



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 7, 2018

Day 47

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Fourth Session

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

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Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition
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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (NDP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (NDP)
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Alberta Party Opposition House Leader
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (NDP)
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Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP)
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (NDP),
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Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (UCP)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UCP)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (NDP)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UCP)
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (NDP)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP),
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Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (FCP)
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Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (AP)
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Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (Ind)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Goodridge, Laila, Fort McMurray-Conklin (UCP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (UCP)
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (NDP)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
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Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (UCP)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)
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Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
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Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)

Party standings:

New Democratic: 53 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 3 Alberta Liberal: 1 Freedom Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Progressive Conservative: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 7, 2018

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's really my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly students from one of the greatest constituencies in the entire province. It was great to go to their school and help open it not that long ago. The students I've met many times over the last few years. From Roberta MacAdams school today we have Mr. Ash Robinson, Mrs. Amber Smith, Ms Katrina Pickett, and Ms Cherilyn Maluga. If you'd all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure, on behalf of the Minister of Transportation, to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly 26 brilliant students from Norwood elementary school in the constituency of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. These students have been busy here today and have visited the Borealis Gallery, the Pehonan Theatre, and the Agora Interpretive Centre in the Federal Building, as well as the Legislature Building. They are accompanied today by their teachers, Susan Strebchuck and Danielle Duncan, and their student teacher, Miss Woodman. I would ask them to please rise now and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you, sitting in the public gallery, students from Niton Central school, accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Maskell, and parent helper Mrs. DeLeeuw. I'm fortunate to be the MLA to several small, deeply rooted, historical towns, Niton Junction being one among them. Niton has been a landmark on the trail to Jasper for nearly 100 years, once acting as a major agricultural trading station on the railway. I ask that you and all members of the House join me in a warm welcome for this group, that's come a long way to visit us.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly distinguished visitors from the veterans' working committee. During Veterans' Week we honour veterans who have given their lives for our country and all those who have served. Today we also honour those who serve veterans. A year ago Mr. Doug Styles, himself a veteran, contacted the Minister of Seniors and Housing about homeless veterans in Alberta. Sadly, despite their service, the last homeless count showed 174 veterans without a home. We know there are many more without a permanent address. In response we formed a veterans' working committee. Now, less than a year later, we will be announcing an exciting pilot project to improve life for veterans and homeless veterans in Alberta. That announcement will take place on Friday.

I would ask the members of the veterans' working committee to please rise as I introduce you: Captain Doug Styles, veterans' advocate; Master Warrant Officer Michael Hogan, Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces; Corporal Wallace Bona, royal Canadian electrical engineers, president of the Aboriginal Veterans Society of Alberta; Major, retired, David Blackburn, Forces@Work; Matt Barker, veteran of the RCMP; Warrant Officer Gerry Finlay, Royal Canadian Legion, command service officer, Alberta-Northwest Territories Command; Lieutenant-Colonel Chad Rizzato, Canadian Armed Forces, project manager, veterans' service centre and housing; Major Chris Duncan, director of operations in the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires; Lynda Cuppens, co-chair of the veterans' working group for the government of Alberta and a military spouse; Sharon Blackwell, co-chair of the veterans' working group; Kevin McNichol, CEO, Forces@Work; Shawna Laychuk, Veterans Affairs Canada; Andrea Fuller-Chalifoux, Veterans Affairs Canada; Ragaad Jurf, Alberta Community and Social Services; Jill Wright, military liaison support. Please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you for your service to our country, and thank you for your continued service to our country.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Schreiner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce my guests in the House today. From the Central Alberta Sexual Assault Support Centre we have Sarah Maetche, administrative assistant and community journalist. Suzanne Zukiwsky, board chairperson, has been on the board for seven years. She is a Red Deer College psychology student and a Red Deer public schools educational assistant. Kellie Cummings, board vice-chair, has been working with the vulnerable sector for 18 years. The last 11 years she has dedicated herself to those fleeing family violence and sexual trauma. We have Dyson Zukiwsky, event volunteer and supporter; Spencer Zukiwsky, event volunteer and supporter; as well as Patricia Arango, executive director since 2014. Patricia is the former ED at Chatham Kent Women's Centre, Ontario, where she worked for more than 15 years. She is an active volunteer, Rotarian, and member of various boards and chairs. Over the last four years under her leadership Central Alberta Sexual Assault Support Centre has created the iRespect campaign and the first provincial text and web chat crisis line service. I am so very proud of my guests today, and I ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to the House two members in the Assembly who are involved with mental health, particularly mental health youth services, Mr. Mark Korhuis and Dr. Adam Abba-Aji. Mark is the CEO of the Mental Health Foundation, an organization dedicated to building better mental health care for people in Alberta. Dr. Abba-Aji is the lead psychiatrist with Access Open Minds, a program working to change the way we deliver mental health service in Alberta. They've both been invaluable contributors to the movement to better integrate mental health and social services in Alberta. I'll ask them to stand. Give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First of all, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly members of the Community Drug Strategy Committee for Strathcona county. This group has been working collaboratively since 2017 to address the opioid crisis in our community and to develop a drug strategy for Strathcona county, including the exhibit *Opioids Don't Discriminate*, an interactive experience. Last night the workplace of some of my guests was damaged. Thank you to firefighters, RCMP, and EMS for their prompt response. I acknowledge that this situation is upsetting for staff and residents alike, and I really thank my guests for coming today. I will ask my guests to please rise as I call their names: Lerena Greig, Susan Robblee, Darlene Spelten, Jean Bell, Stephen Neuman, and Sam Singh. If I've forgotten anybody, please rise. I'd now like to ask that you receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the constituency manager for my office in Sherwood Park, Trish Agrell-Smith. I first met Trish when she was working at Baseline Wine & Spirits in Sherwood Park, and I soon realized that outside of her obvious knowledge of wine she had a lot to offer and that she was the person I wanted as part of my team. She started working in my office part-time and has been my constituency full-time manager since last November. She helps me keep organized, is kind and patient when helping constituents, and is a great graphic designer and writer. Thank you, Trish, for your fantastic work. Trish, I would now ask you to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests who are here today to observe the introduction of Bill 25, the Canyon Creek Hydro Development Act. Mr. Jeff Wearmouth is the cofounder and current director of Turning Point Generation. Jeff is a professional engineer born and raised in Alberta. He has worked in renewables and the energy sector for over 25 years. Mr. Rob Mackin, former mayor of the town of Hinton, has worked with Turning Point to introduce them to the community and key stakeholders in the region. In 2017 he helped spearhead the Hinton Energy Alternatives Team, which is made up of leaders in the community, to support and attract exciting development such as the Canyon Creek project. I ask Rob and Jeff to both stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions. The first is some students who are here with their instructor and staff from Global Tesol College campus within my riding. My guests are visiting from Libya and work in finance, and this is their first visit to Canada, to be immersed in our culture and our language. I want to welcome them to Alberta and, specifically, to our capital and our Chamber here. I invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms Hoffman: Secondly, I rise today to recognize members of the Medical Assistance in Dying Review Committee who are seated in the members' gallery. I want to recognize their dedication and their compassion and the work that this committee has done to ensure that Albertans have the care and support that they need should they choose to access medical assistance in dying and to ensure that the wishes are met with dignity and with respect. I'd also like to acknowledge one of the members, who wasn't able to be here today, Troy Stooke, who has joined the committee as a public member to share her experience as a family member and an advocate. The members who are present today, please rise. Those are Dr. Jim Silvius, Dr. Elizabeth Brooks-Lim, and Debra Allen. Please receive our warm welcome and our gratitude.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you my good friend Jesse Cesar. He's a member of the Filipino community. He's lived in Alberta for eight years. He's part of Yorkton Group International and works as a client relations specialist. He's also a member of St. Theresa parish and a member of the Knights of Columbus. He's an active member of my volunteer team who lives in Edmonton-Ellerslie. I'm so proud to call him my friend. Jesse, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very good friend, a strong female leader, a former colleague. MLA Jacquie Fenske, former mayor, by far makes some of the best pies in Alberta. I'd like to also introduce Marvin Olsen, the Alberta Party candidate for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, and his beautiful wife, Shannon Olsen. Will all members please welcome them to this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through to all members of the House members of the group Advocis, the Financial Advisors Association of Canada. If they could stand as I read their names: Rob McCullagh, Kelly Smith, Wade Baldwin, Lorne Zalasky, Lori Power, Julie Martini, Nick Colosimo, Greg Pollock, Kris Birchard, and Chris Fox. Of course, one of my favourites is Dan Boorse from Grande Prairie. Dan is a member of Rotary and volunteers with lots of organizations within Grande Prairie. If we could give them the warm welcome of the Assembly, that'd be great.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other introductions, hon. members? The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this House Minu Bhatia. As some of you may know, Minu is the creator of the giant crocheted Canadian flag. It's 40 feet by 20 feet and weighs around 132 pounds. It took Minu over three years to complete this amazing project. Minu wanted to pay tribute to the country where diverse groups of people can enrich their lives and those around them. This project is dedicated to a nation where we can all expand our

horizons, build a better future, and realize our dreams. Our government is currently in the process of finding this wonderful piece of art a permanent home. I would like to ask Minu, who is joined by her family and children, to receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

World War I Armistice Centenary

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, in honour of the 100th anniversary of the armistice of World War I, I rise to pay my respects and honour the service and commitment of military members and their families from Alberta who fought for our freedom. The Vimy Ridge Armoury, today located in my riding of Little Bow, is home to the 20th Independent Field Battery, the Royal Canadian Artillery, and Troop 3 from the Medicine Hat-based A Squadron of the South Alberta Light Horse. The 20th Battery can trace its roots as being the truly Alberta battery raised by Major John Smith Stewart, the father of artillery in Alberta. He raised this unit from Lethbridge but recruited the gunners from Edmonton and Calgary as well to form the 20th Battery, which still operates. This year, to mark the 100th armistice of World War I, the 20th Independent Field Battery will conduct a 100-gun salute on Remembrance Day in Calgary.

At this time I also want to share with you a few southern Alberta connections leading up to the last few days of World War I. The second of four artillery batteries raised from Lethbridge, the 39th had the distinction of being the first Canadian artillery battery to enter Mons and can claim to have had one of its 18-pounder field guns fire the last round in World War I. Brigadier-General Stewart, who commanded the artillery units of the 3rd Canadian Division at the end of World War I, was also one of many serving MLAs during the Great War for civilization. He had the great honour to command the parade in the Grand-Place in Mons for General Currie on November 11, 1918. He also returned for the 50th anniversary in Mons, where he was made an honorary citizen. As we commemorate the armistice and continue to recognize the military contribution to Canada, it's also about connecting our members of the Legislature to the military and to their fellow citizens, thus enabling an understanding of how they have contributed and continue to contribute to the fabric of this great province and great nation.

Lest we forget.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Community Drug Strategy for Strathcona County

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to highlight the work of the Community Drug Strategy Committee for Strathcona county. I am so proud of how my community has moved forward in addressing this issue. Strathcona county, like many communities across the province, has been impacted by the opioid crisis. In 2017 community partners, including the following, came together to develop this strategy: various Alberta services departments, Chimo Youth Retreat Centre, Children's Services, Elk Island public and Catholic school divisions, Hope in Strathcona, Moms Stop the Harm, parents empowering parents, Sherwood Park primary care network, the RCMP and its victims' services, Saffron Sexual Assault Centre, the Salvation Army, various Strathcona county departments including family and community services, and the Strathcona county public library. Using a new mental health model based on the premises of collective ownership and empathy, best practices, brain science research, and community engagement,

the committee has developed a community drug strategy for Strathcona county, from addiction to connection.

With funding from an AHS opioid public awareness grant the committee developed a public information engagement campaign, Just a Little to Lose a Lot, and have created *Opioids Don't Discriminate*, an interactive experience. Originally scheduled to run this week at the community centre in Sherwood Park, this exhibit is a unique interactive exhibit allowing participants to follow the journey of three fictional community members who find themselves affected by opioid use. Based on real-life experiences and local statistics, this exhibit is a one-of-a-kind opportunity to explore the impact of opioid use in our community. With the uncertainty surrounding the unfolding incident at the community centre, I hope that this amazing exhibit will have the opportunity to continue and to travel across the province.

As the MLA for Sherwood Park I am so thankful and appreciative of the collaborative work that this diverse group of community partners has accomplished.

Congratulations.

The Speaker: Thank you.

1:50

Myron Thompson

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to salute an Alberta original, my friend Myron Thompson. I have been blessed to call Myron, one of the most successful and best-known politicians of his era, a friend and a mentor. Over Myron's long and successful life he has accomplished much, starting out with an incredible baseball career. In fact, he made it into the New York Yankees' baseball program as a catcher, competing with a guy by the name of Yogi Berra for a spot in the big club.

After baseball Myron and his amazing wife, Dot, would settle in the community of Sundre, where Myron would serve as a school principal for 23 years. Myron served faithfully several generations of Sundre students. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I would guess that well over half of the town population went to school with Myron as their principal. He entered municipal politics in 1974, becoming the mayor of his beloved Sundre. In 1992 he was elected to the House of Commons, where he served faithfully as our man in Ottawa until 2008. He became known in Ottawa for wearing his cowboy hat and was never hesitant to proudly display our western heritage. After he retired from Parliament, he stayed in Sundre, where he served on town council for several more years. He finally hung up his spurs last year after an incredible 50 years of public service to our community.

No one could raise holy heck like Myron or fix a stern glare better, and there's no question that Myron always calls it as he sees it. But if you miss the twinkle in his eye or the playful grin, you don't really know Myron. Myron never leaves you with any doubt about his deep faith in God or how much he truly loves his family, his students, his constituents, his town, his province, and his country, and he never shies away from fighting for them.

Myron announced just a few weeks ago that he is facing what he describes as his last great battle, a fight with cancer. He is facing this fight with the same class, dignity, and grit that he faced every challenge in his life with. There will never be another Myron Thompson. He truly is one of a kind, Mr. Speaker.

God bless you, Myron. You know that my entire community stands with you and Dot as you have stood with us for so many years.

Oral Question Period

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

Suspension of Physicians' Licences to Practise

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this year it came to light that a physician practising near Edmonton had been convicted of sexual assault against patients and nurses with whom he worked. It was shocking to learn that this physician had been allowed to continue to practise with a licence from the college of physicians, so the opposition at the time asked the government to consider bringing forward legislation to ban licences from physicians convicted of assault. We're glad that's happened, but the government will only allow that to apply for five years. Why not ban doctors permanently from practising if they've been convicted of assault?

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

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Like the member opposite, our government and in particular our Minister of Health were very disturbed by the situation that the member opposite describes. That's why the minister has brought in legislation to this House, only the second province in the country to bring in this kind of legislation, to protect vulnerable patients and particularly to protect women in these vulnerable situations from predatory professionals. That's why we are moving forward with this legislation. We are still having good conversations about it, but we're happy to be able to bring it in.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Kenney: I thank the hon. the Premier for her response.
Mr. Speaker, as I said to the government in March, the Official Opposition would be happy to co-operate with the government in the adoption of such legislation. We seek to do so constructively; however, there have been multiple opposition amendments proposing, effectively, a permanent ban on the ability of abusive physicians to practice, given the risk that they will revictimize in the future and also to send a clear message of deterrence to abusive physicians. The government voted down those amendments. Why? Why don't they support a lifetime ban?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very important question. It is our fundamental belief that women and all Albertans accessing health care services should do so without fear of harassment, intimidation, or assault, of course. We're happy to work with all members of this Legislature when considering how best to do that, and we certainly welcome the critic of the opposition caucus. I have reached out for meetings, and we continue to work collaboratively. We also work with front-line providers who provide support to survivors. We've increased their funding, and I'm very proud of that.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, again, the government now on three occasions has voted against amendments that would effectively impose a lifetime ban on doctors convicted of sexual assault. This is a terrible violation of the doctor-patient relationship, and I cannot understand why there would be any consideration of granting a licence to practise to a doctor found guilty of sexual assault. So will the government join with us in listening to vulnerable Alberta women who have been victimized in this way by agreeing to a lifetime ban on the ability of such doctors to practise?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the important recommendation. Again, we are only the second jurisdiction in Canada to embark upon this kind of protection in bringing in a mandatory minimum requirement of a five-year suspension. I appreciate that the amendments came forward recently and certainly welcome anyone to bring forward recommendations at any time to help strengthen our legislation. We continue to work with the organizations that represent survivors to make sure that we have the strictest and fairest consequences in place so we can withstand appropriate constitutional or legislative challenges. We want to ensure that these consequences stick and that we protect all patients.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second main question.

Student Achievement in Mathematics

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, in recent years there has been a disturbing decline in math ability amongst Alberta students through multiple different standardized tests. Most recently the provincial achievement test shows that math proficiency amongst grade 9 students has declined from 67 per cent in 2014 to 59 per cent last year. Does the government share our concern about this data, which shows declining math proficiency amongst Alberta students, and what does it plan to do about it?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important question. That is why the Minister of Education took action almost as soon as we got elected to bring together a group of experts in math to develop some significant changes to our math curriculum, which were announced last year. The results that we're seeing now demonstrate the fact that it was necessary to do. We're very pleased that we've been able to bring in some very significant changes that will in fact improve math ability amongst our students.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: I thank the Premier for that answer, Mr. Speaker. However, the actions taken by the government do not address a fundamental problem, which is that since the introduction of discovery or inquiry learning as a common method of mathematics instruction we've seen a steady 15-year decline. It clearly started before the NDP was in office. Regardless of party, we all need to work together to turn the situation around. Does the Premier share my concern with the fact that the cut-off score for math proficiency is only 42 per cent for grade 9 students?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do at least appreciate the member opposite acknowledging that it was, actually, the previous government that put this system in place.

As the member has identified, we have just in the last year implemented the plan that has been developed by the Ministry of Education. We're supporting math teachers, funding their ability to increase their skills; we are modernizing the curriculum and asking for a renewed focus on the basics, including memorization of multiplication tables and fractions; and we are improving testing. Part of the thing that happens is that as you do that, you see that, oh, the tests are not good. That's why we're working . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: I do appreciate that answer, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister has taken some positive steps forward.

The decline has been so rapid that tens of thousands of Alberta families, many of them new Canadians, are now forced to pay out of pocket after-tax dollars for math tutors to backfill for what children are not learning at school. Will the government make it very clear that the expectation is for our schools to equip young people with the basic math skills that they need to succeed in the future regardless of pedagogical fads like discovery learning?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, that's exactly, as I've said now twice before, what our government is doing. We are working very hard to improve the math curriculum and to improve the outcomes that we are now testing for as well because we think that this is fundamentally important to the educational future of all Alberta kids.

But what I will say, Mr. Speaker, is that one of the other ways that we make sure that our kids get a good education is to make sure that there are enough schoolteachers in the schools that they are learning in. If we were to, for instance, have frozen funding in 2015, we would not see the kind of progress that we are now able to deliver.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Third main question.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, on that point, the government has been in office for three and a half years, and the math scores continue to come down.

2:00 Carbon Levy and Federal Carbon Pricing

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the voters of Washington state for the second time in a year rejected a proposed carbon tax in a referendum. This is the greenest state in the United States. Unfortunately, Albertans haven't had a chance to hold a referendum on the NDP's carbon tax. The Premier has said that she does not intend to proceed with her planned 67 per cent increase in that tax unless there is construction of Trans Mountain. Will she agree to require that a referendum be held before there are any future increases in the carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the member opposite is fully aware of what our government's position is with respect to the climate leadership plan and the matter of pricing carbon as a tool to fight climate change, something that is fundamentally important. I appreciate that the member is often inspired by what goes on south of the border; however, that's not how we take our direction. You know, in Washington, for instance, almost half a million people don't have access to health care, and that's also not a model that we're going to follow. What we are going to do is make progress on combatting climate change, innovation, investment in renewable energy, transit . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Kenney: Well, democracy is not an idea that belongs to the Americans, Mr. Speaker. Albertans want democracy. They want to have a say – they will in the next election, in any event – on the carbon tax.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal scheduled the date for the hearing on that government's constitutional reference on the threatened Trudeau carbon tax. It is going to be

supported by the governments of Ontario, Manitoba, and the incoming government of New Brunswick. Will the government of Alberta seek intervenor status to help defend provincial jurisdiction against the threatened federal carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite knows, we have adopted our own climate leadership plan. As a result, the actions of the federal government are not relevant to Alberta at this time. What I will say, however, is that the member's new-found affection for the Prime Minister and his desire to replace a made-in-Alberta plan, made in consultation with our industry, with a made-in-Ottawa plan that was not made in consultation with our industry is, well, perplexing. However, we will continue to work for Albertans, with Albertans on behalf of our collective environmental interests.

Mr. Kenney: Well, that's exactly the opposite of our position, which is to challenge the constitutionality of a federal carbon tax.

Mr. Speaker, why is it that the governments of New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan are doing more to defend the constitutional authority of the government and Legislature of Alberta than the NDP government is?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what our government is doing is leading the country in terms of taking action combatting climate change. Sometimes, you know, making decisions that are for the good of future generations requires strength and resolve in advance, and that is what we are doing. Because of that we're able to invest in the LRT, in the green line. We're able to finally move Alberta to a place where we can incent renewable energy, something that should have happened decades ago, and we are doing this on behalf of future generations of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mental Health Services

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When a young person is dealing with a mental illness, family can be one of the most important lifelines. However, families aren't always equipped to deal with the additional strain of caring for someone with a mental illness. In order for them to be effective and to support their loved ones, families need our support. They need to know what their resources are, where they're available, and how to access those resources. To the Minister of Health, Minister, I've heard from constituents that are caring for a child with mental illness, and they don't know where to turn. What is your government doing to connect families with the help that they need?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. I want to assure all Albertans that if you're ever at a time of crisis, if it's an emergency, please call 911. If it's something that you have a little more time to process and you want some advice on, you can always call 811 and speak to a licensed registered nurse here in the province of Alberta, and they will help you navigate through some of the options that are available.

In terms of system investments, we've increased our capacity for children and families by building the Rutherford mental health clinic here in Edmonton. We've also funded new counselling supports for survivors of sexual and physical assault through the

Zebra Child Protection Centre, and they supported over 1,600 children and youth last year.

Mr. Fraser: While we all hope that someone dealing with a mental illness can rely on the support of friends and family, that simply isn't always the case. Whether it's because they have no one to turn to or because the people in their life aren't equipped to help them, many people suffering from mental illness are at risk of isolation, homelessness, and much more. This is especially a concern for someone who is being discharged from a facility as that transition often results in falling through the cracks for these patients. To the same minister: what specifically is your government doing to ensure support for those suffering from mental illness after they've been discharged from a facility?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and again for the question. Currently we are in the process of monitoring over 150 initiatives that our government has led and been involved with because of the valuing mental health work that we did when we were first elected. I want to thank the former Associate Minister of Health for her work on that important file as well. There are 18 actions specifically related to Valuing Mental Health: Next Steps, including the building of an eight-bed youth facility in Red Deer, increasing psychiatric emergency service outreach at the Alberta Children's hospital, and the list goes on. We need to continue doing more, but much has been done.

Mr. Fraser: The issues that I've talked about today are symptoms of a much larger mental health crisis in our province. While spending has gone up, we're still struggling to improve outcomes. What we need is a province-wide vision for how we approach mental illness and to help those who are suffering. The Valuing Mental Health report is a good first step, but we need to make sure that the recommendations are being adapted into a holistic approach to mental illness, not simply being applied in a piecemeal fashion. To the same minister: how close are we to full implementation of that report, and is your ministry pushing for a more holistic mental health strategy for all of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's exactly what we're doing. That's why we didn't stop when we wrote a report. Many people said to us when we embarked on this process: we've written reports before, and they sat on a shelf. It was really important to them that this new government, our NDP government under the leadership of our Premier, develop next steps. That's why we have the 18 steps identified under the Valuing Mental Health: Next Steps report.

We've also increased investment through the mental health capacity building in schools. Now over 65,000 students in 182 schools in 85 communities have additional supports because this side of the House voted to increase the budget and give those supports to families while members on that side of the House voted to slash them and lay off front-line workers, Mr. Speaker. I think we know who's got the backs . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Health Care Accessibility

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, a constituent of mine in Lethbridge requires joint-replacement surgery. This constituent is a senior, as

is their spouse. The preference would be to have their surgery performed in Calgary, where their family lives and can provide social supports before and after the surgery. To the Minister of Health: is this an option available in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for this important question. The short answer is yes. A patient can request to have their surgery in a different community than the one that they live in. For example, a Lethbridge physician can e-refer directly to a Calgary surgeon or vice versa. Obviously, our goal is to get patients surgery as quickly as possible based on their needs, but we also know that we need to act with patients' wishes as a guide in this, and I want to applaud the member for her advocacy on behalf of her community.

Ms Fitzpatrick: To the same minister: how many joint replacement surgeries have been performed in Lethbridge over the past year, and what is the ministry's plan to protect that surgical capacity for my constituents?

Ms Hoffman: Specifically in Lethbridge, 233 were performed last year, and AHS performed 569 hip replacements in the south zone in 2017-18, also 778 knee replacements, almost 3,000 cataract surgeries. We protect our surgical capacity by investing in strong public health care, Mr. Speaker, unlike the members opposite, who want to fire 4,000 front-line workers, nurses. We've got the backs of ordinary families.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Recruiting surgeons and other health care professionals to our smaller cities and rural areas is a challenge. Some communities attempt to mount their own version of *La grande séduction* or the Newfie version: hey, boys; a soiree to meet the boys, and then they'll stay. What is the government's plan to ensure that we have the professionals we need in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a friend who works as a surgeon here in Edmonton, but when she was on a stint in northern Quebec, she certainly met every eligible bachelor in town, and I understand why communities want to make that the case. We need something more robust than that, though. I'm proud to work with the AMA and with our medical schools and with RPAP to ensure that we have recruitment aligned with the needs of Albertans. This is a long-term effort, and this is something that Conservative governments failed at and that we have taken up.

Government Services Communication with MLA Offices

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, last week I asked three different cabinet ministers why public servants working in Alberta Works and Alberta seniors offices have been ordered not to talk to staff in MLA constituency offices. Now, the minister said that they knew nothing about this and said that they would follow up with me to resolve the issue. Well, I thought: great. Since then, crickets. My office staff and I have not heard a word from any of the ministers or any of their staff or the much-vaunted MLA contact person. To the Deputy Premier: is this your idea of following up?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I don't have the Blues in front of me, I think what I did say or what I intended to say

is: please, give my office a call. We are happy to work with you on this matter. Every minister has an identified MLA contact to ease that flow of information. Mine is Courtney. She's a lovely human. She's on the fourth floor. Please, if you want to reach out to her or to me personally, I know the hon. member has my contact information. I've been able to solve a number of issues with him directly. My staff are working on a number of files. Of course, we take your concerns very seriously and would be happy to work with you. Give me a call or send me an e-mail, please.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, my office has been trying to get a meeting with this minister and have several issues resolved since August, and so far we've heard crickets. We've heard nothing from the other ministers either, but we did get some response. We got response from staff in constituency offices from all across the province, all saying the same thing, that they've heard the same directive. But, you know, funny thing: all of those offices were for opposition members of the Legislature, not a single response like that from government members. To the Deputy Premier: why the double standard? Why is your government punishing Albertans who had the temerity to elect non NDP MLAs?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again I welcome the member to reach out to me personally.

I want to give an example of another member on the opposition who did reach out to me. It's the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, who reached out to me and said how important it was that people who were getting inadequate service for dialysis on a bus parked in front of the hospital get quality care. You know what? We addressed that, this side of the House. Forty-four years with a Conservative government, and it was this side of the House in an opposition riding that rose to the challenge, fixed that solution. You know what, Members? The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills now says that if a UCP government was elected, it would hurt. You know what? He's right.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll come back to the topic at hand. Given that the constituency offices are supposed to be nonpartisan and given that we have received several reports that Alberta Works and Alberta seniors have been ordered not to speak to constituency office staff but only in opposition-held ridings, to the Deputy Premier. You know, five years ago this kind of behaviour would have had the Premier lighting the Minister of Transportation's hair on fire. What are you going to do to end this double standard?

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is available to help Albertans who need assistance. We are hearing from the front-line staff that MLAs were contacting them directly and that that made them uncomfortable. I will also say that nothing has changed that was in place before us. It's the same process. When you reach out to a minister's office, we are here to help, and if there are any specifics, please reach out to any of our offices.

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

Unemployment Provincial Budget Revenue Forecasts

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Corporate tax increases, provincial carbon tax, and costlier environmental regulations have

resulted in weak job growth, layoffs, and the highest unemployment rate outside of Atlantic Canada. What does this government say to Albertans who are out of work and unable to take care of their families because of NDP policies?

Mr. Ceci: Well, Mr. Speaker, what we have said all along is that Alberta is the lowest taxed jurisdiction in the entire country at \$11.2 billion less than the next province. We have said to Albertans that we are there to support you through this downturn, and we have done that with our employment support programs, with our income support programs. We addressed those. We did not leave them languishing and let people line up and not provide services. We have also provided support for job training, apprentices, and other things to get people back to the workplace as soon as possible.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the government's own budget says: "Beginning in 2021, additional revenue resulting from the federally-imposed carbon price tied to the construction of the Trans Mountain Pipeline will be used to support vital public services as the province stays on track to balance the budget by 2023-24." To the Premier: how does your government plan to provide vital public services to Albertans without a pipeline that you're not willing to fight for?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, this side has fought for the pipeline. We'll continue to do that with Ottawa, to stand up to Ottawa and say: look, this needs to happen as quickly as possible. The Premier has been across the country talking to all sorts of audiences, and some of them weren't very friendly, but she stood up for Alberta and will continue to do that. You know, we have a strong path to balance, and it's based on three principles: a strong and diversified economy, stable spending and cost containment, and reducing Alberta's reliance on resource revenues. We're doing all those things at the same time.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the government, then, saying that their budget is tied to the Trans Mountain pipeline and the ability to get the pipeline built?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I think I've addressed this question several times. Our path to balance relies on two out of three pipelines, but we're going to keep fighting for all three of those pipelines. We will get TMX, we will get line 3, KXL will happen, and we will balance by 2023. On that side they want to cut \$700 million for the richest 1 per cent and leave the rest of us to suffer. That's no plan. Our plan is going to work.

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

Oil Sands Advisory Group Former Co-chair

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, on October 13 the Premier and Tzeporah Berman each addressed the Alberta Teachers' Association. During her speech the Premier said, quote: soon after I was elected Premier, she – meaning Ms Berman – worked with leaders in the energy industry to help fashion Alberta's response to climate change. Listening to that comment, one might think Ms Berman was hired by the energy industry. Premier, Ms Berman was not hired by the energy industry; she was hired by you. Yes or no?

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

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the development of the climate leadership plan soon after we were elected, we discovered that oil companies had in fact been in conversation with environmental groups for some time on the topic of trying to break the land lock and having a more fact-based conversation around Alberta's resources and getting those resources to market. It was a surprise, actually, to me – and it was a surprise to many of us – that that degree of consensus actually existed. It had been led by many of Canada's largest oil companies. That was the consensus that was there, and then there were a couple of pieces of work in terms of implementing . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: No answer, Mr. Speaker.

Given that last spring in this House the hon. environment minister and the hon. jobs minister described Tzeporah's views as wrong and irrelevant and given that even before this government appointed her as co-chair of the oil sands advisory group, she was voicing extreme views about Alberta's energy resources and given that her opposition has escalated to the point that the Premier now feels the need to follow her around after every speech, Premier, what was your strategy when you hired Ms Berman, and how is that working out for Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will rise in this House and deliver an answer that I delivered many times to the same question over and over again, which is that there were three co-chairs for the oil sands advisory group in developing recommendations around implementing the 100-megatonne limit on emissions and a couple of other pieces, including clean tech reinvestments and land-based concerns with respect to oil sands development. That work was concluded some time ago, and therefore there is no need for the oil sands advisory group any longer.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier did hire Ms Berman and now has created a public spectacle by following her pipeline opponent on her speaking schedule and given that the Premier distances herself from Ms Berman now but that even she must recognize that she's responsible for handing Ms Berman a platform for her extreme anti-Alberta views in the first place, Premier, are you finally ready to admit today that your government made a mistake when you hired Ms Berman as a policy adviser for our most valuable resource?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the individual in question shared the co-chair duties with Dave Collyer and with Melody Lepine from the Mikisew Cree, but the members opposite don't seem much interested in talking about the indigenous involvement on that group. Neither are they interested in talking about the industry involvement, which came from a number of companies, including Imperial Oil, who just today announced a final investment decision on the Aspen project within the context of the oil sands emissions limit. Clearly, the climate leadership plan is working to spur investment, to reinvest in clean technology, and to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

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

Education for Students with Special Needs

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many students with special needs are eligible to receive full instructional funding if they attend

a designated special education private school. The funding manual requires that parents consult with their resident school board so that, quote, parents are making an informed decision, end quote, and an official from the resident board must sign off on the consultation. To the Minister of Education: why do parents need permission in the first place? Does the minister not trust Alberta parents to make the best choices for their child's education?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, it's very important that we have a firm line of communication, in partnership with parents and teachers and the school, every step of the way. When we're working with students that require special needs, it's doubly important to have that communication and that conversation every step of the way. Our government has been working hard to ensure that we have inclusive education with supports, and those supports include incorporating and helping to work with the families every step of the way.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the United Conservative Party trusts parents to make good educational choices for their children and given that just last year the minister himself affirmed the government's support for funding of private schools in a letter sent to the ATA and given that he agreed in the letter that special-education schools in particular, quote, should continue to receive government support, to the same minister: if you're so supportive of these schools, why are you bent on making it more difficult for students to access them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for bringing up the specific information. I would be glad to discuss this particular issue with him to ensure that we do have clean lines of communication. He's a hundred per cent correct. We have worked hard to make sure that we have funded all forms of choice in education here in the province of Alberta, and we're very proud of that. Through that choice, we have created a very strong school system, we have excellent results in the provincial achievement exams to reflect that, and I'm proud to every step of the way work with families to make a better education system.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that these families already face significant hurdles when it comes to securing a good education for their children and given that until this year parents were trusted to simply declare that they had consulted with the resident boards and given that no one was informed that a school board's official signature is now required until one week before school started, to the same minister: are you deliberately placing another hurdle in the way of educational choice for these families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, that would never be the intention. We've always been trying to ensure that, by fully funding enrolment growth and looking for ways by which we can refine special-needs supports for families. I think that we've done a good job. This helps along the way. I can certainly use this information to get back to see exactly what the potential challenge

is, but I know that on a universal basis, by funding public education and putting that investment in, which this government has done for four years now, we have built a better system, and we're proud of the results.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Racism and Hate Crime Prevention

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I was proud to host an antiracism consultation event in my constituency. A few individuals associated with the white nationalist movement and with a history of posting misogynistic and racist material online decided that this was an open invitation to drop by. Luckily, the incident was resolved without issue, but I fear that this will discourage members of the public from attending these events and participating. To the Minister of Education: what have you done to combat racism in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to take a moment to commend the member for making it clear that racist and misogynistic views have no place in this province. The presence of these people promoting white nationalism at public events is a frightening trend. It seems to be emboldening. Somehow they are emboldened to do more of this, and I find that reprehensible. That's why we have released our Taking Action Against Racism report and continue to fight against racism and to educate people about this. We have taken many practical steps, and we certainly encourage the public to help us in this fight.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I heard loud and clear from my work that taking allegations of racism seriously in the school system is a major issue. To the same minister: what is being done to make sure that all students feel safe to speak out against hatred and racism?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, racism and hatred, I believe, are a product of ignorance, and you fight ignorance with education. When students have a solid education foundation in critical thinking, history, civic responsibility, and community, they will understand that hatred and racism are fundamentally wrong. When students see themselves reflected as well in what they learn, when they see themselves reflected in the curriculum, their confidence grows, and they feel empowered to speak out against hatred.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As part of the antiracism announcement from the Minister of Education, our government also announced funding for hate crime units. Can the minister provide the House with an update on those units?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, in coordinating our intelligence efforts towards groups that are more systematically promoting hate for political purposes or what have you, it's important that we gather that information together. We have a Hate Crimes Committee, but we want to bring that together

with the police and the RCMP, that do gather that information as well, so that we can tighten the noose on these people who use hatred and racism for political purposes.*

Energy Policies

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, when the Energy department appeared before the Resource Stewardship Committee, the deputy minister could not assess a dollar value for the NDP's social licence. Given that the social licence was deemed meaningless by the deputy minister, to the Minister of Energy: when will the social licence be issued, who is supposed to issue it, at what price, and how long is it valid for in spite of the carbon tax?

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

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about what's real, which is the climate leadership plan, the fact that we have already reduced greenhouse gas emissions through our climate leadership plan; that we are seeing \$1.4 billion worth of investment in clean tech to help oil sands innovation, for innovation projects to support research, commercialization, industrial energy efficiency, and grants for bioenergy projects that help the agriculture and forestry sectors; \$400 million in loan guarantees to support investment in efficiency and renewable energy. We've cut small-businesses taxes by a third . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier's friends and allies and the NDP's fellow world travellers refuse to issue a social licence for pipelines and given that her Trudeau allies have held up construction of three pipelines but chose to impose the painful carbon tax, to the Minister of Energy: who are we supposed to get the social licence from to build the new pipelines? Is it from John Horgan or Jagmeet Singh or Gerald Butts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I noted with interest last week the member's comments on C-69, when he was talking about Trans Mountain, and he was talking about a number of other things. He said about indigenous consultation, "Enough is enough." Now, that is exactly the kind of attitude that doesn't get pipelines built. That is exactly the kind of attitude that drove us into a one-product, one-market, at-one-price situation, which led to a dramatic loss in jobs. Their way forward is no way forward for the province of Alberta.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that I attended Diwali celebrations last night here in Edmonton and given that all those unemployed engineers who were introduced in this House 18 months ago now cannot afford to celebrate Diwali because they continue to be unemployed, Minister, how do we measure and quantify the worthless and nonexistent social licence for the new projects, and how do we get those highly skilled professionals back to work?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the ways we do that is by investing in diversification to make sure that we are broadening the energy economy, adding value to our resources, something that the members opposite have opposed. One of the ways we do that is by investing in efficiency, in renewables, in clean tech, again broadening our energy sector so that Alberta can be an energy economy in every sense of that word, something

*See page 1878, left column, paragraph 7

that the folks opposite oppose. One of the ways we do that is by making sure that good projects go forward like the Imperial Aspen project, which got its final investment decision today, again making sure that we're broadening our energy sector, that we are making sure that good projects go forward. There are a number of different examples.

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

Economic Development

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From September and October the private sector shed another 10,000 jobs while the public sector added 7,000. The UCP recognizes and values the contribution of Alberta's public servants, but supporting them without cheques written in red ink requires a thriving private sector. This government's debt-ridden recovery has put our public servants and public services at the mercy of creditors and ratings agencies. To the Minister of Labour: what specifically are you doing to improve economic fundamentals in this province in order to drive real recovery in the private sector?

2:30

Mr. Ceci: I think I'll address the credit rating discussion that was part of that whole mix. You know, our province and our government were dealt a really tough hand with the collapse of oil prices, but instead of deep cuts across government and privatization, which would be a problem also for people working, we put jobs and diversification first. Our plan is working. We're seeing the deficit drop \$3 billion, Mr. Speaker. We have the strongest balance sheet of any province. I think TD Bank said that our balance sheet is the envy of the country. We're going to keep moving forward with the plan we have for economic diversification.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gottfried: The credit rating is under your watch, Minister.

Mr. Speaker, given that the NDP is undermining Alberta's entrepreneurs and businesses with burdensome regulations while the job-killing carbon tax has only made the situation worse and given that the NDP's red ink recovery has damaged our economic fundamentals so severely that boutique tax credits are akin to putting a Band-Aid on a critical wound, to the same minister: when will this government get out of the way of Alberta's renowned private sector and let them build their businesses, create jobs, and generate much-needed societal wealth?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, a significant part of entrepreneurs out there have small businesses. That's the backbone of any economy, and Alberta is no different. That's why we're putting jobs and diversification and supporting small businesses first. My colleague down there talked about the small-business tax cut, from 3 per cent to 2 per cent, that's funded by the climate leadership plan. Our plan is working: 90,000 full-time jobs last year alone, in 2017. We are going to continue to lead the nation. We're amongst the leaders in the nation again this year. That's going to help businesses.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gottfried: Mr. Speaker, given that both unemployment and the unemployed grow in this province, a robust public sector is only possible if we grow the economic pie, and given that the NDP has

chosen to both shrink that pie while coveting a bigger slice for their own coffers and given that something – or should I say someone? – has to give, to the same minister: which taxes will your government be hiking to pay for your red ink recovery? The carbon tax, income tax, some other magical debt-slaying world view tax, or is it all of the above?

Mr. Ceci: You know, the tax advantages of this province over every other province are \$11.2 billion, with no sales tax, no health care premiums. There's one more that I've forgotten off the top of my head, Mr. Speaker. Anyway, there will be no areas like that, PST and other kinds of things, that we will bring in. He wants to tax Albertans; we won't do it.

Energy Policies

(continued)

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, the government claims to support Alberta's energy industry, but their actions don't always match their words. In fact, their words don't always match the words from just a few months earlier. To the Energy minister: if you support Alberta's energy sector, why have you placed limits on our economic progress with the NDP oil sands emissions cap?

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

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The oil sands emissions limit is in place and has been for a couple of years now, yet we have seen new investments, like the Nexen \$400 million expansion at Long Lake, for example. We've seen JACOS make a big announcement as well, and just today we have the final investment decision coming from Imperial Oil on the Aspen project. I mean, just yesterday the UCP leader was cheering for the Aspen project to fail for his own political gain, but today is a different day.

Mr. Loewen: Given that it seems like the Environment minister has the Energy minister's tongue and given that with these projects that are started now, there's been a lot of other investment driven away at the same time, billions and tens of billions of dollars, and given that members of the NDP caucus have protested ethical and responsible energy industry in the past, including the Education minister, who chanted "no more approvals" and has since shown no regret, and given that the NDP has empowered other unapologetic anti-oil activists, will the Energy minister actually support the people in the energy industry by repealing the emissions cap and the job-killing NDP carbon tax?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we're fighting every day for what matters to Albertans, and that's market access by getting pipelines, it's diversification, and it's creating those jobs that Albertans want, especially in the energy industry. We're not going back to the boom-and-bust days. That's why we're working on a recovery that's built to last. Jobs are returning, new oil sands projects such as the Aspen project, that's going to be a \$2.6 billion investment, hundreds of jobs. It'll be in commission in 2022, and that's all operating under the oil sands cap of 100 megatonnes.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the oil field workers in northern Alberta are overwhelmingly opposed to the carbon tax and emissions caps, so maybe the minister should be talking to them, and given, Mr.

Speaker, that in order to revitalize our energy sector, we need to get better value for our resources, and given that to do this we need to get pipelines built and given that there was no support from this government when Keystone was vetoed and given that the Premier backed Trudeau's cancellation of Northern Gateway, will the Energy minister finally support our energy industry by forcefully and specifically demanding that Trudeau kill his no-more-pipelines act, Bill C-69, and the tanker ban, Bill C-48?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we're fighting every day for what matters to Albertans, and that's market access with pipelines, that's diversification, and that's the good jobs that the energy industry brings. Just this morning I was addressing the chemistry industry, talking about Bill 1 that we had last year, that's bringing billions of dollars of investment to Alberta as we speak, and there's more to come. They're keen to invest in Alberta, and that's because we have a forward-looking plan that takes into account doing what's right for the environment as well as bringing investment.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Electric Power Prices

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, as you know, the government capped the electricity rate that consumers pay at 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour, which sounds great if you didn't know that the average price that we paid used to be half that amount before the NDP started meddling with the electricity market. To the Minister of Energy: how does she answer seniors on a fixed income when they complain about skyrocketing electricity prices?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we're fighting for what matters for Albertans, and that's also a stable electricity system, stable prices. We're fixing a system that was, quite frankly, very broken. We're capping energy bills. We're bringing in common-sense reforms to make bills more affordable and predictable. When we talk about the carbon levy, we have rebates for seniors that help pay for those bills.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given that in Public Accounts Committee yesterday we were presented the actual costs of electricity being charged to Albertans either through rate charges or taxes and given that those prices reached as high as 9.4 cents per kilowatt hour in August this year, can the minister tell us how high she sees these electricity prices going and whether she could table studies showing future increases?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting that the Conservative members across the way want to defend the price spike system and the backroom deals that were part of the broken system that we inherited. They continue to do that, but, you know, on this side of the House we're on the side of protecting Albertans. We have their backs, and we're going to continue to do so when we're fixing a system that's broken by common-sense reforms and capping electricity prices.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, it is said that hindsight is 20/20 vision, and given that the minister has now seen how high electricity prices

have gone, does she still think that this government is making life better for Albertans and especially for those people on fixed incomes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we are protecting Albertans from those wild price swings that were caused by the system that was broken by the previous Conservative government. In capping bills, we are bringing more stability to families. We're bringing in common-sense reforms, a capacity market because on this side of the House we are on the side of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, to the Minister of Education. Junior high school can be a challenging time for students as they prepare for the transition to high school and many begin thinking seriously about their future careers. I know this government is working on modernizing our curriculum, but with government focused on updating what students will learn in early elementary school, significant changes to junior high are years away. What steps is the government taking now to ensure students are supported as they prepare for high school?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a very good question because, of course, as we build through the curriculum, we're certainly going to make sure we use good ideas that we get along the way straight away in our classrooms, to make sure we improve life for junior high and high school students every step of the way. For example, we've been increasing the dual credit program here in the province in regard to agribusiness and health care and in the trades as well. We're making adjustments to exams to make sure – you know, they have the no-calculator portion in the grade 6 and grade 9 exams so that kids are learning to do math on paper or in their heads. Every step . . .

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Given the recent decline in math scores in grade 9 PATs and given that the transition to high school can be a difficult adjustment for some students, it seems like action on the new curriculum for grade 9 is urgent. Will the minister consider changing the curriculum development process to tackle improved supports for grade 9 students sooner rather than later?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. I must say, Mr. Speaker, that we were anticipating that the grade 9 no-calculator portion was going to be problematic because it was the first time they were going to do it. We did it last year with the grade 6s, and lo and behold the grade 6s came through with flying colours this year. I would expect the same for the grade 9s next year. However, we want to make sure we're making these changes straight away. It's important to support grade 9 students, so I have directed my department to move the grade 9 curriculum development forward, so the writing will begin for the grades 5 to 9 curriculum this month.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. I want children to get the kind of education that will prepare them to lead our province for a brighter future. I've heard from my constituents that education is a critical priority for them. How is this government supporting the implementation of future curriculums to ensure that there will never again be students learning from a curriculum that's over 30 years old?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This modernization of the curriculum is historic. We're on to all subject areas and all grade levels, and it's a continuous process so that we're always working to move forward on the curriculum so that things don't get stale along the way. I must say – I've said it before; I'll say it again – that what you do not do to forward education is that you do not fire teachers, 4,000 teachers that you would lose taking \$700 million out of the budget that potentially could be used for education. That is the wrong way to go.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've been advised that the Minister of Education would like to clarify an answer on question 10.

Racism and Hate Crime Prevention

(continued)

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On question 10, when we were talking about antiracism initiatives, I would like to withdraw my comment that talked about tightening the noose.* My intention was to talk about tightening the net so that we use hate crimes intelligence from all police forces so that we are making categorical changes to ensure the safety of Albertans.

The Speaker: I'm advised that the practice of the House has been that the member who directed the first question would get an additional supplemental. Do you have an additional supplemental question?

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Thirty seconds, hon. members.
The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Central Alberta Sexual Assault Support Centre

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fellow members, I would be remiss if I did not embrace yet another opportunity to convey attention to the outstanding organizations that my constituency as well as those encompassing central Alberta draw support from. Friends, it is my pleasure to introduce our Central Alberta Sexual Assault Support Centre. With over 30 years of compassion and caring this organization serves the needs of our Albertans when the unthinkable occurs. They continue their mandate to work collaboratively with community partners to provide a safe haven to those who have experienced sexual abuse or sexual assault, whether the incident occurred recently or decades ago.

Recently, this organization introduced a 24-hour sexual assault text and web chat crisis line to further support those who are victims of sexual crimes. This anonymous, user-friendly method creates an instant resource to assist those who feel that there is nowhere to turn at 3 a.m. or that isolated locations render them powerless. As a result, no one needs to feel that they are alone. With a front line of

volunteers, this cost-efficient method provides instant communication and words of encouragement at a time when personal meaning may be challenged or hindered by sexual assault or abuse.

I am proud to share that this year the centre was recognized by our Red Deer chamber of commerce at their business of the year awards. Friends, this was the first year that a not-for-profit category was incorporated, and I commend the innovation, foresight, and immense commitment that the Central Alberta Sexual Assault Support Centre provides to our citizens. They have answered the call to support Albertans by listening and fashioning resources to combat feelings of no self-worth as a result of sexual abuse or assault.

It is my honour to speak to the work of this great organization in the House and to thank them personally for their pledge in supporting victims of sexual abuse and assault.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Métis Week and Louis Riel Day

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we will be away on Friday, November 16, I rise to remind everyone of Métis Week and the Louis Riel commemorative day. The Métis, hidden but in plain sight, are in our military, in our Legislature, and show leadership in many communities. There are eight Métis settlements in Alberta, with over 114,000 people. Métis Week marks the annual celebration of Métis people, their culture and contributions, including special events honouring the anniversary of Louis Riel's death.

Let's step back in history to 1932, when the Métis Association of Alberta lobbied for improved social and economic conditions and a land base for their people. Not until 1985 did Alberta commit to pursue constitutional protection of Métis land in the federal Alberta Act and the passage of the Metis Settlements Act to provide a framework for local self-government on the settlements. In 1990 land was transferred to Métis settlements, resulting in the only recognized Métis land base in Canada protected by legislation.

Last week we raised the Métis flag here at the Legislature to reaffirm our commitment to Métis rights in Alberta. Louis Riel was a champion of French language rights, the founder of Manitoba, a visionary for Métis self-determination, and exemplary of the new Canada.

This week we also celebrate Remembrance Day. Let me remind you of the 20,000 Métis and indigenous men and women who have served Canada by sharing a poem called a Prayer for Métis Veterans.

As Métis we are standing
We'll bow our heads in prayer
God bless those Métis veterans who
Saw war and who fought over there.

There are many of them buried
In far-off foreign lands
So proud to serve, because of them
Now Canada's freedom stands.

In prayers we will remember
The awful price they'd pay
They gave up their tomorrows
For us to live today.

Lest we forget, we remember November 11 and 16. Canada's strength is in her people. Among them are our resilient Métis.

Thank you.

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

*See page 1875, right column, paragraph 1

Diwali

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Diwali, also known as the festival of lights, commemorates the triumph of good over evil. Diwali is celebrated by the Hindu, Sikh, and Jain communities. Many people in Alberta and around the world celebrate this time with candle lighting, family gatherings, reciting prayers, and gift sharing. It is truly a joyous time of year. The Sikh community recognizes this celebration as Bandi Chhor Divas, as on this date 52 political prisoners were released back to the community.

I'd like to personally thank all those celebrating this colourful celebration for their contributions to our province. As we all know, different perspectives enrich our understanding, which is one of the points of this wonderful celebration. Not only is it the celebration of light over darkness but of knowledge and understanding over ignorance.

As we continue to work together to build a better Alberta for all who call it home, it is especially important to me to thank the community for their many social, economic, and political contributions to our province. Each and every community and ethnicity in Alberta strengthens our social and cultural fabric and adds vibrancy to our communities. It is this diversity that helps to make our province such a great place to live, work, and raise a family.

My caucus colleagues and I wish all families in the province a very happy Diwali and Bandi Chhor Divas, and I hope this new year brings joy and success to all Albertans and is filled with good health and prosperity. May the lamps of hope and joy illuminate our lives and fill our days with peace, happiness, and goodwill and may the festival season illuminate our homes and may the light empower us all to continue showing compassion and understanding towards one another.

Happy Diwali.

2:50 Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I am pleased to table five copies of the committee's report recommending the reappointment of the hon. Marguerite Trussler as Ethics Commissioner for a five-year term. Copies of this report are available online or through the committees branch.

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to provide notice that at the appropriate time I will move the following motion pursuant to Standing Order 42.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government of Canada to immediately prevent Statistics Canada from demanding that banks turn over the personal financial data of their customers, and be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to ensure that ATB Financial as well as credit unions in Alberta protect the personal financial data of their customers from being shared with third parties without their consent.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Bill 25

Canyon Creek Hydro Development Act

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 25, the Canyon Creek Hydro Development Act.

Mr. Speaker, on August 2, 2018, the Alberta Utilities Commission approved Turning Point Generation's Canyon Creek application for a 75-megawatt, closed-loop, pumped hydro energy storage project. The AUC determined that the project is in the public interest. The Hydro and Electric Energy Act requires that a bill be prepared in order to authorize a construction order and an order in council to authorize an operation order for the hydro development. The AUC has indicated that their review of the Canyon Creek application considered both the construction and operation of the project.

Passage of Bill 25 would authorize the AUC to make an order for the construction and operation of the Canyon Creek pumped hydro energy storage project. While this act meets our legislative requirements to grant the appropriate authority to the AUC, it does not remove any of the regulatory duties of that body or the Alberta Environment and Parks approval requirements.

Mr. Speaker, this project shows that companies are eager to invest in renewable and alternative sources of energy in Alberta. Privately funded projects like this one will help us transition to a low-carbon electricity system and enhance Alberta's position as a responsible energy producer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with section 19(5) of the Auditor General Act as chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I am pleased to table the report of the Auditor General of Alberta, November 2018. Copies of this report have been provided to all members.

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table today the requisite number of copies of a news report that I talked about in my questions.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of an Alberta labour force statistics report referenced in my questions today.

Thank you.

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we are now dealing with the motion under Standing Order 42 which was introduced by the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, which I think was delivered to everyone. I would allow the opportunity to the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to speak to the motion.

Statistics Canada Request for Personal Banking Data

Mr. Barnes:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government of Canada to immediately prevent Statistics Canada from demanding that banks turn over the personal financial data of their customers, and be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to ensure that ATB Financial as well as credit unions in Alberta protect the personal financial data of their customers from being shared with third parties without their consent.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important and urgent priority right now because Statistics Canada is asking banks across the country for financial transaction data and personal information of half a million, 500,000, Canadians without their knowledge to develop a new institutional personal information bank. Unfortunately, this includes personal banking and financial transactions, including bill payments, cash withdrawals from ATMs, credit card payments, electronic money transfers, and even account balances of Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, this has created urgency everywhere in Alberta that I've been, but it's also created urgency and concern amongst some qualified Canadians in this business. Statistics Canada has triggered a formal investigation by the Privacy Commissioner, Daniel Therrien, because of their request for personal banking information. Scott Smith, a privacy expert with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, has warned that businesses are concerned with the requirement to hand over consumer data to the federal statistics agency. He's very concerned that it will highlight the differences between Canadian privacy laws and a tough new law in Europe, and he believes this could even put trade at risk. Of course, we've seen what trade disruption with our NAFTA agreement with America has done for hardship for Alberta commodities, for Alberta families.

Mr. Speaker, it's especially urgent because Albertans are very, very concerned about this. Everywhere I went when we were home last weekend, whether it was a Tim Hortons, a roastery coffee shop, or an event, Albertans were coming up to me, Cypress-Medicine Hatters were coming up to me and saying: "Can we not do something about this? I do not want my personal information to be accidentally leaked. This is my information. This is my information, my information that I have garnered and protected my family with, with my bank." And now we have the Trudeau government once again stepping into Alberta families and lives demanding that banks and credit card companies hand over Alberta's detailed personal financial information – and this needs to be said again – without their consent, without Alberta families and Albertans consenting to this information being distributed.

We hear it every day in here. I heard it two or three times in the government's answers to our questions in question period. The government answers: we are fighting every day for what matters to Albertans; we are fighting for what matters to Albertans. Mr. Speaker, through you to the government: this matters to Albertans. Everywhere I went this weekend, Albertans would talk about the concerns they had with Alberta's economy, with other things going on around Alberta, but it was always mentioned at the same time that they're concerned about what the federal government is doing reaching into their personal information, their personal information that they've developed with a bank or they've developed with an institution, and they feel strongly that it's a massive overreach by Justin Trudeau. Again, this is this NDP government's chance to

show that they stand up for Albertans and not with their ally Justin Trudeau.

Mr. Speaker, these concerns of Albertans are not only about government overreach, but there's good cause for concern if this information accidentally gets out in the public, accidentally gets leaked, for the financial hardship that Alberta and Canadian families could suffer, just having to go around and cancel your cards, change your information, protect your family's fiscal future.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you what Ann Cavoukian, a former Ontario Privacy Commissioner, said about this. She said: "It just leaves a bad taste in your mouth, unfortunately, because it seems as if Stats Canada isn't being transparent. When you find out after the fact, it just leaves many questions unanswered, and I think that's the reaction you're seeing now. People are dumbfounded by this. I know it sounds extreme, but you can't rule out what can happen to personally identifiable data, which is very sensitive, that's collected for one purpose and ends up being misused for other purposes." Again, that was Ann Cavoukian, former Ontario Privacy Commissioner.

The Canadian Bankers Association said that they weren't even aware that Statistics Canada was moving to compel disclosure of this information. Think of the cost that'll be pushed back on Canadians, Albertans. Think of the accidents that could happen as this information comes out.

Mr. Speaker, a quick check of security breaches shows how easily this can happen in financial and personal-time hardship to Albertans and all Canadians. The Canadian government's record of privacy breaches just between April 1, 2015, and March 31, 2016, include – and these are only the worst ones – 84 breaches in Veterans Affairs, 50 breaches of privacy in corrections Canada, 47 in immigration, 21 in Canada Revenue Agency, and 17 breaches, not all of them serious breaches, in employment and social development.

Mr. Speaker, I'll just give you a couple of the ones that are amazingly hard to imagine. In 2018 the personal information of 2,027 Canadian federal government employees was lost after a device was stolen from public services at Procurement Canada. The employees weren't notified until more than two weeks after the breach. Can you imagine the financial information that could have been lost, the hardship that some Alberta or Canadian families may be facing now?

Mr. Speaker, in 2016 Statistics Canada lost nearly 600 sensitive files during a census process after confidential documents – confidential documents – were left on a subway, and hundreds were lost after an employee's car was stolen.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I believe that the data that you're sharing may well be important, but the principle – again, the same as yesterday: you've got to get to the point. What makes it urgent? That's what needs to be decided.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What makes it urgent is that the federal government, this government's good ally Justin Trudeau, is forcing this on over 500,000 Canadians right now, including many Albertans. Albertans are terrified of their information being leaked, and this is this government's opportunity to show that they really are here fighting every day for Albertans.

I ask all my colleagues in this House to support this motion. Thank you, sir.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 24
An Act to Recognize AMA Representation Rights

Mrs. Pitt moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 24, An Act to Recognize AMA Representation Rights, be amended by deleting all words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 24, An Act to Recognize AMA Representation Rights, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate November 6: Mr. Cyr]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 24, An Act to Recognize AMA Representation Rights. Imagine that. Just after my comments in second reading, we get before us a referral amendment. I was talking about how we need to refer Bill 24 to committee for study, and here we are now discussing just that. I believe that this referral amendment is in good order and would be the prudent thing to do in order for all of the unintended consequences that could be present with regard to the AMA representation rights in that we would be able to, through committee, understand more thoroughly what is going to transpire and possibly some of the pitfalls with regard to Bill 24 and improve it through the process of committee, make it better, and serve Albertans in a more wholesome way.

Our people, our researchers, have started checking around with doctors. My colleagues have also been talking to doctors. The doctors we've talked to so far didn't even know that Bill 24 was in the works until it was mentioned in last week's AMA newsletter. I'm sure every member here also gets that newsletter, and I will attest that it was in the newsletter, but apparently Bill 24 has been in the works for some time.

The doctors we were able to talk to or who got back to us in the short amount of time that we've had the ability to speak with them speculated about the different groups that the AMA may be interested in going after for representation. What we see in Alberta right now is that the AMA does not necessarily represent all doctors in the province, and as we move forward, the legislation will encompass all doctors, whether they're members of the AMA or not.

First, we have to understand that a medical doctor is not a doctor until they are told they are a doctor. There are lots of categories of doctors also: in training or doctors that are not quite doctors but are more than nurses. So let's review some as potential new AMA members. Of course, the AMA would like to continue to grow their membership ranks, and we see that there are a lot of potential new AMA members that would possibly be under this legislation.

The AMA may be going after resident physicians, the doctors in training, as a group to be represented even though the resident physicians are currently represented by a group called PARA, the Professional Association of Resident Physicians of Alberta.

Then there are the physician assistants. These people are academically prepared and highly skilled health care professionals who provide a broad range of medical services. Physician assistants act as health care extenders, working under the supervision of a

physician to complement existing services and aid in improving patient access to health care. Is the AMA looking to target them also?

We also have the clinical associates. They assess patients, make diagnoses, prescribe treatment, and perform minor surgery under the supervision of a physician. Often these people have been trained as doctors in other countries and are having their skills assessed and upgraded to meet Canadian standards. By definition, these people sure look like candidates also to join the AMA.

Finally, there are the nurse practitioners, registered nurses, RNs, with graduate degrees and advanced knowledge and skills. They are trained to assess, diagnose, treat, order diagnostic tests, prescribe medication, make referrals to specialists, and manage overall care.

Now, the doctors we talked to also expressed puzzlement and wondered why a doctor would never want to be part of the AMA. All of the doctors we talked to were members of the AMA. Membership in the AMA comes with benefits, so all the doctors we talked to felt that all doctors would benefit greatly from being members of the AMA. They have benefits such as a fairly large payout for maternity leave per child, the reimbursement of malpractice insurance, on-call stipends, a flat-fee payment to physicians who practise and also reside in rural, remote, northern program communities, continuing education program, and so on and so on, the benefits of being a member of the AMA. Most doctors would be wanting to become members to participate in those benefits. Of course, we the taxpayers pay for all that.

3:10

We have questions about the groups of medical employees the AMA wants to target to recruit to their ranks. We have questions about the benefits the AMA membership gets. So you see why we might want to send Bill 24 to committee. There are always more questions that need answering. We're not sure that all those questions have already been asked. Therefore, there could be some unintended financial consequences here to Bill 24.

Bill 24 was brought forward as part of an agreement between the AMA and the government. In return for bringing this legislation forward, the AMA agreed that doctors would receive no fee increases until 2021. The government has seen this as a way to save \$98 million in health costs. They've calculated that they believe there will be \$98 million saved over the next three years. The minister talked about saving \$98 million in health costs. That is \$98 million on a Health budget with an operating expense of just under \$21 billion. Therefore, the Health minister is talking about saving less than half a per cent of the Health budget. Actually, if you calculate it out over the three-year period, it's much smaller than that, so relatively small savings but savings nonetheless. The \$98 million is slightly more than the entire budget for addictions and mental health, which stands at \$86 million, and that number can be found in the Health estimates on page 157.

Do you know what the largest line item is in the Health budget, Madam Speaker? It's physician compensation and development. Physician compensation and development comes in just shy of \$5 billion: \$4,919,999,000. Just \$80 million for mental health and just short of \$5 billion for physician compensation, the largest item in the Health estimates. So the Minister of Health is going to save 1.8 per cent on physician compensation with this deal to save \$98 million.

That sounds a bit better, but we are going to have to do a lot better to save money in health care overall. It is a start but a slow start. All one has to do is take a look at the age pyramid of the province to see those baby boomers, just like me, marching towards retirement and the ever-increasing needs the baby boomers will face. The front-line workers know where those savings can be found.

Now, the government will crow about 89 per cent of AMA members approving the agreement, but voter turnout was only 30 per cent. Really, only 26 per cent of the current membership approved this plan, so only 26 per cent of the people who receive just shy of \$5 billion annually even cared to vote.

Madam Speaker, do you see why we might want to take this bill before committee? These dollar figures are astronomical. We have a Health budget that spends almost \$21 billion annually while our tax revenues from all forms of taxation, whether that be personal, corporate, education property tax, carbon tax, and others come to just shy of \$23 billion. If not for the natural resource royalties of \$3.8 billion, transfers from Ottawa of \$8.2 billion, investment income of \$2.8 billion, and revenue from other sources of \$10 billion plus all the borrowing – we cannot forget about all the borrowing that is currently taking place. How else would the province operate? Health alone gobbles up almost all of our tax revenues.

Madam Speaker, I think I've made my case here as to why we need to send Bill 24 to committee. With a budget as large as Health's and with a spend on doctors as large as there is, just shy of \$5 billion, and when the best the Health minister can find is 1.8 per cent of the annual doctors' salary, which is actually spread over three years, and less than half a per cent a year on the total Health budget, we need to have a conversation with the doctors and other stakeholders within the industry.

I would encourage all members to support the amendment to refer this bill to committee. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock's comments today, very thoughtful, on a very important piece of legislation, with lots of questions that need to be answered yet, which I think was the core point of his speech this afternoon. If he would take a brief moment just to expand a little bit on a couple of the things that he raised during his speech that I would be interested in.

He talked in great detail about the question of: what else would be prescribed in regulations if this legislation was passed in the way that it was presented? I'd like it if he would expand a little bit on his concerns on that, maybe even elaborate a little bit on historically what has happened on some of the legislation he's been asked to vote on by this government in his time as a member and then on what he's seen happen or not happen with the regulations side afterwards. Maybe he'll expand a little bit for this Chamber on why that's an important question for the opposition.

Also, you know, the question that he raised about how this could possibly give the minister more power through regulations than we know: I think that's a fair question to make sure that we understand.

Then, lastly, he raised during his comments concerns around consultation. I know you probably get bored, Madam Speaker, when you're in the chair and hearing us talk about that, but in reality we have seen, as you know, this government consistently having to come back in sessions afterwards to fix legislation they brought to the Chamber. Just the other day, on another bill, they managed to catch it in time this time, which was helpful, and they had to change a bill that they had just brought to the House days before.

Maybe the hon. member could expand on those three points a little bit, as he did in his speech. That would be helpful for me.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleague for the questions. Of course, we need to take a look at all

of these aspects as the Official Opposition. The government, to a large degree, is asking us to just trust them. We receive these bills, and in a very short period of time, most times the next day, we're discussing bills that are fairly in-depth, that have huge consequences for the people of Alberta. Many times we have the pitfall of legislation that will be enacted that gives the Executive Council significant powers to put forward regulations as they see fit, and this Legislature, the members here, really have no influence on how that is going forward. As Official Opposition members we continue to encourage the government to bring forward these bills in a way that we're able to digest more of it in a timely manner, to have more time to consult with stakeholders, and to receive more information back on how Albertans are viewing these.

We definitely have to be careful, in my opinion, with the powers that we give the minister of any department, a single person, giving them powers to enact these regulations and make decisions on behalf of all Albertans. We need to be very careful that we do not get into a situation where the minister has powers that would not be healthy for our society.

3:20

The third thing. With regard to consultations, we have seen time and time again over the last three and a half years legislation being brought forward and that stakeholders within the industry or the profession or the group that's being largely affected by the legislation being brought forward have significant concerns with what is being proposed. Time and time again we as the Official Opposition have asked this government to please put in place the proper consultation so that all Albertans, in a very transparent manner, are able to see that this is good for Albertans going forward. What I'd like to see is the opportunity for Bill 24 to . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to the referral amendment this afternoon for Bill 24. I just want to reiterate that this bill and the proposed amendments in the bill really just formalize the government's long-standing practice of working directly with the AMA on matters of physician compensation and physician programs. I just want to remind members that it doesn't really change the existing processes that have currently been in place between the government and the AMA. It doesn't give the AMA any new powers or abilities. Really, it just sort of formalizes a long-standing informal process. This is something the AMA has been asking us for, and, you know, we're here to deliver on that commitment. For that reason, I would encourage members to vote against the referral amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Nixon: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the hon. deputy government whip's comments. I want to reiterate for the Chamber – this is under 29(2)(a), and then I have a question – that this side of the House at first glance actually probably supports this legislation. It was just brought forward by the government. We're obviously doing our due diligence as opposition and talking to some constituents and people that will be impacted, just trying to make sure of that, which is our role.

I'd like the hon. member, though, to maybe expand under 29(2)(a) – or if the minister who has brought forward the bill wants to as well, that would be helpful – on some of the consultation that was done to provide assurances to this House that this should not go to committee. We are speaking about the amendment. It seems to me that you're indicating this does not need to go to committee.

Maybe you could expand on what the government has accomplished or done that would make this side of the House comfortable that our doctors and our constituents have been properly consulted on this piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions, comments under (29)(2)(a)? Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do have a question for the hon. deputy House whip. One thing he said there is that this is actually just formalizing already standing practices. I am the Labour critic, not the Health critic, and I know that this is a Health bill, but the question that I have is that from what I read, rather than saying that it formalizes, it actually gives the AMA exclusive – exclusive – rights to represent the physicians of Alberta.

Now the question I have for the hon. member. If, from my understanding, 80 per cent of physicians are members of the AMA, the other 20 per cent, that have elected not to be, are going to be affected by this legislation now. How can he say that there are no changes to the current practices? I know it's only a six-page bill, but in that bill it says specifically that they have exclusive rights to represent physicians. If you could comment and help us understand this, it would do us a lot of good on this side of the House.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to respond. You know, I just think it's important to remember a few things that definitely won't help the medical system here in the province: a promise that the legacy party of the members opposite, the Wildrose, had actually planned to send patients to the United States if they weren't able to access health care here in Alberta.

When we're faced with a party on the opposite side who is proposing experiments in privatization with our health care system, that would only put patients at risk. It would allow their wealthy friends and donors to jump the queue and access health care services before everyone else. In Canada health care access is based on your need to access health care and shouldn't be based on your ability to pay. We've got to be really wary about what the Wildrose legacy party and now the UCP has been proposing in terms of the way that they'd like to manipulate the health care system. Sending people to the U.S.: it really just shifts those jobs outside of Alberta. What I would rather see, instead of taking patients away and sending them elsewhere, is to make sure that we have a health care system here in Alberta that works for everybody, that it doesn't matter how much money you have, you are able to access the system just the same as everybody else.

I can tell you that another thing that's not going to help the health care system here in Alberta is the \$700 million tax cut for the wealthiest 1 per cent among us. What the members opposite are proposing, in terms of giving tax breaks to their wealthy friends and insiders, is not what our health care system needs. We need to make sure that we're investing properly in our health care system. One of the first actions of our government was to reverse a \$1 billion planned cut that the legacy party of the UCP was proposing. We also reversed the idea of having a health care premium, Madam Speaker. Who knows? That may be what they're going to be proposing in the next election. They really haven't made their intentions clear to Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? Fort McMurray-Conklin.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak to the referral motion on Bill 24, An Act to Recognize AMA Representation Rights. Our role as legislators and as Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta is to ensure that we're doing everything reasonably practicable to make sure that we are making life better for Albertans. It is important that we have time to consult with stakeholders and Albertans to ensure that their voices are heard and that we have evaluated all potential consequences, both positive and negative, of all pieces of legislation before we vote on them.

This bill is no exception. In my previous time I served in Ottawa for the minister of the environment there. In Ottawa it's a long-standing practice that every single piece of legislation automatically goes to committee for consideration before the third reading. As such, stakeholders are able to come and talk directly on the bill and make sure that most of these unintended consequences are dealt with before the bill gets enacted. I truly believe that that's something that could be very useful for this particular bill, because while on the surface it looks quite benign, we don't know what the unintended consequences are.

Being from Fort McMurray, I've seen first-hand the struggle that rural communities have and face in receiving adequate health care. We far too often face challenges in attracting and retaining doctors and other health care professionals within our region. Often physicians prefer to stay in larger centres for a variety of reasons. This is why I feel that this bill might disproportionately and negatively affect our rural communities. In fact, there are doctors that work within the emergency department of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo's hospital, the Northern Lights regional health centre, that actually fly in and fly out of our community. They live in Toronto, in Calgary. They serve our emergency department, which is wonderful, but this creates some challenges, and it's not an ideal solution.

For example, when I was in grade 3, our family doctor left. This created some struggle, and it took us nearly five years, having a different family doctor almost every single year over those five years, before we could find another family doctor. We celebrated when we got that new family doctor. They left two years later. By the time I was in about grade 9, I gave up on the idea of having a family doctor. I typically just go to walk-in clinics. That's partially due to the struggle we have in recruiting and retaining doctors in many of our rural and northern communities. While this is just my experience, rural Alberta faces a complex range of issues in regard to physician access.

3:30

According to Alberta Health data the number of physicians has dramatically outpaced the province's population growth in recent years. At the same time, the number of doctors practising outside of cities has decreased. There are many challenges in recruiting and retaining doctors in many of our northern and rural communities. This is not just the case in Alberta, but this is a nation-wide problem. There's both a shortage and a maldistribution of the physician supply, with many rural Canadians being disproportionately affected. Forward-thinking strategies, including rural exposure for training and training local students, help to improve this, but we're not quite there yet.

Rural Canadians already experience lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality, higher cancer mortality, higher cardiovascular disease mortality, and higher accident rates. According to a 2017 Canadian Institute for Health Information report, of the 84,000 physicians that are in Canada, 92 per cent of them practise in an urban setting. That's a staggeringly high percentage of our doctors across Canada that practise in urban

settings. It's worth noting that while 6 million Canadians live in rural Canada, which represents about 18 per cent, only 8 per cent of our physicians are in rural Canada. That's a 10 per cent differential. Furthermore, when you do a study into how many specialists in Canada practise in rural settings, that drops even more, down to 3.1 per cent. These two facts mean that many rural Canadians must travel to receive the health care they need because so many simple services aren't available. Yet, at the same time, the percentage of doctors has decreased.

In 2012 8 per cent of physicians practised in rural areas. In 2016 this percentage declined in Alberta to only 7.3 per cent. Of the 994 new doctors practising family medicine in Alberta between 2012 and 2016, only 60, or 6 per cent, chose to practise in rural areas. This is really alarming, that many of our new doctors are choosing not to practise in rural areas and are instead choosing to practise in urban areas. This is for a variety of reasons. Many doctors end up staying where they studied because they've started their families, they have their network of friends, and they're used to that lifestyle, having spent many years studying medicine in urban settings.

We've all heard stories in small communities of doctors that have to be on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week without any backups. This is just one of the many reasons that many young physicians are choosing not to take positions in rural communities. They feel that the family balance is not as easily attainable. Furthermore, we've heard that it can be difficult for a surgeon's spouse to find employment within the field of study of their choice within smaller communities. There are a variety of reasons why doctors are not choosing to go to these rural communities.

The College of Family Physicians of Canada in 2016 in collaboration with the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada released a background paper on the challenges for medicine in rural communities. It stated that "Canadians who live in rural communities tend to [have] poorer health than that of their urban counterparts," a disparity that's "directly related to their distance from urban centres." This trend, they found, is particularly severe amongst indigenous populations, which often live in rural and remote communities.

There are just over 10,000 physicians that work in Alberta as of September 2018, and there's only about 7.3 per cent of those doctors that practise in rural communities. Why do this government and the AMA feel that the AMA's role in the negotiating process should be entrenched in legislation? What other negotiating body is threatening the AMA? Why does the AMA need to have exclusive representation when approximately 80 per cent of the doctors already belong to the AMA? Were the 20 per cent that don't currently belong to the AMA consulted on this legislation? Ultimately, if this agreement has been working for the last 15 years, why is it all of a sudden so important to enshrine in legislation? I'm not saying that it's not, but I'm curious as to: why now?

I'm grateful that this bill has found potentially some savings. The government maintains that this agreement leading up to the creation of this bill would result in about \$95 million in health care savings. That's outstanding. But is this long-term savings, or is this something that could potentially end up costing taxpayers more when it comes to negotiating future agreements, mitigating any short-term savings?

This bill had five months of negotiation, and the use of facilitators was required to reach the agreement. Five months of negotiation, but only 30 per cent of the doctors voted. To me, that's not good enough. It received 89 per cent support, but that's still 1 in 10 doctors that belong to the AMA that did not support this, as I've previously brought up. Eighty per cent of the doctors do belong to the AMA, but there are 20 per cent that don't. Were these doctors consulted?

The bill ends the retention program that paid doctors about \$5,000 to \$12,000 a year for each year that they stay in Alberta. Are there risks that this could negatively affect our ability to recruit and retain doctors in our rural and northern communities? To me, there are so many unknowns within this bill. What else is going to be prescribed in regulations? How many doctors were consulted? Were rural doctors consulted? Were rural hospitals consulted? Were rural health providers consulted? What consultations actually went into this bill? What questions were asked during these consultations?

This bill seems to give the minister more power over regulations, and I'm curious if this is actually true. What could all of the unintended financial consequences be? We see short-term savings, but is this actually going to be something that can be maintained? Will this actually save Alberta taxpayers, or will this end up costing us more money when it comes to renegotiation down the line? How will this affect negotiations, going forward, in regard to physician benefits and compensation? What does it do to the 20 per cent of the doctors that don't currently belong to the AMA? Does it make many of them perhaps choose to leave Alberta and go and practise elsewhere? Perhaps they have reasons as to why they didn't want to be part of the AMA. All of these are questions that we really need to be asking ourselves.

It is so important that we take these questions seriously, because our health is something that we can't afford to get wrong. We really can't afford to not have doctors. So many of us in this Legislature represent communities that have countless health care horror stories due to the difficulty in attracting doctors to our communities. Before we can choose whether this is something we can support or oppose, I truly believe that we need a lot more information, and we need the opportunity to consult with stakeholders and the time to do the possible research.

I've personally reached out to a few doctors that I know as well as some lawyers and asked them questions to see what their opinions are of this. But we haven't had enough time to fully consult with enough health care providers, the hospitals and make sure that this bill doesn't have these negative, unintended consequences for our rural communities. It's something that we really need to take seriously. Health care decisions are way too important to get wrong.

While I really do thank the government for their commitment to medical professionals, we can't move forward without some further study or at least some answers to these questions that we've been raising to ensure that this bill is actually positive for Albertans. It's something that's really, really important, and we can't afford to get this wrong.

The current legislation to make the AMA the exclusive representative when governments consult physicians on compensation and benefits: this exists and has been existing for the last 15 years, this relationship. The reason as to why we're doing this now is something that I'm just curious about.

3:40

As I stated previously, when I was in Ottawa, it was very common for pieces of legislation – in fact, it was required that all pieces of legislation go to committee and were studied by a multiparty system, where you could bring in stakeholders and ask questions of these stakeholders to examine the legislation. Oftentimes bills changed substantially while they were in committee, and the opposition members or government members would bring forward stakeholders that brought up some very valid points and often made changes that were critically important to preventing the negative consequences that no one had anticipated. That's why I believe that sending this bill to committee to allow us to have a little

bit more in-depth consultation would be great. I would be really curious and interested to hear what kinds of consultations went into this bill and how many doctors, how many different health care professionals were actually consulted on this bill prior to it hitting our tables there this week. It's something that I think all of us, on at least this side of the House, are really curious to hear, and I'd really appreciate having some of these answers.

I believe that committee is the best possible place to have this. I'm not saying that this is a bad bill. I don't know. I really want to have some of these questions answered before I make a decision, because I truly believe that it's important to make informed decisions before voting on any piece of legislation.

I would truly, truly appreciate it if all members of this Assembly consider this amendment and refer this piece of legislation to committee. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to be able to respond to some of the questions raised by the hon. member and to give the answers to the questions, fair questions, that she's asked during this stage of debate in consideration of the amendment.

I want to begin just by clarifying and reminding everyone that the reason why we're doing this motion is because we entered into a fair and open and good-faith negotiation with the AMA about the state of health care and their contract here and their rates of compensation in Alberta. This relationship has been in place for many, many years, at least three rounds of negotiations that I've been well versed in, Madam Speaker.

When we were in obviously challenging fiscal times, we went to our labour partners and we said: "We need you to take zeros. Albertans are not in the best state economically right now, and we don't want to enter into more borrowing than necessary. We want to ensure that we continue to improve and protect the services that Albertans rely on. We're not talking about deep cuts that would hurt the front lines, but we do want you to take zeros. We think that that's fair and reasonable."

In consideration of that – actually, in the amending agreement we got rollbacks, which definitely helped us on our path to balance and helped us achieve these \$3 billion ahead of projections that we're at today, but also they said: "Okay. Fair enough. We understand that there's a need for zeros." They didn't exactly say it that quickly, but they said: "We want to ensure that we enshrine this relationship, that moving forward the government of Alberta always treats the AMA as a partner at the table and that it's a respectful relationship and it's enshrining the existing relationship that's been in practice in this province for many, many years." Madam Speaker, I think that's a fair price to say: "We're going to continue to have a reasonable relationship with you and a respectful relationship with you, and we're going to honour the role that you have embarked on."

I also want to clarify. One of the questions asked was around the number of physicians. Ninety-six per cent of Alberta physicians are members of the AMA, and those 96 per cent get regular updates through president's correspondence – I think many MLAs get the president's letters as well – and through, obviously, their rep for them and their organizational structure that they have in place. Ninety-six per cent of physicians in Alberta had an opportunity to vote on this. Many did. I understand that it wasn't full participation. But I don't think any of us were elected by 100 per cent of our electorate coming out to elect us, and we still represent those democratic processes that are in place. It did have a very strong vote

of confidence from the members of the AMA that chose to vote on it, and I respect their right to ask for this.

This was done many, many months ago. They had lead-up to their vote, then obviously we ratified the agreement, and then there have been many, many months since then, and we certainly have welcomed feedback from anyone who had considerations about it during that period of time. But this was done in an incredibly transparent way through public disclosure, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other speakers to the amendment? Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate you recognizing me, and I appreciate the chance to rise and speak to the amendment. You know, it's been interesting sitting in here and listening to the debate and the opposition side of the floor coming out with so many reasons as to why this needs to go to committee, as to why this needs to be further discussed, and absolutely clear is our support for our doctors and how good they are, the best in the world, support for our health system, how good it is, support for all our front-line workers but wanting to make sure that we have the opportunity, because we certainly have the time, to get this right. So why not send it to committee? Why not take the opportunity to put this in front of MLAs from both sides, from the parties not in government and have a chance to discuss this with many professionals, with many Albertans, and many other related allied professionals that it could affect?

There are many things that I want to go over, but as my colleague from Fort McMurray mentioned about more of a standard process in the federal government and how it's habit to refer many, many laws, many, many bills to committee, to the opportunity where, in our case, Albertans would have the chance to come in and be fully involved in their province. We as more generalists could hear from experts, could hear from Albertans who know their industry, whose future depends on it, quite frankly, and Alberta's future depends on us getting this right. You know, why not do that at a table where there's time to call in the right witnesses, where witnesses can hear what's going on and come forward, where they can offer all kinds of expert knowledge?

You know, when I was first elected in 2012 – and I always want to say how grateful I am to the people of Cypress-Medicine Hat for this opportunity – one of the first committees I was on was Resource Stewardship, and the committee was very active. It was active equally from the government people and the opposition members. Madam Speaker, I remember us looking at three or four different hydro projects for northern Alberta, for the Calgary area. We even talked about some in other areas like the eastern part of Alberta, and we had experts come in. We had Albertans that knew the impacts, knew the costs, knew the potential come in and tell us about it. We had many First Nations people come in and express their ideas and their opportunities and concerns. It was just a great chance for me, especially being a brand new MLA, and even today, to really listen to those that it would affect the most, to those that it would help the most, and those to make sure that we get it right.

I'm sitting here wondering why this government is not willing to give us the chance to minimize unintended consequences, to get it right. You know, I think I heard that this formalizes a long-time agreement that the government has anyway. Well, if it's a long-time agreement or a long-time relationship or a verbal agreement, what's another couple of months going to take? What's another couple of months going to take when we're here anyway? I see that we don't

have night sittings this fall. It's something we could certainly do at night. Certainly, we're here. We're willing. We want to do the very best we can for Alberta. Why not let us?

3:50

Let's talk about all our great doctors and all the specialties that are in that incredible profession and all the expert, expert knowledge and all the specialized knowledge. I just can't imagine how a little, six-page bill could possibly encompass everything that's important to our important public servants, essentially, so let's take the time to get that right.

I want to talk for a second, too, about what it says here about the relationship between the AMA and Alberta Health when it does become formalized in this bill. Because we don't have a lot of clarity in the short six pages and we're under the belief that many of the details will be just in regulation, controlled by the minister, controlled by the bureaucracy, controlled by the government, we also think at this point that it means that any independent professional associations, and, our people believe, including the Alberta dental association, can no longer negotiate individually with the government and must go through the AMA. I mean, that's just one of many other good associations and other good professionals that take financial risk, dedicate large parts of their life to very, very aptly and very, very capably serving Albertans.

Madam Speaker, I think back to the last time that this minister and this government looked at changing things with the dentists. I don't know if she's heard as much negativity from the profession as I have about her changes, but my goodness she's not only opening the door for this to happen again; she's doing it without the opportunity of many, many of this great profession to come forward and tell us that they're in agreement or tell us how we can make it better. I see that as such a missed opportunity. I wonder why the government would take that risk. I wonder why the government doesn't want to get this as good as possible.

I feel the need to tell a few horror stories, and I think back to health care. I don't know what all the motivation was when the regions were basically eliminated and AHS, Alberta Health Services, was set up, and the unintended consequences – my colleagues use those words lots; I want to use those words lots – that it caused. You know, I've said it in the House before, Madam Speaker, that when I talk to AHS employees in Cypress-Medicine Hat, tremendously hard-working, you know, wanting to give Albertans the best service they can, they talk about the stories about how procurement is so offside, how when they need a little bit of glue, they have to wait two weeks before a big case finally arrives. They end up opening one of the big cans and basically shelving the rest or putting it somewhere where it won't do anybody any good. Can you imagine this kind of thing happening with expensive medical supplies?

My favourite is the one in the Medicine Hat hospital. I haven't heard this one for a while, so hopefully AHS fixed it, but it used to be that when the parking arm broke and you couldn't get out of the parking lot, you'd push the button, and a person would come on and say: "Oh, I'll come right down, and I'll fix that for you. By the way, I'm in Red Deer. I'll be there in five hours." These are the kinds of things that happen when you don't do things right, and as people on both sides of the floor have said, our health service, the physical and mental and health of Albertans, especially our seniors that built this province and our youth, is too important not to get this right.

I'm really, really glad that so many of my colleagues talked about the risk with rural communities and how this may disproportionately affect service to rural Albertans through doctors' services.

The Bow Island hospital – and there are so many good things to say about those people; they're so independent, they're so hard-working, they expect so little – is just going through a process

where they started to lock the emergency door at 5 o'clock. Can you imagine – can you imagine – a real emergency and you can't get your loved one or yourself in the door? I will give our Alberta Health Services people down south tons of credit. They've been made aware of this problem. We've discussed it with them. They're working on a solution. They have a solution. But this, Madam Speaker, is exactly what me and my colleagues are talking about. This was done without realizing the huge impacts it could have on an Albertan, an Albertan family, somebody in crisis, somebody at the worst time for them, unfortunately. Yeah, we'll correct the problem after, and I believe Alberta Health Services will get there, but we don't need to do it after.

It's like this bill. We don't need to do it after. We can send this to committee, we can bring in the experts, we can bring in the dentists, we can bring in professionals and allied professionals from all other representative groups that the AMA is purporting to represent, and we can hear what's important. We can get this right. Madam Speaker, why would we not put in that month or two when we're here anyway, when the government doesn't have us sitting at nights, when we all want to do the best we can for Albertans? That makes zero sense.

We've talked about how rural Albertans, again, you know, don't have access to as many doctors. This agreement talks about some uniformity, some maybe consistency, but that may have a negative impact on a rural doctor, who out of necessity may need to be on call a lot more, who out of necessity may need to see a lot more patients, who out of necessity may have to look for a locum and pay more out of his or her pocket to make that happen. Madam Speaker, I don't know. I don't think the government knows. Let's send this to committee, and let's find out. Let's spend the time to do that right.

While we're here, maybe this bill can encompass – I mean, I understand that universities are more directly responsible for who gets into medical school and who doesn't. But one of the things that surprises me the most, and maybe this bill could improve it, especially for rural Albertans and rural Alberta, Madam Speaker, is the number of young people from Medicine Hat – and I'm talking 10, 20, 30 of these young people that I've met over the last six years – that have, like, 4.0 grade averages, 3.9, are the smartest young people anywhere in Alberta, Canada, in the world, that want to get into medical school and can't.

Dr. Swann: They've got to have more than marks.

Mr. Barnes: Well, I'm hearing there has to be more than marks. Of course there does, but we also know that parts of rural Alberta are short of doctors, whether it's because of rationing or limitations the government has had to put on to control spending.

The fact remains – the fact remains – that we need a more transparent system there, and we need more opportunity, Madam Speaker. We need more opportunity for young Albertans that just want to give back to other Albertans in Alberta. We need more opportunity for them to do that, for them to reach their pinnacle, for them to service Albertans. I don't see that anywhere in this bill. Maybe the AMA wants the same. Maybe the AMA can help us. Surely that's a question that somebody can ask at committee. Somebody can answer it. We can make this better, better for Albertans.

I also, you know, have some concerns about choice for Alberta doctors.

4:00

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have to say that I was very enlightened by what my colleague had to say. He had some good points. I think that we all can agree that utilizing our committees as they were intended, which is to discuss legislation within this Legislature, is important. Something that is as important as moving our doctors into a potentially unionized environment is a concern, I think, that all Albertans have if it's not done correctly. That is where a committee would be an excellent route to go. I have to say that whenever we've got a bill that seems to come before this House, the government seems to have trouble doing the appropriate consultation it needs in order to be able to get the bill right the first time. [interjections]

Mr. Hunter: That's funny. Sadly, they think that's funny.

Mr. Cyr: Well, yeah. Unfortunately, it does seem like this is a bit of a joke for the government right now.

I will tell you that what isn't funny is that this could actually impact our health care system if we get this wrong. We will end up with, potentially, doctors that are unhappy.

I asked specific questions on the referral last time. I'd asked for the government to come back with answers. There's almost going to be \$100 million worth of savings. I have to admit that when it comes to this government, it seems like the only thing they can do is spend, but in this case they're actually looking for efficiencies within the system, and I commend them on that. The problem is if that \$100 million comes out of rural Alberta. That was my question before: if we're going to be finding \$98 million in savings, where is that money coming from? Will we end up putting rural Albertans at risk because we can't find doctors?

I have to say that it's disappointing whenever we've got something as important as doctors coming before the House. This is a good thing that would be discussed thoroughly through a committee setting.

I have to say that whenever I discuss doctors in my constituency, one of the things that continues to come up is that the city of Cold Lake has a lack of doctors. It has had a long-term lack. It has been a long-standing problem within the constituency. I heard from the member before when she was talking about being unable to find doctors in her constituency. In mine, the only way that we were able to get a family doctor is that we were blessed with my wife getting pregnant. Apparently, if your wife is pregnant, a doctor has to be made available. That was the only way that my family was able to get access to a physician.

This is a problem that already exists. My concern here is that if we move this forward and we go to a standardized, set pay scale for the doctors in rural Alberta, are we going to be ensuring that these doctors move to somewhere that is – I guess we've heard over and over again – more urban? We already heard that the majority of doctors favour our urban settings, which is fine. I understand wanting to live in Edmonton or Calgary or Lethbridge or Grande Prairie. The thing is that they're wonderful cities, and I can see why physicians would want to live in them, but we do need health care outside of those major centres. If we get this wrong, that means we're going to see a migration – it may not be today, it may not be tomorrow, but it's going to slowly happen – and then through attrition we're going to see less and less doctors available, and that is unfortunate.

The question I have for my colleague is: do you see attrition happening within Alberta if we get this wrong?

Mr. Barnes: Thanks to my colleague for the question. I appreciate it. Well said. A couple of things that were cut off when the bell went . . .

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

Dr. Swann: Well, Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to speak not only to the amendment but to the bill itself. I've never been a member of the AMA – I chose to be independent – but I know that the AMA has played a critical role in terms of negotiating with the government of Alberta over the years in establishing a fee schedule that they can live with and also in establishing some variance on that fee schedule and is involved in the capitation system, where, on a particular roster of patients, a physician would get a certain amount of money and therefore is more free to provide a range of services rather than just one-off services driven by volume, where his income is driven by volume.

I'm also aware that over the years there have been some disparities develop in the Alberta Medical Association. Certainly, some specialties are, I would say, inordinately valued, and their billings are significantly higher than in other areas of medicine. Historically, too, some specialties have gone directly to the ministry to negotiate their fees separately from family physicians, for example, who are part of the AMA. Their fees are negotiated as with most of the various professions within the medical profession, are covered by the AMA.

So what's developed is a sense of inequity and favoured access for some specialties over others, and that's part of a problem that's divided the profession and pitted one group against another. That has not been helpful not only to the building of a stronger sense of mutual support and fairness within the association, but also it has meant that when medical students look at the levels of income – and they're obviously faced with student debt, a new practice, perhaps buying a house, starting a family – one of the first things they might have to look at is what kind of income they're going to receive. The disparity is growing as a result of having several negotiating groups acting independently in the medical association.

This will bring that all into line. This will provide for a single negotiating team from the Alberta Medical Association. It will, I think, help to bring a little more fairness, I hope, a little more consistency in how we are dealing with each individual branch of the medical professions, and I think it will reduce some of the conflict and rivalry that goes on in any profession where some are more equal than others. It's long overdue. It's something that the AMA has agreed to and the majority of the physicians, I gather, have also agreed to.

I don't see a downside and I see only a positive to this myself. I think we will be better served by a unitary negotiating body. It's been acting in that way as well as it can, but there have been factions within the Medical Association that are in some ways going around the AMA and therefore creating some inconsistencies, some perceptions of inequities, some rivalries, and that has to stop.

In my view, this is important legislation not only for patients but to help physicians start to move towards what are considered more equitable deals in terms of their salaries and incomes and what is a more open and transparent process rather than what often may happen, which is deals being made in more private negotiations with certain specialties. So this is progress. I've watched this evolve over 25 years, and it's not getting better. I'm happy to see that the minister has done her due diligence here and consulted with the profession. From my point of view, the sooner we do this, the better

4:10

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, I really appreciate the hon. member being a doctor, being able to stand up and give us some clarity on this. I know that having someone who's been in the industry as long as he has, having the experience he has: he knows the inner workings. We've often said on this side of the House that the people who are the closest and fighting the fights in the trenches will know best how to be able to move forward.

Some of the things that, I guess, are questions that I do have, Madam Speaker, for the hon. member. He said that we're moving in the right direction, it's been 25 years in the making. I guess the question that I have is: if 98 per cent of the doctors and physicians are part of the AMA, why hasn't this happened until now? I mean, we're three and a half years into the NDP's mandate, so this is something that probably would have been, in my opinion, brought forward right at the beginning if this is, again, 25 years in the making.

As much as I respect the position that this is the right direction – once again, I think we've heard from most of the colleagues here that have spoken, on this side of the House at least, that we haven't made a decision on whether we'll be supporting this bill or not – one of the problems that we face, Madam Speaker, is that when we do ask questions, the Member for Banff-Cochrane, I believe, would stand up, and rather than answering the question, we get again these hyperpartisan responses. You know, again, these are benign questions. They're not intended to cause concern for the members in the government side. These are just asking for clarity.

One of the problems and the reasons why we've said, "Let's refer this to the committee" is because we are trying to get information so that we can do our jobs as MLAs and representatives of the people of our ridings. I think that probably the best presentation that we've seen here today is by the hon. member from the Liberal Party, being a doctor, getting up and saying that this is something that he thinks is good for the health care profession and good for physicians and for Albertans and the reasons why he believes that.

It would have been nice if, when we asked our questions under 29(2)(a), we had received some answers from the members opposite. Actually, I do believe that the Health minister did get up and did answer one of the questions. But, again, the question that I still haven't been able to receive an answer to and would love to receive an answer to from the people who have crafted this bill is: if the Health minister said that the formalization was a concession for zeros by the physicians, how is formalizing this a concession? What is it about the formalization of this that actually is a concession to the physicians? Is it that it hasn't been working, that the negotiations haven't been working, so formalizing this ties the hands of the government more so that it's in the benefit of the AMA or the physicians in negotiations? Again, all that information, Madam Speaker, has not been provided to this House and to the members of this House.

If the member is willing, I would love to hear his position on some of these questions that I have.

The Deputy Speaker: Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. These are legitimate questions. The other question I have and that isn't clear to me is just how much this might influence the self-regulatory control of the profession. How much might this provide access to information and powers to the government that might be seen to be a threat to the profession? I haven't heard back yet from the AMA. They're responding to some of my questions about their comfort or not with this bill. I believe that in the main they are comfortable with the bill. It isn't yet clear in my mind to what extent they may

be surrendering some self-regulation, some self-governance, but I don't see it in this current draft. I don't see any threat to self-governance and self-regulation in this. I see it as a result of good-faith negotiations on both sides.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise in the House this afternoon to speak to the referral amendment on Bill 24. Bill 24, if passed, will amend the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act as well as the Regional Health Authorities Act. It will formalize relations between the government and the Alberta Medical Association, or AMA. Bill 24 will also legislate the AMA as the negotiating body under which all health professional unions must negotiate. If I understand it correctly, the other unions will fall underneath the AMA, and this gives the AMA the power to negotiate on behalf of any group that falls under its authority as long as the majority of its members approve.

As I studied Bill 24, one positive I can pull out is that there will be no fee increases until 2021. I believe this was part of the agreement that the government was able to strike with the AMA.

Now, the government estimates that it will save \$98 million in health care costs. I believe that we have to be fiscally responsible, and any measure that can save the taxpayers money, I think, is a good thing. At the rate that the NDP government is spending, though, we'll be racking up \$96 billion worth of debt in our near future. Of course, the savings that this agreement will create is just a drop in the bucket relative to the financial mess this government has brought into this province. However, it's always small steps and small savings that we need to do, and if we achieve enough of these, we'll be able to slowly tackle the debt the province has given us. If only the government could be fiscally prudent with all of the decisions they make and all of the legislation that they've introduced in this House, perhaps we wouldn't be in the mess we are in right now.

Of course, we don't know the full financial implications of this bill. Send it to committee. The government says that they are short-term savings, but will there also be savings in the long term? We don't understand that yet; another reason why my colleagues have suggested: send this bill back to committee. Let's understand the full process. Are there long-term savings? We don't know.

Madam Speaker, we know that 30 per cent of AMA members voted; 89 per cent approved the agreement that led to this Bill 24. That is very strong support. However, it can be a little concerning that only 30 per cent of the members voted. Thirty per cent. That means that 70 per cent didn't vote. In an ideal world we would be able to get feedback from all doctors and professionals involved. However, I understand that isn't always possible, and the physicians that gave feedback did vote in favour of this agreement.

Madam Speaker, this is one of the reasons why I'm supporting this referral amendment. We need to hear from all stakeholders involved in all decisions of this bill. Thirty per cent is all who participated, which could give us a good representation of all of the professionals, but it may not. We need to ensure that a good sample is conducted and that a majority of the doctors are in full support of this bill. For example, one question we could ask is: did the government and the Alberta Medical Association hear from rural physicians? I believe that it is important as legislators that we hear feedback from stakeholders publicly. Send it back to committee. That is why I believe it's important to refer this to committee. Bill 24 makes some very consequential changes, and I believe as legislators we need to give it due process.

4:20

We should be doing this with all legislation that comes through this House. We know that the government has done a poor job in the past of consulting with stakeholders and ramming through their agenda, but we are here to represent Albertans' best interests, and that's all Albertans, not just special-interest groups or those who have an in with the government. Rather, we need to take proper time to talk to our constituents, consult with them, and hear from stakeholder groups in the matters that we are debating in this House.

When a bill is introduced in this House, as legislators we need to be able to hear feedback from all Albertans. Bill 24 was just introduced last week. This gave us just a little bit of time to review the legislation and talk to our constituents. It's only been a week. However, with a consequential bill such as this we need more time to get it right, and, really, one week just isn't enough time to fully consult with all stakeholders and the constituents that will be affected. I think it's prudent that we consider sending this bill back to committee for that reason alone. One week is just not a significant amount of time, enough time for us to gather the information that we need to provide feedback to our constituents.

Madam Speaker, that's what committees are for, to hear from stakeholders and those closest to the decisions that are being made. It's all done in a public forum so that Albertans can hold us accountable for the decisions that we make and the results of the committee study. Accountability. Transparency. Hmm. I believe that we need to use committees more in this legislative process. The government has seldom used committees when pushing through their legislative agenda.

I've experienced this with my private member's bill, Bill 201. It got dragged through committee. Hey, I think the committee did excellent work, and I agreed with their outcome on that. That's what committees are for. But this government doesn't want to use the committees on their side, just on our side for some reason. We've seen many times where the government has introduced a bill, passed it in this Legislature – and it has come into effect – only to realize later that perhaps they got a few things wrong.

We can't afford that. This is too, too important a bill. Our constituents expect better of us. A really good way to avoid doing that in the future is to actually use the committees that are set up so that the government can get legislation right the first time. Let's take some time, and let's do this right. I think it's extremely important that we hear back from stakeholders, and that's what committees are for. As MLAs we've got a job to do, and we in the opposition are happy to spend time discussing legislation in committee to ensure that we get it right, get it right the first time.

Madam Speaker, there are many instances from this government where they did not consult properly with stakeholders. Let's look at the carbon tax. It got pushed through, and if they had listened to Albertans and given due process, maybe we could have reconsidered introducing the carbon tax. But we all know that did not happen. The reality is that the carbon tax has cost Alberta families a lot more than they anticipated. It's hurt families. It's hurt investment coming into Alberta. Billions of dollars of investment capital has moved out of the energy sector and moved into the U.S. market as a direct result of the carbon tax. Members in opposition here are representing our constituencies. We voiced opposition to the carbon tax; however, government members supported the bill, and the carbon tax got pushed through.

Another example we can bring up about the government's lack of consultation is regarding the increase in minimum wage. I've heard from dozens of small-business owners in my constituency that the increase in minimum wage, the recent increase in minimum wage, has impacted their bottom line substantially and cut back now

on the level of service they're providing their customers and their profit. This is a double whammy: a carbon tax, increase in minimum wage. Consult with people first. Another example. You know, if the government had brought the decision before a legislative committee, they would have heard the concerns from small businesses and how it would have affected them. But they didn't. They just brought it in ideologically, forced it through the House, and now businesses are suffering. But as it turns out – again, no agenda, no regard for the people that are being affected.

Now, Madam Speaker, this is not to say that this is the case for Bill 24. It could be very well the case that the government consulted fully with stakeholders and took their feedback seriously. However, I believe it would be more prudent to refer this to committee and allow us all to fully understand the true impact of Bill 24 on all constituents, not just the doctors but all the people affected by it.

I'm sure the government has done plenty of consultation with physicians and other health professionals regarding this bill, with 89 per cent of the doctors voting in favour of this agreement. I'm sure that there were plenty of stakeholders that would be pleased with this legislation. However, we may never hear all of the feedback that the government has received from the stakeholders. Why not? That is what we need to hear. We need to hear feedback from the stakeholders and the public. Have a public forum so that all Albertans can have confidence that as legislators we're taking the right steps with this legislation.

Madam Speaker, Bill 24 looks to have some positive elements to it. The health care cost savings are something that I think all members of the House would agree on. However, I still have many questions regarding this bill that I think need to be heard and need to be addressed before we can proceed. For example, have we heard from physicians in all areas of the province? I mentioned rural physicians. I don't know of any rural physicians in my constituency that were consulted. Anybody else? No. Why does the consultation agreement between the government and the AMA need to be formalized at all? Under the opt-out provision, why would any physician want to opt out if they're still bound to the agreement? Even though you don't belong to the union, you've still got to pay union dues. That is why I will be supporting the referral amendment, so that we can get proper consultation with all stakeholder groups.

Madam Speaker, in closing, we still have many questions regarding this bill, and I don't feel comfortable carrying on without proper study. I hope that the government will consider a referral motion, giving us time to take in the feedback from all stakeholder groups. Let's send this back to committee.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate being able to hear from my hon. colleague from Highwood. One thing that I heard him say was that 89 per cent of the AMA members voted, but from what I understand, I'm not sure whether or not that's what we've heard. What we've heard is that actually 30 per cent of its members took part in that vote, which, in my opinion, is more evidence and reason why we need to send this to committee, because if only 30 per cent of its members actually took part in the vote and 89 per cent of those voted in favour of it, it is, from what I understand – 30 per cent as a sample group is not bad. But once again, being able to know for sure that this is what physicians want and want to move forward on and that the questions and concerns specifically, I think, in regard to rural physicians have been met: this is something that I think going to committee would provide.

I would like to ask the hon. Member for Highwood his thoughts on whether or not he felt that that sample size is adequate to be able to truly say that this is what AMA members are looking for.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. W. Anderson: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. The concern we have is that I don't think 30 per cent is the right number. It means 70 per cent did not participate. That being said, I'd like to see some of the information from some of the stakeholder groups that they had solicited, if they did, specifically in the rural sectors because in the rural constituencies a lot of doctors are working long hours, hard hours, and they're being affected by this, but maybe they did not have the opportunity, probably didn't have the opportunity to provide some feedback to this government. Now, show us the documentation. Show us the results. Give us the data. Take this to committee and show it to all legislators and all members of the public that will be affected by this.

This is serious legislation. One week is not a significant amount of time for us to even consider what the end result will be. Play the movie out. What does it look like? What does success look like? What we've seen up till now with this government: by ramming legislation through and not taking it to committee, there have been repercussions, serious repercussions. Madam Speaker, I don't think Albertans deserve that. I think they deserve better, and my concern is that if we continue in this direction without proper consultation, without proper feedback, that long-term effect is going to be extremely negative to a lot of people, not just physicians but, obviously, the stakeholders and constituents. I mean, they talk about going to the United States for medical treatment.

4:30

Well, I had the privilege of going through the health care system about a year and a half ago, where I'd be waiting six months just to see a specialist just to have an interview, another year before my spinal surgery would be able to take place. When I called down to the clinic in Arizona, they could do that in 24 hours. Why? Like, this is what boggles my mind. Instead, what they want to do is that they want to fill the old guy with painkilling drugs long enough so maybe he'll just shut up and put up with the system. But waiting a year, three, four, six months just to see a doctor or a specialist and then waiting another three months for his results and then another year later for surgery: this isn't a health care system that works effectively. It's broken. We need to really get down to the details. This is a serious business, and I've experienced it personally. Believe me, Madam Speaker, it's not something I would wish on anybody. I managed to get through the other side. It did work in the end. But, wow, the treatment during the process was horrific, and I don't wish that on anybody.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Madam Speaker, thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to speak. Certainly, I rise to speak to the referral motion for Bill 24, An Act to Recognize AMA Representation Rights. My staff has certainly gone to great lengths to put together notes for me, which I'm sure I am going to get to.

I'm going to support this motion. I think it's important regarding consultation. I want to address a couple of the, I guess, comments that I've heard in this Chamber over the last short bit of time. As my friend from Cardston-Taber-Warner indicated in regard to the

Member for Banff-Cochrane and the hyperpartisan remarks, we're really just asking simple questions, especially when we're just talking right now about consultation.

You know, Madam Speaker, I am just a simple police officer. I was a security guard. I did shift work for, like, nearly 20 years. My father was in the military and police, grandfather was in the military. I come from a working-class family, so I'm a little, quite frankly, tired of hearing about all these alleged rich friends that I have when most people that I know are teachers, are nurses, some doctors, certainly people that are neighbours and friends and from the community. So I hope that we can really just truly get to the issue at hand, especially when we're talking about Bill 24. Again, I think this is a very important referral.

Now, the minister also had mentioned consultation. You know, I think I've said in this Chamber before, Madam Speaker, talked about the importance of consultation and kind of the unintended consequences of lack of consultation. I think I've also spoken in regard to the committees and how successful they can be, ensuring that all sides are heard on a particular subject, especially one as important as health care.

Now, my friend from Highwood, the Member for Highwood: I thought it was very fascinating that he had indicated – and if I am wrong on these numbers, I certainly would appreciate the government correcting the record. When I hear numbers like only 30 per cent of the total number of physicians voted and that, you know, 89 per cent of the 30 per cent voted yes, which – again, no math major, Madam Speaker. From my perspective it appears to be a low number of physicians that actually participated in this vote and this consultation. I certainly would like to know if all doctors – and I think this is important, especially because it affects all doctors – were consulted and were at least made aware of an important bill such as this.

Now, if I was to listen, as I did, to what the minister indicated to me, it was a very exhaustive consultation. It sounded to me like there was a lot of back and forth and that there were certainly a lot of folks that were involved in this. One can only be led to believe that the people that the minister was negotiating or talking with were representatives of the – again, please correct numbers – my understanding is over 14,000 physicians that currently practise in this province, which is certainly an outstanding number.

I guess what I do have a concern with is that, you know, when we get this bill presented in the Legislature and my staff and all my colleagues' staff attempt to contact stakeholders in the community on short notice in the evenings, in the mornings, everyone who should be consulted was consulted. I have had some feedback. I do have at least a couple of physicians that I was able to get hold of. One was able to respond back to me. I think where I have a concern, Madam Speaker, is that when somebody who is a family physician, president of the Canadian Society of Hospital Medicine, indicates to me that he's not currently involved in the negotiations – he read both the act and the Alberta government media release only after I let him know that it had come out. He was not aware of this change and certainly – maybe I won't go into it at the moment – expressed concerns.

Is that consultation, Madam Speaker? When somebody who, let's see, has a bachelor of science, master of science, an MD, CCFP, FCFP, SFHM; staff physician, Beaumont medical clinic, Foothills medical centre; clinical associate professor, University of Calgary; and president of the Canadian Society of Hospital Medicine, when somebody like that says, "I wasn't aware of this," that should give everyone in here pause, everyone, including the folks on the government side, to say: "Hey, wait a second. Maybe not everybody was consulted on this." It's important that people like this – this gentleman here has more credentials and letters after his name than

I have in my entire name. Yeah. This is somebody that is highly respected in this province and certainly in the medical profession itself, and he was not aware of what was going on here.

4:40

So I see no issue with anyone in this Chamber to pause this – we are going on a constituency break – to sit there and say: “Hey, wait a second. Let’s just make sure that all physicians, especially one that represents other physicians, are fully aware of what this bill is, what possible changes are indicated in this bill, and that the government gets buy-in.” I don’t think anybody in this Chamber, I don’t think anybody in whatever profession that they belong to wants something that is even perceived to be forced upon them, let alone be blindsided. My take on this e-mail and certainly comments that have been made to me is that certain folks within the medical community are blindsided on this. Although I can appreciate that a select group of people were contacted – and, again, the perception is that a select group of people appear to have voted on this – based upon the information that I have, I would argue that medical professionals, physicians were not just not consulted but were not even made aware of this bill and what the contents of this bill are.

Again, Madam Speaker, this is one of those things that gives me great pause. I think that doing due diligence, ensuring that the government and those involved get the appropriate buy-in – because I think it’s important that if you’re going to have any form of success, you achieve buy-in with the stakeholders for which you are representing.

Now, Madam Speaker, one of the other things that gives me a little bit of pause here is that, you know – and, again, numbers can always be slightly different, but my understanding is that the AMA represents about 14,000 doctors. Even if we say that 14,000 participated in this – but based on the information I have, I find that that may not indeed be the case. But if we assume that they were, then I see numbers such as 12,460, which would be 89 per cent of the 14,000. That still leaves me pause that you’re still looking at numbers like more than 1,500 would not be supportive of this. We’re not talking about small numbers. And I get it. What the minister said is correct, to suggest that not every single person in a constituency voted during the election. I get it, right? But, again, it goes back to what I was trying to say, which talks about people that you would believe should know what was going on with a bill of this sort of magnitude were completely unaware of what had transpired and what was really dropped upon Alberta over the last, short few days.

Madam Speaker, again I would encourage everyone in this Chamber to give pause. As my friend from Cardston-Taber-Warner indicated, this is something that does not require urgency. It is something that, as was indicated, is a long-standing practice – that’s what I think somebody had mentioned on the government side – that they’re enshrining. Okay. Well, if that is the case, then there is no rush. There is no rush to, you know, put this through the House, to vote on it today, tomorrow. I mean, again, ensuring that we have the necessary consultation, ensuring that all of the stakeholders, all of the medical professions or certainly people that are involved in the medical profession are consulted on this, have their input – you know what? If the government talks to these individuals such as the person that I mentioned, maybe they do achieve the buy-in. That’s fine. If this is a practice that’s been long-standing, again that’s all fine. You know, nobody has indicated that they’re against doing something that is good for the medical profession.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just want to begin by clarifying and reminding folks that joining the AMA is a personal choice for each physician, but currently 96 per cent of the physicians in Alberta do belong to the AMA. Today if a physician chooses not to belong to the AMA, they still work under the terms and conditions reached within the AMA agreement. We are proposing that this legislation will formalize this practice as it’s our belief that negotiating with a single entity ensures fairness, consistency for physicians. That will continue to be the case. This isn’t changing practice.

I also want to remind or maybe clarify for folks who don’t know that the AMA communicates with its members. The AMA has president’s letters that go out monthly, that talk about things like the negotiation process and what the terms are within the new agreements that people have the opportunity to vote on. This was voted on back in the spring, Madam Speaker, so this is something that members had the opportunity to engage on at that point and certainly at any point before or after that as well through their professional association, that being the AMA.

I just want to give an example. I know that the Member for Calgary-West was elected in 2014. I looked up the by-election results. There was a 35.7 per cent voter turnout, and that member got 44 per cent of the vote for those who turned out. And he rightfully was the person to receive the most votes. Even though only 35.7 per cent of voters turned out, he certainly earned his seat in this Chamber. I don’t think anyone would say that he should go to committee and consult with people from his constituency before he can have the opportunity to represent folks. He was elected through a democratic process.

There was a democratic process that ensued as a result of a fair and reasonable negotiation that resulted in efficiencies, zeroes, and formalizing the current relationship. I just want to reiterate that this isn’t about giving new powers or new processes. This is about formalizing what, I think, were a very respectful two rounds of negotiations in the term of this government that resulted in savings for Albertans, that resulted in no reduction to services but, in fact, in many areas increased services throughout the province. All that the physicians are asking for in return through this bill is to respect that we will have fair and reasonable negotiations. I think that that’s something reasonable for us to continue to have as we move forward.

Negotiation was perhaps an overstep. Consultation, Madam Speaker, because, again, just to reiterate, this isn’t actually a union. This is a professional association that we engage with in a very professional and respectful way. I’m really pleased that the consultation has in many ways over the last two years resulted in what felt like a good-faith negotiation, to be frank, even though it was not indeed a negotiation. It was an engagement. That’s what this bill outlines.

Again, physicians are members of the AMA. They were contacted by the AMA about this whole process. It was definitely something that was discussed a lot in the lead-up to the recommendation to ratify the agreement that they reached. It was through their communications with their president, and members certainly have an opportunity to do so. Any physician in Alberta who wants to engage with their association has the opportunity. Not everyone chooses to take that opportunity, and that’s their own choice.

I respect the 35.7 per cent of voters who came out and voted in the Calgary-West by-election, and I respect the physicians who chose to vote for the ratification of the AMA agreement. Part of the terms of that agreement were that we would bring forward legislation this term, and I am honouring that negotiation, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I certainly do not want, and I hope I did not hear this correctly, that the minister was in any way insinuating that this person who I reached out to did not receive an e-mail, may have ignored the e-mail or, in any way, was not properly notified. This is a very qualified individual who was not made aware of this bill. He clearly represents other physicians; president of the Canadian Society of Hospital Medicine. So if he is not aware of this, then it's only reasonable to assume that other physicians are not aware of this bill. It would only make sense that we would consult and make sure that this is sent to a committee so that we can get the proper consultation on this particular bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Any further questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: It was absolutely not my intent to say that that member wasn't notified . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to stand and speak in favour of this referral motion to Bill 24. When we first came into the House to discuss and to debate this bill, we had, obviously, questions that we wanted to go through with our staff, with other colleagues. We sat around the table, we talked about what we see this bill doing and not doing, we talked about the pros and the cons, and truthfully, we had not been able to figure out whether or not this is something that was going to be good or bad because there were just so many questions that we had. The value, in my opinion – and I talked about this earlier this morning – to what we're doing here is the opportunity to be able to stand up, to have debates back and forth. The full Westminster parliamentary system that we have is designed to help us to debate these things so that we can come up with the best practices.

We've gone back and forth. We've had the opportunity to hear from the hon. minister, the Health minister, which I appreciate and I know that the colleagues on this side appreciate. We've had the opportunity of hearing from the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, another physician in the House. I know that there is another physician in the House as well. I'd be very interested in hearing from him to know his position on this and what he sees as the positives and the negatives to this. Again, I think it's important, Madam Speaker, that we hear from the people who are in the trenches, the physicians that are living this day in and day out because I think that they have the ability to get these things right better than some bureaucrat or someone so far removed from those trenches.

When we come into this House and we talk about the need for being able to refer this to committee, it is a genuine desire for us to be able to see good legislation coming forward. I don't believe anybody in the House has any intention of bringing forward bad legislation for Albertans. I know that sometimes in this House things can get heated, but I would say that if someone was willing to put their name forward to actually stand up and try to be an MLA, a representative of the people in their riding, they have the best intentions for those people in their riding. Forgive me for being cynical, but we've seen so many times where the government has said that they've consulted. Then we try to slow it down so that we can have an opportunity to be able to reach out.

Then what we hear from our members in our constituencies and other parts of the province is that they hadn't been consulted, that they had not actually had the opportunity to bring forward reasonable ideas about how the legislation should proceed.

Now, I think that the Member for Calgary-West has provided us with a very reasonable answer to these queries, and that answer comes in the form of an e-mail that he was sent. When we first received this legislation, obviously, being the Labour critic – and I know this is the Health minister's bill, but there is a labour component to this – immediately we sat down, and we said: let's send out an e-mail to physicians that we know in our riding, and let's find out from them what they think of this bill. That happened yesterday, Madam Speaker.

We're starting to receive some of the information back. We're starting to receive some e-mails back and some correspondence, but the concern is that with the speed that this government is wanting to move this bill through the House, it's not going to give us an opportunity to be able to do what we're supposed to be doing, which is consulting with those people who are going to be affected by the bill.

It's only incumbent upon us, Madam Speaker, to present to this House a referral motion that allows us the time necessary. I don't believe that we're asking for months on end. We just need to make sure that we are going to get it right, that the premise of the bill is what it says, that it will be just formalizing already a good practice that has been happening for years, decades in the province. I don't think it's unreasonable to ask.

Now, through the course of today, we've had the opportunity of hearing from the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, and I respect him. I respect his opinion because, again, he is a doctor. He is a physician that has practised, and his recommendation was that this was 25 years in the making. However, there was still a caveat that he presented that I don't think we've heard an answer on yet from the Minister of Health, and that caveat was: how does it affect the autonomy of the AMA in terms of self-regulating?

Now, that is a question that we had not even thought about. That's something that we on this side in our conversations hadn't discussed. We didn't see it. Here's the reason why. I'm not a doctor. The people who were sitting around the table weren't doctors, so we wouldn't know that. We wouldn't see it. However, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View is a doctor. He probably took a look at this thing, made a phone call to people he probably knows in the AMA, and said, "What do you think?" and pretty quickly he was able to get that little bit of information where they're a little concerned. I don't see any reason why we couldn't slow the process down a bit so that we have the opportunity to hear from other physicians who are in the trenches that would be concerned.

We've already identified a few of these concerns here, Madam Speaker, today. One of the concerns that we have – and many of us on this side of the House are from rural ridings – is how it is going to affect members in our rural ridings.

One of the questions that I had has to do with my line of work before. Before I was an MLA, I was in commercial construction, so I had the opportunity of doing some work up in Fort McMurray. Well, while we were doing the work up in Fort McMurray – we were building an airport hangar up there – we didn't have any accidents, but we started to get to know some people up there. I had an opportunity to be able to meet a doctor there, and that doctor told me a lot of information about how his role up in Fort McMurray as a doctor was very difficult. Being so far removed from larger centres like Edmonton and Calgary, it was difficult for his family. I mean, he enjoyed his work. He was very engaged. But it was a difficult thing for his family, being so isolated.

5:00

One of the first things that I thought when I saw this bill was: how is this going to affect these remote areas or rural areas in terms of them being able to retain family doctors? Now, in my riding, Madam Speaker, in Milk River, through the RPAP program we had the opportunity to bring in a couple of doctors. Only one of those doctors has stayed now. They both actually came in from South Africa. We couldn't fill the need for those doctors there locally. We had to bring them in from South Africa. So already we're seeing that it's difficult for us to be able to find doctors that are willing to go into rural Alberta.

But let me go back to this Fort McMurray model, and this is one of the questions I was thinking about today. As anybody who has been to Fort McMurray knows, the cost of living there is very expensive, very high. It's a long way up there, five hours from here. So if the negotiated model in terms of fee structure is centralized and it's unified, as the doctor from Calgary-Mountain View said, how does it work in terms of being able to get the doctors up in Fort McMurray to be able to say, you know, that even though the cost of living up there is three or four times the cost of living in, say, Lethbridge, they have an incentive to stay or an incentive to be there? The good doctor, again, talked about the disparity between those fee structures being brought into line.

I guess my question is – and I don't know. I think that maybe it would come through regulations. I'm not sure. But if you have that uniformity of the fee structure, once again, I would imagine people would want to be in a place like, say, Lethbridge, where the cost of living is so much cheaper. The cost of a home is, you know, a third of what the cost of a home up in Fort McMurray would be. Property taxes are cheaper there. All of the input costs and the costs to physicians are so much higher up in Fort McMurray. So if you are going to make that fee structure uniform across the province and there's no variance, I don't know how that's going to work.

Now, again, I don't believe that this bill actually goes into the details of that. I'm not a doctor, but it just goes to show that we have to start looking at some of these things. We have to start looking at some of the concerns that some of the physicians might be bringing forward. The fact that my hon. colleague from Calgary-West started to receive some feedback and that a fairly prominent physician in Calgary was willing to get back to him and say, "I haven't heard anything about this," in my opinion is all the evidence we need to slow this down so that we make sure that we have a good direction and directive from physicians.

Now I want to go to one of the things that, through the debate back and forth, Madam Speaker, I heard from the minister. The minister made an argument that, you know, 37 per cent is not bad. When you're electing people, that's not a bad thing. I mean, people in this House got elected on I think she said 37 or 39 per cent. Well, here's the problem with that argument. I appreciate her making the argument, but the problem is that we don't actually have to do that.

How many physicians – 10,000, 11,000 – do we have in Alberta? Well, I don't think that it would be very difficult to slow this down and to actually have a fulsome direction from all of the members. If all of the members, 80 per cent of them, decide to vote, I think that we would be able to say: "You know what? It's not 30 per cent. It's 80 per cent that have voted. We have our marching orders. We know what we want to do, what we should do."

But we don't have that sample size. We only have 30 per cent. Thirty per cent of those physicians have voted so far. [interjection] I'm not sure exactly what the member opposite is heckling about. I can't hear him. My hearing is not so good. But I will carry on with what I'm saying. If he's asking questions, I would invite him to

please stand up and make sure that he asks the question so that we can get that in *Hansard* and, again, have a fulsome debate here.

Back to my point, if there's no pressing need, if there's no health emergency, environmental catastrophe, whatever it is, Madam Speaker, if we don't have that impetus, that need to push this forward, why are we? Why does this government feel such a burning need to push this forward?

Bill 6 is a classic example of the unintended consequences when you get it wrong, a classic example, Madam Speaker, of when you say, "Hey, we've got lots of consultation," and then all of a sudden all over the province they have combines lining up for miles and miles on end and some of the largest groups of farmers showing up and protesting on the Legislature steps. I would think that after having that happen, the NDP government, the government of the day, would say: "You know what? We need to do a little better at this, prudently."

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would say that this was very interesting, and there were a lot of questions that the member, my good friend, brought forward. Again, the United Conservative Party is always looking to collaborate with the government on good bills, bills that they are bringing forward in good faith, that show that they're trying to improve Alberta and the direction Alberta is going in. I see that the member, my good friend, has also got some questions about this. And while there are some benefits that we're hearing from the government, we're also needing to make sure that this is done right. So I would like to hear if he's got any more concerns. So far I can say that some of them haven't been addressed yet.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I would like to thank the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, a good friend of mine, for asking me this question. Look, again, having the opportunity of being able to get it right is our responsibility. It's our right. If it can't happen here, if we can't have the opportunity to be able to debate it and then take it to committee so that they can bring forward representation from the AMA, from its members, hearing both the pros and cons, then how can we in good conscience say that we got it right? How could we in good conscience say that we've done the job that Albertans have sent us here for, that what we've done here now is enough, that we've had a fulsome approach to this discussion of this bill, and that in good conscience we can bring it forward and have it receive royal assent?

Within a very short period of time, as you know, Madam Speaker, we've already come up with many good questions. Many good questions. I think that a few times the hon. Minister of Health has stood up and answered a few of them. She keeps going back to clarify that there's 96 per cent of physicians who are part of the AMA. Thank you so much. I didn't know that. I thought it was 80 per cent. I appreciate you getting me that information.

You know, it goes back to this concept, Madam Speaker, of our desire to be able to reach out to the AMA and to its members. Give us the chance. Give us the opportunity to be able to do our jobs. I'm sure that the members opposite, especially the backbenchers, would love to be able to have that opportunity as well.

5:10

We've heard from a past member of that caucus that she didn't feel that they had the opportunity to do that. This isn't just coming from this side of the House, Madam Speaker. This is actually

coming from past members of the government side that are saying: "You know what? We have the opportunity, we have the privilege, and we have the responsibility to make sure that we get these things right." We shouldn't just say that we're going to rubber-stamp something. That's not our responsibility. That's not, in my opinion, a healthy way of being able to do what we've been asked to do here.

I am very much in favour of sending this to committee, of having the opportunity of being able to discuss it fully and being able to have those people who are deep in the trenches, those physicians that actually live, breathe, and have this as something that they have to be concerned about on a regular basis, give us that expert witness and testimony rather than just taking the advice or scout's honour or, as I sometimes have heard the Government House Leader say, you know: trust us. Well, I'm sorry, but the past record hasn't been very good.

Mr. Nixon: Trust but verify.

Mr. Hunter: There you go. Trust but verify is exactly what one of the greatest legislators said. I think we need to make sure that we do that, trust but verify.

That's what we're doing as the opposition, making sure that we're trusting and verifying by sending this thing to committee. I would hope that all members of this House would take a serious look at this as an important amendment to this bill.

Thank you so much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any further comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: On the amendment, not under 29(2)(a), Madam Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: On the amendment.

Mr. Nixon: Okay. Just making sure.

Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the amendment today. I would like to start off by actually, through you, Madam Speaker, to the hon. Minister of Health and hon. Deputy Premier, thanking her for taking the time today to answer lots of the questions of the members of the opposition on this legislation. It's noted and certainly, through you to her, Madam Speaker, appreciated.

I think I'd like to start off by pointing out, similar to what many of my colleagues have spoken about already this afternoon, and making very clear before the House today that we're speaking at this moment about a referral amendment to send this piece of legislation to a committee to be reviewed. That is not taking a position on this side of the Chamber that we are against this legislation. I actually suspect, Madam Speaker, as I've listened to the debate today, that I will likely be leaning towards supporting this bill that the Health minister has brought forward before this Chamber this afternoon.

I still think that this amendment brought forward by the hon. Member for Airdrie is appropriate. It makes sense to send this to committee to make sure that we've properly consulted on the process. Lots of the great questions that I've heard this afternoon – and some of them I never thought about until I heard them – I think are very interesting, and the great feedback that the minister has provided to those questions is valuable. One of the tough parts, though, Madam Speaker, as you know, is that in this Chamber it's often hard to have the type of dialogue to be able to get a piece of legislation correct whereas when we're in a standing committee

environment, it's easier to have that back and forth, to be able to interact and make sure we get the legislation right.

The other reason why I think that's important is that it's also an opportunity where more of the private members in the government caucus get to participate. In my experience over the last three and a half years, they get to participate a little bit more in the committee. Just because of the nature of how the Legislature works, the opposition spends more time debating in the Legislature. That's how our process works. Certainly, the history within this Chamber is that private members have significantly more opportunity to be able to participate.

As mentioned by a couple of the hon. members, we do know that we have some doctor colleagues, physicians, that are in the government caucus. I would be interested in their advice, their thoughts on this piece of legislation, as certainly they're the members in the Chamber that probably have the most experience with it. I know that if we were debating a piece of legislation that had to do with law enforcement, I would strongly encourage, as the House leader of the opposition, that the hon. Member for Calgary-West be able to participate in the process because of his lengthy career in law enforcement. I think he adds significant value to a debate of that nature, just like I do the medical professionals inside this Chamber. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, for example, who I have spoken about positively in this Chamber before, has been a physician for friends of mine in his unique capacity working with people with cancer, so I think his input on this would be something that I would value. In committee, in my experience, Madam Speaker, you have a bigger opportunity to do that.

Now, it was interesting to me to hear the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin speaking in the Chamber today, who comes from Ottawa, not as a Member of Parliament but as a staffer for other Members of Parliament in her time there. She echoed her shock as a new member in this Chamber realizing how our legislative process works here compared to a place like Ottawa. Madam Speaker, it's interesting to me that every time a staff member comes from Ottawa and ends up working at the Alberta Legislature or a former staff member from the federal Parliament becomes a member of the Legislature, which I think is pretty cool, they all say the same thing. In fact, actually, the Leader of the Official Opposition, who has considerable experience in Parliament over two decades: as his House leader I often have to explain to him why things are so significantly different on the committee side, because they just don't understand it, because this would not happen in Ottawa.

We would not be in a situation where the government brings forward a piece of legislation that has significant impacts on a lot of people, a complicated piece of legislation, that was basically read in the House and only a few short days later was in a position where it could pass in this Chamber before members of the Legislature, particularly on the opposition side, who have not seen the bill because the government has had this bill – it's just the first we've seen it – are able to consult with the constituents they represent. I represent a lot of doctors, as do members on this side of the Chamber, as do members on that side of the Chamber. But the fact that here in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta we're in a spot where you could actually pass a bill, all three stages, in one day – that would be rare – or certainly before members of this House have an opportunity to return to their constituency to go and talk to the people that they represent is a unique thing to this Chamber and this House that we operate in.

You would not see that in Ottawa. A bill going to committee is standard procedure in the House of Commons. Being able to call witnesses to make sure that you get legislation right, to be able to

ask questions is a common procedure in Ottawa. I would argue that it's something that I actually think we should do more often inside this Chamber.

You know, the hon. Member for Calgary-West in his comments was speaking about how he's already heard from a constituent or at least somebody from Calgary, I believe, the city that he represents in this Chamber, who has got considerable expertise on this issue, saying: well, I've got some questions. I think that's pretty reasonable. Going to committee allows that to happen. A person could come forward, they could testify, provide information for the hon. members of the 29th Legislature to be able to make an educated decision on how they cast their vote for their constituents.

This becomes important because we have seen examples of mistakes that have been made by this government and, I'm sure, previous governments, quite frankly, by going through a process in the Assembly where they do not use the committee process to make sure that they get it right, to make sure that the people that will be impacted by that legislation have had an opportunity to contribute. In this Chamber we don't often hear from the ministers on that type of legislation. Again, I want to reiterate, as I did in the beginning, that I think it's great that we have heard from the Health minister, to her credit, during this. In fact, I think that makes me more comfortable with this piece of legislation because you can start to get the answers. Pretty rare that we see that, but I digress on that.

Making sure that we get legislation right is an important responsibility of this side of the House. It's an important responsibility of the private members on that side of the House as well. Their job, Madam Speaker, as you know, is to hold the government to account, no different than, actually, the opposition, particularly when it comes to legislation like this, that has really not many partisan implications that I can see. This is a technical issue that we have to make sure that we get right. That's the hon. members' responsibility, just as it is our responsibility.

5:20

I'm sure that they would appreciate an opportunity to be able to talk to some of the physicians that they represent to make sure that this legislation is right. They would appreciate an opportunity to ask questions not only of the minister but of bureaucrats that are involved in the Health department, that may be able to provide some technical advice to the members of the Assembly on this before they cast a vote, but also to be able to talk to outside groups, that are outside of this bubble that we live in, not only in this Chamber but in this whole precinct and in our world in Edmonton. It's often great to see it.

You know, we saw one of the most famous examples, of course, Bill 6, the agriculture safety bill. An amendment like this was moved on that piece of legislation, to move that to a committee to be able to make sure that people, stakeholder groups could come forward. We know that the history of that now is that, in the end, because the opposition spent time asking questions and going through a process like this, Albertans, farmers and ranchers in that case, were able to come to the Legislature to protest – I would argue that it would have been easier through committee – to be able to say: hey, there are some mistakes in this bill. In the end, the government brought forward an amendment to address some of those mistakes. There are still some other issues, I would say, with Bill 6 – we'll address that if we're fortunate enough to form a government in the next few months – but they did make adjustments based on that feedback.

I think that it would have been more efficient in that case to have had that feedback in a committee in a positive way, with farm and ranch communities and farm and ranch families rather than a thousand or more of them on a regular basis having to stand on the

stairs of the Legislature chanting: kill Bill 6; you're getting this wrong. It's a great example of how that would have gone better.

There are many, many more inside the history of the 29th Legislature and, again, Madam Speaker, I suspect, probably through previous governments before the NDP government because the system does not work the same way as the House of Commons. I think it lends itself for the opportunity for these type of mistakes to be made when you're not using the committee process that is common within the Westminster parliamentary system. Instead, you're seeing this type of legislation rammed through often in 24, 48, 72 hours. You've got MLAs literally going out to the cloakroom using their cellphones – I don't know how they did it before cellphones, quite frankly – trying to get a hold of relevant constituents, relevant stakeholders to say: "Where should I be on this? Is this right? Is this going to impact the community that I represent?" It's a flaw of the system.

Luckily, we do have something within our system that can address that. I think the House of Commons' system is more appropriate. I think it's a better form of democracy. When you use the committee system, it allows people to be able to participate from all different angles.

But we at least have an opportunity, as the hon. member for Calgary – not Calgary but Airdrie; she would be really upset if I called Airdrie Calgary – has done, to move a referral and move it then to committee so we can move it out of this Chamber to committee, go through that great process. It doesn't have to be long. It could literally be a couple of days. Bring the right people in and have that opportunity. Unfortunately, it appears, from what I've seen indicated to me – I don't want to predetermine how, of course, the government is going to vote – that there's no interest yet again in sending an important bill like this to committee.

What frustrates me more about that – and I think hon. members across the way should think about this before they cast their vote. The only time in the 29th Legislature that the current NDP government and their backbenchers, their private members, have taken the opportunity to actually vote with the opposition to send something to committee or done so themselves – I'm actually not sure if they sent anything to the committee themselves or if it's always been on one of our motions. I could be corrected on that.

But the only time that they've taken the opportunity to do that is on a bill that has become, politically, a hot potato for them. So you're in the legislature, like: "Ooh, that's a problem. The opposition is getting media on it or whatever is going on, and we want to vote against it. We don't like what the opposition has done." It's usually one of our bills, in my experience, Madam Speaker, most of the time. "But we can't vote against it. We can't be called on the record to stand up and vote, so we're going to send it off to committee for it to either die in the committee process and never come back to the Chamber or to buy some time to be able to figure it out." I think that's disappointing, that that's the only time that we're actually using the committee process to get good legislation, primarily as a government tool to kill private members' bills in the Chamber.

When you have a great example like this, what is probably at its core a pretty good piece of legislation but may just need some minor tweaks – I don't know – there may be some stuff that comes forward in the committee process that the government never thought of. We saw this week the postsecondary minister amend his own bill that he brought to this Chamber. He brought forward an amendment that, I believe, actually passed with the support of the House. I could be mistaken on that as well. A great example. What if he had not caught that?

The government wants to say: "We got it all. We caught it all. It's okay, hon. member. You can trust us." But then we see this

track record over and over of a piece of legislation making it through the House, forced through by the majority, and then the government has to come back the following sitting and try to fix it yet again, sometimes, in the case of some of the democratic renewal bills that we saw in this Chamber, multiple times, I think, something like three or four consecutive sittings trying to fix mistakes that the government put inside their legislation. If you went to committee, it all would have been done right the first time.

Now, sometimes, though, what's really problematic about it, Madam Speaker – and I'm sure it concerns you as much as it concerns me – is that Albertans get impacted by that. How problematic, I guess, really is it that we have to spend an extra couple of days in another city, six months later, debating a piece of legislation the government got wrong? I mean, it slows down other important government business or legislation, but it's really not, I guess, the end of the world that we have to stay here and debate that. I don't have a problem with that. But when there are consequences to the people that we represent that they have to put up with for six, seven months, a year or longer as a result of that mistake that has been made by the government because something got missed – I mean, mistakes happen. My wife informs me that I make plenty. But that does not mean that we shouldn't learn from the experiences that we've had in the past in this Chamber and take time to do it.

This amendment does that. This amendment gives the government an opportunity to be able to send this to make sure we got it right so that they don't have to come and bring an amendment to fix their own bill or bring another bill next sitting to fix the bill that they messed up the previous sitting. It also gives . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have to say that it's very interesting to see the passion that my House leader has when it comes to ensuring that bills get referred to committee. As a man that has sat on many committees, I have to say that . . .

Mr. Ellis: And chaired, too.

Mr. Cyr: Actually, a good point from Calgary-West here. I chair a committee.

When committees are used correctly, we can see actual benefit happening for Alberta. A lot of times what happens – and we've heard this repeatedly – is that the government seems to prioritize opposition bills for committee that they feel are difficult for them, but when it comes to bills that have been identified by the opposition saying that this could be problematic if it's not done correctly, we end up seeing silence on the government side. Then it's accusations and pointing to us that we're trying to slow the process down. Let's be clear. Our job as opposition is to ensure that we strengthen legislation.

While this bill here is not as meaty as some of the other bills – the Municipal Affairs one that just came through: that one there is a rather large one – a lot of times what happens is that a single phrase in a bill can actually mean a great difference in how it actually is interpreted. If I remember correctly, there was a dispute on one of the bills that had gone through the House in an eastern province, and a simple comma actually changed the entire meaning of a paragraph. That's why making sure we get this right is something that, I think, we all are hoping for.

It is good to hear that one of the questions that I'd asked before was: how many of the physicians are in the AMA? I'm very thankful the Minister of Health answered that: 96 per cent of just over 10,000, I believe, so 9,600 members, somewhere in there,

9,700 members, give or take a few, I'm sure. We're looking at a large body of physicians.

5:30

It's amazing how much engagement you can get from a group when you start talking money. That is the whole thing. I understand that the argument could be made that you say that an elected official may only see anywhere from 40 to 60 per cent engagement from the constituents, but I will tell you that if there was a dollar attached to that vote, that engagement probably would be a lot higher.

So to see that we're at a 30 per cent engagement when this is potentially going to have a very large impact to these doctors tells me that potentially the AMA may not have gotten that message out well enough to its members when it was actually going out for consultation on whether or not they should go down this road. Again, I understand that doctors are busy. You know, the one thing that I did struggle with in my career as an accountant was getting a doctor to actually fill a form out. That seems to be one of those struggles. When you have a doctor that has literally no time to fill forms out, you see that they may not have the appropriate time to be able to maybe read every single AMA e-mail.

That is why I'm saying: was that consultation done in an appropriate fashion? I think that having the AMA president before us is a good indicator to the committee, being referred again to the committee, that she would be able to answer these questions, because until we can actually get to the meat of this, it is going to be hard to know. I'm not putting down the AMA, because it's a great organization, and I do believe they're doing a great job representing doctors.

Thank you.

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

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:33 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Barnes	Goodridge	Schneider
Cyr	Hunter	van Dijken
Ellis	Nixon	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Goehring	Miller
Babcock	Gray	Miranda
Carson	Hinkley	Nielsen
Ceci	Hoffman	Payne
Connolly	Horne	Renaud
Coolahan	Kazim	Rosendahl
Dach	Kleinstauber	Sabir
Dang	Littlewood	Schmidt
Drever	Loyola	Schreiner
Feehan	Malkinson	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Westhead
Ganley	McKittrick	Woollard

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 36
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[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I would move that we adjourn debate on this matter.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Ms Ganley: Seeing the vigorous debate we've had and the hour, I would move that we call it 6 o'clock and resume tomorrow morning at 9.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:50 p.m.]

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