



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, December 5, 2018

Day 59

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature

Fourth Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (NDP), Speaker

Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (NDP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees

Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (UCP),

Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition

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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)

Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (NDP)

Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)

Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)

Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)

Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)

Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (NDP)

Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP),

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Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP)

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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)

Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (NDP)

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Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (NDP)

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Goodridge, Laila, Fort McMurray-Conklin (UCP)

Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)

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Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)

Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (UCP)

Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)

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van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP)

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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, December 5, 2018

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 70 students from Millwoods Christian school who are here to visit the Legislature. The students are joined by their teachers, Jose Reyes and Sarah Inman. I would like to invite all of the students and their teachers to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. minister, I'm glad you chose not to introduce each one individually. Thank you for that.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the students and staff of H.W. Pickup school in Drayton Valley. Some of the people in the gallery today are former colleagues and some are former students of mine, bringing their kids here to see the Legislature. At least one is a former pastor of mine. I consider all of these people special to me as we live in community together in Drayton Valley. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

And, yes, hon. members, I would remind you of the event we had yesterday, so out of respect for all of the guests and your fellow members, please practise brevity.

The Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Sergeant (Retired) Bill Patton, whose ongoing contributions to Alberta are truly remarkable. After joining the RCMP in 1957, Mr. Patton moved to Blairmore, Alberta. Over the next 61 years Mr. Patton and his family lived in more than 30 communities throughout our province. After 37 years of exemplary service with the RCMP Mr. Patton became active in the RCMP Veteran's Association, serving first as president of K Division, followed by president at the national level. He's been a volunteer in his community for 50-plus years, and he enjoys retirement living in the beautiful constituency of Edmonton-Riverview. Today Bill is joined by his daughter Carolyn Patton, his grandson Dane Patton, his sister-in-law Barb Pearson as well as his brother-in-law John Pearson. I ask them all to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests from the town of Vermilion, Susan and Brian Hodges-Marlowe. Now, Brian recently was recognized with his 10-

year service pin as an instructor in the fire training school at Lakeland College in Vermilion. Susan has served for the past five years as my constituency assistant in the office in Vermilion, for which she will be recognized with an award tomorrow and, I understand, also qualifies her for sainthood. I'd like all of my colleagues to join in giving them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you my constituency assistants, who have travelled here from Fairview. Dianne Nellis and Eileen Coristine do stellar work every day in my office back home, keeping me in touch with my constituents. I know everybody in this Assembly appreciates the work our CAs do while we're here in the Chamber. I'd ask Dianne and Eileen to stand up and please receive the welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of this House some long-time constituents, friends, and supporters of mine who are visiting the Assembly today. Of course, we know Blake Evans, who's our very talented director of House business. He and his staff do wonderful work on behalf of the government caucus and the Assembly as a whole. His partner, Myfanwy, home-schools their children, dog-sits, and is a member of a very active group of Edmontonians that sponsor Syrian refugee families as they resettle here. Their son Marlowe is deeply into strategic board games as well as Jamaican meat patties, and their daughter Ilya loves music and dancing. I would ask that Blake, Myfanwy, Marlowe, and Ilya please rise now and accept the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Dr. Turner: Mr. Speaker, I've got two introductions today of two nurse heroes of mine. First, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a friend and colleague who I've worked with at the Cross Cancer Institute for years, and she was also a teammate of my wife's on several women's soccer teams. Val Kamitomo was mentioned in my member's statement recently on the RAM iron lung exhibit. She worked with polio patients who survived the iron lung. Her late husband, Gary McPherson, was one of them, and she helped Gary lead a fully rewarding life.

The second introduction is for Shirley Fisk, an RN at the Royal Alex for many years. She's also an accomplished cyclist and has represented Alberta on two occasions at the Canadian ladies' curling championship on team Betty Cole. I ask Val and Shirley to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Begging your indulgence, but I have two sets of visitors this afternoon. My school group will be arriving at 2 p.m., and I do hope I can get consent to introduce them at that point.

I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two members of the Sturgeon bus contract

association. Mr. Dean Millar is the president, and he is here with a fellow bus contractor, Darrel Granger. They've visited me today in the Legislature to discuss their concerns over school busing. I would ask that these gentlemen please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. member, normal practice is that we wouldn't be asking for unanimous consent in the OQP time, but maybe your group will be able to stay.

The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you some members of Islamic Relief Canada. I ask my guests to please rise as I say their names: Imam Sadique Pathan, Mohamed Rahall, and Ayan Abdille. Islamic Relief Canada is Canada's largest Muslim charity, dedicated to providing humanitarian aid and relief within and outside Canada's borders. With operations in over 35 countries Islamic Relief has done a tremendous amount of work both internationally and here in Canada. I thank them for the work they do, and I ask my guests to receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

1:40

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House two great, special constituents from Grande Prairie-Wapiti, Sean and Megan O'Toole. It's not too often that I get visitors all the way from Grande Prairie, but I'm pleased to have them here today. The reason they're so special: Sean is my plumber. I ask them to now please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

Provincial Election 2019

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, 1,311 days since the last election, yet for some it seems like an eternity. I could talk about the 46,000 fewer jobs in the private sector; a lack of investor confidence; misguided public policy; regulatory burden; a perception of less than business-friendly government; 167,000 unemployed; 115,000 no longer receiving EI benefits, struggling to make ends meet; lineups at food banks; families falling behind on bills and mortgage payments, fearing foreclosure and homelessness; depression; substance abuse; domestic violence; marital breakdown; and, with great finality, suicide.

But, Mr. Speaker, I prefer to talk about hope of a brighter future for all Albertans and a return to the Alberta advantage. What does that mean to me, to my colleagues, and to Albertans? Reigniting our renowned entrepreneurial spirit, building on the strengths of our world-famous prairie work ethic, taking our rightful place as a free-enterprise leader, and championing our role as a trading nation on the global stage; jobs for new graduates, work experience opportunities for youth, employment options for those with disabilities, and mentorship roles for active agers; jobs for moms and dads to support their growing families; empowering seniors' organizations, recreation facilities, places of worship, and nonprofits to enrich their communities; regulatory certainty, open for business, investor friendly, job creation, and prosperity; and pipelines. Yes, pipelines to world markets. Goodbye social licence croquet and hello to good old Alberta hardball. Real investment, real jobs, real prosperity, and a return to fiscal sanity.

Mr. Speaker, respectfully, election 2019 cannot come soon enough for the Albertans I speak with every day. Let us all remember that forming government is not about power. It is about the privilege of representing hard-working Albertans as we support them in fulfilling their hopes, wishes, and dreams for a brighter future.

Thank you and Merry Christmas to all.

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

Community Grants in Red Deer

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Thursday I had the distinct pleasure of hosting the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross in my constituency. With a gathering of 100 stakeholders it was amazing to learn more about the initiatives and enhancements from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism's community initiatives program and community facility enhancement program.

Focus on the essence of community brought to light the diversity of projects that have been happening in my city over the last three and a half years and a strong recognition of the community champions who are incredibly invested in drawing attention to Alberta's third-largest city. While I have met with most and have written many support letters to encourage their projects, it was a proud moment to look throughout the room to see how CIP and CFEP grants truly make Red Deer a phenomenal place to live.

Red Deerians are invested Albertans. They seek to evolve the cultural experience of our city, and the aforementioned funding streams enable this. During my tenure we have seen community initiatives that are environmentally, historically, and socially responsible and encompass elements that serve to drive the economic stability and viability of growth within Alberta's third-largest city. But what is most influential is the passion and drive that Red Deerians have to make their community a great place to live, work, and raise a family.

I have spoken before on Red Deer being an important hub for the surrounding municipalities who share our resources, and I am eternally grateful to those who push limits to enable the growth of my city. Having this event with the Minister of Culture and Tourism was a strong example that this government recognizes the true potential of Red Deer and those who seek to build upon its legacy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Retrospective by the Member for Battle River-Wainwright

Mr. Taylor: As we approach Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, who was and is the greatest gift that mankind has been given. We also recognize the gifts that we have been given from our friends, families, and at times from complete strangers. Today I want to say thank you to my constituents for giving me the confidence and the gift to be able to have served these three and a half years as MLA. Every day that I walk up the steps of the Legislature, I pause and reflect within myself on what an honour it has been to serve here and represent not just Alberta but specifically the constituents of Battle River-Wainwright and their concerns.

The job of an opposition MLA is to hold the government to account and to represent his constituents. These past years I've had the distinct privilege to hold the critic positions for Advanced Education, Infrastructure, and property and surface rights. However, working with the communities has been the most amazing privilege I've had. I've seen many victories I fought for, like the construction of a new school in Irma and a hospital upgrade, and although it was not a new hospital that I was fighting for, we

have an expansion to our existing facility that will include a new ER and a CT scan, that are coming soon. With this, more doctors are attracted, with a better lifestyle because of less on call and a wider range of services. But in the past this has not been the story for our hospital.

Unfortunately, this contrasts with fighting for justice for the Dahl family and the tragic accident that they are still reeling from today. Two lives were lost, one seriously injured, and still many unanswered questions. It is my fervent hope that we all make sure that other victims' families don't have to sacrifice justice and closure for the sake of expediency.

Thank you to my friends, family, and the constituents of Battle River-Wainwright and to my colleagues in the UCP for the gift and the privilege of serving them and serving with them. It's a great honour. I wish you all the best. Merry Christmas.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, and thank you for your service.

Recreational Use of Public Lands

Mr. Westhead: If it wasn't bad enough that the UCP plans to experiment with private health care, they now propose to privatize Alberta's public lands, some of our best and most important wildlife habitat. Pay to play might appeal to the UCP's well-heeled donors, but the rest of us like to keep those lands just like our health care system, public. Perhaps this is why the UCP is so against protecting Bighorn Country. Maybe they'd rather sell it to their rich pals, too. Alberta Backcountry Hunters and Anglers say that the sale of public lands will be, quote: a disaster for Alberta hunters and anglers. End quote.

In stark contrast, the NDP has worked to make hunting and fishing more accessible. We made hunting more affordable for seniors. We increased tags for elk and deer and gave landowners more opportunity to hunt elk on their property. We reversed a proposed angling ban on the Ram, Clearwater, Kakwa, and North Saskatchewan rivers. We ensured that hunting and fishing would continue in the new Castle parks. We also put land-use plans in place that improve habitat security for elk, grizzly bears, and native trout.

Hunters and anglers are some of the most conservation-minded folks that I've ever met. Now their way of life is being threatened by the UCP's leader, who says that he doesn't want to get bogged down with consultation and threatens to move so quickly that Albertans won't have time to react. For all we know, he's already promised the lands in exchange for donations, just like he's done with car dealers seeking to roll back workers' rights and consumer protections.

Alberta's hunters and anglers and other conservation-minded organizations stand to lose in a big way from the UCP's public land liquidation plans. Nobody who cares about conservation, habitat, or public access to our land should take this lying down. I'm calling on hunters and anglers and everyone who cares about wildlife to stand up against this land grab by the UCP. Let's keep our public lands in public hands.

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

Christmas Memories

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Christmas is a special time for many Albertans, a time that creates many memories for generations. A few of my favourite memories began as a small child, when my father would pack my brother and I into our car to drive from Sparwood, B.C., to Pincher Creek every Christmas Eve. He would

turn on the Santa Claus report, and we would listen as we followed where he had been seen around the world. We would arrive at my uncle's farm in time to attend the Christmas Eve service at the Mennonite church on my uncle's land. My cousins would always play Mary and Joseph in the nativity scene, and all of us children would receive a small brown bag full of sweets and a mandarin orange. At the end of the service the congregation was invited across the road to the homestead, where we would have our midnight supper.

1:50

On Christmas morning all of my 13 cousins and 10 aunts and uncles along with my grandparents would head into town for the Christmas morning service at the Baptist church, a special church to my family, that my grandparents helped build. We would sing our favourite hymns, and all of us children would sit around on the steps of the pew and listen to the story of Christmas.

We would then head back to my grandmother's house, where the living room was full of games and the largest puzzle a person could find. We would spend hours trying to put that puzzle together.

One of my favourite treats of our Christmas dinner was the fruit punch that my grandmother made. No one knew exactly how it was made, but it sure tasted good. None of us have ever been able to make it since.

Mr. Speaker, as we move into the Christmas holidays, let us all remember those fond memories, whether it be attending a church service, a Christmas concert, a staff party, or just having those precious moments with loved ones. Christmas is about the memories, memories that I can't wait to share with my future children. To those who are celebrating: Merry Christmas and God bless.

Oral Question Period

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

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and Merry Christmas to one and all. Lovely to hear the seasonal spirit here today.

Pipelines to the East Coast

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I have discussed with the new New Brunswick Premier, Blaine Higgs, his plan to revive a coastal pipeline like Energy East, that was killed by Justin Trudeau's new regulations on up- and downstream carbon emissions. Will the hon. Premier commit to meet with Premier Higgs at the first ministers' meeting to commit Alberta's support to his plan to revive the Energy East pipeline?

Ms Notley: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kenney: The best answers are the shortest, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the new Quebec Premier, François Legault, indicated yesterday that he will oppose that plan even though Quebec is receiving \$9 billion a year from the federal government in net transfers, much of that coming from Alberta and our energy sector. Will the hon. the Premier commit to raise the concern of Albertans with Quebec's Premier Legault that if they want to benefit from transfers that come from Alberta, they should be partners in resource development?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There is absolutely no question that we have already been engaging in

conversations with provincial leadership across the country about the need to find a renewed path for energy infrastructure to the east of Alberta, and we're not going to stop doing that. Now, I don't know that we necessarily need to immediately accelerate to public threats. I think that at this point we'd like to have some conversations with the new leadership in Quebec and to look at ways in which we can come up with some mutually beneficial strategies, and we are committed to doing that on behalf of the people of this province.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No one was suggesting threats but, rather, raising the legitimate concern Albertans have when they see billions of our tax dollars effectively being transferred to the Quebec government. While we're in a deficit, they're in a surplus. They have 5 per cent unemployment; we have 7.2 per cent unemployment. They've had years of growth; we've had years of stagnation or economic decline. Is it not reasonable to make the point to the Quebec leadership that if they want to benefit from the resources of Alberta, they should be partners in the development of those resources?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the member opposite doesn't actually spend a lot of time listening to the speeches that I give. I mean, he should because they're sometimes somewhat helpful. Nonetheless, the fact of the matter is that I've been making the point across Canada for well over a year now that Alberta is a net fiscal contributor to all of Canada and that obviously those provinces that are not net fiscal contributors benefit from all of the economic growth and economic prosperity and the downright good, hard work of Albertans. I've been making that case for a great amount of time, and I will continue to make it because Canada needs Alberta, Canada needs Alberta to be working, and Canada needs . . .

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

Mr. Kenney: We share that sentiment, Mr. Speaker. The point is that the leadership of Quebec needs to hear that clearly from Alberta's leadership.

Federal Fiscal and Energy Policies

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, Albertans contribute net about \$20 billion to the rest of the federation through their federal taxes; that is, we pay \$20 billion more to Ottawa than comes back in the form of federal services. Does the Premier agree with me that the strongest leverage we have with Ottawa on getting market access and a fair price for our assets is those transfers? Will she raise the need for equalization reform with the Prime Minister at the first ministers' meeting?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the net fiscal \$20 billion: I do actually speak to the federal government, to business leaders, to community leaders, to schools, to schoolchildren from coast to coast to coast on a regular basis about the import of Alberta's strong economy. That transfer is not a function of equalization; that is a function of the tax system. We will continue to make the point that all of Canada needs Alberta to do well because, quite frankly, there is not a school, a hospital, a

bike lane, or anything else in Canada that doesn't owe itself to Alberta's industry.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, will the hon. the Premier commit to ask Prime Minister Trudeau at the first ministers' meeting to repeal and reverse his veto of the Northern Gateway pipeline?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the Northern Gateway pipeline is not currently a project that is being pursued, but what we have said is that we want them to review their tanker ban so that those proponents of additional projects that are better put together can get investment dollars and get off the ground. That is exactly – exactly – what we have already done, and we will continue to do that. As I've said before, we need to get our product to tidewater because all Canadians need for that to happen. We will continue pushing for that because we are going to continue to push for Alberta's economy.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the Premier just committed to asking Ottawa to, quote: review its tanker ban. Will the Premier instead ask Ottawa to withdraw its proposed tanker ban, Bill C-48?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, in fact, I've already done that. It's very clear. I've been very clear for the last week and a half that Bill C-48 and the discriminatory treatment of Alberta's nonrenewable energy products need to stop. It doesn't make sense that big tankers full of LNG are okely-dokely but refined product or other kinds of nonrenewable product from Alberta are somehow not. In fact, what we need to do is to be able to operate like an economic country and an economic nation that can punch above its weight and be effective on the international stage. We need to stop these barriers, we need to stop the internal fighting, and we need to get on with building our economy as a whole.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
Third main question.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate, then, that the NDP voted against a motion from the United Conservative Party calling on the federal government to withdraw its tanker ban, Bill C-48.

Energy Policies and the Provincial Fiscal Position

Mr. Kenney: In northern British Columbia there is a consortium of First Nations who are in favour of a coastal pipeline for Alberta energy, for Alberta oil, who are opposed to the federal tanker ban, Bill C-48, and are trying to raise funds on the Internet to sue the federal government for failing to consult with them before the Trudeau government vetoed the Northern Gateway pipeline. Will the Premier commit to work with those First Nations who make up the Eagle Spirit consortium?

Ms Notley: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, last week in Ottawa my speech specifically spoke to the Eagle Spirit project. It also spoke to the fact that we needed to allow for the opportunity for a variety of proponents that were able to put together a proper plan, that had proper consultation with all communities and met the standards that were required for them to be able to get off the ground, to attract investment, and to go forward and that, in fact, Bill C-48 barred that and that it was effectively discriminatory to Alberta's product. Those are exactly the points that I made when I was in Ottawa last

week. Those are exactly the points that I will continue to make because, once again, Canada needs Alberta to succeed.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, recently released StatsCan data indicates that the total monthly compensation in Alberta has declined significantly since the NDP came to office, from \$12.7 billion to \$11.8 billion. Is this evidence that the NDP's economic plan is working, that Albertans three and a half years later are making less money?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think that the data that StatsCan relied on is a bit out of date. What we know is that Alberta's average weekly earnings have recovered to postrecession levels and that we always were leading and continue to lead the country in terms of average weekly earnings. We also know that since the depths of the recession the economy has created well over 100,000 jobs. The differential crisis was threatening to stall that growth, but because we took action, we're going to make sure it doesn't, and we're going to continue on the path to recovery, not just for a few Albertans but for all Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you.

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this is very new data. In fact, it's based on income reported in September, just a couple of months ago, and it's down by 10 per cent since prior to the recession, a mark of failure of this government's policy. Professor Tombe at the University of Calgary estimates that if the economy had continued to grow at its same pace that it did prior to the NDP, Albertans would be \$5 billion better off in monthly payments. So why does the NDP continue to threaten us with a further tax increase to the carbon tax given that Albertans are poorer under the NDP?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know that the members opposite love to say "prior to the NDP" and just completely forget, of course, the fact that the price of oil dropped by 75 per cent. People aren't buying that. What they do know is that our government has been focused on standing up for regular Albertans. We have been focused on job creation. We have been focused on making life more affordable. We have been focused on protecting those important public services that all Alberta families rely on. Schools, hospitals: those are the things that build the economy. Those are the things that have Alberta leading the country in economic growth. Those are the things that are making us come out of this much differently than those places that adopted . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
Calgary-South East.

Gay-straight Alliances in Schools

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Party caucus is fully supportive of GSAs in schools and a student's right to privacy and safety in joining. Recent reports that a child was taken off school grounds by an adult not affiliated with the school without the parents' awareness have raised some questions, though. We need to be clear. A student's right to privacy is intended to ensure their safety, not circumvent existing protections. To the Minister of Education: how is your department going to ensure that any visitor coming into a school has to register with the front office, and can you explain how that policy was overlooked in recent reports regarding GSAs?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. We know that GSAs are an important part of our schools. GSAs help to save lives in schools. We also need to know that there's a separation between the GSAs and the policy that we built here and field trip policy and so forth. It's my expectation that schools and school boards follow field trip policy to the fullest extent that they have built that policy and that we make sure that kids are safe every step of the way. That is what we're here for, and that's what we will continue to do.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Minister.

GSAs are a vital peer-to-peer support group for young people struggling with bullying and/or acceptance, and the right to privacy is necessary to assure participants that actually it's safe to participate. We also need to be aware that there must be reasonable limits placed upon what activities are appropriate when parents aren't being informed, especially activities that take place off school grounds. To the same minister: is your ministry considering the development of standardized policies around GSAs, what activities are acceptable, and what activities are not appropriate without parental notification?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know here, GSAs are support clubs in schools. As I said in my last answer, field trips are a separate issue that has to be dealt with, a separate policy. Schools and school boards have those policies in place. It's very important, the confidentiality of students in GSAs. The idea of outing kids who join GSAs goes against the very grain of what they are supposed to be as a safe and caring place. Anyone who suggests that kids should be outed in a GSA doesn't understand and, in fact, is hurting the basic idea and the kids that are in a GSA in the first place.

Mr. Fraser: Minister, six months ago I asked a very heartfelt question about how your government is working with families of LGBTQ children and those who are supportive and those who are just not there yet. To the same minister: can you point to one specific example of how you're working with school boards to foster an open sharing of LGBTQ students along with their parents and families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Good question, and I thank the hon. member for his assistance on this matter. I'm very proud to say that all public school boards in the province of Alberta, all Catholic schools, all francophone schools, all charter schools, and the vast majority of private schools have built their own safe and caring policies, with faith-based principles built right into them if they chose to do so. I'm so proud of that process that we've gone through over these last three and a half years. But I also must say, Mr. Speaker, that if you take public money for schools here in the province of Alberta, you must follow the law just like anybody else.

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

Political Participation

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past year we've seen the rise of many different political action committees, or PACs, here in Alberta. These organizations often work in the shadows and have a big influence on the elections that we've seen in both Calgary and Ontario. To the minister responsible for democratic

renewal: what are you doing to make sure that PACs don't have an unfair influence in Alberta elections?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government is fighting for what matters to Albertans, and that includes having control over their democracy. For too long in Alberta, elections were controlled by those who had the most money. I know that some parties think that they can auction off their platforms to the highest bidder. That is not how our democracy works. The first thing we did when we came into office was to get big money out of politics. Contrary to what the members opposite shout at me, we know that banning PACs is not constitutional, so what we did was bring in the strictest rules around PACs in the whole country.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that PACs often also rely on this big money, again to the same minister: what are you doing to ensure that we keep that big money out of politics and PACs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased that as of last Saturday all PACs in Alberta are now under a \$150,000 pre-election spending cap. That means fewer newspaper wraps, fewer fake calls and radio ads, and a clampdown on these attempts to put big money back into politics. We've all seen the unbelievable rise in third-party advertising over the last few months, and we know that while we'll never be able to stop the Conservatives' rich friends from trying to buy the election, these rules will help ensure that it's regular Albertans, not just those at the top, who have a say in their own elections.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a healthy democracy relies on people getting out to vote and sharing their opinions, again to the minister responsible for democratic renewal: what are you doing to encourage more Albertans to vote?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a great question. Thanks to the changes made by our government, voting over the next election will be easier and more convenient than ever. We're ensuring that all Albertans are enumerated so that when election time comes, they'll be on the list and they'll know where they're supposed to go. We're taking advantage of voting technology to ensure that those who have different mobility needs can vote as easily as possible. We've increased the number of advanced polling days and are ensuring polling stations are in more places than ever before.

Agricultural Methane Emission Reduction

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, the climate leadership plan calls for a 45 per cent reduction in methane emissions by 2025. Now, 70 per cent of Alberta's methane emissions comes from the oil and gas industry, and last year regulations were released to tackle this objective. But 24 per cent of Alberta's methane emissions comes from agriculture, and much of that is from the livestock industry. To the minister of agriculture: what measures are being taken to

reduce methane emissions from livestock production in Alberta, and what results have been achieved thus far?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very good question. I've had the opportunity to talk with genetics people at the University of Alberta and look at the very exciting research they're doing around feed, around different practices for the agriculture industry to do their part, too, because when I talk to producers and ranchers across the province, they want to do their part to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including methane. Some really exciting new technologies, that I'm looking forward to being implemented in the future.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, long on rhetoric but short on results. Other countries have aggressively tackled this challenge. Given that an Australian study that added red algae to sheep diets resulted in an 80 per cent reduction in methane production and given that work at the University of California, Davis, feeding cows a strain of seaweed has resulted in a 55 per cent reduction in methane production, to the minister of agriculture: what comparable work – and give me the numbers, please – is being done in Alberta?

Mr. Carlier: Thank you for the very interesting question, for the little tidbits there, you know, understanding, too, that there are different charcoal products that can be used to reduce methane. But over and above the feeding of the cattle, we have had the opportunity to use funds from the climate leadership plan to assist JBS, a very large meat-processing facility near Brooks, Alberta, to reduce their methane over some of their effluent ponds. There are opportunities right across the sector, Mr. Speaker, to find those efficiencies.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, given that measures to reduce methane from livestock production have the potential to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by some seven gigatonnes – that's 10 times Canada's annual output and 28 times Alberta's – and given that the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency, or ALMA, that used to support research like this, was disbanded by this minister in 2016, to the minister: Alberta is falling behind in areas that we could and should be leaders in. Will you re-establish ALMA or a similar agency so that Alberta can once again assume its leadership position?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Member again for the very, very interesting question. You know, work is going on. Progress is going on with our higher institutions, with the Alberta Beef Producers, with a major packing plant. Everyone wants to be able to find those efficiencies. Within those efficiencies are some economics as well, using genetics, the science of genetics, where there are now beef cattle that are eating upwards of 400 pounds less feed in their lifespan than they were even a few years ago. Research is continuing to be able to find those efficiencies within our processing.

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

2:10 Adoption Advertising Legislation Proclamation

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Adoptive families across this province are still waiting on the proclamation of Bill 206, the child, youth, and family enhancement amendment act, which would allow families to put their profiles online. While we wait, adoption rates actually continue to drop in this province and the list of families looking to give a child a loving home continues to grow. To the minister – I'll ask again because Albertans are continuing to ask me – when will Bill 206 be proclaimed? Why is the government delaying it? It passed in the Legislature over a year ago.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely, all children deserve safe, welcoming, and loving homes, and adoptive families do play a critical role in helping to ensure that children in our province get exactly that. We share the member's commitment to ensuring that the adoption process gives both children and parents the best possible outcomes. We continue to consult with Albertans on next steps, but we do need to take the time to make sure that we get this right on behalf of all those involved.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Well, Mr. Speaker, it's been a year. Last week I had the opportunity to speak with the minister's team about this important issue during the Public Accounts Committee. They informed me that their consultations are ongoing and that they have not yet done the work of summarizing any of the concerns highlighted by the stakeholders through this process. Minister, given that your department has had over a year to complete this work, I can only assume that you've not made this a priority, that you're deliberately choosing not to proceed for partisan reasons. Why?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely, what I can say again is that this is about the well-being of children and making sure that the process gives the parents and children who go through this process the best possibility of a solid and sure outcome. It is incredibly important that we get it right, so we are talking to young people, to families, to parents and organizations, and we're working together to look for improvements. I know that the Conservatives might have no problem in rushing through changes to make life harder for families, but we're not going to do that.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, Mr. Speaker, the amount of correspondence that is coming into my office and the offices of my colleagues: these are the messages of desperate families that are wanting to complete their forever loving homes. I need to ask the minister as I head home to chat with constituents over the Christmas holidays: what do you want me to say to the families about why they won't be celebrating Christmas with the child that they so desperately want?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I will say is that when we talk about adoption, it's an incredibly complex issue and, in fact, there's a lot of different perspectives around how we need to proceed as a province going forward. That's why it's so incredibly important to talk to people and to get it right. You know, while the Conservatives want to hurt families with big cuts to health and education . . .

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

Larivee: . . . we've got the backs of Albertans, and we will continue to fight to get this right and ensure we do what we need to do for the things that matter to Albertans.

Financial Reporting by Government

Mr. Barnes: The Finance minister has sent my friend and colleague the chair of the Public Accounts Committee a letter stating that the Finance department will be changing the way it reports its financial position to Albertans in just over 90 days. My colleague received this letter just yesterday. My question to the minister is simple. Why did you decide to change the way Treasury Board and Finance reports key financial information to Albertans just weeks before a provincial election and your four-year mandate is over? What are you hiding?

Mr. Ceci: Nothing. We're not hiding anything on this side. We have, you know, different groups who've said that we've got the best reporting of any province out there, and we're going to continue to win that race amongst all the provinces and do the best job reporting. What I'm changing is actually going to save the government of Alberta money. I'm not going to be requesting audited financial statements from each minister because we have an auditor who looks at the final audited financial statements of government. We don't need to do that work with 20 auditors and then another auditor. We can do it once, do it well, and save money.

Mr. Barnes: What you're changing is all the red ink the printer is now using.

Given that the minister held notification until after the Public Accounts Committee had completed and he has unilaterally changed how Treasury Board and Finance will report revenues and expenses, including removing all of the department's individual revenues and expenses, and given that on March 31, 2018, the financial report showed that Albertans are already \$67 billion in debt, paying \$1.4 billion in interest annually, with our last borrowing at 3.61 per cent, Minister, what are you planning on hiding . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. [interjection] Thank you.

Mr. Ceci: Nothing could be further from the truth. We're not hiding anything. Though he can say it every time he gets up, it's not true. You know, no information will be lost. No financial information is lost. The Auditor General: remember that person? Actually, they recommend and support the action we're taking with regard to one final audited statement of all the government ministries. Instead of re-creating this and making busy work with 20 auditors, we're saving government money, and we're following the AG's advice.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, curiously, this was disclosed to Public Accounts after our last meeting, and our last meeting, just yesterday, was with Treasury Board and Finance, the very public servants who will be dealing with this change in 90 days on how this Finance minister and this NDP government want to disclose information.

The Speaker: Get to the question.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, all committee members, from both sides of this Legislature, were denied the opportunity to demand answers

yesterday for Albertans. Minister, what are you hiding... [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon members.

Hon member, the question is on government policy. Minister, answer the question.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll just remind the member on the other side...

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

Mr. Ceci: ... that the Auditor General supports the work we're doing. The Auditor General believes we don't have to re-create audited financial statements for all of the ministries and then do it again as a government. They trust the information that our ministries bring forward. We're rolling that up into an audited statement at the end, which is reviewed by the Auditor General. Mr. Speaker, we have one of the best reporting processes of any province out there. We are given an A plus every year, and we're going to continue to get that.

Gas Price Differentials and the Carbon Levy

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, now that we have dealt with the oil differential price crisis, it is time to deal with the crisis facing natural gas producers. On Monday in question period the Premier alluded to a working group of industry players that the NDP government is waiting to receive advice from. Sources indicate there is a draft report. To the Premier: who is on this working group, how long has this working group been running, and when will the report be released?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is quite correct that we appointed a natural gas advisory group, that we've been in constant contact with. We are receiving their advice, and we will be having more to say soon. In addition to pipelines, that we are working for every day, we do have issues with natural gas, and we're looking at things that we can do to help with that. I'd be happy to say more in the next question.

Mr. van Dijken: Given, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta natural gas producers have to contend with British Columbia producers dumping gas onto Alberta's pipeline network, causing prices to drop so low that sometimes gas sells for a negative price, and given that the NDP's fellow-travellers in British Columbia continue to act as an impediment to moving Alberta's oil to market and given that we have not seen any social licence granted by the B.C. NDP government, when will this government admit their climate leadership plan has failed and scrap their job-killing carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have been listening to our gas producers and many other producers, for that matter, and some of the things we're hearing are that we need to add more value here in Alberta, and that's exactly what we're doing. A while back we did our first PDP project, and it's well under way, Inter Pipeline in the Alberta Industrial Heartland. It's creating jobs all around the province. A second one is about to announce their FID. With last year's bill we are incenting more projects, that I'll be happy to talk about in the third question.

2:20

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that these carbon taxes are all pain and will have no measurable impact on our climate or on emissions and given that Albertans recognize that the carbon tax is a sham – it's no wonder the NDP hid the carbon tax from Albertans in the last election – will this government admit that their plan has failed and apologize for the unnecessary pain the carbon tax has instilled on all Alberta families?

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

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is mistaken. In fact, our climate leadership plan has already reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 11 megatonnes, roughly the annual emissions of Newfoundland. This is not immaterial, and Alberta is showing that kind of leadership. Another thing that we're doing for natural gas, though, is making sure that we are phasing in natural gas electricity sources. This is a very good thing for natural gas producers here in Alberta. It is cleaner burning, obviously. We're making sure that we've got the capacity market in place to make those projects economic as we phase out coal. The previous government obviously failed to do...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

School Bus Safety

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that seat belts save lives and prevent injuries. In 2010 Transport Canada released the results of a study which concluded that in the event of side impacts and rollovers children travelling on our school buses were more vulnerable to injury. This study was not made public until October 2018 and poses a great concern to our Albertan students who are bused back and forth to school daily. To the Minister of Transportation: can you speak to the precautionary measures being currently considered to protect our students who require buses to attend school daily?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. You know, it's absolutely important to us that safety of our children comes first, and it's one of our most important responsibilities. All school buses in Alberta must meet the engineering and design standards of Transport Canada, but some new evidence has come to light which we take very seriously, and I've asked my department officials to look into this and to contact Transport Canada as well as other jurisdictions in order to provide me with the best possible advice to continue to keep our children safe.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the fact that Albertan seat belt laws govern the safety of all who travel our roads and highways and given that even bus drivers are required by law to buckle up and that there is, however, currently nothing in place which supports our most vulnerable assets, our children, to the minister: can you speak to the importance of school buses being equipped with seat belts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the question was very similar to the one I just answered, and of course

the safety of our children is of paramount importance. We are looking at the best way to do that. Based on historical research, the advice was to not have seat belts in school buses. There is new research that would contradict that, and the department is working very hard in order to provide me with some options to make sure that we can continue to have the best practices to keep our children safe.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that just this school year there was an unfortunate accident involving a school bus in which some of our Albertan children were physically hurt and in shock and given that three-point seat belts would prevent injuries and save lives, to the same minister: can I count on your support to put the safety of our Albertan students first and foremost and address the seat belt issue in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Absolutely, hon. member. This is something that we take very seriously, and as I've indicated in the answer to previous questions, we are studying this as we speak. I've told the department that I wish to give it the utmost priority, and we're going to come back with the best options in order to keep our kids safe.

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

Tow Truck Driver Safety

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall my colleague from Grande Prairie-Wapiti's private member's bill would have allowed tow trucks to use blue and white warning lights along with the currently permitted amber. The industry repeatedly asked for this change because their work on Alberta's roadsides creates hazards for them as well as members of the motoring public. During last week's snowstorm two tow trucks were struck by passing cars. Minister, you opened up the Traffic Safety Act twice while in government. Why hasn't this legislation been changed?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to remind everyone that safety, including of our tow truck operators, who operate in hazardous conditions, is the highest priority. People are required, if they're passing a tow truck with lights on in an adjacent lane, to slow down to at least 60 kilometres an hour. That's the law. They're treated in that respect the same as any police, fire, or ambulance vehicle that might be on the highway.

With respect to changing the colours of the lights, that is under active consideration, Mr. Speaker, as we speak.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that allowing tow trucks to use more visible blue and white warning lights increases safety for all motorists and given that Saskatchewan and four other provinces successfully made this change, to the minister. You can easily make the required changes to this act through regulation. What's stopping you from making this change before a fatality occurs?

Mr. Mason: Well, the hon. member has posed the question as if, Mr. Speaker, if we made this change immediately, people would not be killed in accidents. What we need to do is make sure that

people slow down and move over when they're passing any vehicle with flashing lights, first of all. We are studying the experience of Saskatchewan in particular, that has added blue lights. If that improves the safety of tow truck operators, we will do it.

Mr. Strankman: Well received, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the occupation of tow truck drivers is one of the most dangerous jobs in North America and given that you have repeatedly stated you would look into this since I first asked you about this issue in 2015, Minister, you could commit today to enacting this change immediately and help these Albertans return home safely every night.

The Speaker: Was there a question in there, hon. member? That was a question, was it?

Mr. Strankman: Could the minister commit today to enacting this change immediately?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Mason: I will commit, Mr. Speaker, to doing whatever is necessary to improve safety on our highways, including for tow truck operators. When I have a clear understanding of the best option to put forward, that's what I'll do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Carbon Levy and Agricultural Costs

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Farmers in my riding are sending me copies of their natural gas bills, pointing out the NDP's carbon tax. In just one month a grain farmer spent \$3,761 just on natural gas and a staggering \$1,766 in carbon tax, over \$1,700 in carbon tax in just one month: not rent, not groceries, just a carbon tax. Given the devastating impact the carbon tax has had on Alberta farmers, will the minister of agriculture be a minister for farmers or just their carbon tax collector?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that slightly odd question. We've done a lot with farmers. We were able to make sure that marked fuel is carbon levy exempted. We've also reduced small-business tax by one-third, which, of course, helps farmers right across the province. From the climate leadership plan we've injected \$81 million to find efficiencies. When I talk to farmers across the province, they want to be able to know: what can they do for their part for greenhouse gas emissions? They have been great stewards of the land for generations and continue to be so.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, Mr. Speaker, farmers do find it odd that they have to pay a carbon tax on natural gas just to dry their grain on a very difficult harvest.

Given that the minister actually had a very similar response in a letter that was written to him, where he was quoted as saying that Alberta has one of the lowest natural gas prices in North America, to the minister of agriculture: are you actually telling Alberta farmers that the government is eroding our ag industry's competitive advantage with the NDP's carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again for the very odd question. You know, Alberta continues to have the lowest taxes

overall, even with the carbon levy, across the country. So to say that we've somehow eroded our competitive advantage, of course, is very false. Through the climate leadership plan we are devoting funds, as a matter of fact a 50 per cent rebate for those farmers that are upgrading or retrofitting their grain-drying operations, looking to find those efficiencies, efficiencies not only to reduce greenhouse gas emissions but economic efficiencies as well.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, it is odd that the minister is unaware that farmers actually do not want to pay their carbon tax.

Given that the NDP seems eager to pick winners and losers of who has to pay the carbon tax and those who don't have to pay their carbon tax and given that Alberta's carbon tax does nothing to reduce greenhouse gases and given that, unlike other sectors, farmers actually grow plants that remove CO₂ from the atmosphere, can the minister of agriculture explain why hard-working farm families are being forced to pay the NDP's job-killing carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:30

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah. Again for the member, I'll let him know that a lot of farmers use marked fuel for their operations, the kind, you know, that they put in their tractors and such things. Actually, that fuel is exempted from the carbon levy, knowing that that's a big part of their operations, making sure that it works for industry, including the agriculture industry, and that at the same time we'll find those efficiencies. It has been very successful. That's the second member now that says that carbon pricing is not effective. It's been effective around the world. There's a Nobel prize winner who won for coming up with the concept of carbon pricing. It is working, and I'm very proud of that.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Economic Development and Energy Project Approval

Mr. Cyr: Mr. Speaker, as every MLA in this House knows, Alberta is in a tough spot. Many, many Albertans are unemployed or underemployed, and many Albertans also are struggling to put food on the table, fill their gas tank, and send their kids to hockey practice. Unfortunately, it seems when job creators set out to spur the economic activity to create jobs in Alberta, they end up facing overbearing and cumbersome barriers of regulation. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: will the government finally admit that its obsession with overregulation is hurting Alberta's international profile?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, what I will admit is that when the price of oil collapsed, it had a significant impact on every business, every community, every worker in this province. We recognize that it's been a very challenging period of time. That's exactly why the Premier re-created the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, so that there is a ministry solely dedicated to supporting our businesses, helping to take our companies internationally to support new markets. We've introduced a number of different tools that are helping to create jobs, that are supporting our job creators here in the province, that I'm very proud to talk more about momentarily.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Cyr: Given, Mr. Speaker, that one example of regulatory overreach can be seen in the case of Prosper Petroleum, an Alberta company that has been waiting since 2013 for regulatory approval of a new oil sands project, and given that despite finally receiving the project approval from the Alberta Energy Regulator in June, the government continues to sit on an order in council that they need to proceed and given that this project represents nearly 11,000 potential jobs for hard-working Albertans, to the Minister of Energy: can the NDP government tell us why the order in council has not been issued already?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We absolutely recognize the importance of this project to the proponent and the investors, and we also recognize the potential economic benefits for Alberta. The Alberta Energy Regulator submitted a recommendation for an order in council to the Department of Energy this past August 2018. The matter is currently making its way through the decision-making process. I can tell you as Energy minister that my number one focus is supporting our energy sector and the good jobs it creates. We are fighting for pipelines, we are fighting for a better price in oil, and we are fighting to upgrade our resources.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Cyr: Given, Mr. Speaker, that this isn't a unique circumstance and given that according to CAPP there are 13 separate projects waiting for regulatory approval, including projects from companies like Osum, which directly creates jobs in my constituency, and given that these held up projects represent jobs and prosperity for Albertans in a time when they are needed the most, to the Minister of Energy: will this government finally stop standing in the way of wealth-creating private enterprise, streamline the regulatory approval process, and let Albertans get back to work?

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? I'm very proud of the work that the Minister of Energy has done, working with the AER to look at ways that we can improve efficiency to approve projects. Now, I'm very proud of the fact that Imperial has made a final investment decision to move forward with their \$2.6 billion Aspen oil sands project. Nexen is also investing \$400 million in their Long Lake expansion. There are a number of companies that are making investments in our province that are helping to create jobs. But you know what's not going to help our economy? Firing 4,000 teachers, 4,000 nurses and giving a \$700 million tax break to the richest 1 per cent. That's not going to help.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Private-sector Job Creation

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, in spite of what we just heard, there are 46,267 fewer private-sector jobs in Alberta than there were three years ago. The Minister of Finance tells us that everything is up, up, up, and the minister of economic development sings the praises of this government's supposed green shoots. Investors and businesses have lost confidence in this government. To the minister of economic development: given this dismal statistic, can you please tell us when private-sector job creation will overtake job losses in this province?

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'll start off by saying that we recognize that it has been a very challenging time. The global collapse in the price of oil has impacted every sector, not just our energy sector but all sectors. That's exactly why our government has rolled out a number of supports, including three different tax credits, funds to help companies access new markets as well as supporting our start-ups but also recapitalizing the Alberta Enterprise Corporation, which helps investment come back here into Alberta. These are all very positive moves. We know that there's more work to do, but firing 4,000 teachers and 4,000 nurses . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that there are 78,733 new jobs in the public sector and given that, as the Fraser Institute notes, "a robust private sector is needed to generate the wealth to support government activity – including government jobs," of course, and given that uncontrolled growth in public-sector employment will inevitably lead to tax increases, negatively impacting private-sector jobs to support them, to the Minister of Finance: how does your path to balance address the need to grow private-sector investment and jobs given your path to dismal performance to date?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, we have a commitment of balancing in 2023, and we're doing that by a number of things. First of all, we're cutting out all that waste that was left behind by the Conservative government, things like sky palaces, an air force, golf memberships, and other things. We're getting back to balance by finding their waste, we're getting back to balance by diversifying the economy, and we're getting back to balance by making sure Albertans have good schools and hospitals and places like that to get a better education and health care.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, it's interesting. We see robust investment in job creation in the U.S. in their energy sector, but given Alberta's flat GDP, reduction in total employment, record unemployment, lower negative interprovincial net migration, dismal job creation, and depressed tax revenues and given the flight of over \$40 billion in foreign direct investment on your watch and given that the wealth and job-generating engine of the private-sector activity is faltering, to the minister of economic development: can you tell Albertans today, right here, right now, how you expect to bring back investor confidence and create more good, stable, mortgage-paying jobs in Alberta?

Mr. Bilous: Well, I'll start off, Mr. Speaker, by – I don't think that the members opposite forming government would bring back investor confidence. We'll start with continuing with a government that supports not only the public sector but the private sector. You know what? A lot of international companies that are looking at setting up shop north of the border are looking at things like high-quality health care. They want good schools for their kids. They want a high quality of life. All three of those we offer here in Alberta, including continuing to be the lowest taxed jurisdiction in the country. We have some of the best talent. We are investing in our postsecondaries. That's how we're going to attract companies, by having high-quality talent and the right regime.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Member for Calgary-Bow.

Flood Mitigation on the Bow River

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Residents from my constituency who reside in riverfront communities suggest that limiting the 100-year return period target flow rate on the Bow River in Calgary to 1,230 cubic metres per second, as addressed in the city's Flood Mitigation Measures Assessment report, will not be sufficient to protect these communities from damage from groundwater flooding, that constitutes about 80 per cent of the damage from flooding events. Can the minister update this House on flood mitigation measures on the Bow River?

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for her advocacy for the people of Calgary-Bow. Of course, we're investing \$150 million for local flood protection projects in the city of Calgary. We made that commitment in 2015. We're making good on it. We also are investing in a feasibility study for our options on the Bow River Working Group. Of course, that means different recommendations on modifying operations at TransAlta, new structural projects. I'll give more detail in the supplementals.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What can the minister say to my constituents who are concerned that to efficiently reduce groundwater damage, the peak flow rate needs to be reduced to below 800 cubic metres per second through upstream mitigation, as was projected as a target in the advance to government on water management for the Bow River basin?

2:40

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're moving forward with short-term options, obviously, for the Bow, and then we need to make sure that we've got all of the correct studies and recommendations in place on the longer term projects. These are large-scale projects. Some of them can be quite expensive, including the addition of Spray Lakes and Lake Minnewanka using Barrier Lake for flood mitigation rather than drought mitigation. All of these things require a government that is committed to keeping the people of Calgary safe and making those investments in the infrastructure to make it so.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the province has recently commissioned a study to further define the upstream options for the Bow River identified in this report, to what extent will the study look to identify flood mitigation schemes that reduce the peak flow rate to 800 cubic metres per second?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, all of the recommendations are being studied for how they are going to keep the people of Calgary safe, including the people of Calgary-Bow. But I can tell you this. Ideological cuts to our infrastructure program will not keep the people of Calgary safe. It will mean no investment in long-term flood mitigation. Waffling on the Springbank dam will not help the people of Calgary, and failing to invest in the Bow will also not keep the member's constituents safe or anyone else in Calgary safe.

The Speaker: We will proceed in 30 seconds with Members' Statements, hon. members.

The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request your permission to revert to introductions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Please proceed, hon. member.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 35 students from H.A. Kostash school in Smoky Lake. The students are accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Ashley Romaniuk and Mr. Murray Lalonde along with their chaperones, Mr. Adam Edwardson, Mr. Brendan Melnyk, Mrs. Stephanie Mahon, Mrs. Roxanne Kozakewich, Mrs. Kelly Klein, and Mrs. Shawne Bishop. I would like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Piquette: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, they're looking forward to my tabling hundreds of letters from the Smoky Lake community, that they brought with them this afternoon, advocating for a new school as well as giving their own letters directly to Minister Eggen. I think the minister knows what they want for Christmas.

The Speaker: Welcome to the Assembly. I'm glad the member got a chance to introduce you.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Water Fluoridation in Calgary

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Have you ever held your child's hand as they go through intensive dental intervention, pinching your pennies to pay for it, wondering where you went wrong or how this could have been prevented? Well, I, like many parents in Calgary, have, and a lot of this occurred after fluoride was removed from Calgary's drinking water. Since 2011 dentists as well as not-for-profits in Calgary have seen a spike in the number of cases of tooth decay in our city. The impacts are even worse in lower income areas, where families may not have the means to pay for regular dental care. This was all done to save the city only \$750,000 per year. If you add that up per citizen over their lifetime, it's less than one filling.

The fact is that fluoride naturally occurs in our water supply, including some Canadian communities that have the recommended .7 milligrams needed. However, the clear, mountain water from the Rockies only carries .1 to .4 milligrams at best, which is not enough to help prevent against oral disease. Meanwhile, Health Canada's research proves that it has no negative impact on your personal health.

Organizations in our city like the Alex and CUPS support this being a priority as they recognize that community water fluoridation is one measure that helps decrease dental disease within our population. For the Alex, 46 per cent of the children they support have tooth decay. Let's talk about these savings. Is that

costing us in AHS when these infections get out of control, in FCSS for additional preventative measures, or additional resources for our not-for-profits that they have to pay?

Right now Calgarians for Kids' Health are advocating to return this basic right to our city's drinking water, and if you support them, I urge you to get involved. This decision by the city of Calgary in 2011 to override the decision that was made by Calgarians in a referendum has caused a tremendous amount of pain to children and a financial burden to families. I urge the city of Calgary to re-examine this and AHS to be part of the conversation or at the very least to bring this question back to citizens.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

Mr. Cyr: Mr. Speaker, as the chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts I am pleased to table five copies of the 2018 report for the Standing Committee on Public Accounts covering its work during 14 committee meetings for the period of January to December 2018 for the Fourth Session of the 29th Legislature.

I want to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of the committee members past and present as well as the LAO and the caucus staff who provided support to this committee and its members. I also would like to thank all of the ministries, agencies, boards, and commissions who participated in these meetings.

This report will be posted to the external committee website, and copies will also be available through the committee's office. Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to present a petition on behalf of 1,625 Albertans. The petition seeks to urge the Alberta government

to reinvest at least 50% of any savings anticipated from generic drug cost reductions resulting from the 5-year agreement recently negotiated between the Pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance and the Canadian Generic Pharmaceutical Association effective April 1st, 2018, into frontline pharmacy services and programs to ensure the delivery of better healthcare for Albertans and the sustainability and job security of the thousands of Albertans employed in pharmacies and drugstores across our province, including Alberta pharmacists who have a demonstrably positive impact on the healthcare outcomes of Albertans and [while they do so] do save the healthcare system money.

I have two petitions, one signed by myself and one I am tabling on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with section 4(5) of the Election Act the Chief Electoral Officer has prepared a report on the July 12, 2018, by-elections in Fort McMurray-Conklin and Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. Pursuant to section 4(6) of the same act as chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I am pleased to table five copies of that report.

The Speaker: The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table 11 letters from various groups that are concerned about the legislation on mental health.

I also would like to table one more letter that comes from the Canadian Addiction Counsellors Certification Federation. I just want to say that this morning I was disappointed by the unparliamentary language used by Edmonton-Glenora and the statement by Edmonton-Centre on this particular issue. I just want to read out one portion of this that the Canadian Addiction . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I understand you had some concerns that may have been expressed with regard. I don't think this is the time that you raise them. Are there any other documents you could put forward?

Mr. Yao: Just this letter from the Canadian Addiction Counsellors Certification Federation that expresses concerns that they were not included.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

2:50

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the five requisite copies of two documents, both of which I made reference to in my comments on H.A. Kostash school in the House last week. The first document is a collection of the most recent letters from community members in the Smoky Lake area advocating for the replacement of H.A. Kostash school.

The second document is a letter which I wrote to the Minister of Education asking for the same school replacement project.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table a letter from the Finance minister to the chair of Public Accounts, our MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, that clearly outlines that he is going to change key financial information to Albertans just weeks before the provincial election.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise in this House to table the five requisite copies of responses from the Alberta Federation of Labour's Fair Start campaign. Having begun my own search for good-quality, affordable child care for my children some 45 years ago, with little success, and knowing that many of my constituents are doing the same today, I'm very supportive of the Fair Start campaign, which calls for the expansion of the \$25-per-day child care centres pilot.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a letter from the Backcountry Hunters and Anglers dated November 27, 2018, that I referenced today in my member's statement, where they call the plans to sell off public lands, the liquidation of public lands, a disaster for all Alberta hunters and anglers.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table various articles in support of my member's statement and question period today. The first one is from the *Calgary Herald*: Suncor CEO Warns Foreign 'Exodus' from Oil Sands May Not Be Over.

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

Thirdly, I have an article from Global News: Number of Unemployed Albertans Living Without EI Benefits Remains High, at over 100,000; 133,000, to be exact.

Lastly, from Statistics Canada statistics on the number of unemployed in Alberta in 2018 versus 2017.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a copy of an article that I referred to this morning in Committee of the Whole for Bill 30. It's a *Vancouver Sun* piece: The Missing Harm-reduction Measure? Regulating Mental Health Professionals. I referred to this in my remarks, and I'm tabling the requisite number of copies in accordance with that.

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

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the five requisite copies of an editorial from the *Edmonton Journal* entitled Mental Health Professionals in Alberta Need Regulation from March of this year. It outlines the need to regulate counselling therapists, which I'm proud to see our government addressing through Bill 30.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Do any other members wish to make a tabling? The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies plus a bonus sixth copy for the minister of agriculture of an article that I referenced in my question from *MIT Technology Review* cleverly entitled Seaweed Could Make Cows Burp Less Methane and Cut Their Carbon Hoofprint.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would have a tabling? Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table two documents today, the first being a letter that I wrote to you and sent yesterday just outlining some things that I think would make the Legislature a better place for all MLAs and that I hope to see considered in the next meeting of the Members' Services Committee; secondly, an article from the *Edmonton Journal* from November 25 of this year entitled 'We Are Stuck': Mobile Home Residents in East Edmonton Lose Advocate for Change, just outlining the issues that mobile-home residents are facing in Alberta right now.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Acting Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Sabir, Minister of Community and Social Services, pursuant to the Premier's Council on Alberta's Promise Act Alberta's Promise annual report 2017-18; pursuant to the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities Act the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities annual report 2017-2018; pursuant to the Protection Against Family Violence Act the Family Violence Death Review Committee 2016 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we might be at points of order. The Member for Airdrie.

Point of Clarification

Mrs. Pitt: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 13(2). When my hon. colleague from Cypress-Medicine Hat was asking the Minister of Finance questions regarding secrecy in the way that Treasury Board and Finance were changing reporting of key financial information to Albertans and highlighting the fact that this could appear to be hiding something, a very sneaky way of changing reporting to Albertans, you asked that the member at that time stick to government policy. I can't think of a policy more important than financial reporting of government budgets and financial statements. I would ask that you explain your ruling.

The Speaker: To be clear, I'll just read it. I think I said, "Get to the question." I also said to the member to get to the government policy question. As well, I told the minister to answer the question.

The issue is this. The member at the time was clearly moving on the edges of the parameters of preamble that has vague – vague – barriers in this House, but the member was delving into committee activities, which is an intervention which, in my view, is not appropriate here. If you go to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* page 513: "When questions have been asked about a committee's proceedings, Speakers have encouraged Members to rephrase their questions, or have ruled the questions out of order." Therefore, that is my reason.

The other point of order you are withdrawing? Is that correct?

Privilege

Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

The Speaker: Yesterday at 11:25 a.m. the Member for Calgary-Greenway provided notice to my office of a question of privilege that he intended to raise in the Assembly. I did hear arguments yesterday, and I am prepared to rule today. Under Standing Order 15(2) a member wishing to raise a question of privilege must provide notice to my office at least two hours before the opening of the afternoon sitting. While this deadline was met, the member did not, based on the comments by the Government House Leader, provide a similar notice by that time to the members whose conduct would be called into question, which is also required by the standing order.

Notwithstanding the procedural deficiency, I did review the substance of the matter and concluded that the Member for Calgary-Greenway has not met the test for a prima facie case of breach of privilege or contempt. In fact, the member for the most part in his arguments drifted into matters pertaining to political parties, and little was said as to the reasons why the comments made by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Government House Leader on November 29, 2018, would give rise to a question of privilege.

An alleged breach of privilege or contempt, as I have said in this House many times, is a very serious matter, and the member's arguments did not support such a finding. As the Member for Calgary-Greenway notes in his letter providing notice of the question of privilege to my office, I ruled last Thursday that the Minister of Municipal Affairs was indeed out of order. The Member for Calgary-Greenway could have raised a question of privilege under Standing Order 15(5) on the day the words were spoken, but he chose to proceed by way of a point of order. He cannot now revisit the matter as a question of privilege.

3:00

Furthermore, the member was clearly aware at the time that comments were made that were offensive to him, and by waiting until yesterday to raise the matter as a question of privilege, he has not done so at the earliest opportunity, as required by Standing

Order 15(6). Accordingly, I find that there is no prima facie question of privilege.

I believe we are at Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 27

Joint Governance of Public Sector Pension Plans Act

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Clerk and Madam Speaker. I rise today to move third reading of Bill 27, the Joint Governance of Public Sector Pension Plans Act.

Over the past week I've enjoyed reading in *Hansard* and listening to the debate about this important legislation. This legislation has been a long time coming, over 28 years, Madam Speaker, and I have been happy to see it move forward in the last couple of weeks.

With regard to the purpose of the bill, as I've mentioned earlier, the proposed legislation is to implement a joint governance structure for three of Alberta's major public sector pension plans – the local authorities pension plan, the public service pension plan, and the special forces pension plan – and register them as jointly sponsored plans under the Employment Pension Plans Act. We proposed to do this because it makes sense. Our government believes that hard-working Albertans who have been saving up and paying into their pensions for decades should be able to retire in dignity.

The plans are funded by employees and participating employers, and the plans' assets rightly belong to the plans' members. By giving equal voice to employees and employers, we're taking the politics out of pensions. The owners of the plan will now get to make decisions about their plan. Those who bear the risk should be in charge.

Under joint governance the establishment of benefits provided under the plan is subject to agreement between employee and employer sponsors. Employee and employer sponsors also share responsibility for the risks associated with funding defined-benefit plans and are empowered to make the necessary adjustments when required without approval from government. The benefits of joint governance are numerous, including clear roles and responsibilities, shared trusteeship of plan assets, and equal representation of employee-employer groups.

Madam Speaker, I realize that any time a government proposes pension changes, a number of questions may be associated with that, so let me provide a few assurances. The plans are well funded, well managed, and have well-established risk management systems in place. They are well equipped to take on additional responsibilities associated with joint governance. The plans will be subject to regulatory oversight by Alberta's superintendent of pensions. For plan members the legislation will not change their pension benefits. The legislation will also provide further protection to accrued pension benefits, which may be particularly reassuring to retired members of these plans.

For those still working, their pension plan will continue as before. Behind the scenes their plan's governance structure will change, but the contributions they pay into the plan and the benefits they earn will continue, and their employer will also continue to make contributions on their behalf. There is no change to planned benefits or how the plans are funded and no cost to government as a result of these changes.

Madam Speaker, by giving equal voice to employees and employers, we're taking the politics out of pensions. Under joint governance pension management decisions will no longer happen to the owners of the plans; they will happen in partnership with the owners of the plans. The proposed legislation has the support of employers and employees and provides a path to transition these plans to joint governance by March 1, 2019.

Madam Speaker, I support this bill, government supports this bill, and we ask all members of this House to do the same. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I, too, rise today to speak in support of Bill 27, Joint Governance of Public Sector Pension Plans Act. Nine days ago, when I spoke to second reading of Bill 27, I highlighted that stewardship of the three public-sector plans covered by this legislation will be a privileged trust on the part of the new boards. As our UCP caucus prepares for third reading of Bill 27 this afternoon, I want to reiterate that statement.

Madam Speaker, today we heard a lot about joint governance and the establishment of sponsorship and corporate boards as well as other bureaucratic sounding terms. Understanding these important terms is important because they will form the foundation of the framework that shifts stewardship of the local authorities pension plan, the public service pension plan, and the special forces pension plan from the Minister of Finance to the contributors of each of the plans.

You know what else is important, Madam Speaker? The 350,000 – 350,000 – members of the pension plans. Every time we spoke of Bill 27 in this House, we thought of these members because they are Alberta's important public-sector employees. They are the firefighters, municipal snowplow operators, MRI technicians, home-care workers, and many, many more who dedicate their working hours to Albertans, to the people of our province. Bill 27 transfers \$60 billion of their pension funds – \$60 billion – to the new governance boards created by this legislation.

UCP supports moving to a joint governance model, but we still spent a lot of time scrutinizing this legislation because we wanted to ensure, Madam Speaker, that this transfer occurs as responsibly as possible. When reviewing the details of the proposed legislation, we looked and asked ourselves the following key questions. First, does Bill 27 provide fairness and balance for all employee-employer groups involved in the plan? Second, can the boards establish quickly enough to provide effective stewardship from the start? You'll recall that that's March 1; that's less than 90 days. Third, does Bill 27 ensure a high level of accountability for the members of each pension plan as well as Alberta taxpayers? With these questions guiding us, we used our initial time in the House to pose these questions to the Minister of Finance. Then during Committee of the Whole we proposed three amendments – three amendments – that we felt would strengthen the bill for the betterment of all.

One of these amendments, Madam Speaker, addressed the NDP's decision to choose March 1 as the quick-change date for the pension plans to transition to the new trustee boards. If the NDP government had introduced the legislation prior to the fall session, we wouldn't have thought it was rushed, but as the boards, including the pension corporations, have only a few months to get established, we believe the NDP is rushing and expediting the governance transfer. Our amendment was fair and simple. It would have extended the transition date to September 1, 2019, still much short of a year, and the opportunity to get it right and avoid some unintended

consequences. This would have given the board six more months to fully set up before they accepted the stewardship of billions of dollars of pension funds, the hard-earned property and the hard-earned rights and savings of Alberta public servants and their families. It seemed to make a lot of sense. Delaying the implementation to the fall of 2019 is not a long time, but it would have ensured that members could be fully prepared to become the trustees of these three plans. I spoke at length about the significance and the importance of trustees. We were disappointed when the minister quickly dismissed this common-sense suggestion.

3:10

The next amendment addressed the balance of employee-employer representation on the boards. Madam Speaker, the minister spoke many times of the need to ensure a balance between employees and employers on the sponsorship and corporate boards. In fact, he described it as a key foundation – a key foundation – of the new joint governance structure. However, I pointed out to the minister that there may have been an oversight because we noticed that the bill requires equality on the sponsorship board but not on the three corporate boards. My amendment would have ensured even representation on all boards. The minister assured the Assembly, he assured Albertans that Bill 27 requires fully balanced membership on all boards. However, he did not point to the section in the bill that addresses this for corporate boards. He just went on to reject our amendment and asked NDP caucus colleagues to do the same.

Our third amendment, which is actually the first I brought forward, would have required that the Auditor General of Alberta be the auditor for the new pension corporations, which is currently the case. Madam Speaker, this amendment addressed a key issue I mentioned from the outset. That key issue is accountability for taxpayers' hard-earned funds. Again, the Auditor General has audited Alberta's public-sector pension plans for decades. The Auditor General also audits AIMCo, which is the investment manager for the pension plans and has been quite successful.

As you can see, the Auditor General's comprehensive analysis cannot be replicated by an independent auditor. This isn't a mark against independent auditors. It's just a fact. It's a fact because the Auditor General is in such a rare position to look at the whole picture, the totality of all of Alberta taxpayers' hard-earned tax dollars. That's one point. Another key point is that the Auditor General reports to the Legislative Assembly, so there will always be full disclosure to Albertans. Through 87 of us there would have always been full disclosure to Albertans. An independent auditor, on the other hand, will have no such requirement to provide an annual public report.

Why is this important to our UCP caucus? Because, Madam Speaker, approximately half of the funds in these pension plans, around \$30 billion, has been contributed by Alberta taxpayers, the 4.1 million hard-working Albertans. These are, after all, public pension plans, and governments both provincial and municipal are major contributors to them. To our UCP caucus it only made sense to amend Bill 27 to ensure that the Auditor General remains the auditor of the plans. That they are moving to a new governance model does not seem relevant to the fact that \$30 billion worth of government funds are invested in these plans.

Madam Speaker, let me also point out that the Auditor General's office was not consulted when the government was deciding to remove it as the pension plan auditor. One of our best, hard-working departments was not consulted. The office, however, was informed about it the day before – the day before – the minister introduced the bill in the House. My goodness. Why are they in such a rush?

The minister chose not to support this common-sense amendment either. Madam Speaker, while we're on the topic of accountability, I want to note that I have been unable to obtain a clear answer. I've been unable to obtain a clear answer from the minister about where the liability from the plan rests after the transition occurs, billions and billions of dollars, the important property and in some cases life savings of our hard-working public servants.

Let me explain, Madam Speaker. Bill 27 transfers all authority for these plans from the Minister of Finance to the new sponsorship and corporate boards. All authority. The transfer of authority presumably includes transferring liability for the \$60 billion worth of investments to the new pension plan corporations. I asked the Minister of Finance and his office to confirm this interpretation of Bill 27. They did respond, but the answer was not as clear-cut as I would have hoped. I then posed the question to the Minister of Finance, but unfortunately I did not receive an answer.

So, Madam Speaker, as you can see, the UCP has performed due diligence with Bill 27. I am happy to note that an important point we have learned during this process is that all three pension funds report good health today. There was some concern about the discount rate being used, but all three pension funds report good health today. According to information we received from the minister's office, they are either fully funded or almost fully funded.

We also appreciate that joint governance is considered a best practice and many jurisdictions are moving towards it. In fact, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia have already transferred stewardship to the contributors of their plans.

So, Madam Speaker, we certainly have faith in this structure. Still, as the Official Opposition it is our job to do our best to ensure Alberta's framework is well constructed, the foundation is strong . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member. Hon. members, please take your seats. We're not in committee. Thank you.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you. Still, as the Official Opposition it is our job to ensure Alberta's framework, Alberta's foundation is well constructed from day one.

Madam Speaker, I accept that the government is absolutely keen to transfer all authority to the new governance boards in less than 90 days, by March 1. But I also note that the legislation allows cabinet to choose another date. The legislation allows cabinet to choose another date. Hopefully, the minister monitors the process and shows prudence on this point for the benefit of our hard-working pensioners.

Madam Speaker, crafting legislation is complex, and it's always important, crucial, that it is done well. This is especially important with Bill 27 because the new boards created under this legislation will become custodians of billions of dollars' worth of workers' and employers' contributions. During the passage of Bill 27 and through our amendments the United Conservative Party sought to ensure that the boards are able to meet the highest standards right from the beginning, to get it right right from the beginning. Again, we were very disappointed that the minister chose to dismiss all our attempts to strengthen this bill. But, in spite of this, we have great faith in the appointees of the new board. We have great faith that the appointees will show great responsibility – great responsibility – as they meet the important challenges before them in this new era of pension stewardship.

Madam Speaker, thank you very much.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and speak to third reading of Bill 27. I just wanted to clarify some of the comments and concerns that were brought up by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Having boards, having the governance models changing from the sponsorship to the sponsorship boards: it's not exactly a new thing that's happening within the pension plans. Many – the LAPP, the PSPP – already have boards that must report to their members annually. They provide an update at the end of each year about how much each member has contributed, how much they're eligible for if they are to retire, and what the plan has currently in it.

3:20

The difference now, when we're looking at the changes, is that we're just removing the politics out of the game. Joint governance really removes the Finance minister out of being able to be the only person that makes the ultimate decisions of the plan. Now we will have equal representation from the employer and equal representation from the employees. They actually get to discuss and make decisions based on their plan as equals instead of having someone being able to come in and say: well, we recognize you've made these decisions, but now the Finance minister has decided to go a different direction.

One of the reasons why joint governance is something that's supported in many other public pension plans across the country is because of the fact that there can be unilateral changes made by governing parties. We saw this in 2014, when there was a decision being made around whether or not public service pension plans should still have the same retirement age as before, or when we were looking at removing the COLA, which is the cost-of-living allowance. There was a significant pushback in the province in 2004 by many of the holders of the LAPP, the PSPP, and the securities pension because of the fact that there was going to be an arbitrary change to the pension plans. This plan now gives equality between both sides, the employer and the employee.

The other thing that's extremely important about this was the comments about the Auditor General and the fact that, you know, ultimately maybe he should be the one that's reviewing the plans. Well, in other joint governance areas in other areas in the country, it's not the Auditor General that does it. It's an agreed-upon auditor on behalf of the employer and the employee that audits the plan. They still have a responsibility under the legislation to report back to the plan owners. There will be an annual report, no different than under the PSPP as it exists now and under the LAPP as it exists now, and that report will be made public. There's still the ability to have that transparency, like, to the owners of the pension plan. The difference is that it doesn't have to be reported to the Legislature, again removing the politics out of the governing of the pension plan.

The other piece that I wanted to talk to as well is about the investment. The hon. member was talking about how these are public dollars that are being invested in these pension plans, so taxpayers should be concerned about what this all looks like. Well, to be honest with the member and to everyone in this House, as a contributor to the public service pension plan, as a contributor to the LAPP they are also taxpayers. So I'm pretty sure that they're going to be very concerned not only of the fact of what their retirement future will look like – and they will want to have viability in their plan – but also the fact that they are contributing to the plan on both sides.

They are taxpayers, and they are also employees. They have significantly more vested interest to make sure that the plan is successful. The one thing we have to always remember when we're talking about people that work for the government of Alberta is that they are not just people that work for the government of Alberta;

they actually pay taxes and they actually contribute to society outside of just being a public servant. So they are very much concerned about tax dollars and what the government is doing around spending and all of those things.

The additional comments as well about where the investment currently sits. There's a five-year transition plan. If the investors of the plan on the employer and the employee side decide that they want to continue to have the plan invested where it is, it can continue to stay there. There is nothing in this legislation saying that they must pull the money out of where it's currently invested, absolutely nothing. If everybody sits down together and they have a conversation and go, "Our plan is viable. The investments are working. We like the relationship that we have with our investor," then they can continue to do that. If for some reason the boards and the governing bodies decide that the relationship isn't working the way that they'd like and the investment isn't viable, then maybe they can change it.

But the reality is that this isn't something that on March 1 all of a sudden billions of dollars are going to be pulled out of an account and transferred somewhere else and we're going to create a whole bunch of pension plans that aren't viable. That's just not the way that it would work. The pension contributors wouldn't want that to happen because that is their retirement fund. They want to make sure that they're just as viable as any other plan that they would be investing in, whether it would be their RRSPs or any of those other things. Investors want to make sure that they have viability in their plans.

I just wanted to clarify that. There isn't much else. I just wanted to make sure that we were clear on that, and I think I'll cede the floor so that someone else can speak to some of the comments that were made.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll be brief. I wanted to just say that, first of all, I think that the idea of being able to have control of your own pension is a great idea. I own RRSPs. I'm very interested in being able to make sure that they get their greatest return investment. I think it's a fantastic idea. I like the model, and I will be voting for it.

First of all, the LAPP is 104 per cent funded, the PSPP is 94 per cent funded, and the SFPP is actually 89 per cent funded. The question that I have is: in terms of consultation has the government had the opportunity to be able to bring representatives of each of those pension funds into a room and at least tell the LAPP that you're going to be bringing on a group that is only 89 per cent funded, so they have an unfunded liability? I think that that's something I haven't heard in the debates that we've heard here, and it would be great to be able to get some of that information. I think that that's important for all of these pension funds in order to be able to know what they're getting themselves into.

The other point, really quickly, that I wanted to make, Madam Speaker, is that when I asked the Finance minister why it took him three and a half years to bring this forward, I was actually very disappointed in his answer. His answer was, after lots of scoffing and mocking on the other side: we've had a busy slate. Now, if this was so important to do, you would think that this would have been done in year 1. I guess the disingenuousness of the argument, that "we had a busy slate; sorry we couldn't get to it until right at the end of our mandate," is surprising that they would actually make that kind of argument. If this was really that important and really that valuable to the pensions, then they would have done that in year

1. They had the time, and this could have been brought forward. There's no doubt about it. So that argument is very weak. Because I didn't have the opportunity to respond to what the minister said, I wanted to make sure that in third reading here I was able to get that on *Hansard*.

With that, I actually am, again, happy with what I'm seeing in terms of what it's doing for each of these pensions, being able to gain that control. I will be very much in favour of this bill.

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

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Well, thank you very much. It is indeed a real honour and pleasure to rise and speak to third reading of this Bill 27, Joint Governance of Public Sector Pension Plans Act, fall 2018. I have worked as a physician at the Cross Cancer Institute and the University of Alberta for over 40 years. I've enjoyed all of that experience. The success of whatever I've been able to achieve is entirely due to a phenomenal staff at both of those institutions. When I'm talking about the staff, I'm talking about nurses like those two hero nurses that I introduced in Introduction of Guests today, to laboratory technologists and radiology technologists as well as radiation therapists. They're actually the technologists that administer radiation therapy to patients needing it.

3:30

There are also research scientists that work at the Cross. In fact, my wife had a 25-year career as a research scientist in radiobiology. Her pension is through the LAPP. I have to tell you, just listening to these comments coming from the other side, that it's clear there's some misunderstanding of the importance of making sure we've got good human relations with our staff in these sorts of institutions and that people feel valued, the folks that are doing this great work. I mean, my nurses are working 24 hours a day. They are the interface with my patients. The success of my treatments, as few as the successes may be, whatever successes I've had, I can ascribe to the ability of those nurses to be able to interact with the patients and because they know that they're valued by their supervisors and by their employer and by people like me. They don't feel valued if they feel that their pension might be altered at some time in the future arbitrarily.

In fact, that was what was going on in I believe 2012, when there was the last sort of big review of public-sector pensions. There was a threat – and it's been alluded to here already – to actually change the terms and conditions of public-sector pensions. It was a dire threat. I felt it as the spouse of somebody carrying that pension. I've heard from the nurses that I work with and the lab techs that I work with and the cleaners in the hospital that I work with that they were feeling very much under the gun because the government of the day, one of the legacy parties of our opposition, wanted to make some dire changes to the pensions.

Actually, Madam Speaker, I'm sure you were going through that same experience at that time, everyone that was working in health care and, by the way, everyone, for instance, that was working for the special forces – our sheriffs and peace officers and other folks – the wildlife officers that work protecting our environment, the hydrologists that I know, that work to make sure that our water quality is really safe. And I could go on and on. All of these people, that this province depends upon to provide quality service, were really worried that the pensions that they had been contributing to were going to be arbitrarily changed and that it was going to be done in a paternalistic way by the government of the day.

What this bill does: it basically removes that anxiety. It tells our valued public servants that they are valued, that we respect them, that they have made a contribution, not just a monetary contribution to their pension plan, but they've made a contribution by being employed by the government of Alberta to provide these services that all Albertans depend upon. This is the main point that I really want to make on this. I have been interested in pension reform for a long time, going back to probably 1992, when the last big changes in the pension structures were made, and there's obviously still a lot of work to be done. I think there were good changes made in 1992, but there is a need to make these further changes.

The last comment I'm going to make is just in response to a previous speaker and some other one who was concerned about whether the LAPP is going to be overwhelmed by the deficit. In fact, as with most other pension plans in this province, these plans are going to be regulated by the superintendent of pensions under the Employment Pension Plans Act. You know, each of the three pensions is going to have a separate corporate and sponsor board. There's not going to be mixing, if you wish – and I don't think that that's all that big a threat – of the funds from the LAPP with the special forces, et cetera.

I'm going to finish with some stakeholder quotes, and I'm going to give one from a registered nurse. Again, those two nurses that I introduced today: I've worked with one of them for over 30 years. She's continuing to work on a part-time basis at the Cross Cancer Institute. The other nurse had worked at the Royal Alexandra hospital for many years. That's our major downtown hospital. It provides a phenomenal service to Edmonton and, actually, to all of northern Alberta. We're dependent upon those folks. Well, let me tell you what a nurse, Karen Kuprys, said:

I am so happy about this. As a nurse and a frontline health-care worker, I want to be able to always focus on the well-being of my patients. So it's great that the promise made by the government almost 30 years ago has finally been honoured.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a third time]

Bill 22 An Act for Strong Families Building Stronger Communities

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Larivee: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is my privilege to rise today to move third reading of Bill 22, An Act for Strong Families Building Stronger Communities.

This bill represents a decisive step forward for Alberta and the more than 10,000 children and youth who are currently receiving services across our province. Bill 22 is a first step, one which will make the child intervention system fairer for indigenous peoples and improve supports for children and youth in and out of care. These changes will help protect vulnerable children, support strong families, and ultimately prevent children from coming into care.

Since creating the Ministry of Children's Services last year, our government has committed to improving Alberta's child intervention system and strengthening supports for the children and families that it serves, which is why we formed the all-party Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, which included members from both sides of the Legislature. I'm proud of how all parties came together, putting politics aside, to listen to families and

experts like the Child and Youth Advocate and Cindy Blackstock. I want to thank all the members of the ministerial panel for devoting their time and energy to this important endeavour.

As a special note, I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Elbow for standing with us yesterday when the Official Opposition was grandstanding on this extremely important matter, when they chose politics over doing the right thing. The Member for Calgary-Elbow knows and we know that Bill 22 reflects many of the challenges and frustrations heard by the panel. He knows and we know that this bill comes from listening to indigenous voices and that it reflects their concerns. It reflects the ideas and frustrations that I've heard too often from indigenous families, communities, and leaders across our province. Indigenous leaders in Lesser Slave Lake and throughout Alberta have told me over and over again about problems that undermine trust in the child intervention system and about the need to make changes that will meet the needs of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children across our province. In the lead-up to Alberta's apology for the '60s scoop I repeatedly heard survivors say how devastating it was to lose their connection to their families and communities, their culture, and their language.

Madam Speaker, our government listens to Albertans, and we listened to these indigenous communities in order to get this first step right. When action is needed, our government stands up and does what is right, and nothing is more important than the safety and well-being of children. That is why this bill offers practical, common-sense solutions to problems that have been overlooked and ignored for far too long, for decades, under previous governments.

3:40

Under Bill 22 First Nations will be automatically notified and could appear in court whenever someone applies for private guardianship of children of their band. Currently the Family Law Act allows applications for guardianship of a child without requiring a mandatory home study and cultural connection plan. This bill closes that Family Law Act loophole and ensures that every child benefits from a mandatory home study, cultural connection plan, and ongoing supports to meet their needs. Right now children also lose financial supports for permanency if their guardian dies, moves away, or otherwise changes. Madam Speaker, this is wrong. No child should be deprived of the supports that they need, and no caregiver should be prevented from stepping up because they lack the financial means to care for a loved one. We are making sure that financial supports stay with the child to help pay for counselling, respite care, transportation, or other important services.

Madam Speaker, the child intervention system is incredibly complex, with life-changing decisions made every single day. This bill introduces important changes that will help caseworkers and courts make better decisions. This includes new guiding principles that highlight child safety and make indigenous involvement a fundamental component of the system. New mandatory decision-making criteria will also require courts and caseworkers to consider every facet of a child's safety and well-being when deciding whether to remove a child from a home or grant a guardianship order or make other life-altering decisions. Every child's culture and family connections must be respected, and every child's opinion must always be heard. We're ensuring that these aren't just items on a shopping list in our matters to be considered but are embedded in all court and caseworker decisions.

Our government is committed to reconciliation and to creating a stronger, safer child intervention system. We will not let recommendations sit on shelves. This bill is the first step of a three-step review of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. We

know there is more work to do, and we're engaging with indigenous peoples this winter on the next round of changes, but Bill 22 is an important step forward, one that addresses the ministerial panel's consensus-based recommendations and fulfills the very first action mentioned in our public action plan. All of these changes are important steps towards creating a stronger, safer tomorrow, where children are kept safe, where indigenous families and cultural connections are better respected, and where children are kept with their families and their communities whenever possible.

If passed, Bill 22 will come into force on February 28, 2019. I am proud of this bill and what it means for the children and families of this province. These changes will help keep children safe, supported, and connected to their community so that they can grow up into healthy, thriving adults. All children deserve that chance no matter where they are born or where they live.

We have still got a long way to go, but make no mistake: we are taking meaningful action to protect children and support families and communities. This bill should transcend party lines, and I ask all members to put aside partisan politics to recognize that we need to do a better job to support the children of Alberta. I urge you to support this important legislation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have some wow words spinning around in my head after the minister gave that little presentation starting from very partisan standpoints and ending with a "we should not be very partisan on this issue" standpoint.

Madam Speaker, let me be very clear. We are here because of the government's inaction and complete failure on this file three and a half years ago. Three and a half years ago in this Assembly we engaged in an emergency debate over the inaction and complete failure of this government and the mishandling of the Serenity file. The public was outraged because of this NDP government's failure. Not only that, but they refused to put together a legislative committee where we could have open and transparent dialogue through the course of a panel process. Now, I understand that there was good work that happened on this panel. I have been told as much by colleagues of mine that were able to participate in this process. There were good things that came out, and there are some very, very good things in this bill.

The government also mentioned the apology for the '60s scoop, Madam Speaker, which, I should mention, was initiated and pushed forward by my hon. colleague from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. The reason that this government is aware of the issues surrounding the '60s scoop is from the Official Opposition. This is the second case, just in my conversation today, of the Official Opposition leading and the government following. And you know what? Albertans are pretty thankful for that. They're absolutely pretty thankful for the leadership that the Official Opposition has shown on the child intervention file because without that, jeez Louise, we'd still have the minister of human services standing up and saying: I've accepted the report; I've accepted the report, but I will refuse to act on any of the recommendations made in that report. That's why we're here.

This government failed, absolutely, completely failed, and then they come forward with the recommendations from the child and youth panel, part 1 of 3. We are months away from an election. Will we see part 2 and part 3? At what point is this government going to completely do the work, and what is the reasonable expectation that this government has for the Official Opposition to blindly say yes to part 1 of 3? When offered amendments in this House, the government refused to engage, saying: "It's not important. It's

okay. We don't need to define family. This isn't what this bill is about. Don't worry about it."

Madam Speaker, there are so many things to say in regard to Bill 22. It's got a great name, An Act for Strong Families Building Stronger Communities. I hope that I've reminded the government of the failures that they've been leading in the last three and a half years and of a "you're welcome" from the Official Opposition to Albertans in bringing these issues forward. I'm happy to see that our leadership over the last three and a half years has proven to be fruitful for the children in this province, most importantly, especially those in our child intervention system.

I think I've said what I need to say in regard to this legislation. I have many concerns around this being a portion of the whole bill that is yet to come. I have concerns that part 2 and part 3 are never going to come to this House, never going to come to this Assembly. The government has all the information now, too, because this wasn't an open and transparent process.

With that, Madam Speaker, I myself will find it very hard to support this for the reasons that I've outlined. I look forward to the government continuing to attempt to fix the failures that they have been a part of in the last three and a half years of their mandate, and I urge all members of this Assembly to think hard and long about the impacts of this legislation for our children in the child intervention system moving forward.

Thank you.

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

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Speaker. When I hear a story like Serenity's or, in fact, the story of any other child when there are reports from the Child and Youth Advocate, my heart absolutely breaks. I think of my own kids, and I think how children are born ready to learn, curious, and full of joy, and I know that every member of this House feels a heavy responsibility to do everything possible to ensure that no child's story ends the way that Serenity's did.

3:50

Firstly, I'd just like to thank all of the members who served on the ministerial panel. I know a lot of time was spent travelling around the province, and I know that what you heard was heavy, and it was challenging to hear. I think that this work that you did was extremely valuable and has led to changes, some of which are reflected in this bill, so thank you to every single member who spent the time doing that work over the course of the last year.

There are a few pieces of this bill that I particularly appreciate. The Guiding Principles section at the beginning is really important because it serves to ensure that children's well-being is central to this legislation. As has been mentioned before, giving First Nations official standing in court is huge, and it works to peel back some of the years of colonial principles that our justice system was built on.

Thirdly, the thing that I really appreciate about this bill is that it ensures the voice of the child is included in choices that affect them.

Last fall I had the opportunity to attend a spoken-word performance by the Stardale Women's Group. It was a performance that was written and performed by indigenous girls aged 11 to 17, and they spoke frankly about the challenges – racism, stigma, and mental health issues – that they face. When I had the opportunity to speak to some of the girls afterward, they shared stories of their experiences in the child intervention system and, in many cases, strong desires to be reunited with their parents. It was hard to hear that the system, they felt, hadn't served them appropriately. Also, earlier this fall, at the march for missing and murdered indigenous

women in Calgary, I heard the tearful pleas of a young man who simply wanted to know where his younger siblings were and if they were okay.

Ensuring the voices of children are heard is crucial to their well-being and to their safety, so I particularly appreciate this part of the bill. These are good steps, and I'm hopeful that we're on the way to even more good steps. You know, I don't think that the work is done until we know that every child in care is safe in Alberta and that every child's well-being is being considered, and I know that all of us want to work towards that together.

I'm thankful for this bill, I'm happy to support it, and that is all I have to say. Thank you.

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

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

Seeing none, the hon. minister to close debate.

Larivee: Yeah. Let's just go.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a third time]

Bill 30 Mental Health Services Protection Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I think I will give the floor to my colleagues to enter into debate and save my remarks for closing on third, but it's my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 30 at this time and welcome my colleagues to join in with their questions and comments.

I think we had some fruitful conversation earlier today, and I look forward to that continuing as we take action to improve and execute the commitments that we've made, both in the throne speech that were recommended through fatality reviews and that we know many members of the mental health community have been advocating for for years.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

I'm proud to be in a government that makes promises, keeps them, and works to make life better for families. Certainly, the families we've heard from accessing mental health services in times of extreme nervousness, chaos, and uncertainty deserve every certainty that they are being well served, protected, and that the professionals that are working with them are held to a high standard as well as the facilities that they are living in.

I look forward to hearing from some of my hon. colleagues, including the cosponsors of this very important bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on third reading of Bill 30, the Mental Health Services Protection Act. This bill consists of two parts, as has been mentioned in this House and as I have read the bill myself as it reads. The portion surrounding the regulation and licensing with treatment facilities and then the second part, being the creation of a college for counsellors here in this province – I'm not sure if I have mentioned this piece before, but this was actually one of the first issues that I contacted my own MLA about, prior to being elected, many, many years ago in response to the creation of a college for counsellors.

It's important for a number of different reasons, I think, most importantly creating a quality and a standard of care in this province and also creating more access to quality counselling services. Madam Speaker, as you know, we're facing crisis levels in this province when it comes to that particular issue, and I think this is a good step forward in helping to address that crisis. Then in relation to the first part of the bill in terms of licensing and regulation of the treatment facilities, providing good, quality care in the facilities is extremely important for my constituents but most certainly for all Albertans.

I look forward to watching the process as this goes along. I think it's important to watch it very closely. I mean, the creation of a college is a process in and of itself, but we've outlined a number of potential unintended consequences through the course of this debate and some examples that have been seen in the province of Ontario, that's done a very, very similar thing. I think it's important that we keep an eye on this legislation, see how it rolls out, and watch it and adjust as necessary as this moves along.

With that, I am pleased to support Bill 30, and I urge that my colleagues support it as well. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm truly honoured today to stand and speak to third reading of Bill 30, the Mental Health Services Protection Act. I'm incredibly pleased to see this bill come forward as it's something that I've long advocated for. Prior to getting elected, I was working as a provisional psychologist in High Level, and it was seeing the consequences of decades of neglect of mental health services by the previous government that spurred me to run for election, among other things. My private member's Bill 205, supporting accessible addiction treatment facilities, addressed the need for an online registry of addiction treatment facilities, and I look forward to working with the Department of Health as this part of the bill is implemented.

But I have an even more personal reason to support improved mental health and addiction treatment services, and I'd like to share just some of my family's story to help highlight just who Bill 30 is intended to help. I have a family history of depression, and I've had my own battles with the disease. I've lost family members to suicide and addictions. Depression took its greatest and final toll, however, on my daughter Amaya. She fought the illness for years. When she was suicidal, we'd sit in the emergency room for hours while a stream of people with visible, external pain were seen first. We'd finally give up and go home. As her pain continued with no real relief, she began the cycle of self-medicating. It began with prescription meds, then gradually escalated to more powerful substances.

Amaya did not want to be addicted; she just wanted the pain to stop. She tried to get support and help to get well, but every step of the way she encountered barriers. For example, to get into treatment, you need to be clean, so for days at a time Amaya would have to show up at detox at 9 every morning to see if there was a bed. Can you imagine arriving at emergency sick, bleeding, and in pain, only to be sent away and told: "Come back tomorrow. Maybe we'll help you then"?

Trying to get into a treatment facility was equally difficult. There's no easy way to access information about these facilities and find out when and where there's availability. As we've heard throughout debate on Bill 30, not only are there government-run facilities, but there are many operated by nonprofit agencies and on-reserve. There are no consistent standards or guidelines to help

individuals know what that treatment might look like, whether it is offered by qualified staff, and whether they can have confidence in the process. The application process itself is incredibly discouraging. I found it daunting myself to navigate. Can you imagine how much harder it would be for someone who's already desperately ill?

4:00

The provisions of Bill 30 will go a long way towards improving access, but it does even more. In my experience as a provisional psychologist, I know how important it is that individuals have confidence in their therapists. In terms of effectiveness the personal relationship between client and therapist matters more than the individual qualifications of the counsellor. Whether they're an addictions counsellor, a psychologist, or a social worker, however, it is essential that these professional titles are protected and recognized. Albertans need the confidence that they are receiving help from someone who is qualified in their respective field to provide it. For far too long in Alberta anyone could call themselves a counsellor. I'm really pleased that this is going to change.

By providing legitimacy and requiring licensing of facilities, Bill 30 will help reduce the stigma and move us further towards treating individuals with mental illness and substance-use disorders as people with medical problems deserving of the same kind of respectful treatment given to those with cancer or diabetes or any other illness.

I think it's really important that we talk about the stigma. The Mental Health Commission of Canada estimates that more than 60 per cent of people with mental health problems and mental illness won't seek the help they need. Stigma is one of the main reasons. In my family we certainly found this to be true. During Amaya's last months of life she went to emergency several times desperately seeking help. She was dismissed as just another addict and sent back out into the street. She told me how horrible she was made to feel by the very people whose role was supposed to be to protect, help, and heal.

The stigma impacted me and my other daughters, too. We all felt it. Stigma allows others to distance themselves and say: "It's not me. It's not my family." This creates a fear of reaching out to ask for help and admitting that there's a problem. The messaging is subtle. You watch your loved one in pain, and you know that they're struggling with an illness beyond their control, but you feel helpless and at times impatient and frustrated with their behaviour. Stigma impacts the way health professionals and front-line service providers react. Stigma creates an environment where someone with an addiction is looked down on as being weak, as having made really bad choices, and perhaps even deserving the consequences.

Well, let me tell you this. Amaya was the strongest person I know. She fought hard. She wanted to get well. She did not want to give up. She did not choose to have a mental illness, nor did she choose to become addicted. She has a family who loved her and did their best to support her. My last conversation with her was about a plan to support her in recovery, and she was ready and willing.

Amaya was beautiful, kind-hearted, generous. She was an incredibly talented singer, musician, and artist. She had a great sense of humour and was so much fun to hang out with. She leaves a large hole in our family and in our hearts that will never be filled. That is what mental illness and addictions look like.

During the process of researching my Bill 205 over this past year, I heard Amaya's story over and over. I heard from many stakeholders that I consulted with: support groups, health care professionals, law enforcement, community elders, and First Nations. I've received numerous letters and calls and was

privileged to have individual conversations with many Albertans who shared their own deeply personal stories with me.

One in 5 Albertans experience an addiction or mental illness, and they're very often co-occurring. It is estimated that 1 in 10 Albertans will require substance-use treatment at some point in their lives. Bill 30 takes another step towards addressing concerns highlighted in the 2015 Valuing Mental Health report and is part of more than 100 initiatives under way across the province.

Unfortunately, while starting to implement these recommendations, the government was forced to respond to an opioid crisis, a health crisis of incredible and previously unmatched proportions. And make no mistake. This crisis was a long time in coming and a consequence of years of Conservative government neglect in the area of mental health. In 2017 there were 569 unintentional, fentanyl-related deaths in Alberta. My daughter Amaya was one of them. In the first 32 weeks of 2018 425 Albertans lost their lives to fentanyl overdoses, and we continue to average almost two accidental drug poisoning deaths related to fentanyl every single day. That's why it's so important that this bill be passed and implemented without delay as it will provide yet more support and access to treatment for those dealing with opioid addiction.

As part of the spectrum of treatment facilities I just want to briefly speak about the importance of the supervised consumption services that have been opened in several locations beginning this spring, including at the Royal Alexandra hospital. These programs save lives, reduce the transmission of infections, enhance community safety, and help individuals access treatment. Had these services been in place earlier, they might well have saved Amaya's life.

Bill 30 reinforces that our government is committed to supporting Albertans to access co-ordinated and integrated addiction and mental health services and supports. A better understanding of the co-occurrence of these disorders is needed along with an understanding of the importance of fair, timely, and evidence-based treatment.

Although the provisions of this bill will improve access to treatment facilities and help Albertans have confidence in the safety and quality of the treatment they receive, there's still much to be done to alleviate the burdens and the obstacles facing patients seeking help. When researching my private member's bill, I heard about the many barriers faced: challenges accessing appropriate treatment, the need for locations that are accessible, more supports for families and individuals with children who need access to treatment, and so much more.

We still need to work to ensure that individuals are treated respectfully and with nonstigmatizing language. Not only health providers but peace officers, judges, justices of the peace, other front-line workers, and Albertans in general need to be educated regarding mental health, substance-use disorders, the co-occurrence of mental illness and addiction, and harm reduction strategies. We need to shift our thinking and perception towards understanding mental illness and addictions as a medical issue, thus helping reduce stigma and barriers.

Unfortunately, stigma and shame persist, creating significant barriers for those seeking help, and there also remains a resistance and skepticism to the research and best practices around treatment. Sadly, we've even seen these attitudes coming from the Official Opposition when it comes to programs like supervised consumption, which have been characterized by their leader as: nothing more than helping addicts inject poison into their bodies.

Make no mistake. Substance-use dependency is not a choice. People seeking treatment need many options through which to access immediate care, and we must provide a wide range of support services to help them on the path to recovery, stability, and

health. Not only is this essential for the individuals who are ill, but their families also need our support and understanding.

Our government is working to build robust services for people living with mental illness and substance-use disorders. Bill 30 will continue to build upon that work and ensure that Albertans are aware of the treatment services available to them and are able to access these services with the same level of support we give Albertans with other illnesses. Licensing treatment facilities and regulating the counselling profession also enhance confidence in the quality of the treatment itself. I look forward to working closely with the Health ministry as they continue to put these concepts into practice in the effective delivery of mental health and addiction treatment services in the province.

When I made the difficult decision to speak publicly about my family's experience and about the loss of my daughter Amaya, I did so in the hopes of increasing understanding and improving the dialogue, thus reducing stigma. Mental illness and addiction have serious consequences for each and every one of us. It is a disease, not a choice. We need to openly discuss the nature of mental illness and substance-use disorders and educate ourselves about addiction. Individuals with addictions and mental illness are our daughters, our sons, our parents, our neighbours, our co-workers, our brothers, our sisters. They need our support and understanding so they can freely seek treatment and manage symptoms without facing roadblocks and stigma. We need to help them get well and ensure that they are always treated with the dignity and the respect they deserve.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to take the opportunity to thank the member for sharing an incredibly personal experience that none of us would want to have to go through. A number of us were able to come and attend your daughter Amaya's funeral, and it was one of those moments where we realize how small the world is. I didn't know that friends of mine were friends with your daughter, so I had the opportunity to support not only you but my friends at that funeral.

4:10

The thing that I remarked on, having the opportunity to share in that and learn a bit about her life, seeing her as a friend and a daughter, an artist and a performer, those things, is that it's tragic to feel that loss in a community. Our Health minister, our Deputy Premier, was just remembering the video that was shared of your daughter singing *The Sun Will Come Out Tomorrow*. It was an amazing moment to be able to share with you.

The things that we fight for in this House, that there was no movement on before having a Premier and an NDP government to move them forward, things like harm reduction services and having more resources being allocated to emergency housing – people find themselves in very compromised and tragic circumstances, and we need to be able to do more to support those people.

I'm so impressed and honoured to be able to serve in this Legislature with you because your ability to continue to advocate on these issues and be such a powerful voice, to help us continue to do this work even when faced with such incredible loss is an example for us all to look up to you for. Thank you for that. If I had to offer another song, it would be *You'll Never Walk Alone* by Rodgers and Hammerstein – I think those are the names of the writers – you know, because you're part of this team. We share the

same values, and we fight for the same things, and we always, always have your back. We're here for you. Thank you again for sharing an incredible story.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to take a moment to acknowledge the incredible strength and courage and leadership shown by the member in sharing such a personal story. All of us being able to share what our experiences are is the kind of example that we need to set for Albertans, that the experiences that we have are the experiences that they have. I'm in complete agreement with the member about the approach to treating addiction. It shouldn't be a fight; it should just be common sense. It should just be a fact that we provide the kinds of services that are required to prevent and treat addictions. Once again, thank you very much for sharing your family's experience.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In the abbreviated time that's available, I want to thank the member for everything she did to contribute to the ministerial panel after this had occurred. She brought her experiences to the table. I think we're seeing that in the legislation that we're bringing forward. She had a very unique perspective on what was on the table, and because of that, our child intervention system is going to be better off for it, too. I want to thank the member for all that she brought to the table and continues to bring to the table as we discuss legislation in this House.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

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

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to take a moment to talk about this bill, Bill 30, the Mental Health Services Protection Act. Mental health has been a chief focus for me in many ways in my time as an MLA over the last three and a half years. So I really appreciate the steps that we've been able to take as a government and, indeed, the leadership that the Minister of Health has shown on many fronts, and the former Associate Minister of Health and now Member for Calgary-Acadia. So I really appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging, as others have, the powerful words that were just shared by my colleague from Peace River. Indeed, my sympathy goes out to her. I've known far too many and still know far too many people that have lost loved ones because they've been unable to find the help they needed when they needed it, for whatever reason that might be, and unfortunately decided that their pain was too much. My sympathies are with her, and I thank her for her leadership in bringing forward her private member's bill, which is along similar lines to a lot of what we're debating here today in wanting to lay out a patients' bill of rights in accessing mental health supports or help in addressing substance use for much the same reasons as we're laying out here. We want to recognize that those that are seeking those supports and those services deserve to be able to access them in dignity, in safety, free from stigma and, indeed, as this bill lays out, to be able to access them from people that they know, when they claim that they are offering a level of

professional service, indeed have the training and understanding and the qualifications to be able to do so.

Now, I wanted to address some of the comments that were made this morning when we were debating this in Committee of the Whole. As I listened to the members, I had several thoughts come to me, and I wanted to comment on a few. The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka was speaking and expressing his concerns about limiting choice available to individuals who were seeking help, and he spoke specifically about excluding options in accessing supports for counselling for mental health and addictions. He spoke of his concern that we are going to restrict them only to government-approved services and the lack of knowledge about the quality or the efficacy of those services that are being provided.

What occurred to me, Madam Speaker, is that, you know, I've spoken openly often about my own struggles with mental health. One of the things that maybe I have not spoken about as much is my own challenges with physical health. For a number of years I've struggled with severe food intolerance, a number of other symptoms, a number of other issues. I spent a lot of time going to a lot of different doctors, medical doctors, specialists, getting all of the medical tests run. When I exhausted all of those and nobody could provide me with any insight or help, then I saw many naturopaths and many doctors that worked in alternative medicine and a whole gamut of other people because – I can tell you, Madam Speaker – when you're in that situation and feeling that kind of desperation, you'll look for any opportunity for help.

But the fact that I had to go through all of that and that I ended up finding help through a lot of my own research and indeed by going outside the system in many respects – indeed, I ended up finding a naturopath who had an understanding, who I could work with, and I've seen a great improvement over the last couple of years as I've worked with him. But the fact is that I am still very glad that that naturopath works with a college and is regulated.

You know, I may cut myself and be able to bandage that wound myself. I may be able to get help from a friend or an acquaintance who has a little bit of medical knowledge. I could have a sore throat or a pulled muscle. I could have a chronic problems with headaches. And maybe there's an herbal remedy that I might hear about from someone that might help me with that situation. Or I may even be living with chronic pain, diagnosed, and simply looking to an alternative to going on a heavy course of opioids or other painkillers and instead find help maybe through meditation or mindfulness or group therapy or other things that might help me. But the fact that those other options exist does not preclude the fact that we need to regulate the medical services that are involved and the medical people that are involved in those things. Those things can all exist simultaneously.

It is similar with mental health. Now, as I said, I had my own struggles, and through the years I saw a number of different individuals in looking for that help. Starting out as I did, as a young man coming from the faith community, I was sent to see a man who was, I believe, a psychologist. But you know, when I first went to see him, he told me that I was oppressed by a demon and wanted to work with me on that front. When we finally found no success, then he referred me to a psychiatrist.

4:20

I saw that psychiatrist, and she – I will be honest that I was not an easy person to diagnose. I was not able to communicate very well because I was in a state of pretty dark despair, severe anxiety, without any language of knowing how to communicate what I was experiencing or what was happening to me because all I knew was what I had lived and grown up with. She diagnosed me with

schizophrenia. Didn't tell me that; I found that out later when my family doctor saw the medical records. Tried me out on a few different medications, and I'll tell you that there were some pretty freaky side effects that put a lot of fear into me and made it a lot worse in some respects. It was a long journey. That started out in 1991, 1992. I saw all manner of therapists, counsellors, individuals.

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, as I said, that I recognize the need to have different alternatives for different places where people might be. Somebody who's struggling with alcoholism may benefit from a 12-step program. Some people go cold turkey, and they're perfectly fine with working that out on their own. Others need to go into a medical facility and sit down with folks who have the training and the knowledge who are able to provide them with that support. Same with people who are struggling with their mental health. Somebody who's struggling with anxiety or depression, maybe because of experiences growing up or trauma they've experienced: maybe talk therapy is going to be good for them. Maybe for them sitting down with their imam or their pastor or a yogi is going to give them the ability to talk that through and work those issues out.

But for others they may need professional help. They may need a dedicated program like when I had the honour of participating in the day treatment program at the University of Alberta hospital, where I got to spend just over three months with trained therapists in an approved and accredited program that helped me begin to lay the groundwork for, frankly, years later, when I would be able to actually start to pick up on some of the things that I heard and was taught in that room and be able to implement them to improve my own life.

But it's essential that when people in this incredibly vulnerable state – and let me be clear, Madam Speaker. When you are in this place, you are so vulnerable. When your mind is racing, your emotions are out of control, you have lost all perspective, and you don't know where you can turn, it is incredibly important that folks who are representing themselves as professional therapists, who are offering services be regulated, that we know that when people are reaching out and asking for help, the help that they are going to receive from individuals who are representing themselves as such is going to be qualified, particularly for folks that are going into residential programs where they are entrusting themselves physically in a situation of incredible dependence and, indeed, trust. We want to be sure that the provision of those services is being done in a safe and regulated manner.

I deeply appreciate the work that the minister has done on this, the consultation that she's had, and indeed recognizing the work that FACT has done. I remember meeting with the executive director. Her name again was Nicole Imgrund. I remember meeting with her in my office and talking with her, and I really appreciate the hard work and advocacy she has done over an extended period. To be clear, Madam Speaker, this was not arrived at overnight. This has been an ongoing conversation for quite some time, and I deeply appreciate when I see folks in the community who take that time and work carefully in their advocacy, reach out to talk to other groups to build that consensus and come and thoughtfully engage with government about moving forward on these things.

The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo this morning expressed some concerns around the consultations that have been happening and identified a group that he felt had not been heard. I appreciate that Nicole's organization, FACT Alberta, clarified that, indeed, they'd actively reached out to that particular group and that members from that group, in fact, sit on the steering committee for FACT Alberta and have had some input as part of this.

I do regret that as the member made his tabling today, he seemed to suggest that both myself and the Minister of Health, in discussing these things, have engaged in unparliamentary language. I would certainly encourage that member that if he feels that I used any unparliamentary language in my comments today, he bring that to the record or perhaps would consider at the time calling a point of order. Regardless, I recognize that he's done work in the field, that he himself has probably had some traumatic experiences in his work as a paramedic, so I can understand the passion that he brings to the table in wanting to ensure that people are helped.

But I think we need to be careful in these discussions, Madam Speaker, to be measured in how we're approaching this because, again, I do not think it's unreasonable that we bring in some basic standards, as other jurisdictions have done before us, so that we ensure that the types of services that are being offered to people are clearly identified, that they can clearly know when they are dealing with somebody who is a professional, who has training, who has background, who has education, has schooling and, again, ensuring that as we do so, we leave the room for these other options that indeed need to be available for people.

I recognize, Madam Speaker, that over the years we are just starting to get to the point where we recognize that mental health is every bit as important and as necessary as physical health, and because we have not historically had that recognition, we have not built up the same kinds of systems and indeed public coverage, access. Government has largely been absent from the provision of what are really often key medical services that are every bit as important as a person's physical health, and in the time before we began to recognize that importance, indeed, I recognize that other communities have indeed provided that service, and we are incredibly thankful that that has been there, that people have had the opportunity to talk with, you know, peer counsellors, that they've had the opportunity to find spiritual support when that is what they need and that is what they're looking for, that organizations have stepped up and provided counselling on a free or sliding scale basis.

It's an incredibly important network of services that we need to have available as we continue to address the issue of mental health because we recognize that the more we talk about it, then the more people recognize the need. Indeed, we see growing numbers of people trying to access services, and we just cannot keep up with the capacity to address it, so we need to have folks at all different points on the spectrum of services to help provide people with what they need when they need it. But, indeed, I think we need to move forward with ensuring that we have a level of services that are clearly identified as being provided by individuals who have training, who have knowledge because we do continue to learn. We do continue to find proven therapies. When we get into psychiatry and other areas, there are definitely proven methodologies and approaches that we know are effective, so it's important that we have a layer of services that is protected and regulated.

Indeed, the creation of this college of counselling therapy is not the last step on the road. This is the first step. So members that have been expressing some concerns about how this might impact other groups: there is room after the passage of this bill to have that conversation and to sit down and continue to work through regulation as this is established, just as has been done with every other college that has been created in the province.

I recognize that, again, some groups may feel a bit of fear about this change coming in, and I can understand that. With change comes some uncertainty. Again, these are groups who have provided important and essential services. But I truly believe, having spoken

with some of the folks that have been advocating for this – and I think that with the opportunity we're going to have to appoint people and see people elected into positions to take on this work – that we have the capacity to do this well and do this right. This bill is the important first step on that road as we continue to acknowledge the incredible importance of mental health, as we continue to acknowledge the work we need to do to support people who are struggling with addictions in a humane way with a harm reduction approach that, as my colleague from Peace River noted, is rooted in ending stigma.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Like everyone, I'm sure, I was just fascinated by what the Member for Edmonton-Centre had to say, so I would love it if he would continue to talk about why this bill is so important and really sort of impress on everybody what the actual facts are.

4:30

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you to the Member for St. Albert. I'll just conclude briefly. I was just wrapping up my remarks.

Again, as we proceed with this, I think this bill is a very important first step on the road, setting up the structures to ensure that we will have the college that will help determine how we regulate, how we protect. We've had some excellent amendments that have helped ensure that this has a minimum of negative impact on those who provide these services while providing good protection for those who need to access them.

I thank all the members that have shared their thoughts on this. I thank the minister for bringing this forward, and I look forward to voting in support of this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, we have a request for unanimous consent to revert back to introductions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. It's such an honour and a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the three most important people in my whole life, my husband, Kent, and my children, Molly and Brady. They are here to learn something as they maybe should be in school, but they are going to see first-hand the proceedings here in this Assembly this afternoon. My husband is wonderful and amazing, and he's here to fix all the broken things over the last year that have happened in my Edmonton residence. Molly, just so you all know, members, is a wonderful, beautiful, smart girl who is into competitive swimming. She's currently trying to beat my 24-year-old swimming record, and I am certain that she's going to be accomplishing that. My son, Brady, is a very, very good hockey player and spent his summer at a camp at the university, building a robot that can solve a Rubik's cube. I would ask that the three most important people in my life, my loves, please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 30

Mental Health Services Protection Act

(continued)

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have to say that whenever we talk about mental health, clearly this is something that I think has touched almost every person's life in this House. I can say that in my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake suicides have been something that have been a very troubling trend, with the lack of work or underemployment.

Having said that, I reached out to my local charities and societies that do counselling in my constituency to get some feedback on Bill 30 – I couldn't get to them all, but I did get to a few – and I've got a few responses, but the one that actually comes forward here, that I would like to read to the House, I think the Minister of Health would be pleased with. It says:

Hi Julie . . .

That's my constituency assistant.

. . . I think that the Bill 30 is a good one and will help . . . consumers to distinguish between a real service and one that is [just] a money grab. As one of the organizations in the region most impacted by this, I would like to see some support [and] compensation to assist with compliance as it will not be cost neutral on our part.

Thanks for reaching out and asking for feedback, much appreciated.

Audrey

Audrey McFarlane is the executive director of the Lakeland Centre for FASD.

When we make laws like this, there are going to be consequences, and one of the consequences here is that there might be some needed training or ability for these organizations to be able to react. I think that she brings up a valid point. She supports this bill, and she says that it really is something that will focus this profession. I think that when it comes to dedicated members of our society like Audrey, we need to commend each and every one of these counsellors that actually are on the front lines doing work within Alberta to make sure that some of our most vulnerable Albertans get the help they need.

That is all I wanted to say. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I actually rise just simply to notify the House that pursuant to Government Motion 36 no evening sitting will take place tonight.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, Minister, would you like to close debate?

Ms Hoffman: I would love to close. Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. I want to say what an honour it was to move third reading of Bill 30, the Mental Health Services Protection Act.

I'm getting emotional thinking about all of the work of our entire caucus. I know it's my title that goes on these bills, but they are such a work of commitment with our caucus committees, with our

cabinet committees. This is what happens when you have a government made up of ordinary folks that love and care for one another, that work in these professions, and that move things forward that matter and will make a real difference to ordinary families. To all of my colleagues: I want to thank them for all of their contributions. I know that it's my name on this bill, but it is every single one of us that needs to feel really proud of our accomplishments today.

I want to thank the members of the Assembly for adding their feedback through second reading and Committee of the Whole and now in third as well.

Madam Speaker, all Albertans have a right to feel safe when seeking support for their substance use or for mental health treatment. They should feel confident that they are receiving safe, quality services from licensed facilities and appropriately trained, regulated health professionals. For decades this hasn't been the case in Alberta. This legislation will introduce licensing requirements and core standards that will protect Albertans who seek help from residential substance-use facilities in a much better way than they are today.

I also want to thank the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster for his thoughtful amendment in supporting patient privacy. I think that when we had a chance to sit down and talk between second reading and today, it was clear that he was wanting to ensure just that patients have a little bit of time to prepare, that that was something one of the stakeholders that he reached out to said would help. I appreciate that he originally was thinking maybe bigger than he ended up bringing forward in the amendment. He understood that if there were safety concerns, we can't exactly call and say, "We'll be there in two hours to check," that it's still important that we have timely access, but that in routine inspections it's important to think about patient-centred care and how we can give that little heads-up for patients.

I also want to thank the members who asked questions about clarifying that the counselling relationship wouldn't negatively impact people with lived experience. The Member for Airdrie talked about somebody she knows – I think his name was Mike – and how he's providing important supports to members of his community. So we wanted to make sure that we were crystal clear in the legislation that peer support and people with lived experience offering that support aren't captured unless they start calling themselves "counselling therapists," which, of course, they won't be allowed to do because it will actually be a regulated title, a regulated professional title, moving forward. I'm really excited about that.

I want to say that, ultimately, this legislation will ensure that Albertans receive consistent, quality care. As we move forward, Alberta Health will work with the service providers to develop standards that prioritize Albertans' safety and security, and this will ensure that the implementation of this legislation does not cause an onerous requirement on service providers that could negatively impact access to treatment.

We also met with some members of this House to talk about our hope that we'll be able to make it free of cost at the beginning, and if there needs to be a cost, that it be minimal as we move forward, but that there not be any cost for moving forward with regulation at the beginning. We want to make sure that this isn't an impediment to good quality care and that it doesn't result in a reduction of services. Unless, of course, services don't meet the criteria. Then we don't want them to be available. We want them to make sure that they change their criteria, that they make sure that they're rising to that higher standard.

I want to thank the cosponsors, both the Member for Peace River, who is the Deputy Speaker, as well as the Member for Calgary-

Acadia, who was the Associate Minister of Health, with a real focus on mental health, when we started this work earlier this year. I want to say that both of these women have brought forward a number of really thoughtful contributions to the legislation itself as well as the work we've done with the community in preparing for today.

4:40

Specifically, I want to mention, obviously, the Member for Peace River, who talked about her lived experience as a mom. I know that, seeing those pictures, there's no way Amaya, when she was that passionate eight-year-old playing Annie in a school play, thought: one day I want to grow up and have an addiction. She wanted to be a star, right? Any one of these kids who comes through this building has dreams and hopes, and it's our responsibility to make sure that we support them in reaching their full potential, that we keep them here another day.

I want to thank the members who've talked about the comprehensive work we've done around mental health and substance-use support in addition to the work that's in this specific bill, because there is no way that it is a choice to live with a substance-use issue. Getting the right help and the right support to be able to exercise your desire to get treatment, I think, is something that we have an onus to make sure we do safely.

This legislation will reinforce the dedicated efforts of highly qualified care as well as ensure that well-run facilities in our province can say that they're part of the proper oversight that's being given and support themselves in continuing to access additional avenues for support. This bill will make Alberta the fifth province to regulate counselling therapists and the third to regulate residential substance-use treatment. I think that nobody in Alberta should feel that they have any less quality of care than any other province, and I'm glad that we will be addressing it in both of these areas to make sure that we move forward with the patient and the family as the focus.

Madam Speaker, everyone in this room knows somebody – I think we talk more openly about it – who has mental health challenges or has substance-use challenges, but we also, probably every one of us, know somebody who's accessed treatment at some point, too. We know that this is something that will continue to be a need as we move forward, so let's make sure we get it right.

Also, when I was with the Member for Peace River this summer, we went and visited the Peace River opiate awareness working group. I want to say that I know we talk a lot about the hon. member's lived experience, but when we were with this working group, we also heard from other people who talked about the lived experience of people in the region as well. It isn't just somebody's daughter. It was somebody's father, somebody's father who in the middle of calving season acquired a muscle injury and couldn't afford to take time off, obviously, in this important season to take care of his body and therefore went and got a prescription.

No community is immune from substance-use addiction, and it is our obligation to make sure that when people are injured, when people have a substance-use issue, we give them the right supports to be able to move forward and reach their full potential, become what it is that they aspire to be. I know that Bill 30 will support Albertans who are seeking this support.

I know that some people have said: "Well, maybe this just isn't the right time. Maybe this will be too cumbersome or too expensive." You know, the right time was before Taylor passed away. The right time was before 2007. The best day to plant a tree was 20 years ago; the second best day is today. So today I ask that all of us plant a tree, move forward in supporting patients in their mental health needs, and make sure that we pass this legislation and don't waste any more time. Don't talk about taking 10 years to fully

implement it. Let's make sure that we plant the tree today and that we move forward to make sure that everyone gets the care that they need as we all move forward as Albertans.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and hon. members, for your time and attention on this important matter and, hopefully, your vote of yes. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a third time]

Bill 23

An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an honour to rise today and move third reading of Bill 23, An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta, on behalf of the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

I'd like to begin by thanking all the Albertans and stakeholders who helped shape this bill throughout our consultation. We heard from over 1,500 Albertans who expressed a desire for less monetary influence in municipal elections, greater transparency, improved accessibility, and stronger accountability and enforcement, and that's what this bill delivers.

I'd also like to thank the staff at Municipal Affairs. You know, none of us would be able to accomplish what we do in this House without the strong commitment of our teams. These folks work so hard, burning the midnight oil to make it all happen. So a special thanks to Gary, LaRae, Laura, and Cathy, who, I'm sure, are watching right now, and all the other staff who helped contribute to this bill. We all greatly appreciate your work.

Our government made it clear, when we updated provincial election laws, that we wanted to take big money out of provincial politics, and now we're doing the same on the municipal level. We consulted with Albertans, and we know they want to see local elections that are more fair and transparent. People should be running for elections on their ideas, not on how much money is in their bank account. These rules will create a more level playing field for everyone who wants to run. This bill will ban corporate and union donations, mirroring the provincial legislation and reducing the influence of corporate and union donors. This proposed reform will ensure that politicians are working for Albertans not campaign donations. Albertans expect nothing less.

We've streamlined the process to remove barriers for candidates to run and to create more competitive local campaigns. Elected officials should be focused on delivering results for their community, not on building a war chest for an election years away. These new rules will also close some of the funding loopholes currently in the act. This bill will increase voter accessibility to the polls by requiring municipalities of over 5,000 to hold at least one advance poll day for those who can't make it to the polls on election day.

Albertans have the right to know who is trying to influence their elections, which is why rules around third-party advertising are vital. In the last municipal election we saw PACs campaigning without any rules or regulations. This bill will change that, requiring PACs to register and disclose their financing, subjecting them to the same rules that they must adhere to at the provincial level, the strongest PAC regulations in the country. Laws must be enforceable to be effective. The reforms before us today would give new powers to the provincial Election Commissioner to investigate offences and make sure the rules are being followed.

Madam Speaker, it's time to update our laws to get big money out of local elections, make it easier for Albertans to vote, and

create a more transparent election process. Albertans asked for these reforms, Albertans support these reforms, and we are delivering. Passing this legislation now would give our local authorities time to learn about, train on, and enact these changes so that the next set of elections run as smoothly as possible.

I thank all the hon. members for their comments and feedback and hope that all members of the House will support this bill. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 23, a bill that I have had the opportunity to speak about at some length over the past couple of days. So in the spirit of the season I will let my comments on the record speak for themselves.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, would the hon. member like to close debate?

4:50

Ms Woollard: I would be happy to close debate. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a third time]

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent of the House that notwithstanding Standing Order 3(1) the morning sitting of the Assembly tomorrow be cancelled and that we resume at 1:30.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Seeing the excellent progress that I think we have made today, I would now move that the Assembly adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:52 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Introduction of Guests	2359, 2370, 2382
Members' Statements	
Provincial Election 2019	2360
Community Grants in Red Deer	2360
Retrospective by the Member for Battle River-Wainwright	2360
Recreational Use of Public Lands.....	2361
Christmas Memories.....	2361
Water Fluoridation in Calgary	2370
Oral Question Period	
Pipelines to the East Coast.....	2361
Federal Fiscal and Energy Policies.....	2362
Energy Policies and the Provincial Fiscal Position.....	2362
Gay-straight Alliances in Schools.....	2363
Political Participation	2363
Agricultural Methane Emission Reduction.....	2364
Adoption Advertising Legislation Proclamation	2365
Financial Reporting by Government.....	2365
Gas Price Differentials and the Carbon Levy	2366
School Bus Safety.....	2366
Tow Truck Driver Safety.....	2367
Carbon Levy and Agricultural Costs	2367
Economic Development and Energy Project Approval	2368
Private-sector Job Creation.....	2368
Flood Mitigation on the Bow River.....	2369
Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees	2370
Presenting Petitions	2370
Tabling Returns and Reports	2370
Tablings to the Clerk	2371
Orders of the Day	2372
Government Bills and Orders	
Third Reading	
Bill 27 Joint Governance of Public Sector Pension Plans Act.....	2372
Bill 22 An Act for Strong Families Building Stronger Communities.....	2376
Bill 30 Mental Health Services Protection Act.....	2378, 2383
Bill 23 An Act to Renew Local Democracy in Alberta	2384

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