, on those communities and workers.

The elevated fire risk. I already talked about that, like I said, when I discussed the issue about Bill 8 and the impending issue that can happen. I was driving in from Hinton last night and people were flicking cigarettes . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of the motion and wish to echo the remarks of my colleagues, the members for Edmonton-Manning and West Yellowhead. The mountain pine beetle remains a serious threat to Alberta's forests, and the province takes the threat seriously. To date Alberta has devoted more than \$500 million to the pine beetle fight, but populations continue to spread across the province. Many Albertans depend on our forests for their livelihoods but also for recreational opportunities. Forestry supports thousands of jobs in scores of communities, and our forests are home to a diverse flora and fauna, which are tremendously important in their own right.

The uncontrolled outbreak occurring in Jasper national park is significantly affecting Alberta's pine forests. Early indications are that this year a broader dispersal of the pests occurred into the Rocky Mountain House and Brazeau regions as well. More information is being gathered to determine the extent and the severity of the dispersal. We're continuing our aggressive survey and control activities. We'll be analyzing the findings and directing our resources this winter to areas where we can have the greatest effect in terms of limiting further spread and mitigating impacts to Alberta's forest resource and the values it provides.

Surveys show that the pine beetle pest levels have increased in the Hinton-Edson area. For this area our tactic is to divide the forest into two zones, the leading-edge zone and the inactive holding zone. The leading-edge zone is the priority. Infestations within this zone are generally widely scattered and small. Due to the potential for further spread, control of beetle-infested trees in this zone is critical to slow or stop the spread along the eastern slopes and eastward

throughout the boreal forest. Our goal in the leading-edge zone is to treat 80 per cent or more of the sites that pose a risk of spread. This year, Madam Speaker, we've devoted about \$25 million to pine beetle management, which has helped control about 103,000 trees this year. This is similar to last year. About 70 per cent of the survey and control work will be located within the Edson forest area. As we develop our survey and control plans, we will continue to co-ordinate with forest industry plans to achieve the greatest impact possible with our control program.

As government we make decisions on how best to protect our forests. Forest management is complex and dynamic. We seek to find balance amidst the diverse economic, ecological, and social values Albertans place on the forests. For example, pine beetles tend to propagate in mature pine stands, Madam Speaker, the same pine stands that are favoured by caribou, one of the many iconic species at home in the boreal forest. Under the federal Species at Risk Act we're obligated to show how forest management can continue to self-sustain caribou populations. The motion calls on the government, with municipal and federal government counterparts, to address impact of the mountain pine beetle. We have a close working relationship with municipal governments in the affected areas. We're actively involved with the mountain pine beetle working group with municipal and federal representatives. The Member for West Yellowhead is on that working group.

5:20

My department staff is in close contact with municipal governments to address community safety through our FireSmart program, which offers an array of tools to help communities manage the forest and how it interacts with the community. For example, the program helps reduce the amount of fuel that occurs when trees are killed by the pest. In Jasper the program is being used to remove dead and dying trees in the Whistlers campground and on Pyramid Bench. This is being co-ordinated by the federal government through Parks Canada.

As part of our overall strategy we have made a formal request to the government of Canada for \$20 million per year over the next five years to enable an expansion of control activities and undertake important research. I have made this request directly to my federal counterpart. I know that many of our forestry and community stakeholders have reinforced the importance of this request as part of the province's overall strategy.

I would be remiss if I didn't thank the people and government of Saskatchewan for agreeing that there's an urgent need to suppress these infestations in order to prevent or minimize further loss and degradation of forests in both provinces. Both provinces recognize the threat of the beetle on our forests and have agreed to work together to minimize it. Since 2011 Saskatchewan has contributed more than 5 and a half million dollars to help reduce the threat.

In closing, I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Manning for introducing this motion. Healthy forests require co-operation between orders of government, which this motion recognizes. I'd also like to thank the Member for West Yellowhead for his continued advocacy for his constituents and all those living and working in forestry towns and to the members who have participated in today's important debate.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak to Motion 506, introduced by the Member for Edmonton-Manning. I know this member has always supported the forest industry. She always comes to the AFPA, or

the Alberta Forest Products Association, in Jasper. Interestingly, it's in Jasper, so we can see every year the advancement of the pine beetle over there.

Madam Speaker, I'm a bit alarmed that this motion is before us today. This is not to suggest anything against the member who has brought it forward. She is doing due diligence. The mountain pine beetle is a devastating pest that has been attacking Alberta's forests at a distressing rate for a decade. What is alarming is that a member of a government needs to push her own government to take action on this growing crisis. This motion asks the Legislative Assembly to "urge the government to work with municipal and federal government counterparts to address the impact of the mountain pine beetle on our national parks and tourism and forestry industries."

Madam Speaker, the mountain pine beetle has been a terrible threat to Alberta and all of Canada's pine forests since it began turning the mountains of British Columbia red in the late 1990s. The thinking at the time was that the Rocky Mountains were an insurmountable barrier for the beetles. But 12 years ago they started flying into northern Alberta, and they've continued trying to entrench their populations here ever since.

Up in my area of Grande Prairie-Wapiti our forestry companies have been proactive. They monitored for the beetle, removed hot spots of infested stands, and they've managed to contain it.

The government of the day developed a strong and effective mountain pine beetle action plan to provide a co-ordinated regional approach to controlling the infestation. This important work was being performed on behalf of Alberta's forests but also Canada's because if the infestation destroys the pine in northern Alberta, they would go looking for more trees, and that would take them into the boreal forest that arches across our province and right across Canada. Because these beetles threaten our nation's forestry sector as a whole, the provincial government of the day lobbied the federal government to assist with funding for the fight and placed particular emphasis on controlling any infestation in its national parks located in Alberta.

It should not have surprised either level of government when Jasper's trees started turning the telltale reddish orange colour a few years ago, but our provincial government is acting surprised, which, I suppose, is the reason for this motion. Our provincial NDP government and the federal Liberal government should have been working hard all along to be proactive about the beetles' inevitable march east. Because their lack of action is such a large oversight on the part of our provincial government, I thank the member for bringing this motion forward. I'm sorry, not for myself but for the communities and the industries being devastated by this ferocious beetle, that it has taken this government three and a half years to figure out that the insect is a terrible threat.

Everyone along the foothills from Pincher Creek north to Hinton and Hythe and Rainbow Lake have known it for over a decade. Yet what did our provincial government do? Last year it actually cut the budget for the mountain pine beetle control program. You don't have to believe me. Let me quote from the mountain pine beetle action plan for the central and Foothills mountain pine beetle planning regions. "In 2017-18, the GoA allocated \$25 million to MPB control programs across the province, down from \$35 million" the year before.

You get the picture. In the midst of a continuing crisis, one that the former government and industry have been proactive on for years, our current government cut funding. This is at a time when the beetles had moved into Jasper national park and were showing up in the foothills outside the park, namely the Hinton area. When the beetles arrived in the national park, it was critical that the province turn its attention there and be proactive. Let up our guard for one moment or three and a half years, and all could be lost. I

feel terrible for the people of Hinton and Edson that this tide of beetles is coming down upon them. But I've seen the effectiveness of the proactive measures in the Grande Prairie area. I know they can be effective. You cannot just sit back, however, and jump in and save the day once they have a hold on the forest. That's why Jasper is in such dire shape now. The federal government announced funding to cut thousands of trees around the Jasper townsite just a short time ago. Until then it ignored the problem, and now it's not if there's a fire in Jasper; it's when.

Of everything I've seen over the past three and a half years with this current government and its mixed-up priorities, this one perhaps baffles me the most. All it had to do was continue the good work that was started by the previous government in concert with the forest industry. Instead they almost abandoned it, and now even its own members have to provide it with direction through the Legislative Assembly to do the right thing. For that reason, I will support this motion, which shouldn't have been necessary. Let's hope it hasn't come too late.

In my area years ago I flew with the government of Alberta. They had forestry people and the industry in the area, and they would spot pine beetles in the helicopter. You could see little infestations. They would go in as a company and remove them and control them. I remember flying. There's nothing worse than flying in a helicopter with a bunch of foresters and one says, "Look down here," and the other one says, "There," and the helicopter pilot is flopping from one side to the other. I told him that he'd better fly straight or he'd have a mess to clean up.

I know they've been working hard at it over the years. I know it's not the provincial government; it's the federal government that needs to do something, and I know the province has to keep pushing them. Jasper is a gem in our province for tourism, but if we burn the thing black, it's not going to be that much of a gem, I have to say. Last year we saw what happened in B.C. after all the pine beetle trees get so old and so dry. It's just like Mother Nature's kindling waiting for a spark, and once it starts, you can't stop it. I'm really worried about the Hinton and Edson forest and their forest companies.

Once again, I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Manning for bringing it forward. I'll be supporting this motion, and I encourage everyone in the House to do so as well. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

5:30

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

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I, too, am pleased to hear about this motion on the devastation, that needs to be addressed in a more active fashion. Again, I am a bit surprised that it has to come from a member when this is the job of government. But that having been said, anything we can do to increase the public support, the government support, the pressure on the federal government is a recognition that this is a very sophisticated attack that has resisted all efforts across the country, across the continent at control. It's part of, you know, the ongoing challenge that we have with organisms, whether it's in the health care system or it's in the natural environment. It's going to require some real vision and leadership.

I'm familiar, in the southern part of the province and the eastern slopes, with the spruce budworm infestation and how much damage that has brought to the eastern foothills in the spruce population. It's devastated a lot of the southern eastern slopes all the way, in fact, to Saskatchewan, across the prairies, and we haven't managed to make much of a dent there either.

I guess I have a question for the minister on the extent to which our planning includes a replanting, a reforestation with resistant populations. To what extent are we simply trying to control a pest which appears not to be controllable given the climatic changes and the lack of armaments that we have to destroy the beetle in its various stages? I would hope that there's an active replanting process going on to develop the undergrowth and to maintain the living systems that will resist not only that particular pest but also, as I mentioned, the spruce budworm, which is out of control in the southwest of this province.

What is being done to ensure that we have resistant plants, trees, other species going in there that will take over for what is seriously going to affect not only the eastern slopes and the parks but also our water supply and, as the member has mentioned, the fire risk? It's going to affect our tourism. It's going to affect, certainly, the recreation opportunities for our population. It has pretty widespread impacts. Focusing on the beetle is one thing, but focusing on the next generation of plants and regeneration that has to happen and whether it's well planned and well implemented: that is the question. Reacting to this devastating thing has shown itself to be relatively simply slowing its spread. It's a relatively ineffective approach to actually stopping and containing it. We need to have a plan B to regenerate and restore new forests and new opportunities both for the industry and for water protection on our eastern slopes and for fire protection.

I don't know if the minister is able to speak to that, but I'd be very interested to know if that's happening as well.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's always a privilege to stand in this House and speak, and today is, of course, no exception as we speak to the private member's motion by Edmonton-Manning. It reads:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to work with municipal and federal government counterparts to address the impact of the mountain pine beetle on our national parks and tourism and forestry industries.

Now, as my colleague said, I'm not sure where this comes from, but as an opposition member and the shadow minister of forestry I'm happy to stand and support this motion. I will have no problem whatsoever supporting this private member's motion. What we have seen in Alberta in recent years is a prolific influx of the mountain pine beetle. In 2006 and 2009 significant in-flights of mountain pine beetles in Alberta occurred. These particular influxes of this nasty pest resulted in mountain pine beetle infestations getting into parts of northern Alberta that had never seen this insect before. I think that we all remember that in the years prior to 2006 we were told by I guess they would be called experts at the time that the spreading of the mountain pine beetle from British Columbia to Alberta over our famous Rocky Mountains would never occur. Those same experts also believed that Alberta's colder climate, certainly northern Alberta's colder climate, would not be suitable for habitation by the mountain pine beetle. Clearly, the experts of the day were absolutely and, unfortunately, misinformed or incorrect.

But it's always prudent, I think, to consider facts when we talk about these kinds of topics, so here's a fact. The mountain pine beetle has destroyed essentially 40 per cent of the British Columbia forests. It's dead and it's dying wood. The forests destroyed in British Columbia by this pest are at the root of the creation of wildfire threats in that province. British Columbia's mixed forests are made up of approximately 40 per cent pine. The rest is about 50

per cent spruce and 10 per cent fir. This is all just pretty close, nothing too terribly nailed down here, but I would expect that there's probably some balsam thrown in there somewhere as well. But the point is that 70 per cent of B.C.'s pine, which, remember, makes up 40 per cent of their entire forest, has been destroyed by this beetle. This is a problem of monstrous proportions for British Columbia and, in my humble opinion, has not been handled appropriately in order to keep this pest in check.

Now it's moved into Alberta, and we're seeing a whole lot of our own grief being created by this mountain pine beetle. Now, this small, little creature remains a very serious threat to the health of Alberta's forests. As we have seen in B.C., infestations threaten social, economic, and environmental values. Infestations cause older wood to dry up. At that point the canopy closes, and the trees lose the lower branches that aren't getting sunlight anymore, which, in turn, creates an excellent propellant for potential fires. Let us not forget that dying or dead trees no longer absorb carbon; they actually emit carbon. Their usefulness in the big picture of a forest is nonexistent. Elimination of trees that are of this calibre and trees that are affected by the mountain pine beetle in conjunction with replanting at an unprecedented effort is about the only way to make a forest healthier, to make mountain parks' forests healthier.

If we look in our own backyard, one of the reasons for the Fort McMurray fire was that we had all this old and dying wood. Now, forests naturally want to try and regenerate themselves, but in the instance of the Fort McMurray fire the wood was, once again, old. The canopy above was all green while trying to regenerate, but the wood below it was dried out, once again creating lots of fuel for a fire to get out of control.

In B.C. the pine beetle problem started in overprotected forests, where the trees were allowed to become, once again, old and weak. It's become clear that in order to protect forests and protect communities within forests and protect human life, it's very important that forests are not allowed to get quite to that stage. It's been suggested by some experts in the field that Alberta should take control of its forests and set aside areas that have older wood that is nonproductive, of little ecological value, and starting to absorb less carbon. The idea would be to harvest those areas, then use seasonal workers such as students, for instance, to increase the amount of timber areas through planting seedlings. A sustainable forest actually needs to have more trees that are being grown than are being cut down.

It is imperative that the province of Alberta continue to develop a coherent and cohesive strategy to combat the spread of mountain pine beetle, including co-operative efforts with other levels of government. Now, this intergovernmental co-operation must be a critical part of any strategy of Alberta's, particularly when it comes to the federal government and Jasper national park. Now, we know that Alberta has had an action plan to fight the oncoming effect of the mountain beetle since 2010, but clearly a plan such as this does not appear to be able to exist on a basis that is independent of efforts that need to be taken with national parks.

5:40

I hope we all know that mountain pine beetles have not yet and never will be constrained by boundaries between federal and provincial jurisdictions. Pine beetles care little about those borders. A question I would have of most people in this building is: when was the last time they drove through Jasper national park? The majestic pine trees, that make up a huge portion of that area, have been affected and infected by the mountain pine beetle by a percentage of about 50. The fact is that the area affected by the beetle is nearly doubling each year according to resource conservationists, and if you have driven through the park recently,

you cannot help but notice the affected areas, that have turned an unnatural bright red. As the members have spoken about here this afternoon, that has spread now into the Edson area.

Practices in the past with this national park have been to extinguish fires, which, as I mentioned earlier, have allowed the forests to become more dense, become older, become weaker, which has allowed the quicker spread of the pine beetle. Before humans of any consequence were here, lightning strikes would start wildfires in forests, and they would just burn up that old wood. Like it or not, it was nature's way of invigorating and rejuvenating its forests.

Just as a quick aside here, current forestry management practices do their best to mimic what forest fires used to do. What these current harvesting methods result in is a forestry area that more closely resembles what a landscape would look like after a fire. A common misconception is that the current practices remove all of the trees when, in fact, many retention areas are left. This also allows for better regrowth of the forest.

It needs to be noted that it is the law in Alberta that harvesting be done in a sustainable manner. Forest companies collect comprehensive data on how trees grow and inventory plant and animal life within that forest. All this data is used to determine how much can be harvested sustainably. Now, I recognize that sustainable harvesting can mean different things to different people, but to a forest company it means ensuring that more trees are being grown than are being cut down. It also means maintaining harvest levels in order to create jobs and sustain forest communities. Sustainable harvesting also takes into account maintaining wildlife habitat, air quality, and soil quality.

As we speak here, infestations of mountain pine beetle in Alberta exist within the central and foothills planning regions. However, without improved efforts for containment, other regions throughout our province could be at risk in the near future. More and more it appears that we simply cannot treat this issue as a provincial problem. Because of improper actions in British Columbia and in our national parks with regard to control practices of this mountain pine beetle, Alberta is now experiencing the pine beetle issue, that clearly transcends borders.

This issue is a national problem, and it needs a national strategy, and the need is now. If the pine beetle issue continues unabated and reaches into Saskatchewan, it could be one of the more devastating natural disasters that we have known. This is a good reason why Saskatchewan actually has chosen to contribute money to Alberta to fight the good fight for this problem.

As I wrap up this speech, I encourage all members of the Legislature to consider seriously the effects of the mountain pine beetle on Alberta's forests. I also encourage all members of this House to support this motion wholeheartedly. Our forests are in trouble, and this is a start to a very large task ahead of us. If this motion is passed, then it is critical that this government make this motion of this Legislature to be more than symbolic.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to take a few minutes to speak on this motion. Right at the start I guess I find it a little odd that we're here to do what it says here, which is to "urge the government to work with municipal and federal government counterparts to address the impact of . . . pine beetle on our national parks and tourism and forestry industries."

I guess I'm curious. We know that the government has been spending anywhere from \$25 million to \$35 million the last couple of years working on this issue. I'm a little curious as to why, with

that much money being spent on it, the government isn't already working with municipal and federal governments. It doesn't appear, based on the motion, that there are any problems with the federal and municipal governments because otherwise we'd be urging them to deal with the provincial government. Obviously, I would think that the provincial government should be working with their counterparts already on this issue.

It does seem to be a bit of a strange thing that we're here talking about this today, but obviously it's good. The pine beetles, of course, don't know the boundaries of national parks or federal boundaries, municipal boundaries, anything like that. They go where they want to go, and this needs to be taken care of in a bigger scheme of things than just the province working on it alone. Like I say, I find it odd that the province would be working on this alone, but if that's the case, then I guess that would make this motion very, very important to deal with at this time.

You know, there are different things, I guess, with the national parks. Of course, they've been suppressing fires for years, and they obviously don't have clear-cutting there. Obviously, that's a prime area for the pine beetle to be working on, and we see the devastating effects in the national parks. Obviously, those are an important part of Alberta, the national parks, as far as tourism and that sort of thing. It's a beautiful part of Alberta, and to see the pine beetle devastating the forest there is not good, for sure.

You know, I'll be voting in favour of this motion. Hopefully, that gets the government working on what it should have been working on for years, which is working with the municipal and federal governments to address the impacts of the pine beetle.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning to close debate.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to all members of the House for your comments in regard to this motion. I just wanted to clarify a few things. I have been working closely with the Alberta forestry producers associations, and one of the things that they have been saying whenever they see me is, of course: what is a city dweller so worried about trees for? So I just wanted to give a little bit of history about my background.

I actually grew up in a forestry community. The community that I grew up in was either forestry or fishing, so I spent a lot of time either on the water or in, you know, the forest, camping and doing different things like that. Because of that I recognize the contributions that our different forestry companies contribute to their communities. Without the forestry company that supported the community that I came from, we wouldn't have had fundraisers for our high school graduations because they always donated cords of wood so that we could sell the cords for people's fireplaces. They developed ecological systems that we could use to go camping or to go hiking or to do different things like that. So forestry has always been something that I've had a strong passion about.

Because of that, even though I live in Edmonton, I'm in Jasper in the winter a couple of times, and then in the summer my husband and I are out camping and hiking and doing different things as often as I possibly can within this position, to the point where every time we drive to Jasper, my husband says, "Yes, Heather, I know; there are pine beetles," because I'm always commenting on how green it was the last time we were here versus how red it is now. So this is a passion of mine.

I think part of the importance for me to have this motion brought forward is not only the fact that there's obviously a disconnect between what is happening in the national park and what is moving into the provincial area but that I really wanted to support the government and the minister and the party that I belong to, the government side, to really put some pressure on the federal government. I recognize that we've been doing the work that we need to do within the provincial context. We've been working with municipalities. The hon. colleague from West Yellowhead has been doing great work around that.

But the reality of it is that the federal government needs to step up and they need to come up with a plan. There are areas – Jasper we've specifically focused on, but, I mean, it's moving down into the corridor or into Banff. It's around Rocky Mountain House, down the David Thompson highway. There are lots of different areas within the province that are being impacted that, without the support of the federal government, will continue to spread. We have seen them provide money for other worms and bugs in the east specific to preventing the spread to some of the trees that are impacted in Ontario, so now it's time for them to do the same work here in Alberta.

5:50

I appreciate what the minister has done in his advocacy and his work, but I do recognize that there are groups within this province that have written letters to the federal government asking them to step up and put money towards this issue. For me this was my way of supporting the minister to do the work that he needs to do but also supporting our constituents in Alberta around something that I think is extremely important to many Albertans.

So I would encourage all of our colleagues in the House to please support the motion. Thank you very much.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 506 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I won't say that it's been an afternoon spent particularly productively, but it has been an afternoon spent. In particular, you know, I'd like to congratulate the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning for her motion, which I think was very useful.

With that, I move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:51 p.m.]

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