



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, June 4, 2019

Day 8

The Honourable Nathan Cooper, Speaker

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature**

First Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP), Speaker
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United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, June 4, 2019

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Members, I would like to draw your attention to a small change to introduction of visitors or guests. It will be my intention to read the entirety of the list and save the applause till the end.

We have a number of guests joining us in the galleries this afternoon. Guests of the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, I encourage you to rise as I call your name: Glynnis Lieb, Gary Simpson, Christopher Pappas, Junaid Jahangir. I also see former Member for Calgary-Hawkwood Michael Connolly joining us. Please rise. And – I'm sorry. I had the chance to meet you earlier. I've totally forgotten, and it's not on my list. I'm sorry, but if you would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Connect Charter School in Calgary

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, this past week I had another opportunity to meet with a part of the school community in Calgary-Glenmore. It was a great pleasure to visit Connect Charter School at Clem Gardner in the district of Lakeview. What I saw as I visited this grade 4 to 9 setting was leading edge, inclusive in every way, and an incredible example of what can be achieved in the education of our young people.

Mr. Speaker, in this school the Alberta curriculum is taught in each grade with, at its base, direct instruction to scaffold their learning. In addition, each student is provided with a tablet or a laptop, which they use in every part of their daily classes.

I travelled from class to class, where I saw the video that the grade 4 class produced of their dino museum as part of the history of Alberta curriculum. I saw the grade 6 class producing multimedia presentations of the travels of a water molecule through the life cycle of water. I visited the art room, where students were creating prints, and they told me how they were moving on to silkscreening. And I saw the various projects that the students had produced as part of partners in place, an initiative undertaken by Connect Charter School and Tsuut'ina Education. Next I was shown the work that students have done with robotics and 3-D printing, robots that they have built and 3-D printing that they have designed and coded. That's right, Mr. Speaker. In this school students begin learning coding in grade 4.

These students are being taught the Alberta curriculum, the critical thinking, and the collaborative skills to prepare them for a future that we have not yet even imagined. With the meaningful integration of technology, the end goal at this school is developing extraordinary citizens.

Mr. Speaker, the student body at this school is one hundred per cent inclusive. All learners are admitted, diversity is celebrated, and inclusive practices are promoted and supported. Connect Charter School is an excellent example of the success of charter schooling in Alberta and one of the reasons that I support school choice.

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

Incitement to Hate

Ms Renaud: Thank you. In 2017 online hate speech in Canada grew 600 per cent, and over that same period the number of police-reported hate crimes reached an all-time high. On May 28 the federal justice committee held hearings to investigate the topic of online hate. During the meeting the MP for St. Albert-Edmonton berated one of the witnesses, Faisal Khan Suri, for suggesting a link between conservative commentators and the rise of hate crimes. Shockingly, the MP for St. Albert-Edmonton chose to quote the manifesto drafted by the person accused of mass killings at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. Both he and his Conservative leader still refuse to acknowledge that the witness was in fact correct.

There's a link between online conservative commentators and the incitement of hate. Rebel media stars have been praised by various vile racists and white supremacists like Richard Spencer and David Duke.

Our Premier has deep connections to online sites like Rebel. In 2018 we learned that one of the Premier's senior campaign staff was behind Fireforce Ventures, a business that sold white supremacist memorabilia. Just a few months ago our Premier refused to expel a UCP member who compared a rainbow pride flag to the Nazi swastika at a Rebel live event. This is the same UCP member that the Premier gushed over, comparing his advocacy work to black civil rights icon Rosa Parks.

The Premier vowed to purge extremist elements from the UCP, even promising he'd create a database to track UCP members with extreme views. Perhaps our Premier has trouble recognizing extreme views. Real leaders condemn hate whenever and wherever they see it, no matter the political cost. That takes courage. It is my sincere hope that our Premier will find that courage and do the right thing.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane.

Transportation Infrastructure in Airdrie-Cochrane

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The constituency of Airdrie-Cochrane has over 51,000 residents, and both Airdrie and Cochrane are two of the fastest growing communities in Canada. Transportation infrastructure is being pushed to its limits. Airdrie, located on a major trade route, has 70,000 people, with very little infrastructure investment in the last decade. The 40th Avenue overpass is a major priority, but it sat on the previous government's unfunded list.

Cochrane is in a similar position, having no major interchange in a town approaching 30,000 people. Cochrane is separated north and south by the Bow River, including a single-lane bridge and a train that runs through the centre of town 30 times a day. When one combines all of this with single-lane traffic on both highways 1A and 22, it creates traffic congestion that is a safety risk.

I will credit the previous government with recognizing the importance of this project and beginning work on a design. However, it was repeatedly claimed that this project was in the budget and on the capital plan, but of course we know that a budget was not released for this fiscal year, so it could not have been funded. And since projects in the design phase still require approval, this interchange could not have been listed as a line item on the capital plan.

This mismanagement of Alberta's infrastructure needs is a microcosm of the NDP's overall mismanagement of the province's finances. Alberta's debt now exceeds \$60 billion, and one of the

last long-term debt financings by their government in February was at a rate of 8 per cent.

Our government will manage this province responsibly, stimulate the economy, and clean up our balance sheet, placing us in a stronger fiscal position to fund our infrastructure needs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Assembly, if I could just beg your indulgence, with apologies to Ms Stephanie Shostak, who is the guest that I had previously missed.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Eid al-Fitr

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today Muslims all around Alberta, Canada, and the world are celebrating Eid al-Fitr, the first day of Shawwal in the Islamic calendar. It marks the end of the month-long fast of Ramadan and the start of a feast that lasts up to three days in some countries.

Eid al-Fitr is an important Islamic holiday for the Muslim community. This event involves many Muslims waking up early and praying either at an outdoor prayer ground or a mosque. People dress in their finest clothes and adorn their homes with lights and other decorations. Old wrongs are forgiven, and money is given to the poor. Special foods are prepared, and friends or relatives are invited to share in the feast. Gifts and greeting cards are exchanged, and children receive presents. Eid al-Fitr is a joyous occasion, but its underlying purpose is to pray and give thanks. [Remarks in Arabic]

1:40

Mr. Speaker, over 113,000 Muslims call Alberta their home, and of them, approximately 2,000 live in Edmonton-Ellerslie. Today, after a month of fasting and reflection, Eid is a time for Muslims to come together to feast, celebrate, and share their good fortune with others.

Muslim communities continue to make Canada stronger, more open, and more prosperous. Today let's celebrate their major contributions to our province. On behalf of the Alberta NDP caucus, to all my Muslim brothers and sisters I am proud to extend our warmest wishes to all those celebrating Eid al-Fitr. Eid Mubarak.

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

Sikh Community in Alberta

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to congratulate Alberta Sikhs on the recent Vaisakhi parades held in Calgary and Edmonton. These annual religious celebrations highlight the birth of Khalsa and the spreading of the message of peace and harmony. I want to thank the Premier and also the hon. members of this House who participated in these important annual events.

The Alberta Sikh community was established over 100 years ago. We have grown to over 100,000 members, many of whom have made significant contributions to the Alberta economy, the richness of Alberta's culture, and the ongoing improvement in the lives of many of our fellow citizens. The first Sikh was elected to this Assembly over 25 years ago.

As most hon. members know, this is a very active community, contributing to many charitable causes. As well, the community's strong connections with its heritages in India foster tremendous potential for two-way trade and future business opportunities. I know that the community is justifiably proud of its addition to the great Alberta family.

Perhaps one of Canada's best-known Sikhs right now is Nav Bhatia, who has been cheering on the Toronto Raptors as they pursue their first-ever NBA championship.

I also want to draw to this Assembly's attention to some dark clouds that are forming over the community. The recent deadly events of four young Indo-Canadians in Calgary due to gang violence and drug wars have created real fear in the community. This House should be aware of the terrible spread of gang violence spilling over from B.C. to Alberta.

Just this weekend I attended a demonstration with hundreds of concerned children, seniors, and youth in northeast Calgary calling on the government to fight drugs and violence in schools. I urge the government to heed their call.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's graduation season in Alberta, and thousands of 12th grade students are writing exams, attending graduation ceremonies, and making plans to attend postsecondary institutions. Attending postsecondary is expensive, but it's an investment that pays great dividends for the individual, for families, and for our society as a whole.

So when this provincial government interferes with the affordability, accessibility, and equality of postsecondary education, all Albertans should be concerned. Should this government get rid of some of the red tape by throwing out the guarantee that tuition increases must not exceed the increases in the consumer price index, for example, postsecondary education will simply become unaffordable for many students.

Alberta's New Democrats recognized the importance of making postsecondary education more affordable, and our reforms would save an Alberta student at least \$2,000 over the course of a four-year degree. Now, with this new UCP government these savings are in peril.

Also, the graduation gift that this UCP government is foisting on the class of 2019 is a big cut to the minimum wage for young people. As we speak, students are lining up for summer jobs to help pay for postsecondary education in the fall, and woe on the unlucky grade 12s who were born in September, October, November, and December and thus can be paid 15 per cent less than their classmates who were born earlier in the year. Over the course of the summer this will amount to hundreds of dollars less for these unfortunate students. Shame on this UCP government for being so unjust and mean spirited to the class of 2019. This is the last, bitter lesson delivered to the students by the UCP before they graduate, and I'm sure it's a lesson these thousands of students will never forget.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Bill 7

Municipal Government (Property Tax Incentives) Amendment Act, 2019

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct honour to rise today to seek leave to introduce Bill 7, the Municipal Government (Property Tax Incentives) Amendment Act, 2019.

This bill introduces changes to the Municipal Government Act that will enable municipalities across Alberta a wide latitude to establish property tax exemption programs to attract investment and get Albertans back to work. This is one part of our government's comprehensive plan to restore prosperity and let the world know

that Alberta is once again open for business. Other jurisdictions in North America have given local governments similar flexibility, but this bill goes a step further in the freedom it gives to municipalities. We know that municipalities are a vital partner in bringing long-term prosperity back to Alberta, and I am very pleased to introduce this bill, that will give them another tool to help Albertans back to work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, I rise today with the required number of copies of a document entitled *Leitch Is Mostly Wrong – But Also Right – About Immigration*, which I referenced during Oral Question Period yesterday. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

St. Albert, please, is rising with a tabling.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of an article by Mr. Keith Gerein, *Scheer's Kid Glove Treatment of St. Albert MP Sends All the Wrong Messages*.

Tablings to the Clerk

The 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. Madu, Minister of Municipal Affairs, pursuant to the Municipal Government Act the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board annual report 2018; pursuant to the Special Areas Act the special areas trust account financial statements, December 31, 2018.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Oil Transportation

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A Minnesota court has thrown another potential wrench into the line 3 expansion, further delaying the point at which Alberta can expand its takeaway capacity to meet our growing production. The timing of pipelines coming online is a critical consideration in the matter of how long Alberta has to continue under curtailment. Can the Premier please advise this House of the exact information he is receiving from officials about what Albertans can expect to be the new operation date for line 3 as a result of this decision?

Mr. Kenney: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question.

First, allow me to inform the House that, very happily, Mr. Speaker, approximately two hours ago Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor gave royal assent to Bill 1, the carbon tax repeal act.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the information I received from officials is the same that one sees through public commentary by experts in the energy industry, that due to the regrettable delays in the line 3 replacement project it likely will not be completed until some time in the next calendar year. I don't have a closer date than that, but obviously this is a very troublesome development for the Alberta energy industry.

1:50

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly hope that the Premier can get more detailed information than that. I do know that he should likely be receiving it.

Now, the reason for crude by rail was to provide more takeaway capacity to all players in the market during a period where our production overshot our ability to move our resources, driving down prices to below \$10 per barrel. Now, the crude-by-rail deal would have moved 120,000 barrels per day, costing roughly \$3.7 billion and earning \$5.9 billion in return. To the Premier: with further line 3 delays, why won't you reverse course and keep the oil-by-rail strategy on track?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the opposition leader and I agree, as do, I believe, all members of the House, that we need to see an increase in crude-by-rail shipments, to increase egress right now and in the foreseeable future. Having said that, where we disagree is that we believe the burden to do that should lie with the private sector and not with taxpayers. We disagree fundamentally with the NDP government's decision to make the single largest expenditure of tax dollars in Alberta history do something that the private sector was perfectly capable and willing to do.

Ms Notley: In fact, Mr. Speaker, the private sector wasn't doing it, and what our numbers show is that this is a benefit to taxpayers, not a cost.

Now, in the reality where line 3 is delayed, crude by rail serves as the incremental release valve for a market that has been consistently plagued by bottlenecks. Now, that's not me talking, Mr. Speaker, but, rather, RBC capital markets analyst Michael Tran. He understood that our government was providing medium-term relief while pipelines were being built. The Premier now wants to shut off this valve permanently and replace it with nothing. To the Premier: are you so blinded by your ideology that you will risk further job losses by cancelling the crude by rail?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. This government has had a chance to review the terrible deal signed at the last minute, during the formal campaign period, in desperation by the NDP, where they committed taxpayers to paying billions of dollars for something the private sector was prepared to do, at much higher than the market costs, with nothing like normal commercial contractual provisions. They got taken, but this government will stand up for Alberta taxpayers. We will say to the private sector: please let market forces ensure additional shipment of oil by rail.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition has the call.

Ms Notley: Well, I've got to say, Mr. Speaker, that if getting \$2.2 billion extra is being taken, I can't imagine what the member opposite would call a windfall.

Education Funding

Ms Notley: Anyway, on to a different topic. Yesterday we revealed that at least two students with disabilities are being denied their right to a fourth year of high school because of financial uncertainty created by this UCP government. The Minister of Education claimed that it was a board procedural issue. That is not true. The provincial government holds all the funding cards. When they don't show them, boards are forced into bad decisions, just like that one, and Albertans know this. Why will the Premier not tell his Education minister . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, as I've said, the Minister of Education will provide information to school boards about transfers in the near future.

An Hon. Member: They don't want information; they want funding.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, they do have funding. In fact, they have the highest level of funding in Alberta history and the highest per-pupil and per capita funding in Canada, in fact, I suspect, in real terms the highest per-pupil funding of any provincial government in Canadian history. What we expect is for school boards to properly manage the resources that are made available to them. There will be more information forthcoming.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, last week parents were being surveyed on whether to cut the music program or increase class sizes. This week students with learning disabilities can't even enrol in school. All of this is just the beginning as this government negligently keeps boards guessing about funding levels for next September. To the Premier: how many more of these so-called board procedural issues can we expect as they try to balance the budget on the backs of Alberta students?

Mr. Kenney: As we committed to Albertans in the last campaign, this government will maintain or increase funding levels for education. Information will be forthcoming shortly to school boards about the next school year. Having said that, what the NDP did was to dig this province into a \$60 billion debt hole, headed to \$100 billion in debt. [interjections] Do you know what that meant, Mr. Speaker? That meant billions of dollars going to bankers and bondholders instead of schools and hospitals. [interjections] We will not allow fiscal irresponsibility to jeopardize the future of public education.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I might just add that a well-placed heckle makes the Chamber a great place to work; a whole bunch of loud heckles at the same time makes it very difficult to hear the answer.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday 82 per cent of Alberta school trustees voted to call on this minister to delay proclamation of the decade-old education bill. This act will create huge uncertainty in our schools while this government hasn't even figured out whether to support the students we already have. To the minister. You were a trustee until last October. Will you listen to your former peers and delay the legislation, or do you really trust that this Premier knows more about our schools than they do?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. The Education Act isn't a decade old. It was passed seven years ago. The NDP said they would bring it into law. They didn't: promise broken. The School Act, which it replaces, is a century old. Unlike the NDP, we are going to modernize the Education Act, which was subject to massive consultations with school boards and all relevant stakeholders. The minister will be making an announcement on a bill that is on the Order Paper that flows from more recent consultations on the modernization of our education law.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition for your third question.

Ms Notley: Consulting with John Carpay is not the same as listening to 82 per cent of Alberta school trustees, Mr. Premier.

Ambulance Services in Calgary

Ms Notley: Now, the uncertainty created by UCP fiscal stonewalling is also affecting health services. Today it was revealed that officials in charge of ambulance services in Calgary are holding off hiring up to 60 new paramedics in anticipation of orders to roll back health spending. This means ambulances are being kept off the road in Calgary. To the Premier. It took you less than a month to start doling out big tax breaks to profitable corporations, but you can't even take the time to give interim certainty to health care workers so they can protect Albertans. Why not?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, AHS is operating on the budget and funding levels of the NDP. Now, officials have contacted AHS and reported back that there was no gap in service as a result of current vacancies. The vacancies discussed in the documents released by the NDP are normal turnover. They're budgeted positions that are in the process of being filled, and all of them should be filled within a few weeks.

I thank the member for the question.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not what the documents that we released today actually said.

Now, our government announced in December that Calgary would be getting 10 new ambulances and 30 additional EMS staff as part of a \$29 million commitment province-wide to boost emergency services. But now we're seeing a delay in hiring up to 60 EMS staff because of fear about UCP cuts. To the Premier: will you direct your Minister of Health to commit to the \$29 million investment, or are you content to literally keep ambulances off Calgary streets?

The Speaker: I see that the Minister of Health is rising to answer.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier said, this is just normal turnover. This is the NDP's budget that they're now complaining about. Quite frankly, we campaigned on fixing the system after four years of the NDP. Costs are up, and results are down. If the NDP are looking for someone to blame, they need to look at themselves.

Ms Notley: The documents released say that there is uncertainty due to UCP budget uncertainty.

It gets worse. We are also hearing directly from front-line staff that where managers would historically address staffing shortages by giving paramedics overtime, they're now worried about driving up costs because the UCP government is not going to fund them. We've been told that as many as five current ambulances are being kept off Alberta streets. To the Premier. You know enough about the budget to spend \$4.5 billion on tax cuts. Why don't you know enough to protect ambulances in Calgary?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, something that the NDP seems incapable of understanding is the urgency of re-creating economic growth and new jobs in Alberta, which is the most effective way of reducing the deficit and eventually balancing the budget. Through economic growth we generate additional revenues. What the NDP was doing was strangling our economy: four years of economic decline, four years of digging us deeper into a debt hole, four years of jeopardizing the future of public services. This government is going to get first things first by growing the economy. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Ambulance Services

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, as the Leader of the Opposition noted, the concerns being raised by front-line paramedics are real and very concerning. I've talked directly with these emergency responders. They're telling me that they simply can't keep up. In fact, the prevalence of code reds in Calgary is becoming almost a routine occurrence. A code red means that there's literally not a single ambulance available to respond to an emergency. To the Minister of Health: will you commit to taking action today to properly staff Calgary EMS, or is this just another matter you'll handle in due course?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I think what the member meant was actually a red alert. Or, no. Is it code red? But they're a part of the system. They come and go. They're for, thankfully, a short period of time. I'm not aware of any disproportionate number of red alerts, but I would expect to be briefed by AHS if there were. I look forward to working with AHS and making sure that the numbers do decrease.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government took action to address the rising need for emergency medical services in Calgary, an increase of \$29 million in the budget last year. This minister owes it to his city to see through the funding commitments that we made. Will the minister commit to ensuring that every position we funded for emergency response in Calgary is filled as soon as possible, and will he commit to a further review of the strain being placed on ambulances in that city?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to echo the comments of the Premier that when we asked AHS after the member's press conference, the vacancies discussed in the documents released by the NDP are normal turnover. They're budgeted positions that are in the process of being filled, and all of them should be filled within a couple of weeks.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's clear that the need for improved emergency services is not just something specific to Calgary. That's why our government also funded additional ambulance services in Grande Prairie, Medicine Hat, Sylvan Lake, Vilna, St. Paul, and right here in Edmonton. Will the minister also commit to seeing through those commitments in conducting further assessment of ambulance services province-wide, or is his only priority that of his Premier's tax cut for wealthy corporations?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, it's a little bit difficult to hear the NDP asking us questions about EMS when for four years the Government House Leader and his caucus asked questions of the previous minister about EMS and about paramedics and for four years they did nothing. That's why we were elected. Albertans got sick of that previous government not listening to Albertans to be able to make any changes and improve EMS services for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has a question.

Natural Gas Industry

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is blessed to have an abundance of natural gas as the fourth-largest gas producer in the world. In fact, approximately two-thirds of Canada's production comes from Alberta, yet we still face challenges, including price volatility, market access, insolvencies, and new competitors. These challenges hurt Alberta's ability to capitalize on the potential of our natural gas industry. To the minister: My constituents want to know: what will you do to bring much-needed stability to this critical industry?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Natural Gas is rising.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon is absolutely correct. We have tremendous natural gas resources in this province. Unfortunately, we are forced to sell our natural gas at fire-sale prices because we can't get our product to market. My office is currently reviewing the Natural Gas Advisory Panel's recommendations to see what actions we can bring forward not just for the benefit of the natural gas community but for all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, please.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the United Conservative government has said that we will work with other governments, regulators, and industry in order to navigate many of the challenges Alberta's natural gas industry is facing and given that appointing Alberta's first-ever Associate Minister of Natural Gas was promised as a solution for the industry in the United Conservative platform and given that my constituents depend on the success of Alberta's natural gas industry, to the minister: what has been the reception thus far from market participants on your appointment?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Natural Gas.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After four years of apathy instead of action on the part of the previous administration, I can tell you that natural gas producers are absolutely thrilled that this government has delivered on one of our election promises, which was to appoint an Associate Minister of Natural Gas. I guess you could say that it's one more example of promise made, promise kept.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our United Conservative platform states that we will focus on revitalizing Alberta's natural gas sector through a robust energy strategy to unblock natural gas shipments and given that Albertans and especially my constituents who work in the energy industry understand the importance of getting this part of our economic puzzle right and given that our province has been experiencing incredibly volatile gas prices, to the minister: when can Alberta begin to see a fair price for its natural gas?

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon I can say that I'm not in the business of predicting natural gas prices. I can say, however, that my office is diligently planning our work. We're going to work our plan, and

we're going to do that by engaging with stakeholders and coming up with meaningful actions that we can implement within this industry.

Thank you.

Premier's Principal Secretary

Member Irwin: Mr. Speaker, the right mix is how the Premier described how he would staff his office. Some Premiers look for a mix of public and private experience or perhaps people with strong legal or business experience. The thing is that the right mix usually doesn't include people who oppose human rights protections. My question is to the Premier. Are you willing to enlighten everyone here on why the right mix needs to include a principal secretary, Howard Anglin, who has a long history of anti-LGBTQ positions and even defended a ban on same-sex relationships?

The Speaker: Members, I hope that this question is a direct question about government policy with respect to this issue. It certainly didn't sound like that to me, but I'll call upon the Premier to answer.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we can hear that the NDP's campaign of fear and smear and defamation of character continues unabated . . .

Mr. Carson: Stop hiring bigots.

Mr. Kenney: . . . by their trouncing at the polls.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I very clearly heard from the backbench, what I believe to be the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday, the phrase "Stop hiring idiots." I think that would be wildly inappropriate if that's what I did hear. I would caution members of the opposition when making statements about individuals who are not in the Assembly.

The hon. Premier has the call.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP's campaign of fear and smear and defamation and attacking people continues unabated after their trouncing in the campaign recently. I'm proud to have Mr. Anglin on my staff. Mr. Anglin is the former deputy chief of staff to the Prime Minister of Canada, a lawyer called to the bar in New York, has acted as a solicitor in England, and is a brilliant man who's run a think tank. I'm delighted to have him on our side.

Member Irwin: It's not fear and smear when you're talking about our community.

Given that last year the Supreme Court ruled that Trinity Western University's community covenant that banned any intimacy outside of heterosexual marriage is discriminatory and put LGBTQ students at risk of significant harm and given that the same day as this ruling the same principal secretary took to Twitter to describe the Supreme Court decision as "one of the worst . . . decisions in recent memory," my question is to the Premier. Do you agree with your top adviser's description, and would you allow universities in Alberta to discriminate against LGBTQ students?

2:10

Mr. Kenney: Now the NDP's penchant for character assassination extends to attacking lawyers who comment on judicial decisions, Mr. Speaker. I would remind the hon. member that the British Columbia Court of Appeal ruled differently than the Supreme Court on the same matter. Will that member now stand up and engage in defamation against the members of the British Columbia Court of

Appeal? I for one respect the decisions of our judges and respect the opinions that lawyers may have on judicial precedents.

Member Irwin: I'd like respect for members of our community.

Given his principal secretary's clear disregard for the rights of LGBTQ students, can the Premier tell the students just how much influence Howard Anglin has had over ideological moves like dismantling the Conversion Therapy Working Group and rolling back protections for queer and trans students so they can be outed?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, all of that is ridiculous, but the good news is that Albertans in their great common sense understand how to filter out the politics of fear and smear that emanate daily from the NDP. That is why that party was so convincingly repudiated by Albertans just a few weeks ago. This government and the United Conservative Party stand for the human dignity of all people regardless of . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: We will have order.

Mr. Kenney: You hear the anger machine. They just don't know how to stop, Mr. Speaker.

We will continue to defend dignity for all Albertans, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, it gets worse with this Premier's principal secretary. When Conservative leadership candidate Kellie Leitch was criticized for campaigning on the radical, hate-driven idea to screen immigrants for, quote, anti-Canadian values, the Premier's principal secretary said not to criticize her and that the backlash was, quote, overblown. To the minister of immigration: will you condemn the comments from Mr. Anglin and promise this House that he will have no say over immigration policies adopted by your government?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, what the NDP has engaged in here is nothing less than character assassination against a distinguished Canadian lawyer, a former deputy chief of staff to the Prime Minister of Canada, who, I can assure you, was my chief of staff as minister of citizenship and immigration when I welcomed 1.3 million permanent residents to Canada, more than any immigration minister in Canadian history. I'm proud of that record and how Mr. Anglin helped us to welcome so many newcomers to this country.

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, given that Howard Anglin also wrote that letting people's grandparents immigrate would "impose a higher burden on the Canadian healthcare and welfare systems," my question is again to the minister of immigration. Are you also against letting grandparents immigrate to Canada?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, apparently the NDP's approach to character assassination now comes to mischaracterizing and attacking political staff. The members of this Legislature, the members of this cabinet are the ones who are . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Members, we heard the question; we'll hear the answer. You may not agree with the answer, but I will hear it.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, apparently their humiliation in the last election did not cause the NDP to reflect for one moment on how their politics of fear and smear and personal destruction are so profoundly distasteful to Albertans. If the member wants to talk about federal immigration policy, I'm happy to do that with him any time. I'm proud of my record in that respect.

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, given that it just keeps getting worse with Howard Anglin's record of perpetuating white nationalist sentiments, similar to the things that resulted in the resignation of candidates during the recent election, does the minister think these comments are acceptable, or will he request that the Premier fire his new top adviser?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, that question was absolutely vile. If the member were to repeat that outside, I believe it would constitute a prima facie case of defamation. Members cannot abuse the privilege of this place to drag into the mud the names of reputable people who are serving the Alberta public. I repeat, Mr. Anglin served as my chief . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Members, I think this will be my third or fourth interjection with respect to hearing the answer to a question.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Anglin worked as my chief of staff, and we welcomed over 1.3 million permanent residents to this country. Mr. Speaker, if what we are going to see from the NDP for the next four years is more of this kind of politics of character assassination, I'll tell you that their repudiation in the next election is even going to be more serious.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie has a question.

Ms Notley: What you will see is us standing up for human rights, always.

The Speaker: Hon. member, the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Member for Grande Prairie has the call.

Highway 40 Twinning

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Minister of Transportation. The twinning of highway 40 is critical in providing safe passage for workers to the many job sites south of the city. Job creation and economic development are key priorities of this government. Given that significant investment and subsequent job creation are proposed for the area south of Grande Prairie, further congesting this highway, will the minister confirm the commitment of this government to the project?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation is rising to answer.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for the question. I recognize that highway 40 is a valuable contributor to Alberta's economic success and that the area south of Grande Prairie is an important driver in the region and for the province. The proposed project is currently identified as unfunded on the capital list and is being considered alongside the rest of the transportation projects. While the capital plan hasn't been set, we can confirm that highway 40 is under careful consideration.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given the financial situation Alberta now faces as a result of the former government's mismanagement, which you just mentioned, and given the potential impact of those financial constraints on key projects throughout the province, affecting both the Infrastructure and Transportation budgets, can the minister confirm that the highway 40 twinning, including the bridge, is a priority and will go ahead this year, and can the minister assure the people of Grande Prairie that this project will not be further delayed?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member, a second bridge over the Wapiti River is included in the proposed twinning project for highway 40 south of Grande Prairie. Engineering, design work started in 2017. The next steps are land acquisition, environmental approvals, and moving utilities. We expect construction, when the project does go ahead, to take three or four years because it's a fairly big project. It's being considered alongside the rest of our important transportation projects. The capital plan has not been set, but I will again assure the hon. member we will take this very seriously.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that proposed projects like those by Nauticol Energy and the tri-municipal development site, once initiated, will both increase the traffic and congestion currently experienced on highway 40 and given that the section approved for twinning is less than 20 kilometres in length, can the minister outline or expand on what other measures and improvements are being considered to improve the safety for workers, tourists, and all Albertans on this highway?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member's advocacy is to be commended. I can confirm to the member that work is under way to pave 56 kilometres of highway 40 right now south of Grande Prairie between the Kakwa River and the Canfor intersection. The work includes nine passing lanes, over 26 kilometres in length, two safety rest areas, seven intersection improvements. When completed in 2020, it will significantly improve safety for all highway users, including tourists and business operators. As far as that goes, we encourage all Albertans to drive safely and follow the signs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs is rising.

Conversion Therapy Working Group

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been nearly a week since I met with the Minister of Health in hopes of getting answers on why he cancelled the Conversion Therapy Working Group. Now, I understand why the minister may not want to keep me on the working group, but his stonewalling of the other members makes no sense. All they have heard is that the minister will get back to them in due course. To the minister: plain and simple, what is the status of the working group?

2:20

The Speaker: The Minister of Health is rising.

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, usually when I repeat things, it gets reported by our friends in the gallery above. As a government we oppose conversion therapy, and I want all Albertans, especially those in the gender and sexual diversity community, to understand this, that if anybody has any information about this abusive practice occurring in our province, my office wants to be able to work with them to make sure that that is reported to the correct authorities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I am joined today in the House by members of the Conversion Therapy Working Group and given that these people have volunteered their time to work on a strategy to ban this harmful practice, is the minister really trying to suggest that their concerns are unwarranted and that they have wasted their time?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, as I said, I'm looking forward to working with anybody who has any information about this abusive practice occurring in our province and making sure that it's reported to the correct authorities, as I've said at the meeting with the hon. member as well as Dr. Lieb, and this extends to all members of that committee. For anyone who wants to meet with me and be able to discuss any conversations that have occurred, any recommendations people have about future legislation, anything related to conversion therapy, my door is always open. It continues to be open for those members.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs is rising.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this minister likes to dole out talking point after talking point while no real action is taking place and given that getting back to members of the Conversion Therapy Working Group in due course just won't cut it, will the minister agree to take another meeting this afternoon with the members of the working group that have joined us here today in the Legislature?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, I think it's really important for us to remember that for four years we had the NDP telling us that this was not an issue, that this practice does not occur in the province of Alberta, that for four years they did nothing on this issue until weeks before the campaign. Really, the group only met twice. Their third meeting was cancelled because they called the campaign, and that's why they weren't able to continue their work. I think Albertans see through what was happening with the calling of that working group, and they see that that previous government really didn't take this issue seriously.

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

Postsecondary Tuition and Noninstructional Fees

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government worked very hard to reduce costs with the tuition freeze and then a legislated cap on increases at the rate of the consumer price index. This would save an Alberta student an average of \$2,000 over a four-year degree. Now, we know that the Conservatives have a history of making cuts to postsecondary institutions and then passing the bill on to students through tuition increases. I ask the Minister of Advanced Education: will you commit to keeping the tuition cap in place for the sake of Alberta students?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As it relates to tuition, as all members of this House will know, over the last four years there has been a tuition freeze in place. We're continuing to work with different stakeholder groups. In fact, later this afternoon I'm having a meeting with the executive of the Council of Alberta University Students to get a better understanding from their perspective to make sure that we can create a sustainable postsecondary education model for now and into the future.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, given that the word "tuition" was not even mentioned a single time in the UCP platform and given that the tuition policy we developed involved a substantial consultation with students, including an increase but just to the consumer price index, I ask the minister now: will you commit today that students will be fully informed about the plans to increase tuition fees and make programming cuts in the province of Alberta?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our student groups, of course, will always be involved and informed in all aspects of decision-making as we look to move forward to renew postsecondary education in the province of Alberta. We've heard loud and clear from our students that one of the things that they need the most, one of the things that they are looking for is a good, high-paying job at the end of their degree, and we're going to work hard to make sure that that happens.

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, given that we know that in the past institutions have circumvented tuition rules by increasing mandatory noninstructional fees and given that the legislation grants to students at this time meaningful input on fees, including a veto, to the same minister: will you maintain the student veto on noninstructional fees here in the province of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, as we look towards renewing postsecondary education, one of our top priorities is going to be to ensure that our graduates have incredibly high-paying jobs, the best quality jobs possible within the province of Alberta. We're going to work hard to make sure that that happens. We want to get a better understanding of the labour market impacts of degree programs, and we want to ensure that when a new degree program is created or offered, our institutions are giving due consideration to the labour market demands for those programs. We need to make sure that there are jobs now and well into the future for these programs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie is rising with a question.

Foreign Qualifications and Credentials

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is a land of opportunity. People come here from all over the world to live, work, and raise a family. My constituency of Calgary-Currie is a diverse community, many of whom are new Albertans that came here seeking a better life. Many of these newcomers also came to Alberta highly qualified across different professional fields. Minister, can you please tell my constituents what our government's plan is to help these skilled workers get their credentials recognized and work in their rightful professional fields?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Currie for the question. This is a very important topic and one that I'm glad to address in this House. Recognizing foreign credentials in a speedy fashion will allow foreign-trained professionals to work at the levels they are capable of. That is why our government will introduce the fair access to regulated professions and trades act to help speed up certification and allow newcomers to fully contribute to the economy. With this

support we believe that more talented newcomers will have the opportunity to contribute fully to our province.

The Speaker: Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the process for getting foreign credentials is often arbitrary, where workers could be left waiting for years for a decision, and given that these new Albertans are often forced to find alternative employment or lower paying jobs to feed and clothe their families while regulatory bodies can take years to make a decision, Minister, my constituents want to know: what is the timeline for getting these foreign credentials recognized and getting newcomers back to work in their rightful professions?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will be introducing the fair access to regulated professions and trades act very soon. This legislation will ensure fairness in the registration process of foreign-trained individuals who wish to work in a regulated profession or designated trade while maintaining Alberta's professional standards. This act will specify a quick timeline for getting an interim decision and indicate whether the applicant requires upgrading, bridging, additional examinations, or work-experience hours under supervision.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Speaker. Given that this province has wasted a tremendous amount of human capital while skilled new Alberta workers wait to have their credentials recognized and given that in the past these decisions have not always been fair and transparent, with some workers being denied without even knowing why, Minister, can you please tell my constituents how our government plans to work with different professional licensing groups to ensure that this process is fair and transparent?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, our plan is to work collaboratively with regulators to streamline, simplify, and accelerate their processes wherever possible. We need to make sure that there are efficient ways for new Albertans to earn the qualifications that they need so that they can work in their chosen field and that these processes are fair, objective, impartial, and transparent. To help achieve this, we will establish a fairness for newcomers office to lead this work. As I said at the outset, our first approach is to work collaboratively with the regulatory organizations to achieve our goal of full economic integration of newcomers.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Manning has a question.

Supervised Drug Consumption Sites

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Kym Porter, a Medicine Hat mother who lost her son to an overdose three years ago, has launched a petition to stop the funding freeze on supervised consumption sites being pushed by this UCP government without any consultation. Ms Porter said that this Premier is making, quote, an ethical and morally wrong decision. To the Premier: will you rise in this House and attempt to explain to a family survivor of addictions how exactly it is that you know better than her?

2:30

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government committed full support for continuum of care for Albertans that ranges from harm reduction to recovery. Let me make that point again. We not only continue to support that; we are committed for another \$100 million for a comprehensive mental health and addictions strategy.

Ms Sweet: The strategy is safe consumption sites.

Given that I've seen countless survivors of addictions come out in favour of these supervised consumption sites, will the Premier and the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions commit to sitting down with a group of these survivors immediately, given that their funding freeze has come without any credible input from these advocates? I'll be happy to arrange it for you.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This hon. member I think is a social worker, too. I would draw to her attention that as a social worker you understand that people's needs differ, their readiness differs. When we want to help people, we want to create a continuum of care. That includes supervised consumption sites. If one is going to be so passionately talking only about one service, one intervention, that's not what we need to do.

Ms Sweet: You're right. I am a social worker, and I know that you have to meet people where they're at, which means that these people will die without these sites.

Given that the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions has said that he expects the review he's ordered of supervised consumption sites to result in a review for him to read, given that all this sounds like another secretive health care decision from this UCP government that they will make in due course, will the associate minister commit that the survivors of addictions will have direct input to his report? Will he tell us who he's picked to be on this review and, frankly, tell us anything about this review?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the opposition had a chance to be government, they picked and chose what to do. But this government is committed to the full continuum of care for Albertans. We're going to provide a comprehensive strategy that will address the broader needs of people who need access to treatment and who need to get help for recovery.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition has a question.

Conversion Therapy Working Group (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Health minister met with the chair of the former Conversion Therapy Working Group and created more questions than answers. When he was asked about them, he repeated standard talking points that were, quite frankly, embarrassing. Today he said that his door is always open, but he hasn't answered the question. They're all up there

listening to this conversation. Will you commit to meeting them today, and if not, why not?

Mr. Shandro: Yes, I actually just already sent a note to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. You know, if that works for their group, then after question period I look forward to being able to make that work, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: I'm very pleased to hear that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Notley: Now, given that this group has been working diligently on the very, very serious issue of conversion therapy and the fact that it creates many, many victims across this province and, quite frankly, across the country, will the Health minister stand up and commit to moving forward with the work of this conversion therapy group?

The Speaker: We'll note the point of order at 2:34.
The Minister of Health, please.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Leader of the Opposition said that I was repeating talking points. Unfortunately, the most important things I said before and after what was clipped by our friends in the media were, first of all, that we oppose conversion therapy and, second of all, that my door is open. I want to work with people who do have concerns with conversion therapy happening in the province and with making sure that's reported to the correct authorities. They want to ignore that, though. They want to ignore everything that we are saying about that issue. As I said, I'm happy to meet with the remaining members of the committee that I haven't met with who are here today.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition for your final supplemental.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said before, given that conversion therapy is such a hurtful, assaultive practice on those poor young people, primarily, who are subjected to it, will the minister commit to maintaining the status of this Conversion Therapy Working Group and implementing the recommendations that they make within the next six months? Yes or no?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, for four years the previous government did nothing on this issue. They kept on telling us that it doesn't occur in this province, and I think Albertans see through what the previous government did in the weeks before the previous campaign in starting a working group.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a group that was appointed by ministerial order. This is not a group that was appointed by order in council. This was a group that was informally, on an ad hoc basis, formed on a time-limited basis for five months. I think Albertans see through what the previous government did on this issue.

Wildfire Prevention and Mountain Pine Beetle Control

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, right now there are forest fires across the province, some of which are in my constituency of West Yellowhead. It appears that this is a common occurrence in the month of May. My constituents are asking how our government plans to protect their communities going forward. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: will your department consider

establishing and maintaining a fire ban or restrictions until after the Victoria Day long weekend, when dry conditions in the province generally improve?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to thank the Member for West Yellowhead for the question. Our firefighters are doing everything possible to fight the fires in your area and across Alberta. Right now there are 29 firefighters and two pieces of heavy equipment fighting the fires in Edson. When it comes to fire bans, they are re-evaluated weekly, sometimes on a daily basis. They are a very important tool to engage with people. We want Albertans to go out into these public areas, use our forests to go quadding, to go dirt biking. We need that engagement between them.

Thanks.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Minister. Mr. Speaker, given that the forestry industry is a significant employer in my constituency and given that there are mounting concerns regarding the pine beetle and its contribution to the forest fire issues and given that the previous government left much to be desired with the pine beetle strategy, can the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry tell me how our government will make changes and improvements to the existing pine beetle strategy?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the mountain pine beetle is a very serious issue, as the member pointed out. Last year we did see a terrible increase near Calgary, Rocky Mountain House, Whitecourt, and Edson, but this government is committed to working to slow the spread of the mountain pine beetle. That's why in our platform we committed \$5 million extra, up to \$30 million, to help fight with this initiative.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Minister. Mr. Speaker, given that in my constituency of West Yellowhead we have Jasper national park, which has been decimated by the lack of a pine beetle strategy, and given that a lack of action in the park has left other parts of my constituency vulnerable and given that the pine beetle is a pan-Canadian issue, how will the provincial government work with its federal counterparts on minimizing the effects of the pine beetle infestation going forward?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the member for that very important question. Since 2006 the province of Alberta has spent nearly half a billion dollars combatting the mountain pine beetle. To date since 2006 the federal government has only invested \$18 million, and so far this year there has been zero funding from the federal government. This is not just an Alberta issue, as the member stated. This is a pan-Canadian issue, across the country, and we will work with the federal government to make sure that they can help, partner with us.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I understand that the points of order have been settled in the usual ways and means. As such, they've been withdrawn.

2:40

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: Hon. members, in approximately 30 seconds I think we will begin debate on Bill 4.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 4

Red Tape Reduction Act

[Debate adjourned June 4]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe the Member for Edmonton-Decore is rising to debate.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to rise in this Chamber and bring forward the voices of Edmonton-Decore and talk about the bill that's in front of us today, Bill 4, the Red Tape Reduction Act, a bill that, quite frankly, contains no targets, contains no timelines, and doesn't even define what the government considers to be red tape.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

This bill does, however, give the associate minister the ability to create new regulations and amend existing ones. Quite frankly, Madam Speaker, I think that that in itself is just red tape. I think it's probably a little bit important to look at some of the work that has gone on around red tape. We have seen British Columbia do some work on this. We've seen Manitoba do some work on this. We've also seen the Ontario government do some work around red tape. I'm sure everybody is always very open-minded in terms of reducing a burden. Certainly, when we have the chance to reduce those things in a way that's responsible, in a way that doesn't put people in jeopardy or in harm's way, and it certainly doesn't affect things like our environment, then absolutely we will need to look at those very closely. But I always have to bring about that little bit of caution.

When we look at 2011, Harper announced the launch of a Red Tape Reduction Commission. The commission called on the government to take action on reducing burden on business, making it easier to do business with regulators and improving service and predictability. In 2015 legislation was brought forward to establish a 20 per cent red tape cut and a one-for-one – meaning, of course, that every new regulation burden proposed must be matched with an equivalent burden somewhere else. Now, when we get a little bit into, “Well, we have to trade one for one,” again, that's where my concern starts to come in: why are we in such a rush? “Well, we have to bring this in. It's really important. You know, we were elected on this.” Do we start to put on blinders or maybe our vision gets a little tunnelled just so we can say: “Boom. Yes, we've managed to reduce once.” We have to be very, very careful about what we're doing.

Some of the failures I would just like to highlight here. When Harper gutted the regulatory framework that protects lakes, rivers, and groundwater by allowing a loophole in the metal mining effluent regulations of the Fisheries Act, this allowed mining companies to dump toxic waste into lakes and reclassified healthy lakes as tailings impoundment areas, which means that they were no longer protected. Again, when I was talking about if we're going to be removing regulations that maybe puts the environment at risk, this would certainly be one of them. Sandy Pond in Newfoundland has been destroyed under this loophole, and Environment Canada has released the names of 29 natural bodies that mining companies have applied to use as toxic waste dumps.

One other piece that I would like to highlight is around food inspections. There was a cut of \$56 million to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency resulting in 100 fewer inspectors, a reverse staffing measure put into place as a response to deadly listeriosis outbreaks in 2008, in which Canadians died. Again, here's what I'm

talking about. The decisions we make, sort of this, “We've just got to get it done; we've brought something in, so we have to remove one,” ended up putting people at risk, Madam Speaker. We absolutely cannot do these kinds of things.

If we look to B.C., one of the failures around money laundering, reports indicate that \$7 billion in dirty money has flowed through the British Columbia economy, \$5 billion of which is in real estate, which inflated prices and hurt consumers. Again, here we are going to that thing, what was, you know, a noble effort, to begin with, around reducing red tape. Some of the members who were in the last Legislature used to love to absolutely just pound on the unintended consequences, Madam Speaker.

Here's a really good one on child labour. In 2003 the B.C. Liberal government lowered the working age to 12 and removed the permit system, effectively deregulating child labour in the province. This put the health and safety of children at risk. There was a dramatic increase in annual payments for accepted disability claims related to children ages 12 to 14 injured on the job, and since 2009 nine young people were designated long-term disabled, or LTD, as a result of work-related injuries sustained when they were under the age of 15. In total, WorkSafeBC has paid out over \$1.1 million in disability claims for 179 children injured on the job between 2003 and 2013.

We can talk about environmental deregulation. We can talk about out in Ontario where Restoring Ontario's Competitiveness Act sets targets of 25 per cent reduction in regulation over four years. One of the failures, just to quickly go through those, was to loosen the ratios for children in daycare. There were restrictions put in place after a number of tragic deaths of children. Now we're putting children at risk again.

So as we move forward on this quest, I guess we could almost say, to reduce red tape, we need to be very, very conscious about what it is we are removing and the effects that it may have past that point. I would feel a lot better if we maybe had some clarity around what the government might be looking at in terms of what red tape looks like, what kinds of timelines they are looking to do.

I would like to draw attention around the reporting of this. I think simply to report once a year on something that you've already done might not necessarily be a good idea. I think that by posting some of the things that you're looking at, Albertans can see in real time what the government is considering. One of the things that we've heard is that they want to hear from Albertans, they want to hear from businesses, they want to hear from industries. This gives them an opportunity to make their input known as to whether this really would be a good idea.

When we look at things in the bill around lowering the wage of persons under 18 years of age, I'm not too sure if somebody considered the red tape around tracking when they're in school, when their birthday is. If they turn 18, do they start getting \$15 an hour at that point in time? You know, are they tracking whether people are quitting school? This sounds like a big ball of red tape that's starting to build here.

I'm looking forward to maybe getting into Committee of the Whole on this bill, talking a little bit more about some of the things that we might be able to do in terms of amending this bill a little bit. I do remember members opposite sometimes talking about the size of bills in the last Legislature. Some, of course, were extremely large, and they thought it was very, very cumbersome. Of course, I also remember them making fun of some of the bills that were a lot smaller. When I look at this bill, it's two pages long, with one page simply being a preamble, so I'm a little bit worried that this is a little bit hasty in terms of legislation that's been brought forward. But I do look forward to the debate on this, how we might be able to strengthen it, how we might be able to add some timelines, maybe

increase some of the reporting a little bit, and around the disclosure that Albertans get to see as the regulations come forward.

At this point I'm happy to take my seat and listen to the debate a little more. Again, I look forward to Committee of the Whole on this.

2:50

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 4, what there is of it. I will be voting against and urging members to vote against this bill.

I think just for those watching, if there are any, it's probably worth just running through the bill really quickly. The bill begins with a definition section, as most bills do, defining minister. Section 2 forces the minister to generate a report every year. Section 3 says that the Lieutenant Governor in Council is able to amend regulations even if they're a ministerial order. Section 4 enables the minister to make regulations. So, in fact, this bill doesn't cut anything, and it doesn't say anything about what it intends to cut. In fact, I might call this bill itself red tape.

I think that one of the first things to note about the bill is that most bills, most legislation in this House tend to begin with a definition section in order to define what it is the bill is planning to do or what the Legislature wants to do with the bill. I think it's interesting that in the Red Tape Reduction Act one doesn't find a definition of red tape, so it remains, I think, unclear what exactly is meant by red tape.

Now, perhaps just for those less familiar with regulations – I've spent the last several years reading them extensively – we have regulations in Alberta on many different subjects. For instance, there are regulations dictating the safety standards that you must have for your elevator in your building. Some might define these as red tape, but I would say that ensuring that an elevator is properly functioning is actually a fairly important function of government. We have regulations certainly around environmental standards, for instance – you can't, for instance, dump mercury directly into a river – again I would say fairly important regulations.

We have health and safety regulations which govern not just different government facilities but things like restaurants at which we eat. Those regulations tell companies the standards to which they must keep their kitchens if they're going to feed members of the public. As someone who frequents food establishments I think that that's a fairly important regulation.

The depth and breadth of these things, the number of areas that they touch on is very, very extensive, so when we talk about red tape, it's not really clear what we're talking about. I had hoped that at a minimum a bill dealing with the reduction of red tape would take some step to define what it is we mean by that. You know, we want to reduce regulation by a third, so does that mean that if we get rid of all of the health and safety regulations, all of the other ones will be left untouched? It's just not really clear.

Really, in sum, I think all that this bill is intended to do is create the ability to make more regulations and a report, although we don't really know what exactly will be in the report or what the report will talk about or whether the report will at long last define what we mean by red tape. I think Albertans, who will be governed by this bill, deserve to know what it is that's occurring in this place, what it is that we're talking about, which third of the regulations they intend to cut.

You know, there's another thing. Like, I think if we're going to go forward, and particularly when we're talking in numbers, one of the most important things we can do in government – and you can

use examples from any ministry – in order to determine whether something has achieved its objective, is if it's something that can be counted and measured. Given that the promise was one-third, I assume that they think it can be counted and measured. One of the ways is: "Well, how are we going to count it? Let's all come together and get on the same page and talk about what it is that we're trying to achieve, how we're going to measure it, and put some definition in place around those measurements so that we're all having the same conversation."

Frequently there's a problem, I think, in this House where folks are talking past each other, and that results from the fact that people are often using the same words to talk about different things. This is, I think, common practice in a lot of academic work. I think that in most scientific work it's common practice to create an operational definition of the terms that you're talking about. Some sort of indication as to, you know, what we are talking about and how we plan to measure whether it's achieving its effect, I think, would be useful additions to this bill.

I find it interesting, certainly, that there's this talk of amending multiple regulations at the same time and that it gives the Lieutenant Governor in Council the ability to amend regulations notwithstanding that they're made by a minister. There are various sorts of regulations. Some of them are ministerial regulations, so those are orders made by the individual minister, and some of them are orders in council, which are made by cabinet in its entirety. Usually there's a difference in granularity, so when it's a more granular thing you're dealing with or when it's sort of more nitpicky, the legislation tends to be the broadest, and then cabinet regulations, and then a ministerial regulation.

Now, there are admittedly instances in which historically, from years and years and years back – I mean, we'll have regulations come forward that have been in place for a long time – a ministerial regulation and an order in council sort of speak to the same subject matter. That can be confusing, so perhaps in those instances it would be best to streamline that. But I think it's interesting at least to suggest that orders in council and orders made by different ministers in different departments potentially about different things can all be amended simultaneously. I think that when we're talking about these things, they have a huge impact on people out there living their lives, and my concern is that, you know, in this rush to go through and to change things, people will miss things, important details will get missed, and that will have impacts on the lives of people out there.

I guess my closing comment on this bill is that it feels like the absurdity one would expect from *Alice in Wonderland*. It is a bill which doesn't define red tape, which doesn't indicate how it's going to reduce red tape, which doesn't indicate how it will measure whether red tape has in fact been reduced or, again, what red tape is even. Presumably, it deals with regulations. But what it creates is the power to amend and create more regulations, and in fact it creates the impetus to create an additional report.

There's a British comedy called *Yes Minister*, and I feel like there was an episode of *Yes Minister* about exactly this. The main character in that case is, obviously, a government minister. He was trying to create an area to reduce bureaucracy, and what winds up happening is that actually they hire, you know, several thousand people to work in this ministry in order to determine what bureaucracy can be reduced. I feel like the Red Tape Reduction Act is pretty much that. We're going to hire a bunch of people to generate a report about we know not what in order to reduce the size of government.

So those are my comments. I would urge members to vote against this bill, mostly because I think it's a bit silly. Thank you.

3:00

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. Now that I'm figuring that out, I appreciate that, Madam Speaker.

I just wanted to comment on the comments from my colleague for Calgary-Mountain View. I wanted to thank her for her breakdown of what is essentially a very, very small and limited piece of legislation which, to me, somewhat begs the question: why do we even need legislation? Really, if we're talking about eliminating red tape and regulation, why do we need to introduce legislation to do that? Why not just do the reductions? Why not just do the reviews? Why create the authority to establish more regulations if the goal is actually to reduce them?

Be that as it may, I think that one of the things that is very interesting is how, obviously, this was brought forward as part of a plan, I think, part of the mandate, perhaps, of the governing party to reduce regulations, reduce red tape. Of course, that comes from this idea that smaller government is better. I think we can all agree, actually, on efficiency, and nobody would disagree with that. However, I find it a bit unusual for a party that did seem to put forward a mandate of having smaller government that they've actually created a larger government, a government of more ministries and associate ministers than the previous NDP government, which is ironic for a government that claims to be about small governance.

I'm wondering if the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has any comments about how increasing the size of government actually goes counter to their objective of reducing red tape and might be creating red tape.

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, and thank you very much to my colleague for Edmonton-Whitemud for her comments. Yeah, I do think it's interesting, actually, that in addition to the bill, which creates a report, we've also created an entire ministry for the reduction of red tape, which does seem like creating larger government.

I think that when we talk about administration, we need to distinguish between different things. Often a lot of things get lumped together, and it's difficult to have a reasoned conversation, I think, if we don't know what it is we're talking about. For instance, when I used to volunteer at the Foothills hospital in Calgary, they had a unit clerk on every unit, ostensibly administration. However, that was administration that was absolutely integral to the running of the unit. The unit clerk did everything from worrying about patients who were supposed to arrive on transfers who maybe hadn't made it to making sure, you know, that if there was a conflict in terms of different appointments between, say, an occupational therapist and a physical therapist, that got sorted out. If people didn't get their meal tray because it hadn't followed them when they moved units – all of that work was done by this incredibly hard-working individual who was fairly consistently run off her feet. I think that that work was incredibly important work.

Now, that being said, I think that perhaps in this instance it's not the same kind of administration. We're literally creating work in the sense that we're generating a report and – well, hope springs eternal. Who knows? Maybe the report will be useful. I don't hold out a lot of hope for it, but maybe I'll be optimistic today and I'll say that perhaps the report will have some use. I think my concern

is that we're saying, "Oh, let's create a bunch of work in generating this report," but we don't know whether it will be useful. In fact, we don't even know how we're going to define "useful." We haven't decided what's red tape and what we're cutting. I think that that continues to be a huge concern.

I think that, in my view, this is a completely nonpartisan issue, right? The idea that if one is trying to achieve the good, however defined – and sometimes it's different on different sides of the House – one ought to define what the objective is. So here's the objective, and then one ought to determine: how am I going to measure whether I've reached the objective? In light of that, what are the steps I'm going to take in order to get to that objective? I think, again, that that is what's lacking in this bill. What's lacking is, you know, some thought as to what it is we're trying to achieve.

I've heard it said before and found it very much to be true in my life: when everything is a priority, nothing is a priority.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak against the so-called Red Tape Reduction Act. It's interesting. In my comments today I want to touch on the absurdity of this legislation that we are discussing today, the fact that it's unnecessary given some of the other processes that the government has to regularly review and reduce so-called red tape, and, third of all and most importantly, I think, to discuss how this is really a gift to the corporate donors of the members opposite.

Madam Speaker, of course, to start out with the absurdity of it all, here we have a minister with no ministry, and his first piece of legislation is to actually create the thing that his boss has told him to cut. It is astounding, and I want to underline the comments from my colleagues from Calgary-Mountain View and Edmonton-Decore. You know, if this were a comedy on television, people would say, "How can they make this stuff up? It's so absurd," but here we have in actual practice, like I said, a minister with no ministry and legislation provided to him to actually create the red tape that his boss has told him to cut.

It's especially ironic given the history of the members opposite, who, I recall, a few years ago derided the establishment of the economic development and trade ministry. That was Bill 1 in one of our sessions of the Legislature. Of course, for the remainder of that session of the Legislature the members opposite would deride the minister and say that it created only one job. Calgary-Hays is confirming that he actually made those accusations. Obviously, they didn't take them seriously enough to disestablish the ministry of economic development and trade. It turns out that it was a good idea. You're welcome, Calgary-Hays and other members opposite, for actually implementing something useful. It's ironic that they would make fun of the economic development and trade ministry, something that actually provided value to the people of Alberta and contributed significantly to economic diversification and job creation in this province, yet are deadly serious when it comes to this highly comedic act of appointing a minister without a ministry and giving him the job to actually create more red tape when, in fact, he is supposed to be reducing it.

Secondly, Madam Speaker, I think it's probably well known now to at least some members of Executive Council that there are already significant measures in place to examine and reduce the so-called red tape, the number of regulations, important protections that the Alberta government has in place. I was privileged in the last session of the Legislature and in my term on Executive Council to sit on the Legislative Review Committee, and I'm sure that the members opposite who are a part of that committee are thankful

every day that they get to go to work on that committee. The thing that I remember most about that committee is the number of regulation expiry dates that we had to deal with. It was the decision of a previous government – and I don't even know which government made this decision. They implemented expiry dates on every regulation that was created either by ministerial order or through order in council.

The bulk of the work that we engaged in on the Legislative Review Committee was actually going through each and every regulation whose expiry date was coming up for renewal. Now, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View can refresh my memory. I think she was much more engaged in the work, I suppose, than I was. But I can't recall a single time where we said: you know, this regulation isn't serving a purpose anymore and provides no useful purpose to the people of Alberta, so we should get rid of it entirely. One or two. But the bulk of the regulations that are in place provide valuable protections for the people of Alberta who need it, Madam Speaker, and when they are no longer needed, the expiry dates already exist.

3:10

So I don't understand why the members opposite are actually duplicating the work. They have the Legislative Review Committee in place to look at the regulations one by one as those expiry dates come up and make the decision as to whether or not they're still serving a purpose and decide whether to keep those regulations or not. And if they can't make that decision on the spot, Madam Speaker, they always have the option of at least extending the regulation expiry date so that they can conduct a thorough review of that particular regulation, to engage stakeholders, people who deal with the regulation on a regular basis to inform government about whether or not those things are valuable. I would suggest that that's probably a better way to approach looking at and reviewing the regulations that are on the books here in the province of Alberta rather than taking a scattershot approach and arbitrarily picking this number of one-third to eliminate red tape and just, you know, trying to give the member – I'm sorry; I forget his constituency – a position to keep him happy.

Madam Speaker, of course, I think the third and most important point that I want to make in opposing this bill is that it's another example of a giant corporate gift to the donors of the members opposite. We've seen it in Bill 1. That's a massive tax giveaway to the wealthiest Albertans. We've seen it in Bill 2, of course. We've decided to cut the pay of young people, the pay of people working overtime so that money goes instead into their employers' pockets. Of course, we see it nakedly laid out in Bill 3, which will cut corporate taxes and enrich the shareholder class in this province. And now we have Bill 4, which is designed to eliminate regulations that impede corporate profitability.

Of course, we know that the members opposite have been, shall we say, swayed by the financial donations of the people who are demanding these things. I want to refer to a letter submitted by the Motor Dealers' Association of Alberta documenting a meeting that they had with the United Conservative Party leader in September. In that particular letter, Madam Speaker, the Motor Dealers' Association promised to raise millions of dollars if, when elected, the UCP would scrap the carbon tax, reduce corporate and personal income taxes, reduce minimum wages. All of those things are promises that have already been delivered.

What else is on the chopping block? Of course, we've got the labour code, occupational health and safety, and WCB changes yet to come. We see some of those in Bill 2. Consumer Protection Act changes, Madam Speaker: we don't yet know what protections are on the chopping block, but we do know that the members opposite

have been influenced by significant dollars into PACs to look at those. Issues requiring government action, banning of imported right-hand drive Asian vehicles: I expect that that's probably another one of the so-called red tape reduction actions that the minister will take to make sure that his corporate donors are well looked after.

That's not the only example. The Motor Dealers' Association was probably the most overt example, but we know, of course, that Restaurants Canada lobbied heavily, spent significant dollars advertising to elect the members opposite in return for reducing the minimum wage for young people and taking away overtime banking for people who work hard in the restaurant industry, Madam Speaker.

You know, one of the things that I would like to see in the report that is required is actually outlining who has lobbied the minister and the members of Executive Council to reduce the regulations that are reported on and being recommended as being removed and correlating those things with meetings that they've had with paid lobbyists and the corporate donors that continue to fill the coffers of political action committees that are associated with the UCP, Madam Speaker. I think that that would be in the interest of all Albertans, to know who is paying the minister to actually do his job. It's not just the people of Alberta; it is, of course, the corporate shareholders who have a financial interest in making sure that regulations that protect the people of Alberta go by the wayside.

Mr. Loewen: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: A point of order has been called. The Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Point of Order Allegations against Members

Mr. Loewen: Yes. Under 23(h), (i), and (j). The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar just accused us on this side of the House of taking in corporate donations, and he knows it's against the law for corporations to donate money to political parties, so I ask him to apologize and withdraw his comments.

The Deputy Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, a response?

Mr. Schmidt: Yes, thank you, Madam Speaker. Of course, if the Member for Central Peace-Notley had actually been paying attention to what I was saying, he would know that I was talking about corporate donations made to political action committees that are affiliated with the UCP and not actually referring to corporate donations made to that party. I know full well the law. In fact, I was part of the government that made those donations illegal. So we don't have a point of order here. We have a difference of opinion.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I have been paying close attention to the words that have been spoken in this House, and I think, perhaps, this is a good time to remind members not to incite and use words to make accusations that would anger various sides of this House. I don't see a point of order.

Member, please carry on and just be cautious.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for your ruling.

Mr. Hunter: Point of order.

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

Mr. Hunter: Madam Speaker, I would like to cite 23(h), (i), and (j). Actually, the one I'd like to cite is, "Imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member," specifically . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, a point of order has already been called on that matter, and I have ruled on it.

Mr. Hunter: Madam Speaker, actually, what he did say, which we haven't actually ruled on, is: "Where is this minister receiving his income? Where is he receiving his income? Who is it from?" That is actually a point of order in terms of imputing false motives, and I would ask him to withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we've already moved on from this matter.

Please proceed, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Madam Speaker, thank you very much for your very wise ruling on that point.

I would like to continue, of course, with a discussion of some of the important consumer protection regulations that we made, that if scrapped, would actually increase profits while decreasing protections for the people of Alberta.

One of the examples, of course, is payday lending. That was one of the first moves that we made in the First Session of the Legislature. We put an end to the 600 per cent interest rates on payday loans to help prevent people from becoming trapped in a cycle of debt. Today payday loan borrowers pay lower fees, have more time to pay off their loans, and are paying them off in smaller installments, Madam Speaker.

Of course, I can recall members of one of the predecessor parties of the current UCP speaking out against those very consumer protections from payday loans that we implemented. Madam Speaker, the payday lending industry is one that has a lot of lobbying dollars to throw around, so it would be very interesting to me if included in the report we saw a list of all of the lobbyists that the ministers met with over the course of the year and correlated those lobbyist meetings with PAC donations, so that we understand . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we're getting into that territory that is not productive for proper debate in this House. Can you please be cautious?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Madam Speaker, I would remind all of the members that my constituents in Edmonton-Gold Bar definitely want to know whose side the government is on. Are they on the side of everyday Albertans who rely on these protections for their financial and social well-being, or are they on the side of the people who would have these protections removed so that they can exploit the very everyday Albertans that we want to protect?

3:20

Payday lending, I think, is a classic example of a consumer protection that we implemented that powerful interests have a significant financial stake in seeing removed. Another one, of course, is door-to-door sales. We were very successful in ending the practice of misleading, aggressive sales tactics by banning door-to-door sales of energy products and services. That ban, to remind everybody, included furnaces, hot water tanks, air conditioners, windows, energy audits, and electricity and natural gas contracts. Madam Speaker, you know, the utility companies made a lot of money off those aggressive door-to-door sales, spreading

misinformation, misrepresenting themselves, pressuring people who didn't know any better to sign contracts that weren't very good for them financially, and of course I am sure that the companies that profited mightily from that practice are just rubbing their hands, eager for, let's say, sympathetic ears to take their side on scrapping those protections. That's why I think it's very important that the members opposite be incredibly transparent with the people of Alberta when they're bringing forward recommendations on which regulations to cut.

Another protection that we brought in place was the new-home buyer protection. This introduced a builder licensing framework to protect consumers as well as the reputation . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any comments or questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just a quick question. I know that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was bringing up some more specific examples around some of my concerns about when we're pushing headlong to try to remove some things all in the quest for red tape removal. I was wondering if I might be able to tap into the member's, you know, former position, before he was elected, and the group that he was a part of and some of the professional standards that he was held to and maybe comment a little bit around some of the implications that inadvertently may be removing some of those things, which may look on the outside as reducing red tape and allowing things to move more efficiently but could put other things at risk. I was hoping the member might be able to comment a little bit on that.

The Deputy Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Decore for that question. You know, certainly, in my life prior to being elected I was a civil servant in the department of environment, and it was my job to oversee industrial facility applications to make sure that they complied with the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act as well as all of the regulations that were associated with that act. Of course, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act has some very well-thought-out protections for soil, for air quality, for groundwater quality, for protecting the environment that sustains us and future generations in this province.

I had many meetings with many industry stakeholders, who, you know, came to the department expecting special exemptions for their particular industry. The meetings all had a similar pattern: oh, well, we're not like everybody else; we don't create problems in the soil or the air or the water, so we deserve a special exemption. And then, of course, when we indicated that we can't exempt one particular person when we've applied these regulations to everybody else who's working in that industry, they would of course rail on about how government is crushing industry and preventing job creation. I guess if we were so intent on creating jobs at the expense of poisoning our skies and poisoning the very water we drink, that would have made those industry stakeholders happy, but it wasn't in the best interests of Albertans.

So I think it's important for people to understand the purpose that the regulations provide in protecting everyday Albertans from unscrupulous actions from bad actors in various industries and that they need to be preserved in order to protect the people who rely on the clean air that we breathe, the clean water that we drink, the clean soil that we farm and let our kids play on and so forth. You know, it's important for Albertans to understand that there are powerful forces who are lobbying for removing of these protections, and I think it's incumbent, then, for the members opposite to be

transparent with the people of Alberta about the discussions that they're having with industry stakeholders and how that's influencing the decisions about the regulations that they are recommending for removal.

Of course, in my past life I was also a professional geologist, and we were held to high standards of professional practice and ethical practice. Those things come at a cost, Madam Speaker, but we as professional engineers and geologists have a responsibility to conduct our work not just in the interest of our clients but in the interest of the public, and often that means creating additional expenses for the very clients that we represent. Most of the clients that I worked for when I was in the private sector were more than happy to pay for those additional costs because they shared our value of acting in the public interest and not just in their own interests. Unfortunately, that isn't the case with a hundred per cent of industry actors, and they would like nothing more than all of these so-called red tape regulations to be removed so that they can do their work.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to thank my colleagues the members for Calgary-Mountain View, Edmonton-Decore, and Edmonton-Gold Bar for their fine comments on the bill. I think perhaps the amount of time that we've spent discussing it and reading it may have been more time than was actually spent in drafting this bill, because there's very little content to it. So kudos to us for being able to speak about this for this long already, and I will continue the trend.

I think the hon. members for Edmonton-Decore, Edmonton-Gold Bar, and Calgary-Mountain View did an excellent job talking about what's in the act and what's not in the act. In particular, we've talked about the lack of definitions about what red tape is. Really, the primary bulk of the act seems to be focused on actually creating the ability for the establishment of more regulations, the irony of which is not lost on any of us here. However, I think that both the members for Edmonton-Decore and Edmonton-Gold Bar gave a great discussion about the kinds of regulations that are necessary for health and safety. They gave significant examples of various areas environmentally, you know, health. My background is actually in education, and I dealt very significantly with the legislation and regulations involved in the education world. So we know that those regulations can be very important – they exist for a reason – and I'd like to thank them for their comments on that.

What I'd like to talk about a little bit today is from my perspective again, going back to my experience. I think it's important to talk about what the role of regulation is because we know that regulation in and of itself carries a connotation of waste and at times mismanagement and that it just slows down things, and it maybe creates work for bureaucrats. But regulations do exist for a reason. There is a distinct difference between legislation in statute and legislation created by regulation, and there's a reason why there are certain things that are put in regulations.

In my background in education I can tell you about how it's very important to have legislation that covers the principles, the goals, the values, the objectives of the system and how you want it to work, but there are some details that don't necessarily fit properly within statutes and should be rightfully within regulations. The reason for that is, as we know in this House, with the exception of the bills that have been introduced in this session, that generally it takes a little while to pass legislation. It takes a little while to bring it forward. If done properly, it involves consulting with stakeholders. It involves working with legal teams, with drafters.

You go through several iterations of it, and then, of course, it has to come to the House, where it should get significant consideration and debate by the members of this Assembly.

So legislation doesn't change easily. It doesn't change quickly, and that's for good reason. It's the laws. There should be some predictability. When drafting laws, you should be looking forward as a government or a body passing legislation. You should be looking forward to making sure that what you're creating lasts and is worth while and provides clear direction to the systems which it's meant to direct. Legislation should be a thoughtful process, and it should be long lasting. We have some examples of legislation that has been around for a long time.

Of course, there should be a healthy review period for all legislation to make sure that it's still current and up to date, but you don't want to be trying to amend it every legislative session. There's a reason why certain things go into regulation.

3:30

In particular, in the education world – and I see the Minister of Education probably has some familiarity with this – in terms of what goes in regulation, there are certain details that are part of that regulatory structure which properly fall within regulation. An example of that, actually, from the education world is that for the longest time the School Act had a provision talking about how far the distance between a student and their school had to be before they'd be eligible for transportation. Because that was in education legislation and statute, that couldn't be changed, and even though that didn't seem to really reflect the reality of what we were doing anymore, we were stuck with it because it was too hard to change the legislation.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Things like that, details like that should be put in regulation because regulation, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar mentioned, is regularly reviewed. It has expiration dates. The job of the Legislative Review Committee is to look at those regulations. The job of bureaucrats is to regularly look at those regulations and to make sure that they are pertinent and applicable and should be kept. We properly need some details to be in regulation.

This is my sort of minidefence of regulation. It does exist for a reason. We wouldn't want to be bogged down by doing all of those things in statute, but we also wouldn't want to be leaving such important health and safety measures without any regulation. We would not want that to be held to the discretion purely of any bureaucrat who is administering it or to the system to sort out amongst itself. Regulation is there for a reason.

I also wanted to bring up that I actually have some experience. I worked in the provincial government, the government of Alberta. I was a civil servant for eight years prior to moving into private practice, and in that time I actually began my illustrious public service career working in the now defunct – but it seems to be revived – ministry that was fondly known as restructuring and government efficiency. Some of you may recall that. I can't remember which Premier brought that in. It was before Premier Stelmach.

Anyway, that was a ministry that was created for, quite honestly, a very similar purpose, which was to restructure and create government efficiency. Now, of course, many of you might remember that that ministry was fondly known by an acronym, RAGE, which was kind of appropriate for restructuring and government efficiency because I think all it ever did was create rage and not just for the people who actually were subject to it. I don't know that it actually did much of anything, but I think it probably created quite a bit of rage on behalf of the minister who was

responsible for that ministry because he really had a ministry that had no use, no function, and was actually created and bloated and became red tape ridden even though it was the very ministry tasked with government efficiency.

So I kind of smile, frankly, when I see this come up again because, to me, this is the difference between political campaigning and what happens when you actually try to govern. It's really simple and it's a very catchy thing to say to people: we need less red tape, we need less regulation, and we need things to be more efficient. Nobody would disagree with that. I think nobody wants to waste money for the sake of wasting money. We all pay taxes. We all care about that money being spent efficiently. We all want our systems to work properly, but properly doesn't always mean quickly. So, okay; it's a catchy election campaign promise to say: let's just get rid of red tape, the scary red tape that exists out there, and let's remove that. But then when you actually have to put that in practice, to create a ministry to do that: to me, the irony is quite astounding, really.

Again, we've heard the ministers in this House, when asked about what they're going to do about this and what they're going to do about that, repeatedly stand up and say: "We're reviewing it. We're reviewing it. Alberta Health Services is being reviewed. Whether or not there should be a conversion therapy working group is being reviewed. Everything is being reviewed." My question is: why would you create a ministry and a piece of legislation and the ability to create more regulations to review regulations? If this is really about efficiency and administrative streamlining, there is absolutely no reason to create a ministry and to pass and create legislation to do it.

Nothing, by the way, is stopping this government from reducing red tape right now. They could do that. They don't need a piece of empowering legislation to do that. You have the tools at your disposal. The reason why it's being established is because that's campaigning. That's the difference between campaigning and promise made, promise kept even though it's a waste of public dollars. I find the irony, coming from a government who has apparently campaigned and platformed on being the stewards of public funds and on no more wastage, is actually putting forward and establishing an associate minister and a ministry and a piece of legislation and more regulations which will waste public funds – we know that there will be staffing involved with that – yet they claim to be the stewards of public funds.

To me, I'd simply come across and say that I've seen this before. I'm not even that old. I'm 41 years old. I began my practice and working in government 13 years ago, and I've already seen this go through one cycle already. Quite honestly, by all means, if this, you know, is going to get your tip of the hat to the people you said that you would – I don't know how it's going to actually achieve it because I've seen this cycle go through before, where they will try to calculate how many regulations we have and which ones are good and which ones are bad, and it's an impossible process to quantify. It's impossible to evaluate. In the end, all we'll have is a lot of public dollars spent on doing an exercise that has already been done by previous Conservative governments and to no end other than to cause a lot of rage. By all means, I think this is pure politics and this is not good governance, but I think that this government is going to find out the distinction between those two very quickly if they haven't already.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available to any members wishing to have a question or comment. I see the Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very excited listening to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud's comments. One of the things that I noticed during the press conference announcing this bill – and I'll tap into the member's experience from her past with this question. One of the things that was said was: there were 17 regulations already eliminated, and we've only been in government for 21 days. Now, the problem was that those weren't posted anywhere when asked. With your experience in the education world and whatnot, are there any concerns around potential changes maybe to things within education? Should they not be posted? Is that a concern? Do you think that there are people that would like to know about these things coming forward so that they could ask their input?

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Decore. I appreciate that question. You know, one of the funny things that I find in my experience, not only having worked in government but also having been part of a legislative review reviewing a large piece of legislation and regularly being involved in regulation reviews, is that it's quite amusing how governments seem to pick and choose when they want something to be transparent and when they don't.

The experience that I certainly had is that regulatory review processes exist. It's probably changed since my time in government. It's been about six years since I've been in government. There was always a very healthy process, but we knew that when difficult decisions were sometimes being put forward to government, particularly on things related to education, at least in my experience, there was actually a feeling of: we don't want to have to deal with those difficult decisions in legislation and in statute, so let's just leave it to regulation because that's where nobody will be paying attention. I've seen previous Conservative governments use that as a tool, as a way to sort of hide the messy details of sometimes having to deal with some things by saying: well, we'll just deal with that in regulation.

Look, there has to be a healthy balance between statutes and regulations containing the guiding principles and the objects for the system it's governing. There are certain details that do need to be properly in regulation, but it shouldn't be used as a political tool. My experience is that that's how it has been used by previous Conservative governments, always as a tool. When it suited them to not be transparent about something, they would put it in a regulation. I think we're already off on the same foot with respect to that. Yeah, I'm interested in knowing, too, what those 17 regulations are. I think that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction has been asked that question in the House, "Can you name one of those regulations?" and was unable to provide the name of one.

I don't know if once again regulations are being used as a tool to keep things hidden. I would be very interested in knowing. Certainly, that shouldn't be a secret, right? Regulations should be accessible to the public. They are accessible to the public, and most people should be able to pull them up with a quick search. If they're removed, I would certainly think and I would hope that the associate minister would put on their website which regulations were removed and why they were deemed to be no longer necessary. You know what? If that's true, I'm willing to say: hey, if those were unnecessary regulations, by all means remove them. We would like to have some efficiency as well.

But doing it in secret, doing it when people don't know why those regulations were removed and which ones they were speaks to me again about a secrecy and that statutes and regulations are being

used in different ways to hide different objectives. I would certainly welcome greater transparency on that. I think all Albertans have an obligation and have a right to know what regulations are in place and why they're being removed. We expect them to abide by them. Regulations have the force of law.

3:40

The other piece I want to mention, again going back to this idea of "Really, if there are inefficiencies in government, go ahead and fix them; you don't have to have an associate minister or legislation to do it," is that we know that regulations get the focus because they have the "r" name, the "r" word: regulations. That's what we're all afraid of, but really we know that there are a lot of things that actually slow down administrative processes, and it's not just regulations. We know that there are policies, there are handbooks, there are directives. The question really is: is this just about show, or is this to really make more efficiencies?

I look forward to the opportunity to see some efficiencies. I just think that we're off to a bad start if this government believes that in order to create efficiencies, they have to create more inefficient legislation and more regulations to do so. That speaks to me that the intent behind this is not actually about efficiencies; it's about political grandstanding.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other comments in the time remaining?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to Bill 4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's really my pleasure today to rise and speak to Bill 4, the Red Tape Reduction Act. Now, you'll know, Mr. Speaker, that I think perhaps the Red Tape Reduction Act could have had a bit more red tape in front of it. You'll see it's only two pages. It's quite the short document. It speaks to how hastily the Premier and his government put this bill together. It speaks to how hastily and without much forethought or foresight they gave to this bill – I mean, the bill contains basically nothing. It has no targets. It has no timelines. It does not define what the government considers red tape. It gives the associate minister blanket ability to create regulations and amend existing ones although the minister already had the ability to do this, so perhaps these two pages just make one extra layer of red tape and then do nothing else.

But, Mr. Speaker, it's very clear, when we look at this legislation that the minister has put forward before us, that the government is deciding to shoot first and ask questions later. They've decided to do no consultation, to do no research, and to not do the work that is required of a government, to not do the work that is required and the research, to go into a bill to make sure that it's a bill that Albertans need and will help improve the lives of Albertans.

This vague shell of a bill: we really don't know what it's going to do. I mean, I think that we should have some concerns about the bill. When they speak about what the Red Tape Reduction Act will do, Mr. Speaker, when members of the government speak about this, they don't talk about what they are removing. Are they removing things like environmental protections? Are they removing things like labour laws or labour protections? Are they removing the requirement to wear PPE on job sites? I mean, that's technically red tape if we go with this nondefinition that the government has presented to us. If we look at this bill, we don't even know if they mean that food service workers shouldn't have to wash their hands after leaving the washrooms. Those are all the types of regulations that are covered under the blanket

nondefinition of this bill. That's what the government is proposing when they bring this forward.

It would be hilarious if it wasn't a real piece of legislation that we are debating today and will likely have to vote for in the very near future. It would be something that would be laughable if it wasn't something that put the protections and safety of Albertans in jeopardy because the government didn't do their homework. It's something that we saw time and time again when the Premier said that he wouldn't consult with Albertans because his legislation was so important it had to be done quickly. His legislation was so important that Albertans did not deserve and could not be trusted, in fact, to be consulted. I think that's a shame. I think it's a shame that we now see bills like this which are rushed through the House with no consultation, no development. Frankly I don't even know if they spent any time writing it at all, Mr. Speaker. I've seen notes on napkins that were longer than this legislation. I think that's really a shame here.

Really, I think the question for this House today has to be: what is the point of creating a piece of legislation, a binding piece of red tape that must be followed in perpetuity, that only creates more red tape? I can't imagine how many hours have been put into deciding how many staff members the minister should have, how much those staff members in the minister's office should be paid, whether the minister should have a blue placard on his desk or a green placard on his desk. Mr. Speaker, this is something that we really need to look at and say: is this the best use of Alberta taxpayers' money and time?

Now, when we talk about what is going on in this bill – the ability, the power that it grants the minister to strike regulations, create regulations, remove regulations, all the things that ministers are expected to do in the due diligence of their jobs – what this bill actually says is that the minister should do his job. Now, I think the minister should be expected to do his job without this House having to legislate him to do his job. I think the minister should be perhaps – I hope the minister is capable of doing his job without the House legislating that. Perhaps I am wrong; I hope I am not, Mr. Speaker. I hope the minister would be able to do his job without members of the opposition and government benches having to force the minister to do his job.

But I hope that when the minister does his job, he doesn't go after the types of protections that his Premier did under the Harper government in Ottawa. I hope he doesn't go after and consider red tape to be things like whether we should allow toxic waste to be dumped in our waterways. I hope the minister doesn't consider that red tape. Without the definition in this bill, Mr. Speaker, it is impossible for us to know. It's impossible for us to know whether the minister considers waterway protection and toxic waste dumps to be red tape. I mean, we can see really clearly that while the Premier was in Ottawa under the Harper government, in Newfoundland the Sandy Pond area was destroyed under some reductions in what we could consider red tape by having 29 natural water bodies being used as toxic waste dumps, basically. We see that in Ottawa the Harper government and the Conservatives and the government the Premier was a part of cut millions of dollars from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, which resulted in fewer inspectors. In fact, we saw things like deadly outbreaks of diseases that actually killed Canadians.

When we're talking about red tape reduction without a clear definition, without actual research or any homework done in this bill, we simply see that we don't know what the minister will do. We don't know whether the minister will protect Albertans or go after the things that protect them. We don't know whether the minister will then decide that as a part of his job he needs to decide to support those corporations which donated so heavily to their

PACs, donated so heavily to making sure they were elected. We don't know who the minister will side with, ordinary Albertans or the wealthiest corporations.

Mr. Speaker, we simply don't know, and this legislation doesn't tell us. This legislation doesn't tell us much of anything. It doesn't tell us whether Albertans should be the ones that benefit from reductions in red tape or whether corporations should be the ones that benefit from reductions in red tape or, in fact, whether it's government members who are the ones that should benefit from reductions in red tape. If the legislation was maybe longer than a napkin, maybe we would be able to know that, and maybe then we could have a fulsome debate on the merits of the legislation. Unfortunately, it looks like, without the foresight and thought being put into this legislation, we won't be able to debate the benefits of reducing some regulations that may be burdensome to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, we know very clearly that we've seen failures in other jurisdictions, not just federally, that I've already mentioned, but in other jurisdictions like British Columbia. I mean, when Conservative governments and Premiers in British Columbia brought in action on reducing red tape, as they would say, we saw suddenly \$7 billion in dirty money being laundered through to British Columbia, which really inflated prices and hurt consumers. Really, we know that we don't want money laundering and illegal activity happening here in Alberta, but unless we can actually get some definitions and some ideas of what the minister is supposed to do with this legislation, we simply don't know. With his blanket empowerment in the legislation to do what he's already empowered to do and is indeed obligated to do, maybe the minister will decide that money laundering is one of those red tape things that we don't need to worry about. I think that is just something that the legislation doesn't make clear for us. That is something that I think members of the government should be concerned about.

3:50

I think members of the government should be concerned that the legislation is so short. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I know that you yourself as well as other members of the Conservative bench, when you were in opposition, spoke at length about how bills – and I believe it was our Bill 1 – were too short, that it should be a lengthier bill and that there should be research put into the bill. Now we see the government bench doing exactly what you spoke against and members of that exact government spoke against. In fact, I think the minister himself spoke against that. The minister himself spoke against bills that were too short, and now we see the minister bringing forward a bill that has nothing and empowers him to do nothing he's not already empowered to do.

I think there is something that is certainly to be said, Mr. Speaker, about how there is hypocrisy going on here in the government. Really, this hypocrisy is something that we can poke jest at here in the Assembly, but again it's something that Albertans will have to live with. It's something that our constituents, regardless of which political stripe you have, will have to live with. It's something that we will have to live with for the next four years.

I know, as my colleagues in the opposition have already mentioned, that the Red Tape Reduction Act, Mr. Speaker, is a very sexy, if you will, name. It's something that people are very excited about, that gets people excited during campaigns. But I will remind the government members that the campaign is over. The time to govern is now, and the time to move forward with making regulations and legislation that improve the lives of Albertans is now.

When we look at this bill, we can see very clearly that in its nondrafted form, the form that's being presented to the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, it does none of those things. It perhaps tells the

minister what he is supposed to do, which could have been done through a mandate letter, could have been done by perhaps just looking at the title of his ministry. Maybe the minister needs a bit more guidance than just the title of his ministry. I think that the legislation is definitely unnecessary.

But when we look at what is supposed to be brought to this Assembly, it's bills that make lives better. Perhaps the minister will be able to take this bill – well, he would have been able to do it anyways – and make the lives of the wealthiest 1 per cent better. Perhaps he'll take this bill and make the lives of corporate donors to groups that support the Conservatives better, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps that is the intention of what the minister wishes to do. I wouldn't know, and I wouldn't presume to speculate on that. But what I will say is that I think it's very clear that Albertans expect a government to bring legislation that improves their livelihood, and it's very clear that this bill does not do any of those things. It's very clear that if you don't spend the time that's needed to draft legislation and if you decide to not consult, to not research, to not do the work that is required to be a responsible government, a responsible and transparent government, then it's very clear that you end up with legislation that is too small to blow my nose on.

Mr. Speaker, I think that is something that is really a shame for us to see here in the Assembly. Something that is a shame for us to see is that members of the government, I believe, will likely vote this through without consulting at all around the issues, will likely vote this through and not have spent the time to actually maybe even read the two pages. I know that sometimes two pages can seem like a lot to read, but I can assure you that almost the entirety of page 1 of the bill is just preambles. You can probably skip that part. So, really, there are only four clauses in the whole bill. If members would spend the time to read the four clauses, they'll see that it's something that perhaps we don't need to spend all of this red tape on, creating legislation that directs the minister to do what he should already do.

Really, when we look at that, I think it's something where members of the government bench, self-proclaimed Conservatives and fiscal conservatives, self-proclaimed ones who are against red tape, can see pretty clearly that this bill does nothing. When they talk about how important it is to reduce the scope of government and reduce the size of government and reduce the burden of government, I think they can see pretty clearly that the four clauses put out in this bill, most of which fit on one page – I mean, the rest is just preambles, Mr. Speaker. We can see very clearly that either the Conservative members don't care that we're creating red tape or only care when it's not their own.

Mr. Speaker, when it's something that helps their wealthy friends and when it helps their wealthy allies, then perhaps that is okay, and maybe the government members are okay with that. If that's the case, then they have the prerogative to vote that way. I guess we will see very shortly when we do see that vote.

But I think, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans are watching when we pass legislation in this House. Albertans see the bills that we pass in this House, and they see who votes on those bills when we pass them in this House. They can see and they can read for themselves whether four lines that tell the minister to do his job is something that is worthy of this House. I think Albertans will make that decision for themselves.

Now, what we won't see, Mr. Speaker, though, is Conservative members making that decision for themselves, because we know that they really do think that creating more red tape through this bill will eliminate red tape, and maybe the minister does need that direction.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll leave it open for maybe someone to ask some questions or comments.

The Speaker: Anyone wishing to ask questions or make a comment under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any others that wish to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to have the opportunity this afternoon to participate in what has been a robust and, I'm sure, incredibly engaging discussion for all members of the Assembly today on what cannot really be called a robust piece of legislation but certainly one which has prompted some, I think, good discussion.

I think that, in all honesty, we recognize that what we have in front of us today is a piece of legislation that is more about show than it is about actual substance, and fair enough. I recognize that for a new government coming into office, it makes sense that you want to follow through on campaign promises, that you want to follow through on things you said, and that you want to do some of those. Some of those promises may not themselves have had a lot of substance to them. They may have been something that sounded good and certainly appeal to, I guess, the sentiments of certain aspects of the folks that you're reaching out to and where, once in government, then you need to do something to demonstrate that you are taking action on that even if there wasn't really significant action that needed to be taken. But fair enough. It is within the prerogative of government, within the prerogative of this minister to bring forward this legislation for this purpose and to bring it in for us to debate, so I will stand here in this House today and I will have a discussion about it.

Now, one of the things about this bill, Mr. Speaker, that many others have raised and which I also sort of share a concern about is that there is so little here and that indeed there is so little defining what actually falls within the parameters of what the government wishes to do. I don't think you would find any member of this House that would disagree with the idea that we want to reduce regulation, that we want to reduce red tape. By all means. I know, for myself, that when I stepped into this office and had the opportunity, I worked to try to set up robust systems within my constituency office, within how I interacted with my caucus, how I worked with government ministers at the time. I think that's a reasonable thing to do when you start out in any process. You try to set up good and proper systems to organize and make sure that you're not dropping balls or missing e-mails and making sure that everything is set up well.

I think we all recognize that over time, for any system that is set up by people, as it grows increasingly complex, as you add more layers and elements to it, as you add more stakeholders, as you add new duties, the system that you use, then, to organize and control things also gets more complex. It makes sense that over time you need to sit down every once in a while and take a look at that system and say: "Hey, is this still serving the purpose that I set it up to serve? Is this still accomplishing the goals that I, in fact, wanted to accomplish?" So I have no issue with the government saying that they want to make that a priority during their mandate, to sit down and thoughtfully and carefully look at systems. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, you will probably find few systems so complex as those that are used to run a province, and that's for good reason.

We recognize that when government began, it was of a smaller scope. It had fewer things that it had to manage. Indeed, human government, when it began – and I won't go into a full history lesson here, recognizing that, of course, we started out with very local government. That made it easier to manage because you're very close to the ground. But as we progressed as a society, it got broader. We took on more responsibilities for larger numbers of people. It requires increasingly complex systems to handle that. It

makes sense, then, that, yeah, when we get to the level of a provincial government, we're going to have some pretty complicated stuff going on.

4:00

There are probably some places where we could do much better in how we approach things, but the other thing to keep in mind, Mr. Speaker, is that when we are dealing with these complex systems that have grown up over time, that are connected with so many different things, when we begin to make changes within those systems, they can have impacts that ripple out in ways that we may not have recognized. There's a phrase that comes to mind that perhaps you've heard in this House: unintended consequences. I'm sure it is something that has never before been uttered within these walls. But we recognize that when we are dealing with complex systems and we are wanting to make them simpler, we have to be very careful that the adjustments we make within those systems don't have consequences that we didn't anticipate and don't cause further damage.

Again, I have no issue with the commitment of this government to make changes to systems. It's my hope that they will do so very thoughtfully and carefully and with careful consultation. The concern is, when they feel the need to put this into a piece of legislation, that they provide so little detail and very little for us to be able to understand precisely what it is that they intend to do and what they precisely consider to be red tape. The reason, Mr. Speaker, that is of concern to me is because of previous, I guess, rhetoric I have seen, sometimes from conservative politicians, sometimes from individuals in the community. We fall back to ideas and terms like common sense.

I think back, Mr. Speaker, to July 2017, when there was an article that came up on the Internet, came up on Twitter – it was being bandied about quite a bit – about a gentleman in Etobicoke, Ontario. There was a community garden, and going down to that community garden was a slope. That slope was difficult for some people to navigate, indeed, particularly for seniors in the community, so they had been petitioning the city council in Etobicoke to build a set of stairs. Now, I recognize that city council, the provincial government are not always the speediest to act, that there can be a lot of competing priorities and things that can slow things down. But at one point, apparently there were some estimates that were done that estimated that a flight of stairs for this short section of slope, which was leading down from a parking lot and had a few other factors involved, came to as much as \$65,000.

There was a huge hue and outcry about this ridiculous thing because one gentleman in the community went and just simply built his own set of stairs. He took the initiative himself. He spent \$550 on supplies and hiring a local homeless man to help him build those stairs, and there they were. They were available to the community. There was much discussion online about red tape, talking about: "See? How much easier could this have been? Government just had to complicate it, make it so expensive, make this problematic. Obviously it's better if we just do things the simple way."

The fact is that the city of Etobicoke later had to go back and remove those stairs. Now, the reason for that was because those stairs actually were unsafe. We have to recognize that there is a difference between what I choose to do in my home and what I choose to set up for myself and what I choose to set up for public use and the issues of liability and all the other pieces that come into that. In the end, those stairs had to be removed, and there were many who decried that and said that that's government red tape, government bureaucracy, that sort of thing. In the end, city hall was able to build another set of stairs. I understand the cost ended up being about \$10,000 to build a proper set of stairs that ensured that

the legal liabilities and health and safety standards and everything were met.

I certainly commend that individual for coming forward and, I guess, pressing city hall on that, but we recognize that there are reasons why some regulations and bureaucracy exist. My concern, Mr. Speaker, is that at times I hear people talking about red tape and bureaucracy without the recognition that it, in fact, does have a place. If we are not defining in this legislation what it is that we are talking about and how we are going to thoughtfully approach this and guarantee that, in fact, the minister will exercise due diligence, then we could be getting into areas where we begin to perhaps make mistakes.

I recognize that in many ways people look at red tape and bureaucracy, and they consider it simply to be a Gordian knot; the Gordian knot, of course, being a part of, I think, ancient Greek or Roman mythology – I forget which – but basically an extremely tangled knot, very hard. It was a task that they set for a hero, to try to untie it. I forget who the Greek hero was or the Roman hero, but – you know what? – the clever guy that solved the Gordian knot pulled out his sword, and he cut it in half.

An Hon. Member: Alexander.

Mr. Shepherd: Alexander. Thank you.

I recognize that maybe that was the solution there, but in some cases we're not simply dealing with a knot which is just hanging there and not really attached to anything important. Sometimes we're dealing with the very lifelines which are protecting our communities, which are protecting people's health, which are supporting very important processes within the province, and to simply come through and try to cleave them down the middle is to invite chaos, disorder, and possibly injury to the public.

It makes sense to me that in discussing these issues, we be perhaps a bit more thoughtful than the level of rhetoric, for lack of a better term – and "rhetoric" in itself is not a terrible word but is often used in that way – that we've heard from government on this. Again, I can understand that this is a flagship issue for them and one on which they want to feel good, but really I would prefer to see that government proceed in a more thoughtful way, perhaps with fewer slogans, more detail, and a better understanding.

One of the other reasons for that, Mr. Speaker, is that, you know, at times I have seen that there can be a bent amongst some conservatives to vilify red tape on things that they personally like or that they want to see happen but then turn and want to apply it on anything that they dislike. Perhaps that's why some folks who have more rightward leanings look at regulations so negatively, because they themselves only apply it to things which they are trying to eliminate.

I think back, Mr. Speaker, to when we were having federal discussions around supervised consumption sites, the original site, Insite in Vancouver, and we saw the federal government under Prime Minister Stephen Harper try to take every possible step it could to eliminate that site. I don't know why. For some reason they felt that that offended their morals, offended their ideology. I'm not sure. They took every possible step, and it took a court ruling to actually stop them in their tracks. They could not actually defund or stop that site from operating; instead, they tried to regulate it to death and indeed make it far more difficult for any other jurisdiction in this country to set up a similar life-saving medical service.

Now, Mr. Speaker, again, I am in agreement with reasonable regulation, and there are reasonable regulations in place. Thankfully, the federal government which we currently have, whether I agree with them on all things, which I don't – certainly, I

did agree with and appreciate the fact that they simplified, they reduced red tape around jurisdictions being able to set up supervised consumption sites. Now, to be clear, the rules, the regulations in place are still robust. Indeed, when the business association here in Edmonton, you know, took the providers of the current supervised consumption sites to court, the court took a look at it, and they dismissed that case. They said that, in fact, they had met all of those criteria and that it had been a robust process of regulation and consultation that put those sites in place.

But, again, we have seen from some individuals who identify themselves as conservatives that they view regulation as a weapon, as a way to eliminate things which they dislike. I think back, Mr. Speaker, to when we were having discussions in this House about regulations that were being brought into place to support the legalization of cannabis. Indeed, there were members who were at that time on this side of the House and now sit on the other side of the House who were very concerned that perhaps there was not enough regulation being put in place around when and where individuals could consume cannabis. I think those are, again, appropriate questions to discuss, and I think we're here for the very purpose of discussing regulation and how that went forward. But it became clear to me that for some members of this House it was not so much about the public good, it was not so much about reasonable regulation or smooth operation as it was about their personal discomfort with the use of cannabis.

4:10

Again, Mr. Speaker, that brings me back around to the legislation and the fact that what we have here is a fairly vague and ill-defined bill, very aspirational in its content but potentially significant in its impact. Given the enormous responsibility that is entrusted to us as legislators in this province to ensure the safety and the protection of the Alberta public, to make sure that the rules and the regulations that we are putting in place are there for the benefit of the public . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if there's anyone who has a question or comment for the member.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I was listening with rapt attention to the Member for Edmonton-City Centre. I regret deeply that he was cut off in the middle of his comment, and I'm wondering if he is able to complete his thought.

The Speaker: Thank you to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre, if you'd like to continue.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe I've made my thoughts clear. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other questions or comments for the member?

Seeing none, are there any others who wish to speak to Bill 4? The Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, hon. Speaker. I would request unanimous consent to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 2

An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business

[Adjourned debate May 29: Ms Renaud]

The Speaker: Hon. members, Bill 2 is available for debate. Are there any wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is rising.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and speak to Bill 2, which is, in effect, an act to pick the pockets of the workers, of the people of Alberta. I want to touch on three provisions that I find particularly troublesome in the legislation and associated regulations.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

First of all, I of course want to express my deep, deep reservations about the government's move to create a youth minimum wage for students who are under the age of 18. I know that this is a move that will not be very popular with young people in the province of Alberta. In fact, the other day I had the opportunity to conduct an impromptu focus group with some youth here in the province of Alberta, specifically my children, who are the ages of 11 and 8, on the drive to school. We were talking about finding work and getting summer employment, and I told them that the members opposite had decided that students under the age of 18 should have their wages cut by \$2 an hour. Instantly they both cried out that that was not fair, that just because you were a student and under the age of 18 shouldn't mean that you make \$2 an hour less than somebody who is doing the same job but is over the age of 18.

It's curious to me, of course, that these young, engaged Albertans who I was driving to school would immediately see the unfairness in this proposal, yet the members opposite don't. The only thing I could use to explain it, Mr. Speaker, is that, you know, my children aren't really engaged in political matters in the province. In fact, they spend most of their time on the Internet looking at pictures of cats. So they come to this issue of minimum wage with fresh eyes, and they don't have their minds clouded with hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations to associated political action committees made by organizations like Restaurants Canada and the Motor Dealers' Association of Alberta, who are, of course, clouding the minds of the members and making it seem to them like it's a good idea to reduce the minimum wage.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when they asked me why they decided to reduce the minimum wage, I used the words that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed used to justify this when he spoke to I believe it was the Calgary Chamber of commerce. I can't remember. I told them that as students who were under the age of 18, they have less human capital than somebody who's not a student and is 18. Of course, as you can imagine, that wasn't a satisfactory answer to my children, and I don't think it's a satisfactory answer to any student who is under the age of 18. This argument that you are a person of lesser worth goes against the very dignity that is inherent in all work, and I think that anybody who proposes that line of thinking should maybe give some reconsideration and certainly not stand in this legislative Chamber and talk about how compassionate they are when they give their responses to the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, you know, as troubled as I am by this move by the members opposite to cut youth wages, I do see some good coming from it in that at least nobody under the age of 18 now will ever, ever vote for the UCP. I'm looking forward to the massive influx of young people who are motivated to throw the members opposite out of office at the earliest opportunity so that they can get a fair wage back. I thank the members opposite for creating an entire generation of NDP supporters, that I think will benefit all of the people of Alberta in the next election and going forward from there.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, the other aspect that I wanted to touch on that troubled me about this bill was, of course, the move to pick workers' pockets by eliminating some specific general holiday pay. You know, under our government we made anybody who was hired at any time eligible for general holidays regardless of how many days that they worked. Even if those general holidays fell on a day upon which the employees wouldn't normally work, a Saturday or a Sunday, they would still be eligible for that holiday pay.

Now, Mr. Speaker, of course, you know, as many members of this Chamber know, that the people of Alberta haven't had a real wage increase in a number of years. In fact, if you look at the data, the average worker in Alberta has seen an overall decline in their earning power over the last decade or so because real wages haven't increased. The people of Alberta are upset by this because it's not pain that's equally shared. The data shows that people in the highest income brackets in this province continue to receive more and more of the wealth that's created in the province while the other 90 per cent of the province are left behind. They continually are losing faith that the system that we've created will work to their benefit.

You know, the members opposite were elected on this rising tide of anger at the system. The members opposite told them that they would get jobs and prosperity, but what they're really getting is another cut to their wages in the form of having holiday pay reduced. Mr. Speaker, it makes no sense, at a time when workers in Alberta haven't seen their real wages increase in a number of years, to actually be lowering them. To take away general holiday pay on a day on which it normally falls – normally I would use the word "Scrooge" to describe that, but at least Scrooge gave his employee an extra lump of coal on Christmas Day. In fact, this legislation takes away even that, so employees who are not normally employed on Christmas Day when Christmas falls on a Saturday or Sunday will get nothing. Under our government they were entitled to a day's worth of pay, and now the members opposite are taking that away from them.

4:20

I think that that's the opposite of compassion, Mr. Speaker. The people of Alberta work hard all year. They look forward to celebrating Christmas with their families, and to know that they're now getting a pay cut because they're taking that day off or, you know, the government has decided that it's too expensive to pay them a Christmas holiday will create a lot of unhappiness and anger amongst the people of Alberta, and rightly so.

The final point that I want to make, Mr. Speaker, is of course on taking away overtime banking. Now, this is an area that I have a lot of personal experience in. Prior to moving to the civil service, I was an environmental consultant for a couple of different consulting companies here in the city of Edmonton, and it was standard practice for professional engineers and geologists working for these firms to work overtime hours but only to bank those hours at a 1 to 1 rate. Now, the members opposite, when they rolled out this legislation, of course, trumpeted the so-called flexibility that it would give workers to negotiate more overtime with their employers, and nothing could be further from the truth. When I was employed in the private sector, it was never offered to me as an option to work overtime. It was an unstated expectation. Of course, that was not just me; everybody was expected to work overtime and expected to bank that overtime at a 1 to 1 rate.

Now, you know, the principle around paying people overtime comes from this really old-fashioned idea that the day should be evenly divided up into three separate segments: eight hours for work, eight hours for personal time, and eight hours for sleep. The reason that we pay people overtime when they work more than eight hours a day is because it's cutting into the valuable personal time

and rest time that people need to be able to live good lives. That's why we pay them more for overtime hours, Mr. Speaker. And if we are going to pay them overtime hours in cash, it seems only fair to me that we should also pay them in time in lieu at a 1 to 1.5 rate.

Mr. Speaker, you know, working as an environmental consultant, of course, you can see for yourself the exploitation, I guess, that employers put their employees through. Certainly, I know that I was charged out at approximately \$150 an hour when I was employed. I got less than a third of that. The rest, of course, went to my employer.

This was not easy work. The overtime hours that I put into the job were not overtime hours that I spent in the comfort of an office but were, in fact, overtime hours that I spent in the furthest corners of the province in incredibly challenging working conditions. I spent many months away from my family and my home, working in places like Zama City, Fort Chipewyan, places where it's either 40 below and freezing or 40 above and mosquitos so thick that you can't see the people standing next to you. To know that I was enriching my employer at the expense of myself and my family was difficult to swallow, so I was quite happy when our government brought forward legislation that at least compensated my former colleagues who continued to work in this field at a 1.5 overtime banking rate because at least they were able to get a little bit ahead working those expected overtime hours under incredibly trying conditions.

It seems to me to be grossly unfair to my colleagues who continue to work in that field to take that away from them and to say: "You know what? We think that your employers need a raise and that you need to cut your wages, so we're going to remove this banking scheme that was implemented only a couple of years ago."

I don't understand the necessity of any of these changes, Mr. Speaker. Nobody here will dispute the fact that Alberta is going through a period of higher than usual unemployment. Certainly, we in this Chamber all have a common desire to get Albertans back to work, but of course we differ significantly in our views on what would be successful measures to get Albertans back to work.

I think it's important to notice that none of the changes that are presented in this bill and the associated regulations are in place in any other jurisdiction in the country. If you go to B.C. or Saskatchewan or Ontario, you know, you will have the same sort of general holiday pay that the members opposite are taking away here, and you will have the same overtime banking arrangements that the members opposite are taking away here. It's funny that those kinds of arrangements have been in place in places like B.C., Saskatchewan, and Ontario, with no seeming effect on unemployment in those provinces. In fact, with those very same worker protections in place, the unemployment in those provinces is lower than it is in Alberta.

I wonder why it is that if those measures have no impact on unemployment levels in other provinces, it wouldn't work here. What is it that's magical about Alberta that means that we need to pay workers less, take away their hard-earned holiday and overtime pay, and give their employers a raise just so they can create jobs? I would like the members opposite to actually stand up and tell us why Alberta is exceptional in that fact and why Alberta workers don't deserve the same kinds of protections that their fellow Canadian workers in every other jurisdiction in the country deserve.

So, Mr. Speaker, I encourage all of my colleagues to vote against this bill.

The Speaker: Members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Questions or comments? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was listening very, very intently to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar about his concerns with this bill. Of course, my history is very much rooted in labour. I can almost already hear the teeth-gnashing going on from members opposite when I say the word "union." I'm very thankful that I was part of a workplace that had a union because at least there was some degree of protections that were afforded.

One of the things that I used to always advise my members when I was a shop steward over at my workplace and, of course, when I was relieving through my union was to never build your life around overtime. I will concede that there's no mandate that an employer has to provide you with overtime, okay? Overtime is meant to help the company out when they find that they're short-staffed, be it in various forms. It could be that somebody is away, that somebody is sick, that somebody is on maternity leave, whatever the case may be. All right? It is a voluntary act by that person to step up and say: I'll work those hours to help you out. The exchange is, as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar mentioned, to take time away from your family, your friends, your other commitments, your sleep, whatever the case may be. That was the reward for doing that.

So when I hear things about taking away people's overtime pay – I mean, at the end of the day, overtime is overtime. You don't define it in any other way, so if you're going to pay it out to them in overtime pay, you would pay it out to them in overtime hours as well.

4:30

What I was hoping that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar might be able to do is talk a little bit – he had also mentioned around the different wages. Maybe the member might talk a little bit around the proposed liquor service differential wage. I know very, very clearly that a lot of workers in that industry are women. My experience, again, through the labour movement was of women being exploited through a wage differential. In order to be able to make those tips, some businesses – and I even remember protesting one just close by here, by the Legislature, Mr. Speaker. They wanted them to wear revealing outfits so that it would help them to generate more tips because of the wage differential. I was hoping that maybe the member might be able to comment on that a little bit as well as on some of the other things that I've mentioned.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I made an offer to my constituents that I would also wear revealing clothing for their tips, but I have to say that citizens of Edmonton-Gold Bar rejected that offer resoundingly. So I will look for other ways to supplement my income, I guess.

The Member for Edmonton-Decore is correct that tipping is not a stable form of income. In fact, it's not fair. There are a number of people who work in retail and the fast-food industry who don't get tips. I'm thinking of people who, you know, work at chain restaurants, fast-food restaurants, those kinds of places, who do work that's very similar to people who work in other restaurants, but they don't get tips, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we all know that tipping is not a fair way to compensate people for the work that they're doing.

Mr. Speaker, I lived for a number of years in Germany, where tipping is not part of the culture, and the reason it's not part of the culture is because Germans pay their food servers a fair wage. To tip a worker is actually insulting to them because it's implied that they are not getting paid enough or are not being recognized for the value of what they're doing. I think that we need to move to a similar system here in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any others wishing to add some additional comments to the debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View rising.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of comments to make on Bill 2, this, of course, having been an area in which I worked in my previous life. I will make those comments, but I would like to begin by moving an amendment. I'm moving it on behalf of the MLA for Edmonton-Manning, and I would like to seek your indulgence to have it amended at the table.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. If you can pass the documents through to the pages, we'll just review it at the table and distribute it as such, and then I'll let you know to proceed when necessary.

For the benefit of all members in the Chamber the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View will be moving this amendment on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. On the original document, that's kept at the table, we will make the amendment to the document to reflect that change. If you are so inclined and you'd like to make the change on your document for your records – I'm sure you're all keeping extensive personal records of amendments and otherwise – you would be welcome to do so. Having said that, obviously it's not required as the table will keep track of that.

Having said all those things, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Manning I move an amendment which says something similar to: that An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 2, An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, I think that referring this bill to a committee for further consideration is certainly a worthwhile aim. Certainly, amendments that were brought forward to these bills, to labour and to employment bills in the previous session, were heavily considered and discussed. I feel that we shouldn't rush to be making these changes in this particular case. I think it's worth discussing some of the changes that the government has been making in terms of labour and employment act changes generally. Certainly, one of those changes has to do with amendments to the minimum wage, and another one has to do with changes to how overtime is paid. Obviously, the minimum wage tends to be a regulation under this act, but I think that all of these things move together.

I continue to be of the belief, as stated earlier today when we were discussing corporate tax cuts, that the best way to stimulate the economy is to put money into the hands of those who are middle and lower income earners because they do tend to return a larger portion of that money to the local economy, and that tends to create jobs for other individuals.

I think it's worth noting that in talking about how youth workers, workers under the age of 18, don't need the same minimum wage, well, I think it takes a very specific perspective. It takes a perspective that, admittedly, I myself grew up in, the perspective of middle-class or above children whose parents have already saved for their university education and who may be working jobs but not necessarily supporting themselves in the same way. But that isn't the case for everyone.

Certainly, I spent a number of years working at a chain restaurant, and I actually had the dubious honour of working in pretty much every position in that particular restaurant. One of the individuals I worked with, who worked washing dishes, was in fact in high school – so it wouldn't be the case that he had left high school and that the changes didn't apply to him. He was still studying, which was actually impressive in light of his circumstances. He was 16 years old. He lived with his 12-year-old brother. He paid the rent in order to support both of them because they were not safe at home. To suggest that somehow that individual wasn't worthy of the same income or didn't need the same income I think would be a little absurd. Even beyond that, whether a young person is saving for school or whatever they're doing with their money, I think, generally – I'm surprised that it's this side speaking in favour of market economies – it's not really the government's job to pass judgment on what you do with your money.

I think that certainly it's possible that people end up in these tragic situations, where they aren't safe with their parents, and they are still going through school, and they need income to support themselves and to support siblings or possibly even to support their own parents. These are definitely situations that exist, but it's also the case that many young people are saving for university. I think that's a laudable goal, but regardless of the goals, if we're going to say that you're old enough to work, you're old enough to earn your income, you're old enough to decide how you spend it, and the government shouldn't be peeking into your pocketbook and trying to determine whether or not you're worthy of the same wage as everyone else. I disagree strongly with that.

4:40

There are a number of other changes in labour and employment law that frustrate me. I think of one of them, you know, when we talk about: oh, well, employers and employees will sort of negotiate for whether or not people take lieu time or whether or not it's paid out. Well, they don't really negotiate. Certainly, I spent a number of years also working at a bank – it kind of sounds like I've had every job in the book here – but there was no negotiation. The employer required that you take your time as time in lieu. There was no getting paid out, and the reason was because they didn't want to pay extra. That's certainly a thing that occurs.

You know, in my case I was free to leave that job, but there were a number of people that were working in the same role that I was, that were working as bank tellers, that were single mothers, because it's a job that you can get fairly easily. It's a job you work during the daytime, when child care is open. A lot of those people needed that job, so they were in a position where they couldn't argue with their employer. I think that's the challenge when people sort of talk about this, "Oh, well, you'll just negotiate, or you'll just work it out," because it's a myth that there's equal power. It's a myth that somehow the employee has equal bargaining power.

Certainly, some employees do have equal bargaining power, maybe not equal but more bargaining power. For instance, obviously, my previous career was as a lawyer. I was exempted from the Employment Standards Code in that profession. You'll frequently hear from articling students that they've sort of worked 100-hour weeks, and if you worked out what they made, it's significantly below minimum wage, but there's a difference there, right? There's a difference in terms of their sort of access to information and to bargaining power, and there's a reason that those professions are sometimes exempted from the Employment Standards Code. Yeah, it's debatable. Let's just say that it's debatable. But this idea that employees, particularly employees in something like a restaurant, have equal bargaining power and that

the employer is going to negotiate with them: I just think it's wrong-headed.

I think another thing we ought to take the time to consider, which could be done at this committee, is the role of unions. You know, members in this House seem to, without having a really good understanding of the impact that unions have, talk at length about them in very negative ways, which I think is very unfair. In fact, if you look – and one of the areas I practised in was human rights – there's actually quite a lot of overlap between human rights law and labour and employment law. The reason for that is that most employees don't necessarily have the funds or ability to hire a private lawyer and pursue their rights in the context of a workplace.

The result of that is that in order for employees to be able to pursue those rights, they have to band together, they have to work together and pool their common resources, which are considerably lesser than the employers', in order to make that headway, and how they do that is unions. That's pretty much precisely what unions do. In fact, many of the major human rights cases that are cited actually have the name of the union on them because it was the union that pursued those cases, because they had the ability to do that.

In any democracy, I guess, there are going to be those who disagree with the will of the majority. That's always going to happen, and actually one of the beauties of democracy is that the majority rules but that some people will disagree. The idea is that, you know, we get a majority opinion from workers. They want to pool their combined resources, they want to be able to effect change in their workplace, they want to affect the safety of their fellow workers, they want to affect the income of their fellow workers, they want to affect the working conditions of their fellow workers, or maybe they just want to all band together and stand up and change a rule. Maybe they think that there should be greater parental leave, or maybe they think that greater accommodation should be made for employees who have disabilities, or maybe they think any number of things.

To say, "While the majority of workers have ruled in its favour, we can find one person who's unhappy, who for whatever reason doesn't particularly like the way the union is going, so that proves that workers' rights are being trampled" – well, Mr. Speaker, I can certainly find one person who is unhappy with this current government. I am such a person. It doesn't necessarily mean that the people's rights are being trampled. That may or may not be the case, but it isn't a necessary outcome of the fact that some people disagree with the will of the majority.

I think it's worth taking the time to consider the value of things like unions. You know, over the years they fought for a lot of the things that we enjoy today. They fought for worker safety. They fought for reasonable working hours. They fought for reasonable notice of things like shift changes. Some people say, I think wrongly, that they're not necessary anymore. I don't think that's true. I think, given how our understanding of workplace injury is evolving, that that's definitely not true. There are posttraumatic stress injuries that first responders suffer that we've only come to understand recently, and it's the job of their unions or their associations to fight to ensure that those new types of injuries, those new types of on-the-job injuries that we've only just recognized, are protected in the same way that previous things were.

Certainly, groups of employees come together in unions, and they've lobbied the past government for changes that were made with respect to the acknowledgement that certain types of cancer are caused by occupations. I think there are a lot of changes that still need to be made going forward. We always say that when we know better, we do better. I think that as the world evolves and as more and more people recognize new types of injuries or we have new types of employment, unions are still going to have a role to

play. I think that allowing the majority of workers to come together and form a union and decide on their common destiny and work together – I mean, I think there's nothing more innately human, innately community based than to say, you know: "All of us have a common interest. Let us work together in order to achieve that."

I think this amendment will allow us to take the time to consider these and other changes. There were a lot of changes that were made to the labour and employment codes. There were a lot of protected leaves that were brought in, and I think many of those had beneficial impacts. I remember at the time the now government, the then opposition members speaking at length about how these weren't real things that existed, that they weren't real problems. But they were real problems. They were real problems that I frequently got phone calls about every day from people in those actual situations, people calling to say: I had to take time off because my child was ill and ultimately passed away, and my employer is trying to terminate me. Those were real phone calls from real people.

I think that ensuring we have modern workplace legislation is critical. I actually think that it's beneficial for the employer as well. I think that healthy, well-taken-care-of employees who are happy help move their company forward.

With that, I will say thank you and sit down.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available for questions and comments.

Seeing none, are there any others who wish to speak to referral amendment 1? I see the hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration standing.

4:50

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak to the amendment proposed by the hon. member, basically suggesting that we actually move Bill 2 to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future. I recognize the concerns raised by the hon. member. She had concerns about the complications associated with the items in Bill 2. Quite frankly, none of this is complicated. Now, we were pretty clear in our platform about the changes that we actually wanted to make. The changes, the vast majority of the changes, are simply going back to what we had before. This is not new. This is not special. What this is doing is actually going back to the law that we had prior to the previous government making changes – right? – so that we can create jobs and restore workplace balance and workers' rights.

The member opposite also spoke at great length concerning the youth minimum wage, you know, stating that it's unfair to youth. But what's unfair to youth was the previous government increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, the highest in the country, and reducing the job opportunities for youth. Again, our change in terms of the youth minimum wage is to create jobs for Alberta's youth, to get them working so they can actually save up for school and assist their families or for whatever they want. Quite frankly, \$13 an hour is far better than zero dollars an hour if the youth don't have jobs. That said, I'd also like to point out that Bill 2 doesn't deal with the youth minimum wage.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we were very clear in our platform that these are the changes that we wanted to make, that are included in Bill 2. Albertans voted on it, and we want to deliver on our promises. This is not complicated.

With that, I do not support this amendment, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to adjourn debate on this issue.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Ms Glasgo moved, seconded by Ms Rosin, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois Mitchell, CM, AOE, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Debate adjourned June 3]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak? I believe I see the hon. Member for Peace River standing.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise today to give my speech in response to the Speech from the Throne, and I begin with a word of thank you. A great statesman once said that gratitude is not only the greatest of all virtues but also the parent of all others. Indeed, gratitude is the greatest of all virtues because it is the plainest. Anything a man has, be it food or clothing, knowledge or wealth, he must receive from another. I've received much, and therefore I've much to be grateful for. I'll begin with four thank yous: first, to the voters of the Peace River constituency; second, to my country, our Queen, her Lieutenant Governor, and this Chamber; third, to my family; and fourth, to my God.

To the constituents of Peace River: thank you. Thank you for electing me to represent you here in Alberta's Legislature. Alberta is, of course, God's own province, but I must inform this House that God does play favourites, and Peace River is God's own constituency in God's own province, the most beautiful corner of the province and, might I add, the largest corner at that.

The history of my riding begins with the First Nation peoples – the Dene Tha', the Tallcree, the Beaver, among other nations – our first inhabitants and the first entrepreneurs living on the bountiful land and travelling up and down the mighty Peace River. Among the first Europeans in my constituency was Alexander Mackenzie, from 1789 through to 1793, on his first voyages across North America, a decade before Lewis and Clark, I might remind our American brothers. After his first trip through the constituency of the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, he was so disappointed with his experience that he named the now Mackenzie River "Disappointment River." Mr. Speaker, I feel compelled to inform the House that Mackenzie, being a man of refined taste and high intelligence, made no such comment after passing through my constituency only a few short years later.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, after crossing the continent, Sir Alexander Mackenzie entered into a career of politics, like many of us. In June 1804 he was elected to the House of Assembly of Lower Canada. During his tenure in the House, to the certain disappointment of his government whip, he attended only one session out of the four years, and he explained later that he was heartily tired of legislation. It was a different age.

I also wish to report to this House that in the far reaches of my constituency even today farmers are still breaking new farmland, not unlike our Dominion and its creation some many years ago. Canada's first nationalist, D'Arcy McGee, who might be familiar to some members of this House as he was quoted by our Premier at the swearing-in of many of us as MLAs, said in the early days of Canada:

Here, every man is the first settler of the land, or removed from the first settler one or two generations at the farthest – here, we

have no architectural monuments calling up old associations – here, we have none of those old popular legends and stories which in other countries have exercised a powerful share in the Government – here, every man is the son of his own works.

Likely he spoke of the Laurentian Hills or perhaps of the plains next to Lake Ontario, but it could easily be said again today of the frontier that is north Peace Country in my constituency. The pioneering spirit of the people and the get 'er done attitude, as we're all familiar with, would have made Mackenzie, David Thompson, and the rest feel quite at home in today's north Peace Country. Mr. Speaker, I know this House and all of my predecessors would agree that the north in Alberta truly is the new west.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'll be remiss if I do not also note for the benefit of my hon. colleagues the sheer enormity of my constituency. At over 109,222 square kilometres, that's 16.5 per cent of the land mass of Alberta. It is 1.5 times the size of New Brunswick, the same size as the island of Newfoundland, more than three times the size of Belgium, and it is over 227,272 times larger than the smallest state, Vatican City.

My home is closer, as the crow flies, to Yellowknife, the capital of the Northwest Territories, than to this capital building in this tropical city right now, and of course I try not to draw any parallels between my geography in the province and the geography of my current seat in relation to the front bench.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, to my constituents: I thank you. For your confidence and your commitment to both myself and to the conservative values I ran to represent, I thank you.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my country, Canada, Her Majesty the Queen, her representative the Lieutenant Governor, to whose speech I'm supposed to be responding, and, finally, this Assembly and its members, both past and present. These institutions of tradition in our society did not appear overnight. No, they arose, as the common law has, from time immemorial. Generations of statesmen have risen and fallen, washing over these institutions, refining them, defining them, dignifying them, just as waves wash over harsh rocks, making them into jewels. And that is our heritage here. It is a jewel that has been preserved and polished for us.

Tradition has lent this 30th Legislature her strong arm and has pulled us up to great heights. In our present age, which values progress above all else, the role of tradition can be easily forgotten, but we must remember, Mr. Speaker, as Chesterton wrote:

[Tradition] is the democracy of the dead. [It] means giving a vote to [the] most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. . . . Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about [today]. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of [their] birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of [their] death. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our groom; tradition asks us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our father.

Our Legislature and cabinet are institutional manifestations of this tradition by making present the will of the people, the rule of law for all Albertans, and the Crown, our sovereign authority to govern in this Chamber. This Legislature is the continuity of the political patrimony of all of our western civilization. We members are the stewards of that and nearly a millennium of tradition and history that allows me to speak freely in this Chamber on behalf of my constituents today.

The seed that was planted nearly 1,000 years ago at Runnymede in 1215, when King John signed the Magna Carta, has blossomed into a tree, and that tree has borne good fruit for us. But trees must be tended; our institutions must be guarded, both within and without. Tradition is a living being. Like all living beings, it must be pruned and cultivated. Culture is the means whereby we cultivate

our traditions and guard our institutions. These traditions, however, are not playthings to be manipulated or corpses to mutilate.

When cultivating and pruning our traditions, we must always keep the words of William Wordsworth in our mind when he said that we must not murder to dissect. The tree, once felled, lies dead, and no fruit will be borne from her boughs. So it is true with our traditions. Any attempt at a clean break from tradition is akin to hewing off our own legs, and as soon as you cut them off, Mr. Speaker, we are not going anywhere anytime soon. Therefore, we owe all our predecessors and our ancestors gratitude, and I thank them now for all the service that they have done for future generations, our current generation.

5:00

Third, Mr. Speaker, I thank my family. Every one of us in this House has a family to whom we owe thanks. The family is the first and fundamental of all institutions that populate our society. It is in the family that our children first learn to speak, to know right from wrong, selfless service to siblings, and it is in the family that our children are taught fundamental truths and the most deeply held convictions that we hold. John Paul II believed that: “the history of mankind, the history of salvation, passes by way of the family.” It is true not only in the theological context quoted but also in a very earthly and practical sense. We are formed and informed by the love and support of our families. All of us pass by way of a family, and I am no different.

So, Mr. Speaker, allow me to share with the House just one short story from my own family history, recorded in a humble rural newspaper. My grandfather and great-uncle were immigrants from Poland to what at the turn of the 20th century was the edge of the wild, a quarter section just north of Barrhead. Here I’ll quote from the *Barrhead Leader*. Uncle Frank and my father bought 160 acres of homestead north of Barrhead, paying \$10, and then, after the government opened up more land for homesteading, bought additional land in Vega, this time for \$12. My Uncle Frank said that the land was nothing but bush, and it all had to be cleared by hand. I’m told that he later had a tractor to help him. He continued on, finishing by saying: time flies; I remember being on the boat from Poland like it was yesterday, and here’s 100 years creeping on me; I’ve had a good life and 92 years of happiness; what more could one ask for?

Uncle Frank finished his life with gratitude, as did my grandfather and all of my ancestors before me. I’m grateful to them today, and I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to indulge the House. I offer thanks to my mother, my father, my three brothers, my dear wife, who is here in the Legislature, and every family member that came before us. The weight of our generation, now carried on our shoulders, is made light and the water we carry is made easy when we pick up the yoke of our ancestors and draw from their wells.

Fourth, Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my God, the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For how could I not thank my God? He has given me all: my constituency, my country, and my family. These are all gifts, and I would be greatly remiss if I were to be grateful for the gifts but not to the gifter. I would be such a fool if I were to be thankful for the creation but not to the creator.

For many current political commentators the role of religion and faith in society is often misunderstood and, for them, relegated to history books. I propose, however, that religion is a contemporary act in our society, as unfamiliar a manifestation as it may be to those authors of those history books. Religion is often conflated with culture or deeply held personal opinions. While religion certainly shapes culture and personal beliefs, it definitely transcends them.

Most importantly for my speech today, it is said that religion fully reveals man to himself. Religion fully reveals man to himself.

I believe humanity can be best understood in its mission and purpose through the exercise of religion. Therefore, free expression of religion via public faith is necessary for full and true participation in any free society. In antiquity civil and religious powers were one. Happily, that is no longer the case – a lesson in history from Ambrose and Thomas Becket and Thomas More is for another speech – but the separation of church and state is one of the jewels of our western civilization. However, this separation is often misunderstood.

The separation of church from state does not mean that religion is relegated exclusively to private life. From a religious perspective such a position is untenable. How can a citizen believe that God is the ultimate meaning to existence, believe that God reveals man to himself, but be expected to leave his religion at home when stepping into the public square? The separation of church and state means that religion and government both have legitimate spheres in which they operate. They are both free, not one greater than the other, no one able to dominate the other. In other words, the separation of church and state means that religion and government are respectful peers, neither bedfellows nor strangers, neither master nor servant.

Why do I say all of this? I say this to make the simple point that human dignity is contingent on the free exercise of religion. If we truly wish for a humane society, where humanity can truly flourish, we cannot cut off the river from the spring any more than we can separate humanity from God. The great link that ensures that humanity is not cut off from its source is liberty. Through liberty, then, humanity’s divine calling can come to fulfillment, in my belief. As such, conscience and freedom of religion is paramount for a free society. To strip a man of his public faith is to strip a man of his own self. I suggest that to want to make a public square with our religion checked at the cloakroom is just as desirable as a public square devoid of moral obligation or any earnest conviction.

We are a province built in part by public faith and its expression. Many of our great prairie heroes, from Lacombe to Manning, from Douglas to Blakey, have been motivated by religion and their great works informed by faith.

In closing, Mr. Speaker and hon. colleagues, these four thank yous stand as something of a road map for my hopes as a politician. I hope to serve my constituents as they deserve, and although legislating can be tiring, as Sir Alexander Mackenzie found, I will be tireless in promoting the common good. Second, I hope to uphold the dignity and grace of this Chamber that we inhabit, always trusting in the traditions of our province and our country, that are not things to be scorned but treasures and jewels to be cherished. I hope to promote the good of all families, always acknowledging that the state, though properly ordered for a good society, is a poor nanny and should never replace and substitute the family. Finally, I hope, as the highest law of the land, our Charter states, to acknowledge the supremacy of God, to uphold the dignity of conscience, and to fight for the freedom of religion.

These four points, these four hopes and thank yous – my constituency, my country, my family, and my God – are the things for which I am most grateful for today, and these are the things which I dedicate my life to in public service. So help me God.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), I believe, I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to thank the Member for Peace River for his wonderful remarks in response to the throne speech. I have known the Member for Peace River for a long time.

He's been a dear friend. He's a tremendous campaigner. I'm certain he's a wonderful husband and son and even a pain. But I can tell you that in this Chamber it will be hard to find a man of greater character.

I know he has worked diligently to get here, as we all have, and I'd like to know if he can maybe comment a little bit further about his road getting here, where it started, what really motivated him to be part of this great change that we are involved in, you know, the movement, as we call it, and maybe what he hopes to accomplish in this Chamber and in his tenure as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. So if I could ask the Member for Peace River to maybe respond to that.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and through you I'd like to thank my hon. friend and colleague the Member for Cardston-Siksika for his comments and questions. We have had a long friendship, the member and myself, and it's been fruitful, and I'm grateful for it, but it is not just that member alone. Many of the members on this side of the House have become dear friends of mine. The story of how I made my decision to enter into politics, to strive for the common good in public service, would be lacking without acknowledging every one of them along the way, particularly the Premier of Alberta, who has become a dear friend of mine and a mentor in many ways, along with many other members of the front bench today, men and women that I look up to, and I'm grateful for their friendship.

The decision itself was difficult. I'm very grateful that my wife is here today in the gallery to watch. It's been a longer road for her than me, perhaps. I believe that anyone who wants to thank me for any service must go and thank her first. The decision was not taken lightly, but I believe that she also is grateful that we have this opportunity together, husband and wife, as a family, to continue to advocate for what we believe is the truth and speak on behalf of the constituents in the beautiful constituency of Peace River.

I'll leave my comments there and thank you, Mr. Speaker, and all my hon. colleagues for putting up with me and my speech for the last 15 minutes.

5:10

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Under (29)(2)(a), are there any other members who wish to continue for the last couple of minutes?

Seeing none, are there any other members who wish to speak? The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a distinct honour to speak in this Assembly today as the representative for the Grande Prairie-Wapiti constituency. First of all, I would like to congratulate you on your election by our peers to this position. Your attention to upholding the great traditions, privileges, and burdens of this House, which are foundational to our democracy, and your commitment to ensure an orderly and dignified process to our collective deliberations are of great service to Albertans.

I would also like to thank Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor for her delivery of the throne speech on May 22. The throne speech was a true message of hope to all Albertans and a notice to the rest of Canada that we are taking back our voice in this Confederation.

I would also like to acknowledge the strong elected leaders who have represented my region in the past and to whom I look for inspiration and example. Wayne Drysdale, our most recent MLA, serving our community and this Chamber for the past 11 years, has set a high bar in representing the constituents of Grande Prairie-Wapiti. His availability to constituents was exceptional and

nonpartisan and distinguished him as a true public servant. He has been, on a personal level, a generous mentor. Past cabinet ministers such as Walter Paszkowski, Everett McDonald, and Marvin Moore also hailed from my area, and I'm keenly aware of the legacy of the strong, principled leaders to whose names I now humbly add my own.

The newly drawn boundaries of the Grande Prairie-Wapiti riding extend west of Grande Prairie to the British Columbia border, south into the Kakwa-Willmore wilderness, and encompass the communities of Hythe, Beaverlodge, Wembley, La Glace, the Horse Lake First Nation, Bezanson, Clairmont, Sexsmith as well as an eastern portion of the city of Grande Prairie. The south part of the constituency runs deep into the Rocky Mountains. In its centre it includes rich agricultural land in the Sexsmith, Hythe, Wembley, and Beaverlodge areas and rolling grazing land in the Rio Grande and Teepee Creek regions. The region is rich in resources and includes part of both the Montney and Duvernay shale basins, the most prolific and accessible liquids-rich zones in western Canada. Accordingly, the region contributes significantly to the provincial economy with a sophisticated and competitive energy industry.

Agriculture continues to contribute in a major way to the economy, with the region home to many long-time farming and ranching families. To add to the economic diversity, our forestry industry includes local, national, and international firms that sustainably produce wood products for use by consumers in Canada and around the world. The great geographical and economic diversity of my constituency make it a microcosm not only of Alberta's industries and challenges but also of the beauty and opportunity that Albertans experience every day.

The stories of survival, challenge, and innovation have been part of the Grande Prairie-Wapiti region for many years. In the 18th century the predominant culture of the Peace Country was the Beaver First Nation. There was an abundance to the land, with bison, moose, caribou, and bear providing much of their food as well as the serviceberry or, as we now call it, the Saskatoon berry. The Beaver and, later on, the Cree would travel long distances for berry gathering in the Grande Prairie, and after having secured and dried a sufficient quantity of fruit, scatter again in small bands into the more remote parts of the country for the autumn hunt.

While the land was generous, it could also be harsh, with long, cold winters bringing with them the threat of starvation. By 1793 bands of Beaver and Cree were making regular excursions to fur-trading posts to exchange furs for European items that would help them survive and continue to hunt and trap. The fur trade grew to include the Métis coming from the east, which led to a number of Métis settlements such as Lake Saskatoon and Flyingshot Lake.

Favourable reports by surveyors and fur traders began to create interest for European settlers by the early 1900s. A.M. Bezanson was particularly enthusiastic about the agriculture opportunities that he saw in the Grande Prairie-Wapiti region. His reports, among others, helped fuel the land rush of 1910. Getting up to this rich, new land was a challenge, not for the weak of mind or heart. Homesteaders came from the east, through the Peace River and Slave Lake route or up through the Edson Trail. The bull outfit that came up with six new teams of oxen made their way into the region in 1910 and settled in the Beaverlodge area, with names that are still part of our community to this day such as Gaudin, Sherk, and Lossing among them.

In another timeless struggle, getting our rich resources out of the Peace Country to ocean ports to the west was a topic of much discussion in the early 1900s. In 1936, concerned about the high freight costs for shipping grain, a Métis settler named Alex Monkman led an incredible effort to cut a road southwest of Beaverlodge through a mountain pass that he found while trapping

one winter, to connect to the road system near Prince George in the British Columbia interior. Initial volunteer progress on the trail led to a vigorous solicitation of funds for the cause, and as government funds were not available, residents raised funds from the community in a variety of ways and at great sacrifice. Local crews worked by hand with rudimentary equipment and made remarkable progress cutting a primitive road in the wilderness.

At one point in the effort, in an attempt to prove the viability of the route to governments, an adventurous few toiled ahead on a pack trail to get a Model T through the entire pass. While the car made it to the Pacific side of the Great Divide, the effort failed as winter set in early, leaving the group fighting for survival as they made their way out on foot. The project came to an end when in the fall of 1939 war broke out in Europe, and the young men of the Grande Prairie flocked to join the Canadian Forces, as they had done in World War I. With that, the dream of the Monkman pass died. The effort to build the road through the Rockies against all odds and without government support became a thing of legend in the area and is a testament to the vision, resourcefulness, and resiliency of early residents.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Peace Country became home to my parents in 1962, when they purchased 480 acres of land southwest of Beaverlodge, starting out in a two-room cabin with three small children and 50 head of cattle. They were able to provide for their growing family because of the strong and diverse economy, starting in agriculture, supplementing through the forest industry, and in later years expanding into the oil and gas sector.

Mr. Speaker, that is why Bill 1, the carbon tax repeal act, has been so welcome in my constituency. All of our industries, from agriculture and forestry to tourism and resource development, as well as the countless other small businesses that spring up to support the community in turn need relief from that tax burden.

Bill 2, the open for business act, and Bill 3, the job-creation tax cut act, are also significant in my region, where the entrepreneurial spirit runs strong. The city of Grande Prairie has ranked among the top six entrepreneurial cities in Canada for the last 10 years, and in 2018 it was the only mid-sized city in Alberta to make the national list. In the long history of the Peace region we have not looked for handouts but simply an environment where hard work and a bit of risk is commensurate with the reward at the end of the day.

My parents' story of tenacity and hard work coupled with the willingness to take risks is a familiar story to many in the Peace Country. From the Beaver, Cree, and Métis people, that at times struggled to survive but were able to persevere through their resilience and connection with the land; to the first surveyors that remarked on the Grande Prairie, that was, in the words of surveyor George Dawson in 1879, quote, parklike with groves of poplar and exceedingly fertile, unquote; to the European settlers, that came to escape persecution and starvation in search of opportunity, the Peace Country has always required a strong spirit and outside-the-box thinking. In return it offers endless possibilities for prosperity, for family, for strong community, for natural beauty. Opportunity abounds.

I believe it is for that reason that the message of the United Conservative Party, Alberta Strong and Free, resonates so deeply with the people in the Grande Prairie-Wapiti riding. The level of engagement was high from the nomination process right through to election night, when, I am proud to report, our riding had the highest voter turnout in the province, at 80.2 per cent. We are strong, and we value the freedom to grow, create, work, innovate, prosper, and persevere.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, like most that serve in this Chamber, on both sides of the aisle, I am here today because of the unwavering support of the most important people in my life. This starts with the partnership of my wife, Kim; the blessing of our children and their families; and encouragement and support of my parents, extended family, close friends, and, of course, the voters in the Grande Prairie-Wapiti riding. Alberta has given its best to me, and I commit each day in office to give my best back to constituents and the people of this great province.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any questions or comments for the member? The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to congratulate the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti on his election. Of course, I know that he'll do a stellar job at representing the constituents there. His calling as the Minister of Finance is, obviously, a good position for him that I know he'll excel at, too.

Previously part of the area that he represents was the area that I represented with Grande Prairie-Smoky, which doesn't exist anymore. Two communities that kind of come to mind there – I guess there are three. There's Sexsmith, that's just had Chautauqua Day, a celebration where they open up the main street for families to enjoy the community and also have a nice parade. There are lots of old cars in that parade. It's a great time there. I had a chance this year to stop by just for a minute to take in Chautauqua Day because I couldn't resist, when I was driving by, to stop in and check out Sexsmith.

Also, the community of Teepee Creek, which, of course, has an enormous stampede, Teepee Creek Stampede, which is world renowned. It's a community of tens of people that turns into thousands of people for the Teepee Creek Stampede, 4 Days in the Wild, I think it's called.

Then, of course, there's the community of Bezanson. I think fondly of these small communities and the success that they've had. Now, Bezanson just built a big facility for their community hall. It was such a huge endeavour for such a small community, but they worked so hard in the community and gathered funds and really developed something that's actually pretty spectacular.

I just wanted the member to maybe comment on some of these communities that I used to represent and take a little time, and we'll talk about that. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Central Peace-Notley for that question. Let me say that it's an incredible honour to follow in the member's footsteps from Central Peace-Notley. In that half of the constituency, certainly, as I've reached out to constituents, they have spoken highly of the representation that he has provided.

Small communities in rural Alberta contribute in a very impressive way to the fabric of this great province. In fact, I sincerely believe that the spirit of those that reside in those small communities exemplifies, I think, in a lot of cases really what it's taken to move Alberta to where it is today and, in fact, embodies so much of what is good about this province. Very often in those small communities such as Sexsmith and Teepee Creek and Bezanson, as the member has alluded to, you will find individuals who, perhaps partly out of necessity and perhaps partly because of the values that were instilled in them by their parents and families, so often tend to

be particularly resilient in times of hardship. They tend to be willing to take risks when there is opportunity, and they tend to be accountable for their decisions. They also, I think, perhaps most importantly, tend to be very compassionate and help out their friends and neighbours in times of need.

Again, just to probably go back to a point in my maiden speech, I truly believe that residents, constituents in these small communities appreciate maybe in a disproportionate sense the platform, the plan, that this United Conservative Party government has. That is a plan to ensure that we as a province have the most competitive business environment possible so that residents can follow their dream, so that residents can take full advantage of opportunities in front of them, so that investment again can come back into this province and jobs can be created, opportunities can be created. Not only our small communities but every community and every people group in this great province can benefit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others wishing to speak to the throne speech? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, the Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Copping: Thank you. It is truly a privilege to be here. I am awed and humbled by this place, its storied history, the ability to positively impact the lives of so many Albertans, its conventions and traditions although I have to admit, Mr. Speaker, that even though I agree with it, I'm still trying to find the reference to the \$100 donation to your charity of choice for violating the cellphone rules in the standing orders.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that I echo the sentiments of many of my colleagues. It is such a gift to be able to serve but also a tremendous responsibility. I feel this each time I walk into this building. I am thankful that this place, with its marbled columns, stained glass windows, and ornate details – all of this serves as a constant reminder of how fortunate we are to be here and the responsibility we bear in the days to come.

With that in mind, I would like to thank the residents of Calgary-Varsity for having faith in me to represent them in this Chamber, and I would also like to thank the Premier for giving me the opportunity to serve all Albertans as a member of government. I recognize what an honour and responsibility this is, and I will serve to the best of my ability.

Mr. Speaker, in my remarks this afternoon in responding to the Speech from the Throne, I would like to thank some of the people who brought me to this place, talk about the issues and dreams of the people who live in Calgary-Varsity, and share my excitement in working with my colleagues in this Chamber to improve the lives of Albertans.

First, I would like to thank my parents. I was born in Toronto. Wait. That said, I was saved at an early age. My family moved to Alberta when my twin sister and I were four years old. My parents, John and Penny, like so many, wanted to move to Alberta to see greater opportunities for themselves and their children. They sought out the vast prairie sky and the Rocky Mountains, the entrepreneurial spirit that lives here, and the freedom to live life on their own terms.

I was fortunate to grow up in Calgary and on a small ranch near Water Valley, Alberta. From my father, an industrial electrician, rancher, and entrepreneur, I learned about hard work, planning, and, above all, safety. I have been doing prework safety briefings since I was eight years old, even before they called them safety briefings. From my mother, a schoolteacher, guidance counsellor, and lifelong learner, I learned compassion, dedication, and the love of

ideas. It was they who sparked for me an interest in politics. Growing up, we would often have conversations around the kitchen table concerning issues of the day. My parents both played a huge part in how I view the world and the values I hold.

From my father, and I quote: you can't take more out of a pot than you put into it. As you can probably tell, he has a very strong aversion to deficit financing, and he is a tremendous fan of King Ralph. From my mother, and I am paraphrasing: politics is about people. As a society we have decided to pool our resources to ensure that all children can get a good education, anyone who is sick can see a doctor, and those who need help can find it. Government is our government. It is us. We need to take responsibility for it. Thank you to both of my parents for their love and guidance.

Second, I would like to thank the many mentors and colleagues who helped me on my journey throughout my education and career. This interest in politics instilled by my parents prompted me to do my first degree in political science. One might ask: what do you do with a poli-sci degree once you graduate? That's a very good question. Well, one answer is that you move to Ottawa and apply theory to practice, and one of my first jobs after graduating was working for the hon. Harvie André, Member of Parliament for Calgary-Centre and Government House Leader. For those that may have known him, Harvie was a tremendous leader and extraordinarily hard working. Although I learned a great deal concerning the political process, there were three main lessons that I took away from my time in Ottawa. First, you can make a difference. By working with others and working hard, you can make positive change in politics. Second, although sometimes difficult, it is possible to maintain your values. Always act with integrity, and remember that you are there to serve. Harvie demonstrated this over nearly 20 years in Ottawa. Finally, if you wish to represent your fellow citizens, you should understand what they are thinking and have experience, skills, and ideas to offer.

5:30

With these lessons in mind I left the world of politics. I completed a master's degree in industrial relations at Queen's and started a career in the business world in labour relations and human resources. I had the tremendous opportunity to work with one of Canada's great companies, Canadian Pacific Railway, for just under 20 years, and then I started my own business consulting. I also had the privilege to teach at two of our great schools in our province, the schools of business at the University of Calgary and the University of Lethbridge.

Over this time I worked with and taught a number of truly remarkable people. There are too many to recognize, Mr. Speaker. Suffice to say that they included business colleagues and partners, union leaders, university professors, a number of my students, government officials, and community leaders. Although this group of individuals had very differing views, they shared common traits. They were dedicated to something greater than themselves, they were thoughtful, and they strived to make this world a better place. Working with each of them, they showed me that through hard work and dialogue you can find greater solutions, and I thank them all.

Third, I would like to thank my wife and children. While working with CP, I met my wife, Marian, who worked here at the Legislature for one of her first jobs following graduation from her first degree. A second-generation Ukrainian, I soon joined through marriage the vast Alberta-Ukrainian community. Where once *holubtsi*, *pirohy*, and *nalysnyky* were simply foreign words, they are now common household dishes and sometimes not common enough. We have been blessed with three girls: Katyanna, Genovia, and Natalia. As many in this Chamber know better than I, this role truly is a family

affair. We cannot do it alone, and I would like to thank my wife and children for their love and support.

Finally, I would like to thank the constituents of Calgary-Varsity and, in particular, two former Calgary-Varsity MLAs, Donna Kennedy-Glans and Murray Smith. Nearly 10 years ago my wife and I moved to Varsity, in our humble opinion and according to *Avenue Magazine* for over a decade, one of the top neighbourhoods in Calgary. Calgary-Varsity is a riding like no other. The beautiful trees that create vast canopies over the streets are as multigenerational as the people who like to walk down the sidewalks underneath them. It's rare and amazing to find a community where you can go for an evening stroll, as we often do, and be greeted by seniors, students, children, parents, and pets. It is truly an area that reflects the vast diversity of the province we live in.

Varsity, once considered an outlying suburb, is now inner city, a hub for ideas, community, and vibrancy. This is in no small part due to its namesake, the University of Calgary, this institution that has made its mark not only here in Alberta but nationally and internationally. It is a blessing to have access to such high-calibre education, that attracts the best and brightest right into the heart of our constituency. I would imagine that there are a few U of C Dinos in this very Chamber. In addition to the university, Calgary-Varsity is also home to the Alberta Children's hospital, Foothills campus, numerous primary schools, and strong and resilient community associations.

Whether you live in Varsity, Silver Springs, Brentwood, Banff Trail, University Heights, St. Andrews Heights, Parkdale, or Charleswood, you are part of a larger community that celebrates family, belonging, teamwork, and community. Whether it be picnicking by the river, playing Frisbee in Bowmont Park, or sharing ideas with old and new friends at the local coffee shops, a sense of belonging and friendship is reflected in our constituency.

Over the years Calgary-Varsity has been ably represented by praiseworthy MLAs who still live in the riding today. Murray Smith represented Calgary-Varsity between 1993 and 2004. Murray served as a cabinet minister in a number of portfolios, including labour, economic development and tourism, and energy. As part of the Klein government he helped to restore balance to our budget while at the same time rebuilding our economy and was re-elected in his final term with a significant majority.

Donna Kennedy-Glans represented Calgary-Varsity between 2012 and 2015. Donna chaired the all-party Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship and was the associate minister of energy and electricity and renewable resources. I recall that one evening during her nomination Donna showed up at my door in Varsity. Her passion, dedication, and thoughtfulness reignited my love for politics, and not only did I become her supporter, but I became extremely active in local politics again.

Although both Murray and Donna are very different people, they share a number of common traits and views. They are both thoughtful and resourceful, willing to engage in conversation about ideas, and were focused on representing the interests of the constituents of Calgary-Varsity. I would like to thank them both for their dedication, service, and especially their advice.

Lastly, I would like to thank the residents of Calgary-Varsity. Over the last 10 months I was honoured to meet literally thousands of Calgary-Varsity residents that opened their doors for me – it was particularly helpful when it was minus 29 – and each shared what they loved about our neighbourhood, their concerns, hopes, and ideas for the future. Although I am not certain why, and perhaps it is the influence of the University of Calgary, the residents of Calgary-Varsity are incredibly engaged in politics and care deeply about the issues confronting them and their families. Many have

participated in policy conversations on the economy, health care, and education, and want to seek solutions. At the doors, in coffee shops, and in community halls Calgary-Varsity residents engaged in conversations and presented ideas facing our province today.

What did I hear? I heard a deep concern about jobs and the economy. I met unemployed and underemployed geologists who had lost their jobs in 2016 and had yet to find full-time work. I met university students on the cusp of graduating who are having difficulty finding jobs here in Alberta and were having to leave the province to find work or go back to school to do another degree. I met tradespeople who had lost their jobs in the oil patch. One individual in particular had started his own business after losing his job and, unable to make a go of it, was on the brink of bankruptcy. With tears in his eyes he shared with me that he did everything right. He went to school. He got his certificate. He worked hard and paid off his loan. When he lost his job in the patch, he started his own company, but there was not enough work. He was losing his business and his house, and he did not know what to do to support his family. His message was that we as government needed to fix the economy and bring jobs back to Alberta.

I heard concerns about growing debt and taxes. Young families and seniors alike commented on the increased cost of living caused by growing taxes and the burdens that we were shifting to future generations given that we were living beyond our means. I heard about our health care and education systems. As I already mentioned, Calgary-Varsity includes a number of great institutions, including the U of C, Alberta Children's hospital, Foothills medical centre, and a number of public and private schools. We have a large number of people who work in education and health care, and they care deeply about the services they provide and want to see them improved.

Although there is a recognition that we need to get spending under control, there is a desire that we do this in a way that maintains and even improves front-line services. We need innovative thinking and new approaches in solving this. How can we do this? One approach is that we engage front-line workers in finding ways to improve services, manage costs, and make these jobs good jobs so we can continue to attract good people to provide these services.

I heard about our need to protect the most vulnerable in our society. The role of government is to ensure that those who need assistance can find it. All Albertans, regardless of who they love, to whom they pray, or their ethnic origins, must be respected and included. What counts is the character of the person.

Finally, I heard a desire to move away from the politics of division and the politics of personal attacks. Instead, we as elected representatives and community leaders should focus on ideas and solutions and, above all, represent the views of all our constituents.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, the constituents of Calgary-Varsity are looking for a policy agenda that will create jobs and rebuild the economy, reduce taxes, improve our health care and education systems while at the same time managing our budget, protect the most vulnerable in our society, and do this in a way that is respectful and represents the views of all of our constituents. I believe our government is well on its way to addressing the issues put forth by my constituents. With bills 1, 2, 3, and 4 already introduced and Bill 1 already passed, we have shown that we are ready to create jobs and rebuild the economy. More legislation to create opportunity for Albertans is yet to come.

I will have the pleasure of introducing the fair access to regulated professions and trades act, making it easier and fairer for newcomers to be credentialed in their professions, work at their skill level, and contribute to our shared prosperity. To help those most vulnerable, we will introduce the saving the girl next door act

and table legislation to give effect to Clare's law, which will protect victims of human trafficking and domestic violence. Finally, we have already improved decorum and respect in this Chamber by making changes to the standing orders.

5:40

Lastly, we will focus tirelessly on balancing the budget over the course of the next four years. In doing this, we will protect front-line resources. In making this commitment, I must reiterate that this is not just about saving money. This is about ensuring that we as a province have the ability to fund those items that are important to us – health care, education, social services – over the long term and not spending millions or billions on debt-servicing costs.

These are just a few examples I will probably provide to my constituents when I am asked how we are responding to their concerns. There is much more to come.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to speak to the Chamber. I commit to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to find the best solutions for Albertans. Although we may not always agree on the best path forward . . .

The Speaker: I'm sure someone will be happy to provide you with an opportunity to conclude your remarks.

While it's confession hour, I might just add that I didn't realize that the hon. member and I had so much in common. I, too, was born in that place you mentioned and came to Alberta when I was four and lived in Water Valley. So we're basically soulmates.

I see the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche rising to perhaps see if you might like to conclude your remarks.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Varsity and Minister of Labour and Immigration for his wonderful remarks, similar to the Speaker and lots in common. It was really interesting to hear your remarks. I, too, had safety briefings at the age of about two, and they continued on, including on our campaign's sign team, which had a daily safety briefing before installing any campaign signs, including lawn signs. I was just wondering if the hon. member could perhaps continue sharing some of these remarks with the Chamber.

Mr. Copping: Thank you very much to the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche for the question. I'd be pleased to finish my remarks. Yes, safety briefing: as the Minister of Labour and Immigration I'm responsible for occupational health and safety. I can honestly say that it's in the blood, from my father.

As I was indicating previously, Mr. Speaker, I would just simply like to thank you again for the opportunity to speak to the Chamber. I will commit to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to find the best solutions for Albertans. Although we may not always agree on the best path forward, through respectful dialogue we will at least understand each other's views and, hopefully, identify and address unintended consequences. I commit to working on behalf of all Albertans as a member of this government. Finally, I commit to working hard every day for the constituents of Calgary-Varsity and to keeping my eyes, ears, and heart open to them and be worthy of their trust.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others wishing to add questions or comments to the hon. member? The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, please.

Mr. Getson: Yes. I really appreciate the comments in your maiden speech. Again, there's no question why you were chosen for your position. It's an honour to have you there, sir.

A couple of things. We share some fellow things as well: nalysnyky, pirohy, everything else. I learned it before I got married but have the same affliction.

I wonder if you could share some personal stories, though, about some of the constituents that you came across other than the one gentleman you spoke about, something that really struck another chord, some of the impacts and the reasons why you're stepping forward to help out your constituents.

Mr. Copping: Thank you very much to the hon. member for the question. Again, out door-knocking, I spoke with thousands of constituents in Calgary-Varsity, and a large number of them were particularly concerned about their ability to find jobs. With this one particular individual that I actually spoke to, what actually struck me and the colleagues with whom I was door-knocking was that he had no idea where to turn to and didn't know what to do at that point in time. That truly struck home for me. You know, why I chose to run and represent our constituents is that we need to actually change our policy direction to create jobs for Albertans and because of how harmful it was for a number of Albertans who got left behind.

That was the most dramatic story that I talked to, but there were lots of others; you know, a geologist, as I pointed out. But often numbers of individuals who wanted to start up a new oil-servicing company or start up a new oil well company, because they had been laid off, but couldn't find the financial capital to do that and were simply unable – you know, even though they had saved up sufficient funds and they were living off their savings, they knew that if something didn't change soon, they would not be able to retire, and they'd have to go someplace else. And then stories of neighbours whose children had graduated from the University of Calgary in engineering and had found work, but the work was actually in Texas, and they couldn't have the opportunities here.

I'm sure, like many of the other members in this Chamber, we've heard lots of stories, and that's why I'm so excited about our government and our mandate to move forward and create jobs for Albertans, diversify and grow the economy, and help these individuals in my constituency and all of our constituencies.

Thank you.

The Speaker: There are just a few seconds left for questions and comments.

I would not want to prevent anyone from speaking. Having said that, if there are none, I'd be happy to hear from the hon. Member for Morinville-St. Albert and Associate Minister of Natural Gas.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured and humbled to be here in front of you. I would like to thank the wonderful people from Morinville-St. Albert, who saw to it to elect me to represent them in this Legislature.

I'd also like to give a shout-out to some of the people that, of course, have been behind me, starting with my parents, who moulded me into the person that I am. If you don't like that, you can speak to them. I'd also like to mention my wife, Randa, who inspires me every day to want to be a better person. One of the things that she taught me was to always recognize those people that are the hardest working people.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a second just to recognize some of the hardest working people in this Legislature, and that's the pages. I am so incredibly impressed by them because on day one they knew 87 names and 87 ridings. I'm quite impressed by that. So my goal is that before the end of this session I'm going to try and learn all of their names, and I'm also going to challenge myself to try to learn at least one thing about them. I've got a couple now that I'm just going to quickly share with you. This is for anybody,

by the way, who wants to take up skiing. I would suggest you go and see Amber because she was a competitive alpine skier. You might want to chat with Lily, whose favourite colour is grey. Or you could talk to Maria, who absolutely loves Indian dancing. Now, I would suggest that if our Prime Minister could find Alberta on a map, I would ask him to come here, and perhaps Maria could teach him a move or two. The last one I'll sort of mention is Summer, who is not only a valedictorian this year, but she's also graduating. In grade 10 and grade 11 she got 100 per cent in math two years in a row, and she's now going for 100 per cent in grade 12 as well. That'll make it 3 for 3. So when you see Summer out in the lounge, please give her a high-five and tell her we want 3 for 3 of that 100 per cent in math.

I'd also like to give a shout-out to my daughter, who is a successful business owner and who has taught me and constantly reminds me about the benefits of being a compassionate Conservative. My son Jadd, who's 15, is also, by the way, the best Minecraft player in the world. You don't get good at Minecraft and be the best in the world without playing a lot of Minecraft. I'd like to give a shout-out to him because he taught me, if nothing else, that persistence overcomes resistance. And then, lastly, my youngest son, Shadi, who taught me to never take my eye off him because he's a bit of a troublemaker and reminds me quite a bit of myself. He's also a great hockey player as well and plays at quite a competitive level.

Those are certainly the people that have inspired me and motivate me to come in here and to be the best that I can be.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask all the hon. members through you, of course: put your smart phones down, close your Standing Orders, and get comfortable in your seats because we're going to take a ride. You might want to buckle up as well for this one. Now, we are going to start in the most southern portion of my riding, my hometown, St. Albert. St. Albert is the city of botanical arts. If your preference is wave petunias or purple flame grass, it doesn't matter because we've got a little bit of something for everyone in St. Albert. In fact, from June 8 to August 24 you can actually hop on the botanical bus. It starts at the Enjoy Centre, and then it takes you to our world-famous farmers' market, and from there it'll take you to our botanical centre, which, of course, is world-class and definitely worth the trip.

5:50

But that's not all that St. Albert is known for. Mr. Speaker, St. Albert has an affliction. I suffer from that same affliction. It's known as hockey. I can tell you that the people in St. Albert love hockey. They're either playing hockey, they're practising hockey, and when they're not doing that, they're thinking about when they can next play hockey. I'm going to give everyone a little tip here, for anyone who does any fantasy hockey leagues, and I know there are lots of you: you might want to write down the name of Matt Savoie. He's native to St. Albert. He lives a block from me. I never see him unless it's on the ice, because he's another one of these 14-year-olds that lives and breathes hockey. He was recently drafted number one overall to play in the WHL, and they are using his name in the same sentence as other child phenoms such as Sidney Crosby and Connor McDavid. So, like I said, remember Matt Savoie for your hockey drafts.

Now, on this journey we're going to drive northward, and we're going to go through Sturgeon county. As you're driving through Sturgeon county, you're going to notice the canola fields on your left, and you're going to notice the Sturgeon River on your right. Mr. Speaker, you would be forgiven for thinking that you were in God's country, because there is no doubt that this is one of the most beautiful ridings if not the most beautiful riding in the province if not the country.

Drive a little further north, Mr. Speaker, and of course you've got the Industrial Heartland, which is responsible for half the GDP in this province. If you haven't toured the Industrial Heartland, I would encourage you to do so because it's definitely worth the trip.

But on this trip we keep heading north, and we're going to hit Morinville. Now, Morinville was founded in 1907. The St. Jean Baptiste church was named a historical site in 1975, and Morinville just finished construction of a world-class recreational centre. It's a \$30 million leisure centre, and I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that people from Morinville, if they've proven anything, it's that they can punch above their weight class. I encourage you while you're on this journey: don't be afraid to check out the recreational centre in Morinville.

Now, on this trip we're going to keep going north, and we're going to go to Legal. Legal is a wonderful French community. For myself, I will always think of it as the smallest town with the biggest church, and if you want to know what I mean, just go check it out. It does have the largest church in town, but that's actually not what they're known for. They are known as the national capital for French murals. Most people don't know this, Mr. Speaker, but there are actually 28 murals in the town of Legal. On some Sunday afternoon when you're looking for something to do, I encourage you to drive to Legal and check out those 28 murals. It's quite impressive.

Now, on this drive, of course, we're going to now head into Bon Accord, which is the first community in Canada and the 11th in the world to be designated as an international dark-sky community. So if you're interested in astronomy and you want to take your telescope out one Sunday evening, Bon Accord is a great place to go just because they don't have a ton of visual pollution or light pollution in the sky.

Now, after you leave Bon Accord, you're going to head into Gibbons. Gibbons was originally two separate towns, Astleyville and Battenberg, but they merged together, and they named the town after the founding land settler, William R. Gibbons. For me Gibbons will always be known for something else. It will be known for their world-famous meat draw. Now, prior to this campaign, Mr. Speaker, I didn't know what a meat draw was. If you're looking at me wondering what it is, well, it's a great opportunity to raise money for the local town. I would encourage you to go to the Gibbons Hotel. You can order a cold beverage. I recommend the nachos; they're excellent. Then you can participate in the meat draw. It's actually a lot of fun, and it's a great way to bring the whole town together.

Now we're going to be going a little further north. We're going to be hitting Redwater. Redwater gets its name from the nearby river, which actually turns red from the spring runoff, and that's how the town got its name. Redwater has a 45-metre tall discovery well derrick, and it's one of their historic landmarks.

But there's something else kind of cool about Redwater, Mr. Speaker. There's a gentleman there by the name of Dave. He works on town council. He's a retired RCMP officer. He purchased the old RCMP detachment, and he renovated it into his home. It's actually quite impressive. He renovated the entire detachment except for the jail cell. He left the jail cell intact. So it's got the bars, it's got the stainless steel sink, and it's actually quite neat. If you go there, if you knock on his door, tell him Dale sent you. He'll be more than happy to give you a tour. It's quite a neat little project that he has going there.

I am very fortunate to represent this incredible riding, but I'd like to back up just a little further now and tell you how I got into politics. My interest in politics started in grade 5. That was when my grade 5 class, under the guidance of Mr. Penner, taught us about government. We actually had an election, and I ran to be Prime

Minister of the class. My slogan for that campaign was Nally's His Name, Improvement's His Game. Now, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that my political prowess has improved somewhat since then, so you won't be seeing that slogan on any of my buttons any time soon. It certainly got me interested in politics at an early age.

I never had the opportunity to get involved, though, because I was a single parent at a young age. I went to university full-time, I worked part-time, and I raised this little girl on my own. And you can imagine how difficult that was. I didn't have any family supports close by, so I was on my own. It was at this time that I developed my own ideology, what I call compassionate conservatism. I realized, Mr. Speaker, that the best way you can help someone out who needs a hand is by having a strong economy. I learned at this opportunity that if an industrious, hard-working person can apply themselves, they can get ahead and they can get a mortgage-paying job. That was what I learned at this crucial juncture in my life.

I also, shortly after that, found myself as a general manager of a Home Depot. This was during one of the largest labour shortages our province has ever seen. At that time if you went into any big box retailer, whether it was Home Depot or Walmart, they were all grossly understaffed. They just couldn't hire people. Well, Mr. Speaker, I had the only big box retail store that was fully staffed. The reason it was fully staffed is because I reached out to the Mennonite centre, and the Mennonite centre's job is to find jobs for newcomers. They did a great job of helping us get staffed up. In addition to that, I started looking for other partnerships, and I formed a partnership with a company called EmployAbilities, and their job is to find employment for people with disabilities. From there they introduced me to a few other organizations that found work for people with disabilities. The end result was that I had the

only fully staffed Home Depot in the hottest economy in North America. The best part was that our profit was so high, because we had such great staffing levels, that the president of Home Depot actually sent my wife and I to the Beijing Olympics as a thank you.

It was at that time when I learned about what I call the business reason for hiring people with disabilities. Mr. Speaker, everybody has value, and the challenge is to find that value that they can bring to the workforce and harness that for the company and also for themselves as well.

It was shortly after that time when I bumped into a gentleman who worked for the chamber of commerce. He found out about the work that I was doing with companies, promoting the hiring of people with disabilities, and he asked me to be the co-chair for diversity Edmonton. It was a consortium of businesses that worked with other businesses to promote the hiring of people with disabilities. It was at that time that I got to do more work on what I call the business case for hiring people with disabilities, but it was also an opportunity for me to learn about the importance of taking care of the most vulnerable in our society.

Mr. Speaker, those are some of the ideals that I hold dear to my heart. Four years ago when we saw the electoral map change, I had some concerns. Those concerns were realized when we got on track to be \$100 billion in debt, when we had 200,000 unemployed Albertans. We were in a job crisis. We had the third-highest unemployment in the country.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt; however, I see that the clock has struck the hour of 6 o'clock, and as such the House is adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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