



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, June 5, 2019

Day 9

The Honourable Nathan Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature

First Session

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New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, June 5, 2019

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: The prayer. Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and her government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideas but lay aside all private interests and prejudice and keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, in my gallery, the Speaker's gallery, this afternoon it's an absolute pleasure to introduce some of the family members of two of our hard-working pages. Kiki Reed's parents, Tracey and Kelly Neufeld; her sister and former page, Jordyn Reed; and her grandparents, Susan and Rudy Neufeld, are proudly looking on this afternoon. They will no doubt be watching her quick attentiveness to members' desires. I hope that you will put her through her tests this afternoon.

Also with us today to see their daughter in action is Rebecca Hicks' father, Scott Hicks. Please join me in welcoming the pages' families to our Assembly.

Hon. members, I have some additional guests that I will now introduce to the House. I'd just ask that you keep your applause all the way until the conclusion of the introductions. Guests of the hon. Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions: all the way from British Columbia, Giuseppe Ganci and Jared Nilsson. Guests of the hon. Minister of Education: Dr. Vivian Abboud, Lorrie Jess, John Jagersma, Simon Williams, Barry Litun, Bevan Daverne, Ryan Stierman, and Susan Lang.

Members' Statements

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

Education and Health Care Funding

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, it's been just over a month since this UCP government was sworn in, and the impact of their actions is already being felt across the province. From Peace River to Taber, school boards are bracing for massive cuts. The silence of the Education minister on funding education has resulted in school boards forcing parents in Calgary to decide whether their children's class sizes will grow or if they'll have a music program. When asked, the UCP say that information is coming soon.

Now, because the Education minister seems only willing to provide messaging rather than the essential funding school boards need to serve students, schools in Calgary are forced to preemptively deny special-needs students their right to enrol in school. When asked, the UCP called it a board procedural issue.

School boards across this province are warning parents that the school nutrition program, that provided meals to 33,000 kids in 200 schools, might vanish. In Westlock school boards are warning parents that the school fees our government eliminated will be coming back because of the UCP.

Because of the Health minister's in-due-course attitude when it comes to funding our essential services, ambulances are being kept off the roads in Calgary because of staff vacancies. The Health minister also chose to put a healthy dose of ideology in front of Alberta's best interests when he and the UCP stopped construction on the critical Edmonton superlab.

My constituents are worried about the UCP's track record of imposing these cuts without a hint of consultation. They can see the impact of the UCP policies on health care, education, and the services that they desperately rely on. They are worried about what the UCP has planned for Edmonton.

It's only been a month, Mr. Speaker, but the UCP are living up to the promises made by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. It is going to hurt.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake would like to make a statement.

Lesser Slave Lake Area Wildfires

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and speak to you today about the heroic efforts currently being undertaken to contain the wildfires spreading in and around Lesser Slave Lake and to aid those people affected. The vast boreal forests that cover my riding have provided our communities with so much, but they can also make us vulnerable to the whims of Mother Nature. Since the start of the wildfire season there have been 95 wildfires and more than 216,000 hectares destroyed in the Slave Lake forest area. The fires have forced thousands from their homes, some carrying little more than the clothes on their backs, while yet thousands more remain under evacuation alerts, uncertain of what the coming weeks will bring.

Amongst this chaos the one constant has been the brave and selfless individuals that step up in our communities in order to help their fellow Albertans in times of need. The heroism and bravery displayed by the first responders, municipal governments, and all those helping throughout the province are truly inspiring. A particular thanks goes to Tyler Warman, mayor of Slave Lake; the chief of the Bigstone Cree Nation, Silas Yellowknee; Marcel Auger, reeve of the MD of Opportunity; as well as Gladys Okemow, chief of the Peerless Trout First Nation, for their exceptional leadership in these trying times for their communities.

As of Sunday there were 24 helicopters, 60 pieces of equipment, 346 firefighters and support staff fighting these wildfires. People across Alberta have joined in to help us battle the fires and save our communities.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say thank you to all those helping to keep Lesser Slave Lake and the entire province safe, and I encourage everyone to do what they can to help support their efforts. These heroes embody the Alberta spirit and spread the message throughout the north that when tragedy strikes, you are not alone. You are courageous and resilient. You are Alberta.

Lethbridge Concerns

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, Lethbridge does not have a voice in this cabinet, so residents are relying on me to advocate for our city. Southern Alberta has one of the worst opioid crises in Canada, but the scale of the problem is something that we've known for some time. In 2015 downtown business, fire, EMS, city officials, health care providers, and the police services asked our government to act. We responded to their request for a safe consumption site. We committed to new funds for an intoxication facility, new detox beds, and new supportive housing. The safe consumption site in Lethbridge

prevented 855 overdoses in one year alone. Those are lives saved. Those are people who lived to get help.

When downtown Lethbridge was struggling with crime and drug activity, the city and the province worked collaboratively with front-line health workers and law enforcement. We now have a well-run needle debris program and a new neighbourhood watch program. I know that this has made downtown more livable, walkable, and has renewed optimism among downtown business owners. I know this because my children and I walk, shop, and live in downtown Lethbridge.

I am not sure that the next steps that Lethbridge asked for and that we delivered will be continued by this Premier. Lethbridge's pleas for supportive housing and expansion of intox and detox are now being heard by a Premier who has twice travelled to Lethbridge and insulted our police chief over this issue. It is my role to advocate for my city to a Premier that didn't see the need for a voice from Lethbridge in his cabinet. I will fight to make sure Lethbridge has the supportive housing it needs. I will stand up to defend our public services, law enforcement, downtown small business, and represent all the women and men who work so hard in our local public health care system.

I hope this Premier eventually learns how important the city of Lethbridge is to our province and learns to treat us with respect.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Irma School Expansion

Mr. Rowsell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm privileged to rise and tell you and my colleagues the fantastic story of the upgrades and expansion of Irma school. Between its opening in 1950 and now, the only capital spending was for modernization in 1984. In the 2015-16 capital plan the Buffalo Trail public school board of trustees designated Irma school to be their primary capital project. In combination with support from the community of Irma, which at the time was seeking to build a new community hall, the board proposed to construct enhanced space to be used jointly for education and community usage.

1:40

In April 2017 the board approved a proposal to expand the school facility by 556 square metres. This expansion was estimated to cost nearly \$1.7 million. The village of Irma pledged \$350,000 for the expansion, and the MD of Wainwright pledged \$750,000. Unfortunately, this wasn't quite enough, so they turned towards fundraising. Both personal and corporate donations were accepted, ranging anywhere from \$100 to \$100,000, with two large community events serving to bolster the donations. The first event, held on April 1, 2018, raised over \$200,000 for the expansion. The second event, held on April 6, 2019, raised over \$240,000. To date the enhancement society has raised \$2 million, exceeding the original goal by \$300,000. Mr. Speaker, this is all from a town of around 400 people. The additional funds have been dedicated to other upgrades in the building.

Mr. Speaker, this is a fantastic and inspiring story of a community banding together in order to improve their local school, and I am incredibly proud of the people of Irma and the MD of Wainwright for accomplishing such a wonderful feat.

The Speaker: The Member for Sherwood Park is rising to make a statement.

Strathcona Christian Academy in Sherwood Park

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's children deserve a world-class education. In order to ensure that our new government's commitment to world-class education is realized, promoting and protecting school choice is critical and is a key component of our agenda. School choice ensures educational quality, diversity of programs, and that every individual child and their parents are able to find a school model that works best for them.

In that vein, Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to highlight a family of schools in Sherwood Park that are a great example of how school choice strengthens Alberta's education system. These schools are members of the Strathcona Christian Academy, or SCA, group, which has an elementary school and a secondary school. Founded in 1980 as private schools, SCA Elementary and Secondary follow the Alberta learning curriculum for kindergarten to grade 6 and grades 7 to 12, respectively, and deliver instruction with a Christian perspective. Mr. Francis Poole is the principal of SCA Elementary, and Mr. Jon Elzinga is the principal of SCA Secondary.

SCA joined the Elk Island public schools in 1998 and now operates as an alternative Christian program under its umbrella. Both schools serve over 575 students each year. The schools' teachers are government certified and are committed Christians who support the academy's mission. SCA students perform well academically and athletically, and both schools contribute greatly to the prosperity of Strathcona county.

Mr. Speaker, SCA Elementary and Secondary schools are excellent examples of how school choice ensures excellence in education. I am proud to be part of a new government that respects, is firmly committed to, and values school choice in our education system.

May God bless SCA. Go, Eagles, go. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Support for Business

Mr. Loewen: Yesterday the NDP House leader rose in this place not to offer amendments or to represent his constituents; instead, he rose in this place to stay true to his party's left-wing, antibusiness ideology. He attacked Alberta's job creators, those very people who offer gainful employment to the folks looking for work, those job creators who put their lives and livelihoods on the line to create the prosperity that people come to Alberta to enjoy.

That former minister, whose government was soundly rejected by a record number of Alberta voters, said that if a business is facing hardships, if a business is struggling with thousands of dollars in additional costs foisted on them by the NDP carbon tax, if that business is facing the prospect of closing its doors, too bad, so sad. He said that they should have had a better business plan. While the now Official Opposition was imposing the carbon tax that they didn't even tell Albertans about in their election platform, a record number of Alberta businesses closed their doors for the last time. The suggestion that businesses should just somehow be able to absorb "paying a few thousand dollars extra a month" speaks to how totally out of touch that opposition party truly is.

The NDP oversaw billions in investment leaving Alberta, thousands upon thousands of job losses, more than 170,000 unemployed Albertans, and a record number of business closures, and their House leader has the audacity to say that those people should have just had a better business plan or found new management.

I am proud to say that Albertans heard that message loud and clear and put this province under new management. On this side of

the House we are proud to scrap the NDP carbon tax. We are proud to make this province the best place in the country to invest in, to create jobs, and to start a family. What's sad is that this opposition is still trying to attack the very people who make Alberta prosper.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education has a bill to introduce.

Bill 8

Education Amendment Act, 2019

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with great privilege to introduce for first reading Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019.

This legislation, through a series of amendments to the Education Act, will strengthen and modernize Alberta's education system. I believe that amending the previously passed Education Act, which was first introduced in this House in 2012 and continued to be consulted on until 2018, will allow it to serve as a blueprint for the education system for years to come. The amendments we are introducing today will bring stability and help the province's transition to the Education Act occur more smoothly.

I look forward to discussing and debating the important amendments included in this bill with the House in the very near future. I am both proud and honoured to move first reading of Bill 8.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night in my speech on Bill 3 I made comments that corporate tax cuts don't actually result in more jobs or increased wages for workers but, instead, enrich the shareholder class by allowing share buybacks. In that speech I referenced two articles. One was titled Oilpatch Share Buybacks Drive Record High Totals on Toronto Stock Exchange, from the Canadian Press, dated November 25, 2018. I have the appropriate number of copies of that document.

I also have another document here, dated May 14, 2019, entitled Cash-rich Canadian Oil Firms Favor Buybacks as Other Options Narrow.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings of returns or reports? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a backgrounder report entitled Hate Speech and Freedom of Expression: Legal Boundaries in Canada, that was produced by the Library of Parliament. The report highlights the robust legal mechanisms that Canada has in place to prevent the use of hate speech and discrimination towards individuals and other groups. As we move forward with our mandate to implement the Chicago principles on free speech on campus, I thought it prudent to inform this Assembly and all Albertans that implementing the Chicago principles will enhance, not erode, our commitment to the safety and well-being of all Albertans.

The Speaker: I'd just caution the hon. minister that Tabling Returns and Reports isn't an opportunity to make a statement that

you would not otherwise be able to make but often just a brief description of the document that you're actually tabling.

Are there other tablings today? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a copy of a letter that was provided to Calgary police by the members of the South Asian community over their concerns with rising gang violence and illegal drugs in our communities. I have the requisite number of copies of that.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Gay-straight Alliances in Schools

Ms Notley: It was like a slap to the face; it was like everybody in the world hates you: those are the words of Jane MacNeil describing efforts to set up a GSA at a Calgary Catholic school in 2016. The school tried to change the name, they sent Jane to counselling, and they never established the GSA. All of this occurred under Bill 10, exactly the law this Minister of Education wants to restore. To the minister: why are you putting your ideology over Jane's education, her feeling of safety, and her mental health?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. Under the new Education Act we will have the most comprehensive GSA-, QSA-inclusive legislation in Canada. I've been in contact with students recently from the LGBTQ-plus community, and they have told me that they are really looking towards the balanced approach that we are putting forward.

Thank you.

Ms Notley: The minister's characterization is absolutely untrue.

I have a very political battle to fight right now; I was hoping I wouldn't have to fight it, but it's a battle nonetheless: that, Mr. Speaker, was Calgary grade 12 student Sean Ruhland reacting to the election of this UCP government. He's involved in a GSA, and he vowed to stand up against this minister's plan to roll back protections for LGBTQ students in their schools. To the minister: shouldn't Sean be studying for his diplomas instead of having to fight to protect himself from you?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. Proclaiming the Education Act will make Alberta schools the most diverse, excellent classrooms that all Albertans desire and deserve. It modernizes our education system by replacing a piece of legislation which originally was introduced in '88. We will have the most comprehensive GSA, QSA pieces of legislation in all of Canada.

Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Once again the minister has repeated something that is not true.

This is saving lives; this is everything that my life and my friends' lives and so many strangers' lives depend on when they're at this age: this was Amelia Troughton, a student at Victoria school. Now, while that school here in Edmonton will probably continue to

protect LGBTQ students through strong policies, supported GSAs, and strict privacy rights, we know that at least half the schools in this province will abandon this job with the permission and tacit encouragement of this minister, Mr. Speaker. To the minister. GSAs save lives. Why are you going to literally put those lives in danger?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. I categorically disagree with what has just been said. We will have the opportunity for students to form a GSA, a QSA, or any other inclusion group that so meets their needs. This will be the strongest legislation in all of Canada, and I'm very proud to put forward the Education Act that will support it.

Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Allow me to explain to the minister, Mr. Speaker. Reversion to Bill 10 removes the obligation to have an LGBTQ-supportive policy, thereby allowing schools to discourage kids from asking for GSAs. It removes protection from being outed, thereby scaring kids away from GSAs. It removes government enforcement provisions, thereby allowing schools to block GSAs. Minister, be honest. You know that as many as half of boards will abandon GSAs, and you're okay with it because your values are more important than the safety of those kids. Why not just admit it?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. I again disagree with what has just been said. Under section 35.1(1) of the Education Act it specifically guarantees student entitlement to create inclusion groups, including GSAs and QSA alliances. Students cannot disclose a student's membership in any inclusion group as a matter of routine as there are student privacy considerations that trump other legislation. What I heard from students that are in these organizations is that they want balance.

Thank you.

Ms Notley: Your vested interests want balance. Those are the only people that want balance.

It is clear from what we heard from the minister that she's not listening to these students, not at all, and she has a duty to protect them. Cathy Hogg, president of the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta, said: our association a hundred per cent supports the protection of this vulnerable population, and safe and caring schools are extremely important to us. To the minister. The PSBAA advocates for 24 schools boards and hundreds of thousands of students. Why won't you listen to them at least?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. I will enlighten the other parties as to what happens when a student would like to participate in a GSA inclusion group. Under section 35.1(1) of the Education Act it identifies the steps for establishing a GSA. Those steps are very plain language. Students can ask to be part of it, the principal permits the GSA, the principal designates a staff liaison, and so on and so on. It is very well spelled out. There will be protections. There will be strong antibullying policies and a strong, safe, and caring schools policy.

Thank you.

Ms Notley: The bill won't work, it didn't work before – everyone over there knows it – and she's not being straightforward. Now, when the UCP's John Carpay, you know, the guy who equated the . . .

Speaker's Ruling Addressing Questions through the Chair

The Speaker: Sorry. Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, I'm very apologetic. I've let it slide a number of times. You might just send your comments through the Speaker, not refer to the minister as "she" or otherwise. It would be appropriate for you to send your questions through the Speaker.

Ms Notley: So I should refer to the minister as "they," Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

Mr. Bilous: Point of order.

Gay-straight Alliances in Schools (continued)

Ms Notley: When the UCP's John Carpay, you know, the guy who equated the swastika to the rainbow flag, challenged GSA protections, the court said that GSAs in no way restrict the rights of parents or schools to continue to impart their religious and moral values to their children. To the minister: why are you so driven to roll back protections for LGBTQ students that you're ignoring them, elected school trustees, and the courts?

The Speaker: I just might note two points of order at approximately 1:56 and 1:57.

I see the Government House Leader rising to answer.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to answer this question. It's disappointing to continue to watch the opposition go forward with these tactics. The hon. Minister of Education has done a very good job this afternoon of answering the questions that have been asked, making it clear the protections for GSAs will remain in place even under this legislation. She went so far as to even read the legislation to confirm that. I will be clear. Bill 10, which was supported by all the legacy parties who represent this current party and the opposition party at the time, remains in place. GSAs will be protected, and it doesn't matter how much the opposition wants to yell and scream; those are the facts.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Two days ago I asked this Education minister . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

Member Irwin: . . . why she hasn't done a thing to support LGBTQ youth. She keeps saying that she's looking for balance. As a former teacher and administrator let me paint a realistic picture for this minister. An LGBTQ student is walking down the hallway through a gauntlet of homophobic and transphobic insults. The student's school tells them that they can't have a support club because they find the words "gay" or "queer" uncomfortable. They quit school. Mr. Speaker, this actually happens. This is what Bill 10 allowed. Is that the minister's version of balance?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we have in our schools very strong, safe, and caring schools policies. We also have very strong antibullying policies.

As far as trying to get a GSA established in your school, that will absolutely still be able to happen. That is very clear in the Education Act, and it will continue.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2016 this Education minister told a right-wing online news site that it was not necessary to, quote: create additional policies for one group. She was referring to the work of our government to fix that mess that was Bill 10. In my last question I gave the minister a crash course on just how hard things were for LGBTQ youth without solid legal protections for GSAs. Does the minister understand now why one group, LGBTQ youth, needs additional protections, and if she doesn't, should she really be the minister?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, it's so disappointing to watch these tactics. This is a very important issue and a conversation that's certainly worthy of this Chamber. The Education minister has been taking her time answering those questions today, making it clear that GSAs will be protected, something that all sides of this House supported. In fact, all sides of this House supported Bill 10, to make that clear that GSAs need to be protected going forward and are an important process within our schools. It is shameful to watch this continued attack, personally, on the Education minister, who is doing an excellent job of answering those issues. I suggest the opposition takes some time and listens to what she has to say.

2:00

Member Irwin: What's shameful is putting our kids at risk.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This minister says that Alberta will have the strongest protections for GSAs in the country once she's through, but it's not true. We called our Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-straight Alliances.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

Member Irwin: By reverting to Bill 10, we will be enshrining a toothless law that doesn't support students. To the minister. I guess we should call your bill An Act to Destroy Gay-Straight Alliances.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. Again, I would have to categorically disagree with the hon. member. We will have the strongest legislation on GSA, QSA, and inclusion groups. Oftentimes they forget the rest of it, the inclusion groups piece. What is in the privacy legislation that will govern this is FOIP and PIPA, and that actually supersedes, so there will be privacy legislation that will ensure that the private information of a student is safeguarded.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has a question.

School Nutrition Programs

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. School boards are bracing hard for the cuts this Education minister is planning. At Pembina Hills, trustees anticipate the school nutrition program will be cut, a program that feeds 33,000 students across our province. Research shows better academic performance when kids are fed. To the

Education minister: is feeding hungry students so they can learn a priority for your government?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader is rising.

Ms Notley: How hard a question is that?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it's always great to hear from the Leader of the Official Opposition heckling away. This is the ridiculous behaviour that continues to come from the NDP, but I digress.

Instead, about the question. The Minister of Education and this government and the Premier have been clear about the importance of funding education. We'll be working through the budget process as we go through it and making sure that that is dealt with one hundred per cent. It's a priority of this government. We made that clear inside our platform as we campaigned to come to this place. Again, Mr. Speaker, through you to them . . .

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: . . . I encourage the hon. members to bring some decorum back to this place. I suspect that's why they sit on that side of the House, because they continue to act that way.

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

The point of order is noted.

Ms Hoffman: Let's try this for decorum. To the Government House Leader: will the 33,000 kids that go to school getting lunches be fed next year . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Hoffman: . . . or will they be hungry, in need of school lunches, Mr. Speaker?

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. We've been very clear, I've been very clear that we are committed to funding education. We will be building schools. As to the specifics of this, boards are in the best position to decide where they're going with things, but as far as – you know, what I have to say is that instead of playing politics and speculating on education funding, which we've been very clear about, I encourage my colleagues to wait for further information.

Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Students throughout Alberta arrive at school hungry. That is a fact, and key messaging from the minister doesn't fill empty stomachs.

Given that 150 students at St. Gregory the Great school, one that the minister was a school board member for and screamed the praises of this program, will the minister let those 150 students go to school hungry next year, or will they and the other 33,000 students actually get a school lunch? Yes or no? Are you feeding hungry kids . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Hoffman: . . . or are you going to let them starve in their classrooms?

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. As a former trustee I totally understand the pressures that school boards are under to make these decisions, but we have said that we will be continuing to fund education. It is a priority for us. Students are

looked after every single day. We care about these kids, and we will do the right things for them.

Thank you.

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

Calgary Construction Environmental Concerns

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary ring road borders several communities on the edge of my riding, Calgary-West. This significant transportation infrastructure project has raised some concerns for my constituents, especially when it comes to the power poles being placed by Enmax. In particular, they are concerned about the impact that these poles may have on their health and quality of life. Can the Minister of Transportation please share what our government is doing to address these concerns for my constituents?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the hon. member is right in having empathy for his constituents. Construction leads to temporary diminishment in quality of life just by the nature of the noise and the other disruptions. The location for the infrastructure is decided through a process that requires Enmax to file an application with the Alberta Utilities Commission for approval of the proposed transmission lines. I will commit to following up with the member. He has expressed interest in finding a time to meet with his constituents on this issue, and I will try to make that happen.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that the ring road is subject to provincial jurisdiction – I understand that, once completed, it will fall within the provincial noise level average of about 65 decibels over a 24-hour period. However, there are several urban residential communities in my riding that directly parallel this new construction, and given the uniqueness of the situation, will the minister consider adhering to the city of Calgary's lower noise level guidelines of 60 decibels to ensure that residents are not negatively impacted by the noise?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most Albertans love roads, and most Albertans dislike the noise from them. It's a fact of life. Noise attenuation measures are planned for the community of Signal Hill together with construction on the ring road. Lots in Discovery Ridge bordering the ring road were within 20 to 30 metres, and the road was moved 30 metres away to try to accommodate that. I invite the hon. member to continue to work with my office on this issue and discuss the noise attenuation issues for Springbank Hill, Discovery Ridge, and Signal Hill.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These are serious concerns. Given, again, that the ring road will closely border several residential communities in my riding, which will include communities such as Discovery Ridge, Signal Hill, and Springbank Hill, will the minister commit to narrowing the lanes of traffic and implementing sound attenuation measures such as berms and walls to further minimize the impact that the noise is having on these communities?

Thank you.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll reiterate to the member that noise is a real issue. I understand that. Noise studies are carried out on an ongoing basis once the road is in operation. Noise attenuation measures are planned, and I will assure the hon. member that once the road is complete, more noise levels will be studied to see if additional measures are needed to be put in place. I will review with the member based on that factual information once the road is up and operating.

Speaker's Ruling Addressing Questions through the Chair

The Speaker: If we can just pause the question period clock for a brief moment while I – obviously, all members will know that points of order are dealt with at the end of question period, but just to try to create a sense of a go-forward path here this afternoon, as I've heard a number of points of order, I'd like to provide some clarity around my comments with respect to the interjection that I made to the Leader of the Official Opposition. Questions and answers should be directed through the chair. Of course, everyone knows that that's page 610 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. Members may refer to members or ministers in the third person, as we saw earlier with reference to "she." However, earlier today we also heard members refer to people as "you," in the second person. This was the heart of the interjection.

I'm happy to provide more comment after question period once I have the benefit of the Blues, but I would encourage members to make sure that they are directing questions through the chair and defer "you" or direct lines of communication as we are a little bit excitable here this afternoon.

With that said, if the clock can resume, I'd like to hear from the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

2:10 Education Funding

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, 30,000 kids get a nutritious meal every day from the school nutrition program, and in Lethbridge the school board tells us that they not only feed kids during the week, but for some of the lowest income parents, they actually send weekend food parcels home with kids. The public board is preparing for cuts to these programs. It's the kind of help lowest income children need, and it's what's at stake with this Minister of Finance's cruel and heartless dithering on education funding in September. Will the Finance minister confirm with this House that he will direct the necessary funds towards the school nutrition program to properly fund it in September?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education is rising.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. Again, I want to reiterate that our priority is to look after every single child under our care. We have over 700,000 students.

Before I go any further, I just wanted to share with the House that there was an accident this morning. A contracted bus carrying Grande Prairie Catholic grade 8 and grade 9 students from the Celtic Sports Academy to Bear Lake pulled out onto the highway and was struck by a semi. Twenty-five students were on the bus, but we hear that they've been assessed by first responders. It appears the students suffered only bumps and bruises. We're sending our thoughts with those families. I just wanted to make sure that we knew that.

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister did not campaign on cuts to inclusive education in the Peace-Wapiti region and given that the classroom improvement fund supported a number of

services for children with disabilities in his own constituency, what is the minister's understanding of the future of these programs if he does not fund them?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were clear during the campaign period, we were clear with Albertans that we will continue to maintain education funding and, at the same time, look for every opportunity to deliver a world-class education system in a more efficient and intentional manner. I've got great faith in our excellent Education minister to do just that.

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, given that the classroom improvement fund supports speech-language assistance, literacy, and math interventions in Peace-Wapiti and given that one student in Peace-Wapiti reported that the programs gave them "the only adult in my life that cares about me," how will the Minister of Finance go home and explain to his constituents that he cruelly waved his wand and made those programs disappear?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has talked about some excellent educators and some good programs that are meeting the needs of Albertans. As I mentioned earlier, we're committed to maintain funding for education. We believe that we can be fiscally responsible with taxpayers' dollars and deliver world-class programs.

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

Drug- and Gang-related Violence in Northeast Calgary

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Residents in northeast Calgary are terrified over the rise in drug trafficking and gang violence. The Calgary police have confirmed that four members of the community have been killed in three different attacks since the beginning of the year. To the Solicitor General: are you aware of this situation, and what specific actions have you taken to address it so far?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, I'm aware of the matter, and we're reaching out to these parties and co-ordinating with my colleagues here to meet with them to talk about the concerns that they addressed. Obviously, we take matters of policing very seriously. Also, we want to make sure that all Albertans know that we want to make sure that all Albertans feel safe in their communities, and we'll make sure that we reach out to stakeholders to make sure that they are heard on this matter.

Mr. Sabir: Given that hundreds gathered at Nelson Mandela high school and marched to Saddle Ridge police station over the weekend to raise their concerns and given that a representative with Progressive Cultural Association Calgary said, and I quote, "We can save our kids before they have to kill each other," again to the Solicitor General: what other supports is your ministry providing to protect our children and warn them about the dangers of associating with gangs?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, again, our party is committed to making sure that Albertans feel safe in their communities. As our campaign promised, throughout Alberta we want to make sure that our police and front-line services have the resources they deserve. We're going to be making sure that we fund programs like ALERT to deal with drugs and gangs and human trafficking, and make sure that our front-line services have the resources they need to do their

jobs. We've had increasing crime across Alberta. We're going to make sure that we address this head-on.

Mr. Sabir: Given that my constituents and those in other northeast ridings need to see a police presence in their communities and given that we are already seeing evidence of cuts to sports for students in our schools, will the Solicitor General agree that funding our classrooms and social programs for our youth is more important than a risky corporate tax?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier on, I'm looking forward to meeting with the stakeholders referenced in the northeast of Calgary to talk further about their concerns regarding this matter. Our government is committed to making sure that our front-line police officers have the resources that they need to do their jobs and make sure that Albertans feel safe in their homes. That's a commitment our government has made. I want to make sure that all Albertans know that we take that seriously.

Support for Business

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, the NDP oversaw a record number of business closures as they imposed their job-killing carbon tax. Can the Minister of Finance please inform this place of what steps the United Conservative government is taking to undo the damage caused by the NDP?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, yesterday in this Chamber the former economic development minister said, "Companies are going out of business because of the carbon tax" – I'm sorry; if paying a few thousand dollars extra a month means you went out of business, maybe you need to take a look at your business plan." It should be obvious to everyone that the NDP have absolutely no idea of what it takes to run a business and create jobs, and that is what has led us into this economic mess that we now find ourselves in. We're extremely proud of having just lowered the cost of doing business through the elimination of the carbon tax.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, given that the NDP House leader rose yesterday to attack Alberta's job creators by suggesting that they should be able to absorb "paying a few thousand dollars extra a month" caused by their carbon tax and given that Albertans rejected the NDP in record numbers and given that the United Conservative Party has a clear mandate to implement a new plan to make it easier to invest in Alberta, can the minister please inform the House on progress being introduced to make Alberta the best place to invest in Canada and to create jobs?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, in addition to lowering the cost for business by limiting the carbon tax, we're introducing other pro-business – that's right; I said it: pro-business – measures. Our job creation tax cut will create 55,000 jobs, grow the economy by \$12.7 billion. Unlike the NDP, we do not hate businesses and understand that wealth is created not by taxing job creators to death but by allowing them to grow and thrive in our province.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, given that the NDP House leader's callous remarks in this place indicated that the opposition party does not understand that "paying a few thousand dollars extra a month" is a real hardship for Alberta job creators and given that the NDP oversaw record job losses, more than 170,000 unemployed Albertans, and record business closures, can the minister please inform this House on how businesses are reacting to the NDP war on job creators?

The Speaker: I just caution the hon. member. I sometimes struggle to grasp how it might be possible to use a quote without using a preamble. As such, I would just remind members that all questions after question 4 should be phrased without preambles.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, our office has received many calls from businesses who are excited and eager to bring jobs back to Alberta. The past month we've done more to renew that advantage than the NDP did in four years of government. By scrapping the carbon tax, reducing red tape, and making our corporate tax rate more competitive, we will bring back those jobs and families that fled our province.

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

2:20 Public-private Partnerships for Capital Projects

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know there are important infrastructure projects all across this province. From high schools to hospitals and dams to ring roads, we need public infrastructure that works for Albertans. Given that because of the Conservatives' risky ideological experiment in P3s in 2015, schools in Edmonton were left with bright orange fencing where fields were supposed to be and principals weren't even allowed to heat their schools based on contractual issues, will the Minister of Infrastructure commit to not repeating this failed ideological experiment?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, it's really rich coming from that member, who was part of the government for four years. They had four years to build public infrastructure efficiently. They failed. Albertans decided on April 16. They gave us a mandate to build public infrastructure that will build prosperity for Albertans, and we're going to do that.

Mr. Dang: Sounds like kids will just have to play in the mud, Mr. Speaker.

Now, given that the city of Edmonton tried this risky experiment in P3s for the valley line LRT and given that this risky experiment has now resulted in indefinite delay and given that the mayor of Edmonton has called on you to not force P3s down the throats of municipalities, will the minister commit to not forcing municipalities to pursue your ideological agenda?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, on April 16 Albertans elected this government, which campaigned on our platform. We clearly said that we will aggressively pursue P3s to build public infrastructure faster, within budget, and safely, and that's what we're going to do.

Mr. Dang: Sounds like we're just going to be hearing about more delays, Mr. Speaker.

Now, given that P3 projects are not only failing in Alberta but we can see that in Scott Moe's Saskatchewan, the North Battleford hospital, which has only been open for two months, already needs its entire roof replaced, will the minister commit to not repeating the mistakes that we're seeing elsewhere and not build our health care with this dangerous P3 model?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, the public-private partnership approach was adopted all over the world before this member was even born, okay? [interjections] There are merits in doing – our government will take a case-by-case approach, and if there is a business case for a P3, we'll likely pursue it, but there are different procurement methods. We apply those based on an individual project's business case.

The Speaker: I might just mention to the hon. minister that, as you saw, that type of language moves in the direction of a personal attack on the Member for Edmonton-South. I would encourage you to choose your words wisely.

Transportation Projects

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, it's critical for public transportation that the city of Calgary get the long-overdue green line, and I'm proud that our government worked to ensure that this project would move forward to keep Calgaryans moving. Will the Minister of Transportation commit that this NDP priority will continue as originally designed, with the original timelines as well, or will he just rely on the Premier, once again declaring that he was the first supporter of the green line but offering no real plan to build this important project?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, first of all, would like to thank the hon. member for reminding Albertans that the Premier in his time in Ottawa actually put forward one of the first large chunks of money – I think about a billion and a half dollars – towards the green line. Further – wait for this – I would thank the previous government for about matching that.

Yes. As we promised in our campaign, we will go ahead with the LRT projects in Calgary and Edmonton as we committed as part of our platform.

Member Loyola: Given that the UCP has said that nonpriority projects may be cancelled or delayed, will the minister tell us if the Fort Saskatchewan bridge, which is necessary to support proper flow of traffic in the Industrial Heartland, will continue on time, budget, and with the original scope?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would say to the hon. member that the bridge in Fort Saskatchewan is a very important project, and as we go forward with our capital planning and budgeting process, it will be considered in a very serious way. We will make those announcements when the time comes. We understand just how important that project is, and we'll consider it with great seriousness.

Member Loyola: Given that the folks in Medicine Hat and Lethbridge deserve to be connected, will the minister commit to making the rural transportation pilot in this region permanent? Why or why not?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. The question is extra interesting. The fact that it's a pilot means that the previous government didn't see fit to make it permanent. We will evaluate the pilot as the pilot continues and make decisions based on how we best meet the needs of Albertans and how it fits in our capital and budget planning process.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-South East has a question.

Provincial Fiscal Deficit and Credit Rating

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP government's reckless accumulation of debt gets a lot of attention, and rightly so. Alberta's credit was also impacted, seeing six downgrades in only a few years. Credit downgrades increase our cost to borrow and result in higher interest payments on the debt we have, potentially

taking money away from essential services like health care and education. For the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance: can you comment on the difficult task ahead, not just in paying down Alberta's debt but in repairing Alberta's credit?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for the question. Credit ratings do matter as they directly affect the cost of borrowing to the provincial treasury. Credit-rating agencies did not like the NDP government. In fact, in the four years that the NDP held office, Alberta's credit rating was downgraded six times. They managed to drive us so far into debt that the interest payments alone are now higher than the budgets of 17 out of 21 government departments. I can confidently say that we will be doing things differently.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. While Alberta's credit was deteriorating, one of the primary rating agencies stated that they were hoping to see a more deliberate effort to address the deficit by the former NDP government. Can the minister comment on the deliberate efforts his ministry and our government are taking to address the deficit and repair our credit?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is absolutely correct. The state of the province's books is unacceptable. Under the NDP Alberta's debt-servicing costs tripled: \$1.9 billion dollars now go to bankers and bondholders, not to health care or education. That's socialist economics for you. What do socialists do when they hit the debt wall? They tax even more. The NDP raised taxes and fees 97 times. Once again I say: we're doing it differently. We've already repealed the carbon tax. We're bringing back 55,000 jobs to Albertans.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Jones: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that, like many Albertans living under the previous government, these rating agencies consider Alberta's fiscal outlook negative or unstable due to the previous government's financial decisions and given that we have made a commitment to Albertans to clean up our credit and our finances, does the minister see a path to improving the outlook of our credit rating, and can he comment on what the rating agencies will be looking for from us in that regard?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are reducing taxes and creating economic capacity in the province. There's a path forward here, and it begins with fiscal stability, responsibility, and predictability. The credit agencies will be looking for us to reduce our spending and get to a balanced budget, and, unlike the NDP, the credit-rating agencies will see that we are serious. Like I've said, our government's approach will be different. We're bringing back prudence and vigour to the budget process. Albertans expect us to balance the budget, and that's what we'll do.

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

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I asked the Minister of Advanced Education if he would keep the tuition and

instructional fee protections in place, and he did not provide anything that resembled a clear answer. Now I think I know why. Last November this minister posted the following on social media, and I quote, reducing tuition has no impact on increasing enrolment. To the minister: were you really claiming that keeping tuition rates affordable does not allow more people to actually access postsecondary education?

2:30

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, as I had addressed yesterday, the tuition freeze has been going on for about four years, and it's still in place for the 2019-2020 academic year. Subsequent to that, current legislation already exists tying tuition increases to the rate of inflation. I had an opportunity to meet with representatives from CAUS, that's, of course, the Council of Alberta University Students, and we were able to sit down and discuss some of their immediate priorities. I look forward to continuing to work with them and other student groups from across the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, there's nothing that resembles answering a question with that first one. Let me try again.

Given that the minister also posted, and I quote, "Sadly, freezing tuition will not make Alberta postsecondary education more accessible," and given that the tuition cap introduced by our government has saved students, on average, over \$2,000 over the course of a degree, to the Minister of Advanced Education: given that you clearly oppose a tuition freeze, just how high will you raise the price of postsecondary education for students while your government doles out billions to . . .

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Accessibility is incredibly important, and that's why we have committed to providing various investments with organizations such as Careers: the Next Generation and Women Building Futures, so that we can help encourage more people to pursue entry into the skilled trades and other vocational opportunities. We want to expand the registered apprenticeship program as well, doubling the number of high schools that that organization works with. That's all tied to accessibility, so we have clear action there.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this minister's views on downloading costs to postsecondary students are on display for everyone to see on social media and given that his comments will certainly spur a great deal of anxiety amongst students, parents, and teachers, I'm going to ask the minister one more time: will you reject your past views on tuition controls and pledge to this House now to keeping the tuition freeze intact for the duration of the term?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I agree with the member opposite. Students have a lot of anxiety because they don't know if they're going to have jobs at the end of their degrees. Regrettably, the entire economic climate – because of their high tax and debt policies, the economy is on its knees. We're taking action to make sure we get our economy back on its feet so that our students and our graduates can have good jobs at the end of their programs.

Environmental Programs

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's quite clear that when the members opposite speak about jobs, they're not talking about green jobs. Energy Efficiency Alberta delivers a host of programs that help Albertans save energy and money. Before our government established this agency, we were the only jurisdiction in North America that didn't have one. But in March the Premier told reporters that after they won the election, those programs would be gone. Is the Minister of Environment and Parks still planning to cancel those programs?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the Premier and I have been very, very clear. We will not be going forward with the direction the NDP did, which was taking hard-working taxpayer dollars and investing them in buying light bulbs and shower heads for Albertans. It was fundamentally rejected on April 16 by the people of Alberta. We have a different approach. We're going to be focused on climate change working through our TIER program, working with our largest emitters, which is the bulk of the emissions that happen inside our province, bringing forward and working on innovation, and actually trying to tackle the problem. Again, it just comes down to a fundamental difference between the UCP and NDP. We're focused on actually accomplishing something; they were focused on taxing people.

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, we are focused on tackling climate change, the single most important . . .

Some Hon. Members: Preamble.

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

Mr. Schmidt: . . . emergency facing humanity. Given that we are now hearing that the UCP is backpedalling on its promise to roll back these savings to Albertans and given that the UCP has also opted for Justin Trudeau's carbon tax, can the minister please explain how he will now fund EEA programs given that the only source of revenue that supports them is gone?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the hon. member brought up Justin Trudeau's carbon tax. The fact is that this opposition, when they were in government, spent their time trying to shore up and be an ally with Justin Trudeau. We have a different focus. We have been able to stop the NDP carbon tax now. Our next focus, as has been presented by our Premier and our party, will be to fight Justin Trudeau on his carbon tax. We fundamentally reject any carbon tax. We'll continue to support Saskatchewan and Ontario and other provinces that are fighting it. We'll continue to stand up for Albertans when it comes to the carbon tax. Again, just a different approach between these two parties.

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, their approach involves hiring lawyers while firing people who are working in energy efficiency.

Given that Energy Efficiency Alberta created 4,000 jobs and given that these programs generated almost a billion dollars in economic activity and saved Albertans half a billion dollars a year and given that the UCP government is intent on giving \$4 billion to billionaires, can the same minister explain why helping homes and businesses to save on their energy costs and reduce pollution is less important than writing cheques to their donors?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will tell you that the single biggest thing that we could do to help Albertans with their energy bills was to terminate and kill the carbon tax once we got inside this place. I'm proud of that. As for the hon. member referring to

lawyers, this is the difference between Alberta's new government and Alberta's old government. Alberta's old government was focused on working with Justin Trudeau to cause pain for Albertans. That's what they were focused on. This government will be focused on defending them, and we will use every means possible, including legal challenges, to be able to defend Albertans. That's our approach; again, very, very different. The biggest approach we'll have is that we'll be working to get Andrew Scheer elected as the next Prime Minister of this country.

Emerald Foundation Environmental Awards

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, for the minister of environment. I was pleased to see that a rural constituent of Lacombe-Ponoka, Mr. Lloyd Dahl, was the recipient of a lifetime achievement award at last evening's Emerald Foundation awards, that recognize environmental leadership in the province. Can the minister tell me a bit more about Mr. Dahl's background and how passionate many rural Albertans are about their environment?

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, Mr. Dahl was born in 1929 in central Alberta, where both the hon. member and I are from. His childhood was spent farming land, mainly by hand, and helping others in the area where they farmed. While working for the village of Alix, he developed many parks and playgrounds around the community. He also developed the Alix Lake campground and the Haunted Lakes campground north of Alix. Mr. Dahl is exactly the person that the United Conservative government wants to partner with when it comes to conservation. It was exciting to see him receive his lifetime award, and I congratulate him on that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Mr. Dahl is a truly fine example to all Albertans when it comes to quiet, self-motivated, and principled leadership on the environment – he just rolls up his sleeves, goes to work, and gets things done – can the minister tell me about some of the specific work around Alix Lake and Haunted Lakes that he was honoured for last night?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, in 1997 Mr. Dahl retired and began to dedicate his volunteer life to Alix Lake and the Alix Nature Trail Society, formed in 1999. He helped to develop the beautiful nature trail around Alix Lake, including birdwatching facilities and points of interest signage. He's been an advocate for Alix Lake for more than 40 years, raising awareness for lake health issues and ways in which the community can get involved in caring for the lake resources. At 90 years young he still tries to walk a portion of the trail every day to check on its well-being. Again, those are who we want to work with on conservation in our province.

Mr. Orr: Given that the made-in-Alberta Emerald Foundation awards are in their 28th year and Alberta is the only province in Canada that honours environmental stewardship in this way, can the minister speak a bit more about the foundation itself and how Alberta has and will continue to lead the world in environmental stewardship?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you to the hon. member for the question. The foundation connects the province's environmental leaders and provides year-round programming that engages, informs, and emboldens environmental stewardship in our

province. The Emerald awards have recognized and celebrated the outstanding environmental achievements of large and small businesses, individuals, not-for-profit associations, community groups, youth, and government groups for nearly 30 years. And, again, they're exactly the kind of people that the United Conservative Party and Alberta's new government want to partner with to work on conservation.

2:40 Rural Crime Prevention and Law Enforcement

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, crime continues to be an ongoing issue for my constituents within Highwood as well as all over rural Alberta. After numerous town halls and conversations with residents, rural Albertans want the government to address skyrocketing crime rates in rural communities. There is mounting frustration all over Alberta but especially in rural communities that crimes are being committed by repeat offenders. To the Minister of Justice: what do you intend to do to stop the current revolving door of our justice system?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, this is the number one issue that I hear about from rural Albertans. I also want to thank the hon. member for his leadership on this matter and continued thoughtful advocacy on this. Over the last four years, we've seen crime rates skyrocket across so many of our rural communities. We are committed to ensuring that our law enforcement officials have the tools necessary to do their jobs. We're going to create police-Crown high-risk and repeat offender units in each judicial district to provide recommendations for early release for repeat and high-risk offenders. We're also going to be putting forward our public's right to know act.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the strain on policing is increasing as the scope of their duties continues to expand, including the requirements of policing cannabis, to the Minister of Justice: what are your plans to ensure adequate funding for rural police enforcement?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, unlike previous governments that wanted to hand out free light bulbs, we're going to be making sure that our police officers have the resources they need to do their jobs. We're going to be making sure that ALERT has funding of \$50 million to tackle drugs but also making sure that we tackle gang activities across Alberta. We're going to make sure that our police and prosecutors have the tools they need to do their jobs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood has the call.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As rural areas are geographically vast, there's a growing frustration about long response times to 911 calls to help rural Albertans protect themselves, their loved ones, and their property. To the Minister of Justice: what steps are you willing to take to deal with the long response times in rural areas so residents finally feel safe?

The Speaker: The Minister . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah. It takes two years to investigate a leadership race.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar will see that the Speaker is on his feet, and as such he will keep his comments to himself.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that we'll be implementing the United Conservative Party's Alberta crime strategy. We're going to be expanding the use of electronic monitoring technology to ensure that law enforcement is able to respond more quickly. We're also going to be reviewing the Crown policy manual to ensure that we take into consideration the challenges faced in rural Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. I'm not sure if we would like 30 seconds to head to the lounges or if everyone would like to stay and observe the points of order. Perhaps I'll give those who would like to head out just a couple of brief seconds to do so. [interjections]

Hon. members, please take your conversations to the lobbies. I believe that the Government House Leader rose first.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do have several points of order today. Some of them we may be able to roll into one, but the first point of order that I rise on will not be able to be rolled into some of the other ones that happened afterwards.

I rise first today under 23(h), (i), and (j) in regard to the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition in this place today. I believe that her actions create disorder when she does this, and I will describe what I'm talking about momentarily, Mr. Speaker, but I wanted to refer you to the standing order.

Unfortunately, we've seen the Leader of the Opposition do this outside of this Chamber to you. The reality is that you have been elected as the Speaker of this Chamber. When you rise and take control of the House, we must respect that even when I disagree with you and the same for the Leader of the Opposition. She again, in that moment that I called that point of order, challenged your authority. I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that that creates disorder in this place. I was shocked to see her do that on Twitter or in press releases in the past, but that's not relevant to this Chamber. I'll grant you that.

That behaviour needs to stop. It's unbecoming of a Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, it's inappropriate, and it is causing trouble inside this Chamber. I would ask that you correct members to make sure that they respect your authority, particularly when you're standing up.

There's a standing order to question your decisions. The hon. Leader of the Opposition is welcome to use that. I used it last night, 13(2), in case she's unaware of it. That is the appropriate process to deal with that.

We must respect the chair, or we will have the things that we've seen take place in this House today.

The Speaker: Thank you for your interjections. I'm not sure that I need your assistance on this particular interjection, Opposition House Leader. I think the Speaker is very well equipped to decide when a point of order is indeed necessary with respect to challenging the chair. I think we've seen on a number of occasions the Speaker perhaps more than willing to do so with respect to interjecting when people have made comments that may or may not have been directed towards the chair. As such, this is not a point of order.

The Official Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Oral Question Period Practices Addressing Questions through the Chair

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's interesting. I rise on a point order under 23(h), (i), (j), and I think what we saw

today is the Government House Leader jumping up on countless points of order which weren't, in fact, points of order. I mean, it appears to me that the Government House Leader actually thinks he has your job, which is to ensure that there is decorum in the place. That is not the role of any other member, to be telling members or scolding them on what they do. Quite frankly, what the Government House Leader is doing is infringing on members' rights to express themselves in this place. If they do cross a line, then you will call them to order or such.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to be arguing a number of different things because the Government House Leader popped up about 15 times, and I think, quite frankly, many of those were because he didn't like the fact that the opposition is holding the government to account and asking tough questions. That is our job, as the Government House Leader knows very, very well, and I will argue in subsequent points of order that how our opposition is acting is no different than the Government House Leader's caucus when they were in opposition. Yet somehow now the shoe is on the other foot, and we shouldn't be asking pointed questions to the government. I think the Government House Leader needs to review the point of question period and how this place works.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Are you handling this, or do you want me to respond to it?

The Speaker: Yeah. I will organize how we do points of orders around here.

I might just add, you know, that I didn't require an intervention from the Official Opposition House Leader on the first point of order. I'm not convinced that I need an intervention from the Government House Leader on this particular point of order.

The Opposition House Leader will be very well aware that any member can call a point of order at any point in time should they feel as though one is warranted. In addition, the Speaker may also interject and call a member or the House to order whenever he or she sees fit as well. As such, there was no language that created disorder with respect to calling points of order. While you may disagree with the Government House Leader's tactics with respect to calling points of order, certainly that in itself is not a point of order.

What I will say, though, to what I believe were points of order 1 and 2 and some of the confusion that the chair may have created, as I referenced during question period – and, of course, by now you've all double-checked to see what page 610 in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* says – on a number of occasions, including in the first question, the Leader of the Official Opposition asked the question to the minister: "why are you putting your ideology . . ." Then, additionally, in the following question she said: "instead of having to fight to protect himself from you." Then, additionally, she said: "Why are you . . . literally [putting] lives in danger?"

2:50

It is not the practice to direct a question directly to a minister or member inside the Chamber, as I noted in my ruling in the middle of question period. If the Leader of the Official Opposition had chosen different words such as "Why is she," or otherwise, "putting individuals at risk" – or perhaps the most appropriate path forward would be to say: why is the minister doing this? That was my interjection at the time. It did create confusion because I also used the word "she," which was inappropriate. I hope that this can rectify a number of the points of order that the Government House Leader did call, but I am happy to hear additional points of order.

I believe that that deals with points of order 1 and 2, and I'm happy to proceed to point of order 3.

Mr. Jason Nixon: I believe point of order 3 is mine, Mr. Speaker. Several of the points of order that were called today revolve around page 610 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, which I think you've done a good job of addressing. I appreciate that. Again, I think it's a worthy caution that you've given the Official Opposition during question period today, and I would encourage them to adjust the way they're doing that. I could have called even more. In this place we need to work through the chair, otherwise we will continue to create discourse. As such, I will withdraw point of order 3 because I believe you have addressed it.

The Speaker: Point of order 4.

Point of Order Gestures

Mr. Jason Nixon: That's me as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do rise under 23(h), (i), and (j) for point of order 4, again in regard to the Leader of the Official Opposition. Despite what the Official Opposition House Leader may think or may be attempting to present, we on this side of the House do respect the role of the opposition. We had it not too long ago. I understand the responsibility that the opposition has inside this place, but they also have a responsibility to do that in line with the rules of this Assembly.

I'm sure she'll deny it – and that will be disappointing because I think the right way to do it is to apologize and withdraw – but the Leader of the Opposition, while again not talking through the chair, which you've just addressed, took to waving fists today at members. Now, I don't think that she was doing that in an attempt to threaten anybody or anything along those lines. I'll give her the benefit of the doubt on that. But the problem is, Mr. Speaker, again, when you go around working through you, the emotions get high, and that's what starts to happen here. It's inappropriate to do in this House, and I would ask that you ask members not to do that in the future.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, this is absurd and not a point of order. The Leader of the Official Opposition did not shake her fist. If the Government House Leader has his way, no member will open their eyes, move their hands, do anything with their hands, or anything outside of only talking when they're allowed to talk. It is ridiculous. This is not a point of order.

The Leader of the Official Opposition, like myself, talks with her hands and moves her hands around a lot. If hand waving is offensive to the hon. member, then I'm not sure how to satisfy him, other than maybe – I will refrain from what I was about to say. But Mr. Speaker, this is not a point of order. This is quite silly, quite frankly. The Leader of the Official Opposition was not waving her hands to cause disorder. Again, someone who talks with their hands: this is what they do. It's not a point of order. I don't know why the Government House Leader is so sensitive today to everything.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. I, too, in this case agree that this isn't a point of order. I would say that – and I didn't see any gestures that were made – of course, gestures inside the Chamber can cause a point of order. Just as a cautionary tale, for example, if you were maybe making stabbing signals with your hands or something like that, that obviously would be a point of order and wildly inappropriate, but no member of the Chamber would ever do such a thing. As such, this is not a point of order.

I believe we are at point of order 5.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, point of order 5 would be the same as the page 610 issue that has just been dealt with, so we will withdraw it.

The Speaker: Thank you very much.
I believe points of order 5 and 6 were the same.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Yes. Point of order 6 would be the same.

The Speaker: We are at point of order 7.

Point of Order Preambles to Supplementary Questions

Mr. Jason Nixon: I rise and for expediency of time will just refer you to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 510, Mr. Speaker. We could have been calling this point of order for a while – we have not, but it became particularly overboard today, so I feel obligated to call it – and that’s in regard to preambles.

Clearly, if you look at the Blues, you will see that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I believe, was asking the question at that time, though it was taking place throughout today. I heard you caution a few of our members on that as well, and I would agree with that caution. Preambles are not to happen outside of the leader’s role.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader is rising, if he would like to.

Mr. Bilous: Well, you know what? I just would like one point of clarification. I’m not sure. I missed when the Government House Leader said which standing order this is in reference to as far as how a preamble is a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think there have been examples. If the Leader of the Official Opposition failed to use the word “given,” then, you know, I’m sure that that was an oversight, similar to other members in this House on all sides who have done so in this place.

Now, we know that it is up to your discretion, Mr. Speaker, to remind members if they fail to use the word “given” in supplementals. I mean, you know, I’m happy to stand and argue on a daily basis that this is not a point of order because I have a feeling that the Government House Leader will want to talk about failures to use “given” on a daily basis. I do not think that this is a point of order, but I will remind all members of the House to use the word “given” in their supplementals.

The Speaker: Thank you for your interjections. The Official Opposition House Leader is correct that there is no standing order on preambles. However, there are a wide, wide, wide range of Speaker’s rulings on preambles. I think, as we continue the cut and thrust of debate, your Speaker will review the previous rulings around preambles, and then, hopefully, arrive at a place where we agree.

What I might add – and perhaps the Government House Leader was referring to this – is that, you know, members of the Official Opposition did provide some level of editorial comments prior to getting to their “given,” and I think this may be a small case of the pot calling the kettle black, if I might, with respect to the Government House Leader rising on this point of order, as we’ve seen a fair amount of preambles all around the table.

So once again I would find that this is not a preamble, but I do caution all members with respect to editorial comments prior to getting to their “given.”

Number 8.

Mr. Jason Nixon: I’ve lost track. I don’t have a number 8. It was probably another page 610.

The Speaker: I’ll consider it withdrawn.
Are there any other points of order to be raised?

Mr. Bilous: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Oh, thank goodness.

Mr. Bilous: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I thought we got into the double digits there. I apologize for that.

Point of Order Restrictions on Oral Questions

Mr. Bilous: I rise on a point of order under 23(h), (i), (j). The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka’s questions were, first of all, a member’s statement turned into a set of questions, even admitted by the member himself to one of our members, which I found interesting. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, question period should be used to be asking questions about government policy, not speaking about a reverent old constituent in their riding.

The fact that this gentleman received an award – I congratulate him – has nothing to do with government policy, quite frankly. Really, the crux of it, Mr. Speaker, is that question period is a very important tool that private members have to ask Executive Council questions. It is coveted time, especially by the opposition. This is one of our only ways to derive information and hold the government to account. When members use questions frivolously and members’ statements are turned into a question that has nothing to do with holding the government to account, I think, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, it is disrespectful to this place as it is wasting the time of our members.

Thank you.

3:00

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I fail to see where 23(h), (i), and (j) has any connection to what the Official Opposition House Leader just referred to. I think that was a bit of a stretch today. For somebody who spent a considerable amount of time, the last few minutes, accusing us of stretching, he almost became six foot eight like me. He just stretched so far with that one.

The reality is that if you look at the Blues, you’ll see that there are some clear answers referring to government policy and the intention of this government to work with people like Mr. Dahl. This government also supports many of the programs that were involved in that award ceremony. There are lots of connections to the government. I know that the hon. member may be disappointed that the other hon. member wanted to ask a question about his constituent related to government policy, but the reality is that this is not a point of order. Certainly, the references that the Opposition House Leader just referred to have absolutely nothing to do with what he talked about.

The Speaker: Thank you, House leadership. I would suggest that both House leaders in this case brought forward some relatively important points. I would just like to highlight that, you know, the Government House Leader is correct that perhaps this isn’t language that creates disorder given the jovial nature of the lovely gentleman in the constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka. Perhaps he would have liked to refer to *Beauchesne’s* 409(11), where it speaks specifically about government policy.

A question which seeks an opinion about government policy is probably out of order in that it asks for an opinion and not information. A question asking for a general statement of government policy may be out of order in that it requires a long answer.

It goes on to say:

Other questions inevitably deal with government policy and the general restrictions regarding such questions have [not yet] been applied.

There are some significant references with respect to government policy. I am sympathetic to the Official Opposition House Leader in this case as I would say that the connection to government policy was loose at best.

Having said that, private members will make a determination about what is important when it comes to holding the government to account. I would encourage all private members to do their best with respect to holding the government to account and ensuring that it is, in fact, about government policy.

Having said that, Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 4
Red Tape Reduction Act

[Adjourned debate June 4: Ms Sweet]

The Speaker: Are there any wishing to speak to the bill? I see the Official Opposition House Leader rising in debate.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today and speak to Bill 4, the Red Tape Reduction Act. Now, the idea, I guess, behind reviewing regulations from a business lens to see if there are regs that are unnecessarily placing a barrier on business I think is important. I can tell you that our government did that with every single regulation. We didn't need to create a whole new ministry and then staff it, actually creating more red tape to review red tape, which is what I'm hearing from Albertans when they heard about the creation of this ministry but also of this bill.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

I find it interesting that, you know, the government during the election said one thing, and this bill actually says something different. During the election they had promised to reduce regulations by a third. Now, I don't support a sweeping elimination of tens of thousands of regulations. Quite frankly, I think, Mr. Speaker, that the associate minister got a little bit better of an understanding when he became an associate minister of how many regulations there are in existence. Broadly eliminating a third could impact the health, the well-being, the safety of Albertans, whether it's food handling or usage or around equipment and safety within our health space, protecting our environment. You know, regulations aren't all bad. In this bill we now have a promise to create, I believe, a committee, but the questions that I have for the minister – the bill talks about red tape reduction yet doesn't define red tape.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, something I'm very proud to have done when I was the minister of economic development and trade, Madam Speaker, was to travel the province and speak with chambers of commerce, speak with economic developers and other business owners and business groups, small and large. One of my first questions for them when the term "red tape" would be brought up – I would say: "Great. You know what? I'm all ears. I'm happy to look at any regulation that you bring to my attention. What is being so burdensome and cumbersome to businesses? What is being cost prohibitive; what is slowing down the process?" And you know what? It was on a rare occasion that a stakeholder was able to articulate which regulation was causing such burden.

Now, I can tell you that when it was raised, I happily brought it back to the cabinet table, and we had a thorough discussion, just like we did with every regulation that came across the cabinet table. We viewed it as the role of the whole Executive Council to be reviewing every regulation to see if it's continuing to serve its purpose, if it's no longer relevant, what implications and impacts it's having be it on our job creators or Albertans, and: could it be either amended or discarded? We did that on an ongoing basis, Madam Speaker. You know, we didn't believe that we should just keep regulations because that's how we always used to do it.

What I found interesting, especially going in front of chambers of commerce, is that they would often reference red tape. I would ask them to present to me the specific regulations that we could work on. The challenge, Madam Speaker, is that to say that there's just a whole bunch of red tape, that doesn't identify the problem, so it makes it very difficult for one to address it or fix it. If a specific regulation is outlined, then working toward that would be useful.

I'll give you a great example, Madam Speaker, something that I was working on with the Canadian free trade agreement that was renegotiated under our government. I'm very proud to be the minister that renegotiated the new Canadian free trade agreement, which replaced the agreement on internal trade. A number of tables were struck, and one of them was regulatory harmonization. I can tell you that we worked on a number of different regulations, some that really made no sense. A great example is that across the country little dairy creamers come in different shapes and sizes. Different provinces have different regulations on what those shapes and sizes are. So imagine that you or your family owns a dairy farm. You produce this cream, and you want to sell it to customers across Canada. You have to have different packaging depending on which province you're selling to. If you're wondering why the heck that was, we asked the same question. It seems a little ridiculous. Now, that is a cost burden on the producer; it is unnecessary red tape, I would argue, and we worked with provinces across the country.

That's a specific example, but when it isn't defined, what might be red tape to one person might be an environmental protection or assurance that there are protections to another. In this bill there is no specificity, so we don't have targets, we don't have timelines, and we don't have procedures to ensure both transparency and accountability, which I think is really, really important.

The other thing that I would have loved to see is a process or a mechanism by which Albertans, including the opposition, can weigh in and evaluate which potential regulations the government is looking at either amending or omitting. I think it's important to have a sober second thought. That's one of the roles of the Official Opposition, Madam Speaker. That's something that I hope the associate minister will be able to respond to when we get into Committee of the Whole. What is the oversight on which regulations are being debated or are on the chopping block, and is there an opportunity for Albertans to weigh in or for different organizations to weigh in on that? These are some of the questions that I have.

3:10

So far from what I've seen, this bill and the talking points of the minister are, of course, something that's very popular and populist. I mean, businesses obviously want to cut costs where they can, and if there are unnecessary costs, they're happy to look at ways to eliminate them, which isn't necessarily a bad thing, but I think it's incumbent upon the government to ensure that they're having a conversation with Albertans as far as what the specific regulations are, what their purpose is or was, and what the impact is of either changing or eliminating certain regulations not only to that sector but, even more broadly, to all Albertans, Madam Speaker.

I can tell you that one of the other things that I worked on with the former Minister of Energy was working with the Alberta Energy Regulator to look at how they can try to process applications in a much more expedient manner. I recognized and our government recognized that there were some projects that were waiting years for an answer. You know what? That's not right, and that bothered our government as well. We recognized that capital moves much quicker than governments do, and companies that are looking at making significant investments need answers and need answers quickly. I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that this is exactly why I worked very closely with the Member for Lethbridge-West, the former Minister of Environment and Parks, and with the former Energy minister – I guess I can say her name now – Marg McCuaig-Boyd to work with municipalities in areas in the province that wanted to create industrial zones or industrial parks. It took a little time. It took maybe a little longer than what we had hoped.

I can tell you of a great example, Madam Speaker. In the Grande Prairie region you have the trimunicipal partnership between the county of Grande Prairie, the city of Grande Prairie, and the MD of Greenview. They worked diligently for a period of time and struck an agreement on cost sharing and revenue sharing, which was something that I was a big advocate of even four years ago when I was first Minister of Municipal Affairs: getting municipalities to collaborate with each other in order to compete on the international stage. The reality is that Alberta is trying to attract investment and companies, like every other jurisdiction around this globe.

We know that we have significant competitive advantages over many different jurisdictions, but something that I heard from companies often was that if there was a way to shorten the time for them to go from inquiring about making an investment to actually having that final investment decision and shovels in the ground, that would make a huge difference. So we worked with the trimunicipal partnership and were successful in initiating a model that, I can tell you, other municipal leaders in other regions of the province have asked for and wanted to emulate, getting as close as possible to a plug and play model.

Now, again, recognizing that there are certain regulations, certain processes that need to be met depending on what type of industry it is, that there are environmental approvals that need to be given, we discovered that there definitely is a way to do some streamlining and to improve efficiency and shorten the times of this, which will and did make Alberta more competitive as far as attracting investment. I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that that is something that was concrete that we were very proud of, but I can tell you that we didn't need to create a whole new ministry in order to do it, nor did we need to bring in legislation to do it. We had the tools and means at our disposal. Those are the types of concrete actions that we took.

You know, I look forward to the associate minister responding to some specific examples, which I think all members of the House would be very interested to sink their teeth into as far as let's look at what stakeholders, what businesses and associations have been coming to the minister to say: these are some of our concerns; help us address them. Again, I think there is and always is room for improvement and ways to help our industry and our business community be even more competitive. Absolutely. What we're looking for here is more details, where this bill is very, very thin. I'm tempted to poke fun at myself in one of the bills that I brought forward early on in my term. Members that were in this place during that time will know what I'm talking to. But the importance is – it's important, Madam Speaker.

You know, I guess, some of the concern that my colleagues have, quite frankly, is what could be on the chopping block. We have some examples, Madam Speaker. You know what? The former

Prime Minister of Canada back in 2011 announced a red tape reduction commission. They called on the government to take action to reduce burdens on business, making it easier to do business with regulators, improving service and predictability.

Now, in 2015 legislation was brought forward to establish a 20 per cent red tape cut and a one-to-one rule, meaning every new reg that was proposed must be matched with an equivalent burden somewhere else. Now, what's sad, Madam Speaker, is that there were a number of areas where there were significant changes made which had a detrimental effect.

On food inspections, Madam Speaker, the former Harper government cut \$56 million from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Of course, CFIA is the federal body that inspects all food across this country to ensure that it's safe. They had to lay off a hundred inspectors. Now, this reverse staffing measure was put in place in response to the deadly listeriosis . . .

Ms Phillips: Listeria.

Mr. Bilous: . . . listeria outbreak in 2008 in which 22 Canadians died. There are examples, Madam Speaker, where when there are cutbacks made to the very agencies and bodies that are meant to oversee and protect Canadians, it backfires and there have been more causes of challenges.

You know, Madam Speaker, there are a number of examples of other governments across this country that have attempted such things. Here's an example. The Premier . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Are there any members? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was interested in some of the other jurisdictions that the hon. member was discussing, and I'm wondering if he can provide the House with more information and more context so that we can all understand the potential outcomes, negative consequences, unintended consequences of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I'll thank the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West for that question. I mean, that's really what I think the crux of some of the concerns is: what are the potential unintended consequences? Again, the bill doesn't have a lot of detail, has some sweeping, vague outcomes but doesn't really share with Albertans and with this House how it's going to get there.

3:20

The example I wanted to use – there are a number of them, but I'll just use this one example. Premier Ford over in Ontario in December of last year – so this is very recent – introduced the Restoring Ontario's Competitiveness Act.

It set a target of 25 per cent reduction in regs over four years and requires provincial approvals for job-creating projects to occur. Part of the challenge, Madam Speaker: the government of Ontario is loosening the ratios of children in daycare. These were restrictions put in place after a number of tragic deaths occurred. This is the staffing ratio of what is appropriate for the number of kids in a daycare to the staff, and they loosened that significantly because that was seen as a burden to daycares. I'll tell you this much. If my nephews and nieces are in a daycare with a growing number of other students and pupils with fewer staff, I have grave concerns over that. This is about the safety and well-being of children. Here's an

example of a bill that had great intentions, but this is one of the consequences or unintended consequences of a bill of this nature without detail to be debated in this place and in front of Albertans.

Madam Speaker, I can tell you that there are economists and advocates and researchers that have argued that deregulation under the guise of reducing red tape often has hurt workers and doesn't actually lead to job creation and improved wages. Now, again, I'll put a caveat on that comment because that is also a broad, sweeping comment. I think, really, the crux of my questions for the minister really are around, again, the targets, the timelines, when it will be implemented, the procedures, more clarity around what regulations. What is the process upon reviewing, publishing, and amending or omitting those regulations? How can Albertans, including members of the opposition and other private members, have an opportunity to be part of these conversations?

With that, Madam Speaker, I will take my seat but wanted to comment on not just the spirit and intention of this – I do appreciate where the minister is coming from – but my concerns with the bill in its current form. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any more comments or questions under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to this bill and to offer some reflections around the regulatory role of government in respect to the environment, keeping people safe, keeping the environment safe. It would seem to me that this bill provides another layer of work for people in the public service. It provides another seat around the cabinet table, perhaps for reasons of geographic representation, provides another person with a fleet car to drive around Alberta in. It doesn't actually provide for a real assessment of regulatory reduction. This is, in fact, a shell of a bill that contains within it no targets, timelines. It doesn't even define what government considers to be red tape.

Madam Speaker, you know, it's kind of funny that it's actually duplicative. Calling upon the minister to prepare a report on an annual basis is something that can and is done within ministry annual reports and ministry business plans. Setting out performance metrics for individual departments that they must adhere to and must report publicly on is within ministry business plans. This is well known to the members of the current government and members of Executive Council given that they served in opposition and queried those very annual reports and business plans during the course of estimates debate and committee debate. Having to prepare yet another report: well, that sounds like excessive bureaucracy to me. What we have done is that we've laid out an empty shell of a bill so that we can provide another well-paid position to someone around the cabinet table with no specific job to do.

Now, certainly, there have been cases in the environment area where we had work to do around regulatory backlog. When we came into government in 2015, there was a tremendous backlog of Water Act approvals, Madam Speaker. They were considerable, and they were causing angst, certainly among municipalities who had concerns about lengthy timelines and the ability to get projects done. Sometimes Water Act approvals were taking just an excessively long time for people to do simple things like replace a culvert. That was absolutely true, so we got down to work and we rolled up our sleeves. We brought in some new technology to deal with some of these Water Act approvals, particularly those that were more routine in nature. We made sure that we had a Water Act approvals blitz during the seasons when municipalities would not miss their construction window while they were waiting for

approvals, typically in sort of the early year, early spring. We reduced that Water Act approval backlog, Madam Speaker. It took a couple of years.

But here's the thing. You didn't need an extra minister to do it. You didn't need an extra piece of legislation to do it. You didn't need an extra report to do it. You didn't need an extra team of bureaucrats to do it. What you needed was people to listen to stakeholders and then direct departments and for ministers to show up and do their job. It also helped, I think, Madam Speaker, that we didn't have a revolving door of environment ministers anymore given the palace intrigue that defined 44 years of PC rule, at least the tail end of it, in this province. What it required was people to be serious about the governance of this place. We cleared up that backlog. We'll see, if there are big layoffs to the civil service, whether that backlog will re-emerge because part of it was about that.

Now, there are a number of areas in which I have concerns that this bill and this minister in particular will take a run at public safety and environmental protection in this province, Madam Speaker. I worry about the Water Act, the Water Act that protects Water Act licence holders to the first-in-time, first-in-right system, that protects investments in irrigation, that protects farmers. I worry about any wholesale deregulation of the Water Act. The Water Act is a careful balance. It is not a creature of the previous NDP government. It wasn't even a creature of, necessarily, the previous PC government. It was actually a creature of the Klein government. Lorne Taylor brought in the Water Act. It was very difficult work, very difficult balancing work. Going at those regulations in a way that is not thoughtful, that doesn't understand the knock-on effects on the environment or the business climate can be very, very damaging to southern Alberta, and I will be the first person watching for that and holding this government to account.

I'll be watching for the role of watershed councils, who play an important role, Madam Speaker. They're enabled within the Water Act, but they also must be funded in order to be able to do their multistakeholder work. I'll be watching for that because they are an important check on how the Water Act is actually being administered and how public safety is actually moving along.

I'll be watching for air quality, Madam Speaker, both in the funding of the airshed councils, absolutely, but also on Alberta's performance relative to the Canadian ambient air quality standards. Why does this matter? Well, our government took action on Canadian ambient air quality standards to reduce pollution and ensure public health. We did this in consultation with industry via the airshed councils, but, again, this is very delicate work and cannot be achieved through a vague bill or a misunderstanding of environmental law.

I cast my mind back to estimates debates, where I was asked by members who now sit on the government caucus side what things like PM 2.5 were, particulate matter. On the record I told the member to google it in an estimates debate because the question was ridiculous and revealed a fundamental misunderstanding of the world around him, Madam Speaker. Those are the folks who are now going to be taking a pass at our air quality standards, so I worry about that.

I worry about public land transfers, Madam Speaker. We have already seen sweeping statements by the Premier about public land transfers, which deeply worried rural municipalities in southern Alberta who are home in their public land to some of our last tracts of native grasslands, and they want to protect those. I'm speaking here in particular of the MD of Taber, that has a public land transfer before the minister of environment right now. We want to make sure that those are done with the highest degree of environmental protection.

3:30

Madam Speaker, I worry about oil sands monitoring. One of the first acts – it was the first act – that I brought in as environment minister was to ensure that oil sands monitoring had integrity to it. The Chief Scientist had the role of reporting to the public, not to the minister. He has a role that protects his scientific independence, and I worry that this bill will be used as an excuse to undermine the good work that we have all done as industry and as government to rehabilitate Alberta's environmental monitoring reputation in the oil sands and restore scientific integrity and scientific independence. This is a difficult thing for a government to do that is home to a number of people who have questioned the science of climate change. Certainly, I'll be watching for that.

I'll be watching, Madam Speaker, for regulations that change overland flows, wetlands replacement – I'll be watching for those as well – for regulations governing drinking water because that is what keeps people safe. When we went through this in the province of Ontario – and we watched this all go down in the 1990s, everybody who went and embraced the concept of deregulation with such enthusiasm – we saw people die in the Walkerton tragedy. So I worry about that, especially seeing as I do recall having to answer a set of questions from people sitting now on the government side about AHS drinking water standards and facilities having to adhere to them and why they had to do that. That is of concern.

Finally, I will speak to the question of dam safety. After the Obed mine disaster, Madam Speaker – and I will just refresh the House's memory. After there was a dam spill, about 670 million litres of waste went into the Athabasca River in 2013. It was the second-biggest coal spill in Canada, seriously contaminated the Athabasca River, forced a number of major communities to stop drawing from it. In the wake of that, we found that there was no regularized dam safety regulation for inspections and enforcement, so we brought in new dam safety standards to ensure oversight and monitoring of tailings dams, public reporting on this information. We did this in consultation with industry. It took two years. What I worry about is that any wholesale and ill-advised and ill-informed run at regulations like these will not protect the public, will not protect the investments that companies have made, and will go backwards because Alberta is now a world leader in dam safety. We need to ensure that those kinds of standards remain in place.

Madam Speaker, I think I have sufficiently informed the House about potential unintended consequences of this bill. Of course, it's hard to say because the bill is such a shell. It doesn't actually lay out anything. It makes the minister write a report, so that means he has to hire some people to write a report. He has to make sure that there's a team of bureaucrats to come and brief him, people who could be briefing existing ministers. What we have here is a bit of a hood ornament of a bill, to quote Brian Mason, in terms of governments doing things that really have no practical use to them, but they are to satisfy some call for throwing red meat to the base and providing some window dressing. The issue here is that unintended consequences can and may happen given the ideological orientation and respect for science that prevails among some folks in this House.

I would urge the government to define what red tape actually is in their endeavours, and perhaps, Madam Speaker, we can query that and provide some more clarity for the people of Alberta around this loosely defined bill that appears to have no real practical effect or purpose for the people of Alberta, at least yet, in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate listening to my colleague the former Minister of Environment and Parks, who, of course, listed a couple of examples of very important regulations and how they are protecting not just Albertans, whether it's their health and safety, but also protecting our environment, our ecology, whether it's the wetlands, the mountains, and other important locations throughout the province. I wanted to ask the Member for Lethbridge-West: what are some other examples of critical regulations that could be on the chopping block because of this bill? We don't have any specificity in the bill or any specific examples for that.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. One of the issues that I do worry about is around the wetlands regulation, wetlands replacement. Now, world-wide we find that about 88 per cent, I believe, of wetlands have been lost. Wetlands are, of course, critical for biodiversity, and they are critical for, essentially, managing water on the landscape. They are the Earth's natural sponge, and they are critical for flood protection of communities as well.

In Alberta we find that about 90 per cent of our wetlands have been filled in in some way, shape, or form. That is why there was a wetland replacement regulation. It's a very complicated regulation, and it's just been changed. In and around 2013 it was changed, and there were a number of different processes that had to then follow that regulatory change that the previous, previous government made. Again, that was the product of a tremendous amount of consultation, in particular with municipalities but, of course, obviously, with property developers, proponents of various transportation projects, and others.

Of course, there is a wetlands replacement fund, Madam Speaker. That wetlands replacement fund is doled out in a specific manner within the regulation, and a number of different groups, in particular Ducks Unlimited, assist the government in our work in ensuring environmental integrity on the landscape.

Now, why is this so important? As we build out more, as our cities grow, one of the things that we find: as climate change changes, our weather patterns and water events become more frequent and severe – we saw this in 2013 in Calgary – and water moves faster. When we have more wetlands, we are holding it on the landscape rather than it flowing into your basement, Madam Speaker. That is one of the things that we regulate in this province, how we replace wetlands, how we make sure that the Earth can perform its functions as a natural sponge so that we can go around performing our functions of building the economy and building a good life for our families. Certainly, that is a regulatory environment that is the product of a lot of consultation with ENGOS like Ducks Unlimited, nonprofits, and others.

Now, another one is the proceeds of public land sales, Madam Speaker. Historically, those have gone to conservation organizations that are called land trusts, and they undertake certain initiatives to ensure that not public land but private land is appropriately conserved. The conservation notation is affixed to it, and that notation then follows the property. I am concerned that if there is a big kick at the Public Lands Act, land trusts will then be thrust into a more uncertain environment. Many of their undertakings are multiyear in process and sometimes involve multigenerations of ranchers and landowners.

I think that probably the biggest concern I have with this legislation is around the delicate balance, though, of the Water Act. I referenced this earlier. You know, the Water Act, really, in a time of water stress, which we now see – we now have closed basins, the South Saskatchewan, and we're seeing a number of . . .

3:40

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 4. While I was listening to my colleagues as well, the concern that came to mind is that the bill, I guess, follows a promise during their campaign that they will reduce red tape. Also, I think that at that time nobody knew what that was. I guess we were hoping that there would be some discussion, some definition of what, actually, red tape means. If you look at the definition, the history of red tape, it takes you back to 16th-century Spain; it takes you back to the Cold War era. All those kinds of definitions could mean anything and everything. I think, first and foremost, that it's just a skeleton of a bill that fulfills their campaign promise so they can get up and say that they made a promise and somehow this bill fulfills it.

This bill is even more vague than what they were saying during their campaign. At least at that point they were saying that they will reduce it, cut it by one-third. Now I think it has no targets, how much they will cut. It has no timelines, when they will cut. It doesn't tell us anything about what this red tape means.

And it's not only us – that's my take – who don't understand what that means, because in question period the associate minister responsible for this was given an opportunity to talk about red tape and essentially share just one example of what he will cut and what that will look like, and the minister failed to provide even one example of what that will look like. That's how unclear this piece of legislation is. Not only this side of the House but the minister who is responsible for it wasn't able to name one piece of regulation that he sees as red tape and that would be cut. That's really unfortunate.

Instead, I guess, of cutting, what this bill does: it creates one job. That was their platform promise, that they will create more jobs. It already created one job, and it also provided the minister with the authority to create more red tape, like, I guess, a huge authority there to create regulations, essentially adding more to the red tape. That's what, on the face of it, this bill is doing. During that campaign I think that they made those promises, I guess, without thinking too much, considering too much about it, and this legislation clearly shows that they didn't think about what that means at that time. They were just making vague and empty promises, and clearly this bill shows that they didn't consider it then, and they don't know now what it will look like.

For instance, if we talk about improving efficiency, improving processes, there's an agreement in place called the New West Partnership trade agreement. What that agreement allows: it allows businesses, business corporations to register in one province, one jurisdiction like Alberta, B.C., Saskatchewan – now Manitoba is part of that agreement as well – and be able to, I guess, get your corporation registered in others, too, without essentially filling out all the forms again and again in all four jurisdictions.

I will say that that agreement certainly reduced red tape, cut down the process, and all those things. But here I think we have no indication whatsoever of how their red tape reduction will work although it acknowledges that “a consistent, transparent and efficient system of regulatory and administrative requirements is necessary to protect the public interest.” If we are to protect the public interest, we acknowledge that there is need for a consistent

and transparent manner, and regulations certainly help achieve those goals.

But their piece on regulation: it has no definition, which should have been there for members of this House to understand what that entails. There should have been some target. They at least could have added some timelines. Just creating more regulations, creating a report after a year, starting by 2020: I don't see how that saves us time, how that saves us money, how that saves us resources, and how it's encouraging investment or boosting Alberta's competitiveness and all those things that they were also promising during their campaign.

I think what it's doing is exactly the opposite. By creating this ministry, they are putting more work on the public service, that will now be reviewing it and creating a report. It's in no way saving us time. By blowing resources in creating these reports, which I guess any minister could have looked into – and many of our colleagues, when they were in government, did look into the processes and how they improve those processes – it's not saving us any money or resources.

For instance, in Community and Social Services we looked into the process for AISH, assured income for the severely handicapped. At that time I think the AISH form was somewhere around 23 pages. The public service looked into that application. They figured out what information was duplicated, and they took that out. They figured out that we don't need to have a two-step process; all the forms can be handed to clients for their eligibility for their medical at one time. They can be explained through the creation of guidelines to fill out those forms, so we did that. Eventually we came up with a form which may still be a bit long – it's 16 pages – but it's an improvement on the existing form, that then contained 23 pages.

Similarly, there were complaints about how Alberta Supports offices and Alberta Works offices are handling incoming Albertans. What are those timelines? Essentially, there were no specific set timelines. So very brief standards were created, essentially four standards: that when you come in, you will be seen that day, and they will have to report on it; if you have booked an appointment, you will be given an appointment within a certain time; if you are approved, within a certain time you will get your funds or supports that you need. That's an improvement on the process. We didn't need to create an additional ministry to look at those things because as ministers, as government, that's part of your job. You are given a job; you are given a mandate. You are asked to do that as best you can, and you always try to improve on those things, try to find efficiencies.

3:50

I don't think that a separate ministry created to find efficiencies will be in a better position than the minister who is in charge of the file. Like, that's counterintuitive. I can't find the rationale that if I was responsible for a department for four years, an associate minister from outside will have a better look into my ministry, into my regulations, into my processes. I don't buy that argument, and I can say that for any of my colleagues; for instance, the Minister of Environment and Parks. Even while sitting at the cabinet table, I wouldn't know her files as well as that minister would know them. The Minister of Advanced Education: same thing. And I'm sure that applies, or should apply in theory, to all the ministers on the other side, too. They don't need to source out that part of the job. They don't need somebody with a bureaucracy, with a department, with a budget and all those perks to come and tell them: hey, this regulation doesn't work, and let me cut it for you.

I think it's also somewhat, I guess, subsidizing the responsibility of that minister. He or she is not looking into those processes. He

or she is not doing his or her job properly if he doesn't know where to improve, what to cut, where they can bring in efficiencies, where they can find savings. From that standpoint, I think it's very strange to source out that job of the minister to another minister, who will certainly not have that kind of access into and that kind of information about some other minister's office and processes.

From that standpoint, it wastes money. It wastes resources. I think they use investment in everything, but I don't know how it encourages investment in Alberta without knowing what they are going to cut. Are they targeting certain ministries, where every minister is, I guess, responsible to report to that associate minister? Processes are not at all clear. What it does, I think, at best, is that it creates more red tape. Also, the bill uses certain terms that can be interpreted in many different ways. For instance, it is saying that we are moving from a process-based approach to an outcome-based approach.

My extended family are in small business: pizza shops, those things. For instance, when they build a store, there's a process. They will negotiate a lease in an area where you can have that kind of business, and once you construct that shop, there are certain processes that you will follow. You need to have a business licence. You need to have a health inspection. You need to have inspections from plumbers, all those things. Like, these are the things that guarantee that there are transparent procedures in place that are regulating things in a way that's taking into account the public interest, public health, and that all those things are accounted for and that there are some kinds of measures and safeguards in place that will ensure that. That's why we do it every year or every three years. Those kinds of processes are in place. But, again, this piece of legislation doesn't say if those things will be looked into.

With respect to approval of projects, those things that they talked about, not in this bill but in their campaign: again, I don't see any kind of targets, any kind of hint in this piece of legislation. Yes, it uses those buzzwords that they were using before, but I think that at this point we need to stop this rhetoric, these campaign-style things, and stop putting those things into all legislation. I think that at this point Albertans deserve better. Albertans deserve clarity. They need action. They need to see, if that was the promise that was made, how exactly they will cut red tape, what exactly they view as red tape, how long that will take, and tie them to some kind of outcomes for how it's helping us to attract investment, how it's helping us to encourage job creation.

The Deputy Speaker: Any comments or questions under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? I recognize the hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that. I heard some interesting comments from the last speaker. There are a few questions that come to mind. The hon. member was looking for examples of red tape. I suppose an example of red tape might be when you bring a company out from Ontario to change a light bulb and they've got to visit a house in Alberta twice to change one light bulb, and then they take the light bulb out that was already working, after they make two visits to take the one light bulb out. I would call that red tape. I would imagine the hon. member might even call that red tape though the hon. member supported it when they were government. In fact, not only did they support it, but they paid for it, and they made Albertans pay for it with the carbon tax. There's one example.

We heard commentary here. Actually, I found it interesting that the hon. member thought that keeping a promise that we made during the election was a bad thing. Madam Speaker, on this side of the House we're kind of of the opinion that keeping your promises is a good thing. It might have been out of fashion with the

previous government. We kind of feel differently. We feel like Albertans have a right to expect that we will do or try to do the things that we said, yet the hon. member was talking about it as if it was a bad thing to keep our promises. So I would make that comment on what I heard.

I also heard comments here today about the knock-on effects of regulations. I wonder sometimes what the hon. member would think about that, about the knock-on effects, for example, of the previous government's radical minimum wage increase from \$12 to \$15 in a very short period of time during a bad economy, which led us to record unemployment amongst young people, absolute record unemployment among young Alberta males between 15 and 25, higher than it's ever been in the history of Alberta. I would call that a knock-on effect of a bad policy, and perhaps others might refer to it as red tape.

Madam Speaker, you know, I think it's important that we do think about the knock-on effects. We heard comments about that today. I think we need to think about the knock-on effects, for example, of the carbon tax. The knock-on effects make buying groceries more expensive for every Albertan no matter how poor they are or no matter how rich they are. There is a knock-on effect of a bad regulation that our government has already moved on in our efforts to reduce red tape, the fact that the carbon tax makes every business less competitive and more expensive in Alberta compared to all the surrounding provinces. I guess there's no way to put an exact number on the thousands of jobs that that has cost Alberta families as a knock-on effect of bad regulation and red tape. I wonder what the hon. member thinks about that part of red tape.

It takes me down the road to where one might wonder what the knock-on effect was with Bill 6, when it made farm families feel insecure on their farms, not knowing whether they were going to be able to exist, when they already had insurance in many cases for their employees and they were forced to take a second insurance policy out without the government bothering to find out how good their first insurance was. I think there are probably farm families in Alberta that would have referred to that as red tape. Madam Speaker, I wonder what the hon. member thinks about these things.

I wonder about the red tape in the form of a court order to stop construction in the Weaselhead as part of the ring road, something that the previous government ignored. I guess they thought that was red tape, that court order protecting the environment. Apparently, they considered it red tape, though they haven't bothered mentioning it in this debate here today.

4:00

They don't seem to have a lot of enthusiasm for removing red tape, but I guess I would ask the hon. member how he feels about all of these things, particularly – I heard a comment about Alberta's reputation. Well, I would say that the knock-on effect of the previous Premier of this province calling Alberta the embarrassing cousin might be inconvenient, and that might cause less business to be had here in Alberta although they didn't consider that to be red tape.

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

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to talk about the Red Tape Reduction Act. When this bill was introduced, I had constituents reach out to seek clarity around what this meant, and honestly I'm not able to provide clarity. The bill has no targets, no timelines, and what's worse is that it doesn't even offer a definition of what red tape is. What it does give is the associate minister the ability to create new regulations and amend existing

ones, which, to me, seems to be red tape in itself. It seems that a process of setting up more bureaucracy to reduce bureaucracy is what's happening here with this Red Tape Reduction Act.

I agree with what my neighbour here had mentioned about each ministry currently having the ability to look within their own ministry to determine what is working and what isn't working. We rely heavily on our stakeholders and our community members and Albertans to come to us to identify what's working and what's not working. An entire ministry shouldn't be needed to do that, and without clarity of what that is, it's a little bit concerning. It seems that anything at this point is open to be targeted, and it's a little bit unsettling, I can say.

I know I'm proud of some of the efficiencies that we introduced over the last four years, some of them about consumer protections specifically. We were able to really strengthen areas in consumer protection, making sure that this was a priority. We wanted to be able to ensure that people who just want to go to a concert are able to do so. We banned the ticket-buying bots and improved consumer access to refunds from resellers. I know that being able to buy concert tickets should be something that's fun and exciting and not be a challenge, looking at all of these bots that were purchasing them up and then reselling them at a higher price. I know that that was something that was important to many of the people in my community. They were grateful that that was now being protected.

We did the legislation around payday lending. 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. We know that that happens. When people need to look for other sources of income, they often turn to some of these payday lending places, and we were able to ensure that they had better protections. We know that now, today, the payday loan borrowers pay lower fees, they have more time to pay off their loans, and they are paying them off in smaller instalments, which makes it a little bit easier when you need to take out a loan.

We talked a lot about the door-to-door sales in my community, and I had a lot of people expressing a lot of gratitude for that. It was something that people came to us and expressed concern about, so we listened, and the Minister of Service Alberta did something about it. A separate Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction wasn't needed because that was something that was in her ministry at the time to directly have an impact on.

What we did was that when we heard concerns and ideas for putting in just some sort of strategies in reductions to help reduce some of the barriers, we were able to do them within that ministry itself. It's just a little confusing why they would want to add an associate minister to look at this when each minister across the floor has the ability to do that within their own ministry, and I would suggest that they should be quite capable to be able to look at their own ministry and know it well enough to be able to identify what some of the concerns are and where some of the strengths would be to enhance the reduction of some of these barriers.

Another thing that we did that I know the people in Castle Downs were very happy about was condominium living. We were able to introduce condo regulations to improve buying and living in a condo. It was something that we heard from the community that was a concern, and we were able to help with that.

It doesn't make sense to me, Madam Speaker, why this complete bill and the associate minister are needed. If government would be able to provide some sort of definition about what it would actually be reducing, some sort of timelines, targets – I think it's quite unsettling to members on this side of the House and Albertans across the province to really have no idea what this bill speaks to, what their intention is, and what they're going to be coming after. I know that it's concerning for me and I know it's concerning to

constituents in Castle Downs to hear that this very vague bill is going forward without any real definition of what it is.

I think, with that, I'm going to end my comments, but I would just urge that clarity is definitely needed once again from this government. It's something that we haven't received a lot of. I'm afraid that this falls under "in due course," and that's a little bit concerning to me.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Mr. Hunter: Madam Speaker, actually, there are a few points that were made by some of the members that I took copious notes on to make sure that I could understand their concerns. It's important that we try to get some buy-in from opposition members. I didn't feel when I was in opposition that we got that, so I think it's important.

Just to be clear, I'd like to tell the members opposite that I personally reached out to their critic of red tape reduction – I'm not sure what that makes them. Maybe that they want red tape? I personally reached out to them and asked to find out if they had any concerns, to be able to discuss the issues as clearly as we could get about this portfolio, and I did it twice. Not once did I hear any of the concerns until we got into second reading.

Now, what's interesting about that is that I question how genuine these concerns are or whether or not it is just grandstanding, whether or not it's just being able to stand up to say: we are in opposition to what you do no matter what you present. This is a concern that I have.

I remember very clearly. I introduced a private member's bill when we were in opposition to not just decrease the regulatory burden but actually just to stop it, be able to make it so that it doesn't keep on increasing. We heard many times from our job creators, our innovators, the people who actually do the heavy lifting in our society, the ones that they said that they were championing yet continued to add burden upon burden upon burden onto, these job creators and innovators. This is in large part the reason why they lost the last election, yet they still haven't learned this lesson. They still haven't learned that when you pile on to our job creators, they refuse to create jobs or they can't. They go out of business. We heard that a lot.

Now, it's interesting. We were very specific in the way we designed this bill. We wanted it to be a small bill so that we could walk the talk. We want to be able to get to the root of the problems. We've heard two arguments coming from, actually, the one member from Edmonton. I can't remember where he's from. He argued different points to this bill.

4:10

The one point is that it's not prescriptive enough and that we don't have enough information here, that we don't have enough regulations in here to be able to make a good decision. Then he said: "You know what? This associate minister is actually just creating red tape." You cannot say both of those arguments, yet he did. So I'm actually confused. I was really listening to try to find out what their concerns are, yet many of them have argued both of those concerns. You can't have both. You either have to have less red tape or more red tape, yet they've argued for both of those to happen.

If we're going to try to be able to help our job creators and our innovators to do what they do best, which is create jobs, then we have to have a plan to do that. Yet the plan that we heard from the old government in the past was: let's add a hundred pages to the Occupational Health and Safety Act. That'll do it. We can pile onto

our job creators, and hopefully they will get the message that we want them to create jobs – by piling a hundred pages onto the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

Well, I can tell you that as soon as that came out – in fact, when that came out, it came about two weeks after I introduced Bill 207, my private member's bill to abate the increase in red tape – I remember speaking to the then economic development and trade minister and asking him whether or not they were going to support this. I thought it was a reasonable approach to getting our job creators back to work. He said: absolutely not.

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

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to thank our minister, you know, rising up and trying to justify his job, but it still didn't really help. Just reading the name of the bill, the Red Tape Reduction Act, and flipping through the pages: it doesn't really help. Like, what is the real purpose of this bill? Again, as the hon. minister has said, the bill is just put on the table for the sake of the bill as they made an election promise, still missing the accountability – and I still can't find it – and the specific area and the specific regulation this bill is targeting and trying to address.

As my colleagues already have mentioned and, you know, said about it, it simply seems like for the sake of the bill it has actually been put on the table. When looking at this, what does the bill have to do with? Like, you know, there is a very vague introduction, I would say. So there is no introduction, really. To create more reports, panels, and regulations: looking at that is like creating more red tape for the sake of trying to eliminate the so-called red tape.

I have seen, Madam Speaker, you know, in my riding and on Edmonton's south side back in 2012 and 2013 the condominium construction and the construction of the buildings that lacked, actually, regulation due to the lack of the regulations. The consumers and the residents of the area were in big, huge trouble. They bought, they invested in those condominiums, and then they were not complying with the regulations. That led to huge chaos, with leaking windows, with I want to say the defective foundations of those buildings.

The consumers were fighting for years and years without getting any justice. It was very hard for the government to hold that builder accountable as I think at that time he was not traceable. He just decided not to, you know, face them.

I just wanted to share my recent experience. As I mentioned many times in this House, I had the privilege to run a small-scale business. I happened to apply for a business licence for the building where I had my business, and that process took almost a year, you know, for me to obtain the licence for that building. The reason was that the officials were saying that that particular building was built in the 1970s, and either there were not really legitimate regulations existing or the builder at the time did not really follow the rules. We went through a huge hurdle, again, hustling for almost a year because there were not proper regulations in place at that time.

As my colleagues, you know, already mentioned, I don't know what the need was of creating a specific ministry to address this issue without targeting specific areas that this wanted to address as the previous government had been in a position, the ministers had been in a position with the capacity to address the issues like payday loans and other related issues. There are a number of examples that have been tried in similar directions across Canada by our federal government. All it has done in the past was compromise consumer protections and the health and safety of the workers. Looking at this very, very vague bill without any specific definitions, right now it seems like it's threatening more of our consumer protections than

it's going to do to address any of the hurdles, as our members on the other side are calling them, that the businesses are facing or the burdens that businesses are having.

I just wanted to record my comments. I will just summarize my comments by saying that this bill has failed to target specific areas of the regulations they're trying to address, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any comments or questions under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, Member, for your comments on this bill. I think, as the member has noted, that there is no clarity in it. It's just a skeleton bill. A lot of things need to be filled in later on, and we didn't get much clarity when the minister was trying to address it.

Other members, when they spoke, were talking about light bulbs and companies from Ontario. Sure, those kinds of things certainly can be improved. Next time around we can have an Alberta company. But at the heart of that project was that Alberta was the only province that didn't have an energy efficiency program, and that was because of 44 years of a Conservative regime that never brought forward an energy efficiency program. We brought in that program. I guess if they see that as red tape, then I don't know.

Then they were talking about the carbon tax, how that's red tape. I think in my riding they didn't get that mandate. People view the environment, people view climate change as the most serious existential threat to our planet, to humanity, and they want their government to take strong action. I don't see that as red tape.

4:20

With respect to minimum wage I believe that a measure of a fair society is how the most vulnerable in that society are treated among us, where we have a wealth of resources. We have oil and gas, we have other resources, and we have agriculture. We have many things to be proud of, but at the same time we do have people among us who work and still are not able to put food on the table, to have shelter. That promise was made in 2015, and that promise was kept.

What they are doing, I think, is that they are reducing red tape by reducing youth wages. Those students are not always working for fun. They have responsibilities; they have families. They have expenses to meet. If that's the kind of red tape they are trying to reduce, I don't think that was the mandate or that Albertans understood that kind of reduction to be red tape.

Cutting, for instance, school fees. They are saying they will maintain it, but over four years under our watch \$2 billion was added to the K to 12 school system. Now they are cutting it, and the Calgary board of education alone is predicting a \$40 billion deficit. Cutting those funds is red tape reduction? I don't think so. That's not what we understood red tape reduction to mean. Similarly, cutting from the Health budget I don't think in any way amounts to red tape reduction.

Reversing the protections that were given to LGBTQ and the most vulnerable in this province, reversing those protections: is that red tape reduction? I don't think so. I don't think that Albertans or any of us understood that to be red tape reduction.

Again, I guess, the next time the minister gets up, we hope that he will put some parameters around red tape, what exactly their government means by red tape, put some definition on it, put some understanding on it so that we have a common understanding in this House of what we mean by red tape. Otherwise, we will be just coming up with our own definition. Otherwise, we might see their cuts to the Education budget as some kind of red tape reduction. They also need to explain, I guess, just come up with some example.

I mentioned earlier that in question period the minister was given that opportunity. Just name one process, name a couple of regulations that we see as red tape so that we have a better understanding, a kind of common understanding on both sides of the House, and we will be able to participate more meaningfully in this debate. Otherwise, again we are left to . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour today to rise and speak to Bill 4. I haven't had a chance to speak to it yet. I'm going to echo a little bit of what the member just shared. We came from a question period earlier today where we asked a lot of questions about protections for LGBTQ youth. You may say that it's a bit of a stretch to connect that to red tape, but as the member just pointed out, without clarity around what these red tape reductions are, we're left here to speculate. I'm concerned. I'm concerned about what it means to eliminate red tape when we're talking about vulnerable Albertans.

I talked yesterday in my maiden speech about the fact that I represent Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, which is a riding that has some of the highest rates of poverty, child poverty in particular. Many folks are struggling. Many folks rely on AISH. Many folks rely on other supports to survive, quite frankly. My concern here is what is going to happen to those vulnerable Albertans, with a lack of clarity around this bill. I just want to go on the record as saying that we said it here first. I want to chat a little bit as well about the educational impact. Again, I worry that without any definition of what red tape is, how will social services and how will education be affected?

One of the things that a few of the other members have talked about is some of the broad failings of this bill, Bill 4. Now, we know that they're creating – and the Member for Edmonton-Decore talked about this as well – a whole heck of a lot more red tape. New processes, new panels, new reports, new regulations, all in the name of red tape reduction. I mean, it's not only ironic; it's somewhat humorous, I must say. And there are no teeth. There are no timelines.

I come back to the issue of LGBTQ youth. We've just been told that when or, I guess, if – likely when – the Education Act comes into effect, there is now a lack of timelines and accountability. For instance, a principal can dilly-dally and can sort of take their sweet time in responding to a student's request for a GSA. I'm seeing a lot of parallels in the legislation that this government is putting forth when it comes to a lack of accountability, of targets, of timelines.

The fundamental protections that are being threatened under Bill 4 concern me a whole heck of a lot as well: consumer health and safety, environmental health and safety, which I'll talk a little bit more about in a minute, particularly the environmental piece. We know that the members opposite are getting a lot of their advice from the CFIB. One of their top validators even said that "in Alberta's case, new rules on health and safety have only made the burden on business owners worse." Again, I come back to vulnerable Albertans, vulnerable Albertans who are working at jobs that may be precarious, and what a lack of regulation is going to mean for those vulnerable Albertans.

Now, I said that I would chat a little bit about the environmental regulations in particular. I'm quite concerned given that this government, these members opposite, have just axed the carbon tax, effectively killing the climate leadership plan and the energy efficiency programs that some of the members talked about earlier.

I'm quite concerned about what red tape reduction is going to mean for our environment.

I'll come back to the fact that I spoke last evening in my maiden speech about what I heard at the doors. I heard from countless constituents that they're concerned about climate change. Actually, I just got an e-mail the other day about the extinction of species, the absolutely plummeting species diversity we're seeing around the world. I'm quite worried about what this means. We can look back – you might again say that I'm fearmongering – and history shows that when environmental regulations are gutted, there are tangible, scary impacts.

For instance, when former Prime Minister Harper gutted the regulatory framework that protected lakes and rivers and groundwater by allowing a loophole in one of the regulations of the Fisheries Act, mining companies were effectively able to dump toxic waste into lakes. It meant that they were no longer subject to any protections, and we know that there were countless water bodies that, in turn, were basically used as toxic waste dumps.

We saw something similar happen on the environment front in British Columbia. We know that former governments there reduced government oversight and basically relinquished any responsibility for environmental monitoring. What did that mean? Well, that meant that projects like dam construction, forestry management, hazardous waste disposal: they were all affected. In the mining industry in particular we saw one of the tailings dams that had absolutely huge, widespread environmental damage.

4:30

I get concerned that given so far – I mean, this government has only been in place for a couple of weeks here, and they've already shown that there's not a commitment to addressing climate change. There's not a commitment to strong environmental protections. I get concerned what this is going to mean for, you know, an already precarious environment here in Alberta.

Again, I come back to – and this is why I urge the members opposite to really heed our warnings – the lack of specificity in this bill. I urge them to really ask some of those questions around when it comes to environmental protection, when it comes to supports for vulnerable Albertans, "What red tape are we actually proposing to cut?" because it's not clear to me. I've read the proposed legislation. I know many of the members in this House have read it closely as well, and a lot of questions remain. A lot of questions remain. I caution about, you know, unintended consequences of red tape reduction. Again, if I didn't have a whole heck of a lot of evidence from jurisdictions not just here in Canada but internationally as well where they've cut red tape, I wouldn't be ringing the alarm bell quite as loudly as I am.

Now, one of the issues that's really top of mind right now, I know for at least the members on my side of the House here, again, is coming back to vulnerable Albertans. I'll talk a little bit about the impact on addicts, on mental health, and on drug addiction. Now, we know that in British Columbia some of the deregulation, some of the cutting of red tape, so to speak, that occurred was around the drug recovery houses. I know, again, in my own riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood we have a number of organizations that are really working to offer safe spaces, evidence-based harm reduction practices for vulnerable neighbours. We've got an incredible institution called Ambrose Place, where there's basically harm reduction in the form of helping folks who are Edmonton's most vulnerable, people without limbs, people who've been living rough, homeless for very long periods of time . . .

An Hon. Member: Decades.

Member Irwin: Absolutely, decades.

They take those folks, they bring them into Ambrose Place, and they offer them an opportunity to address their addictions. I've toured Ambrose Place, and I've talked to some of the clients there. It is incredible just hearing their stories, just seeing these incredibly vulnerable Albertans having an opportunity to combat their addictions.

We saw in British Columbia similar recovery houses – in this case they were drug recovery houses – that were subject to deregulation, and what happened? These spaces became fully overcrowded, they were unsupervised, they were dirty, they were unsafe, and there were no rules. There were no regulations. What did that mean? Well, in that case vulnerable British Columbians were left even more vulnerable. Again, I urge you to think about some of these examples when there's, you know, a direct correlation between introducing deregulation and the impact on vulnerable Albertans.

I really want to hammer home, because I know a lot of folks have talked about the consumer side of things, the consumer protection. That's important as well. For me, again, I come back to my own experience. You know, I can argue that I am able to represent the voices of my constituents in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood who are vulnerable because I've talked to them. I've entered the affordable housing, the subsidized housing spaces that we have in our riding. I've entered Ambrose Place. I've entered these places where our most vulnerable Albertans are living, and I'm listening.

Again, I want to close by just saying to the members opposite: please consider the most vulnerable Albertans as you review this bill and ask those questions to your colleagues about how vulnerable Albertans will be affected by deregulation and by cutting red tape.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any comments, questions? We have not heard yet from the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have sat here and listened to my colleagues on the opposite side talk about some of their quarrels with proposed legislation to cut red tape and question whether or not it was necessary to appoint an associate minister responsible for red tape reduction. My comment is: if this House recalls, this was one of the fundamental platform commitments that we made in the course of the just-concluded campaign. There is no better form for citizens to express their democratic will than through an election, and in dozens of events and speeches our Premier and many of my colleagues had the opportunity to speak about why it was necessary for a future Alberta government to ensure that they reduce the burden on the ability of the private sector to help us tackle, quite frankly, the economic disaster that the former NDP government have bestowed upon us.

We were losing jobs in the tens of thousands, and investment in Alberta was fleeing in the tens of billions of dollars. There was so much uncertainty within the investment community that they were not prepared to follow through to risk their hard-earned capital to invest in Alberta, this province that used to be the magnet for investment across this country, across the globe. It used to be the case, Madam Speaker, that investors around the world were looking forward to bringing their hard-earned capital to invest in Alberta, but under that NDP government that completely was no longer the case, so we are faced with this huge problem of a government that presided over the near decline of the wealthiest province on the face of this country.

We made a commitment to the people of Alberta that if we were fortunate to earn their mandate, we would pursue legislation that

was clearly laid out in our platform, a specific platform commitment, 375 of them. We made a commitment that we would appoint a minister responsible for that. On April 16 the people of this province had the opportunity to weigh in on that particular platform commitment, and overwhelmingly, by hundreds of thousands, they supported that platform commitment.

My question to my friends on the opposite side is whether or not they learned any lesson from the outcome of that particular election, specifically on this particular issue. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: I mean, it is true that Albertans had their say on April 16, but it's also true that myself and members on my side were elected as representatives for their ridings, and I was with a pretty good majority, I must add.

For me, I'm here to represent my riding, my constituents of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I'm not making it up when I say that all the time at the doors folks were concerned about their vulnerable neighbours. I'm not making it up when I say that I visited safe consumption sites, I visited drug addiction houses, and I visited, like I said, affordable, subsidized housing. I heard from those vulnerable Albertans first-hand, and they make up a large part of my constituency. So yes, while Albertans made their decision writ large, they also elected a whole lot of us to be their voices.

4:40

The Deputy Speaker: There's like 10 seconds.

Mr. Bilous: I wonder which regulations were the ones that drove businesses out. Which red tape specifically made businesses less competitive?

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

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. Thank you so much, Madam Speaker, and thank you, members, for this opportunity to debate Bill 4. I will say that during the campaign period certainly the concept of reducing red tape was something that was discussed, and I think that a lot of people want efficiencies. I think a lot of people want efficiencies in all parts of their life. The creation of, specifically, an associate minister and bringing in a bill and a whole set of regulations that go with that: I don't think that that was something that I heard people say that they were voting for. I don't actually recall if an associate minister for red tape was one of the platform commitments; I know that reducing red tape was. I think that finding ways to increase efficiency is something that we all strive for and should strive for in government and also in our personal lives.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

I also think that finding ways to be more efficient shouldn't be at the cost or opportunity for things like occupational health and safety or workers' compensation, things that keep us all safe in our daily lives. Having speed limits on highways, having rules around who can control what substances where: I think some of that some people might consider red tape. I think that we have a lot of these rules and regulations because we want to govern ourselves in a society in a way that's fair and reasonable.

I think the prior speaker, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, was referring to, you know: we were elected, and we said that we were going to appoint an associate minister. I will say, having spent time in this building, that creating more ministries is not efficient. Having ways for people to work together and work collaboratively

is probably more efficient if that's your goal, to find more ways to be streamlined and efficient. Definitely I would say: creating new opportunities for MDMs, minister-deputy minister meetings, often very cumbersome, often a lot of reports go into preparing for those meetings and the time that it takes to sit down and have them.

That's a little bit about what I want to say about specifically creating a minister and specifically finding ways to make things more efficient. It doesn't actually seem like a head nod that that would make things more efficient.

That being said, the ministry has been created and the minister has a role to play, and I respect that. I want to say that this bill is, I think some people have probably said, a shoot first, aim later kind of piece of legislation, where it's set up that we're going to have a press conference, we're going to talk about what we're going to do to cut red tape, we're going to have scissors and a ribbon, and we'll figure out exactly what we're going to do after we've done all that. But this is going to be a really good photo op. We're going to be able to say that we're doing something in line with what we campaigned on. What it actually does, in my reading of it, is that it creates committees to examine things to come back and report on things.

The other thing I want to say, especially to the members of cabinet, is that cabinet time is precious. Period. I know that when I was sitting around the cabinet table, I already had about 40 per cent of the budget; I knew I couldn't take 40 per cent of the time that cabinet had as well. I didn't think that that would be fair to all of my colleagues. There were certainly times where we had to, where things would come up and we would have to focus a significant portion of cabinet time on things like, certainly, the opioid crisis or when the federal government decided they were going to legalize cannabis or when we had to find out ways that we were going to modernize professions, how we regulated a number of professions, including paramedics. That was not a regulated profession before we came in.

All of that needs to come to the cabinet table. This bill needed to come to the cabinet table. The regulations that will flow from it need to come to the cabinet table. Every time you put something to the cabinet table, it means that something else isn't going to be there because there just literally isn't enough time. If the full cabinet spent all their time sitting around the cabinet table, there would still be things that government members and private members within the government caucus wanted to achieve that there just isn't enough time for.

So the question I have is: is this bill priority? It must be because it's Bill 4 of the first term. It was given, you know, a big press conference. But it's going to take a lot of time – creating this bill took a lot of time – actually the development of the regulations, bringing the regulations back, passing the regulations. I don't want to call it red tape. It's an important process of consideration. It works its way through the process, but it means that you're spending your time on this instead of spending your time on other things that are important to your private members within your caucus as well as members within cabinet who have other items they'd like to bring forward.

I can tell you that there are about three more health professions that I wanted to be able to bring forward to the cabinet table for due consideration but there physically just isn't enough time. If you keep putting things on the cabinet's table – and that's what we're doing here. When we pass bills, we say: "Hey, cabinet. You're going to develop regulations. You're going to figure out how to implement this. This is going to be a new law. You're going to spend a lot of time on this." By doing this, you're taking things like the accreditation of massage therapists off the table for cabinet or the accreditation of other professions or things around water in your

communities or things around other priorities where you'd like to make laws about other things.

I doubt a lot of people, when they were thinking about why they were going to run for government, thought: I want to run for government to make a bill that sets up a committee. I just don't think that's something that people – like, everyone in this room presumably spent a lot of time thinking about their decision, campaigning, talking to people in their communities to make sure that they can move forward on things that really matter to them and to one another.

That's my first question: why? Why are we doing this, and why is this the most important thing for cabinet? They actually have this area called the machinery of government. Is this the most important thing for the machinery of government to be focusing its efforts on for the next several weeks or months? Because it will. Once we pass legislation here, that becomes their mandate, and that's what these organizations within government have to focus their efforts on. That's number one.

Number two. We just saw a different bill tabled this afternoon that is looking at going back to a prior piece of legislation, a bill that was passed in 2012, an amendment act to that bill that will basically take out most of the things in the introduction of that bill, the Education Act, where it talked about age of access, when it talked about age of entry, all of these things that were the thrust of why that bill came in. There's a new amendment act coming in saying: "No, we're not going to do all those other things. What we will do is go back to the GSA rules we had before."

Again, by passing bills like this you're creating a whole new level of checks and balances and government need to develop regulations to implement something that I would argue is beyond unnecessary. I'd say that it's unnecessary, but the piece that it's specifically targeting, I would say, is an act to discourage or rather destroy GSAs in our province.

By passing this bill, we're saying on one hand that we think that things should be more efficient, maybe, by creating committees to report things back to us for us to consider at a later time, and on the other hand we're passing laws that are old and outdated, and the meat of those laws at the time in which they were passed is totally counter to what the actual bill is going to do now. Oh, PS: we're going to make sure that we take out the provision around immediate access to gay-straight alliances or around commitments to privacy and the fact that students won't be outed, which was in another set of laws that has another set of regulations that will, if that piece is passed, go out the window.

I do have to say that I find it a bit frustrating that we keep talking about: we need to find more efficiencies; we need to find ways to streamline things. We can't introduce our family members now. If a family member comes in, the Speaker will say their name, and at the end of everyone's name being said, we'll clap. It's too cumbersome on this House. It takes too much time. It costs too much money, but we will take time to pass legislation to say that we might make a committee that might report back on things.

It just smacks of, in my opinion, taking away the voice and the opportunity from private members. I think that private members play an important role in a government caucus and in our Assembly as a whole. I think that private members' voices are incredibly important to making sure that not just the folks who happen to be placed around that cabinet table but all members of both the government caucus and the entire Assembly have an opportunity to have their voices heard.

When I see things like this being brought forward, it says to me that other good ideas from around the caucus table – and especially having heard the maiden speeches from so many folks last night and in the days prior, I don't remember anyone running saying that they

wanted to pass Bill 4 to create a committee to report back on something. I heard a lot of people talk about other reasons why they ran. I would say that, to me, it's problematic that this is becoming a priority.

I think a lot of the things that private members said in their speeches – some of them were definitely intended to be knives, to twist and turn, and, you know, political messaging, but a lot of things that were said are things that I think all of us in this Assembly or at least the vast, vast majority of us would agree on. A lot of things were said about wanting to make sure that our kids had opportunities to grow up in a province where they'd all have opportunities to be successful. A lot of things were said about wanting to make sure that the services in their community were protected and strengthened, that families had good jobs and good opportunities for employment.

4:50

I'll say that this bill becoming our priority doesn't reflect what I heard in those maiden speeches. That's the main thing I wanted to say. I think that this is not going to achieve what some people hope it will achieve. It's actually going to take a lot of time away from other important things that members care about. It was a beautiful photo op, but I don't think that this actually has the teeth or the ability to influence more efficiency, which I think is something that is valid, that all of us should be seeking on an ongoing basis, ways that we can be more efficient, do our work more effectively on behalf of all Albertans. This, I think, is the exact opposite of that.

I'll leave that, colleagues, for your consideration.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) I believe I see the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much. I'd just like to rise on 29(2)(a) and point out a couple of things. You know, the opposition has asked us for reasons why this bill is so important. I'm going to give you a few examples that have come across my desk just in the last week. They're quite reasonable asks, and the people involved are very, very frustrated.

One of the cases involves an entrepreneurial family in my area that is in the gravel business. Now, they've been trying to get a disposition opened up on a gravel pit on Crown land for upwards of eight years. Eight years. Originally, they applied for it, and the application, for some reason, was rejected. They appealed and, over a two-year period, went through the process of the appeal, got to the point of a hearing. A hearing is very cumbersome. You know, it can take eight hours. It's very expensive for the government. It's very expensive for these people. They've spent over \$100,000 just on this one pit, trying to get it open. They got to that stage where they met with the board, and – guess what? – they won their appeal.

The director then rejected their application again. They reappealed. Again, over a two-year period they got to the stage of the regulatory process and got to a hearing stage again, and they won again in front of a new set of people. A new set of eyes looked at the whole situation and said: you know, there's no reason to reject this. They overturned the director's decision.

Guess what happened? The director rejected it again. After over eight years and hundreds of thousands of dollars in investment, this entrepreneurial family is pushed almost to the point of bankruptcy by bureaucracy.

Another example. A family in the Bonnyville area has a quarter section of land with a farm building and road access to it. They butt up against a piece of Crown land that they lease for grazing. When they went to sell their property, it was discovered that the house and the road were too close to the property boundary, so the only course

they had through the process was to purchase a section, about a six-metre-wide strip of land, off the Crown piece. That's been in the process for two years. It's been approved, paid for. They've paid all their fees. All the department has to do is send that request in to the land titles office. It's been over two years, and they've been told that it'll probably be another two years before they can get that process done. That's red tape.

Another case. A company that's working on the EPCOR waterline up in the area had to do a pipeline tie-in to the EPCOR waterline, that has water just like this, drinkable, potable water. When they went to do the tie-in, they had to dewater one section of the line. The government inspectors on the project said: well, you have to dechlorinate that water before you can dispose of it. Seriously. If it wasn't that funny – you could take the water out of the pipe and drink it, but you couldn't pour it on the ground to dispose of it or truck it away.

That's how ridiculous this is. That's what red tape is. That's why we need Bill 4. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. If there was anything in this bill that would actually fix those concerns that were raised by the hon. member, I would probably be enthusiastic, too, but this bill is simply, "The Minister shall make the report available to the public."

Is this the minister's mandate? I know that there were no mandate letters. I get it: there's a mandate of an election. But this seems like a bill to create three jobs – an associate minister, a chief of staff, and a press secretary: three jobs – and a lot of ARs and a lot of reports and a lot of committee meetings, but I don't think what's going to happen, hon. members, through you, Mr. Speaker, is actually addressing the issues that hon. members, I think, have every right to raise, saying: this is an issue I want to address in the community. Bring that up with the relevant minister, find a way to get that on the cabinet agenda rather than getting a report of a committee meeting on a cabinet agenda.

I think that this is a very lovely exercise. I'm sure that that press secretary was very proud cutting the ribbon. Hello. Shout-out to whoever the press secretary is in the associate minister's office. That was a beautiful, beautiful photo shoot, but I don't think it addresses the issues that the hon. member just raised.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Any other members? I believe I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung standing.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure this afternoon to rise to speak to Bill 4, the so-called Red Tape Reduction Act. I wanted to commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who recently brought up an issue that I thought was germane to the topic of discussion today. She did mention in her discussion a moment ago that there were no mandate letters made public by the current government when it came to power, yet it seemed to me that simply a memo or a mandate letter to ministries regarding their goal of reducing regulations and administrative burdens would have been a sufficient way of dealing with any concerns that the current Premier had about an overburden of regulation in the province. But to go ahead and create a whole associate ministry to perform this function: it seems to me to be a total oxymoron to call a ministry into being to contribute to removing red tape.

The whole question that really confounded me is that the whole topic is not even defined in the legislation. Now, how in the world can you go ahead and attack a problem when you don't, by definition, understand what it is? I think that if you do a man-on-

the-street interview and ask, “What the heck is red tape? What does it actually mean?” you would probably get a surprising number of different answers but perhaps a lot more dumbfounded looks, because they really couldn’t come up with an answer as to exactly what one is talking about when you say “red tape.” It’s a term that’s been bandied about for many years, yet an actual definition of it is something that is in question, and it’s something that obviously should be embedded in an act proposing that they reduce red tape, and we’re not even sure what it is.

Mr. Speaker, I’ve been a member of the Public Accounts Committee for four years. I was deputy chair, and I witnessed and participated in many debates on many different topics of reports of the Auditor General from almost all of the departments, and I can say that as a current member of the Public Accounts Committee, I look forward with relish to receiving a report through the Auditor General’s office on the efficacy of this ministry somewhere down the road and having officials from this ministry appear before the Public Accounts Committee to answer questions about what they actually accomplished because, of course, Auditors General are interested in value for money and outcomes and consequences and performance measures. I don’t know if any of those things are possibilities under this act.

5:00

I can think right now as to the contests that might be going on amongst auditors at the Auditor General’s department to see who might get to take a crack at investigating this ministry, because it’s going to be a fun one for them. I think there’d be probably a contest to see who the heck gets to do the audit on the Red Tape Reduction Act and this ministry that it’s created.

I certainly look forward to those meetings as well because it’d be like a definition, to me, of what the Auditor General seeks to make an example of when he does a report on a government ministry. I can’t think of a more fun meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to attend than the one that may be forthcoming should the Auditor General decide to do an audit on the performance of this particular ministry over time, starting with what I mentioned earlier, a total lack of a definition of what, actually, red tape is. How do you define an outcome or how do you manage to determine whether you actually reduce red tape when the bill itself doesn’t even define what it is?

I’m really tickled to think about what type of an investigation and what type of an audit might be forthcoming from the Auditor General looking at performance measures and value for money and the worthwhileness of this whole ministry, that really could have been accomplished – the outcomes, I believe, could have been accomplished with a simple note, a memo from the Premier’s office to each ministry saying: please do your best to make sure that we don’t have any redundancies in our regulations and administrative orders, and keep tabs on it, and make a report to me as to what your success has been over the year. Certainly, it could have been a line item or a paragraph in that department’s annual report but didn’t require a whole ministry to accomplish that task.

I also want to caution the government as to what failures there can be when you go ahead and authorize a ministry to go in and make changes to regulations within a department that they may be totally unfamiliar with. When you get the red tape security police coming into your ministry to take a look at all your legislation and they take their hatchet to your regulations, you, I think, as a minister of a particular department and responsible for a ministry might be wanting to maybe protect your turf a little bit and have a pretty good argument to make when the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction comes in and starts hacking away at your particular regulations. You’re saying: “You’re really sort of coming in from

afar. These regulations have certain roles to play, and they’re really being effective. You don’t really quite understand why they’re in place, yet you’re coming down to a determination and you’re saying that I can’t have these regulations, that they’ve got to go.”

I’m just wondering: who, in fact, will be in charge of the hatchet? Now, is it really going to be something that the Premier himself is in charge of from afar in saying, “Look, you go on a hunting mission, and go ahead, and these are the targeted regulations that I want you to go after and claim thereafter that they happened to be made because we thought they were efficiencies that we’re generating,” when, in fact, there was some other, ulterior motive that the government might have to go ahead and slash some regulation in a particular department that they couldn’t otherwise accomplish, sort of a backdoor way of accomplishing change in social legislation, for example, when going in the front door would cause them a great deal of consternation and public outcry? My suspicion is that this ministry really is a hunting mission that has been invoked at the Premier’s behest so that he can go ahead and attack certain departments and ministries in a way that using the front door wouldn’t allow him to do.

Just on a plain, common-sense part of it, though, I think the ministries themselves are the most able to determine the redundancies in the regulation structures, not the red tape security service. The creation of this red tape security service seems to me to have an ulterior motive, and I think it happens to be a political motive right out of the Premier’s office. I think time will tell if indeed I’m right or not, and I think the Auditor General’s reports may actually come to this conclusion when we finally see him or her reporting on this ministry down the road. I’m looking forward to participating in those meetings as a member of the Public Accounts Committee in the not-too-distant future once we see some of the efforts of the current associate minister put into place.

I wanted to talk a little bit more about some of the risks that are inherent in a bill like this, where other jurisdictions have gone ahead and tried to clean up red tape, as they say, or clean up regulations that seemed to be unnecessary or burdensome or redundant. For example, the Harper government, with its clean water protections: they gutted the regulatory framework that protected our lakes, rivers, and groundwater by allowing a loophole in the metal mining effluent regulation of the Fisheries Act and allowed mining companies to dump toxic waste into lakes and reclassified healthy lakes as tailing impoundment areas, which means they were no longer protected. Sandy Pond in Newfoundland had been destroyed under this loophole, and Environment Canada released the names of 29 natural water bodies that mining companies have applied to use as toxic waste dumps.

As I say, ulterior motives, Mr. Speaker, seem to be inherent in this legislation, giving ministries the opportunity to do things through the back door they otherwise wouldn’t be able to accomplish through the front door because of the public outcry that would ensue if indeed they were up front about what they actually wanted to do within a particular ministry by removing certain regulations.

This search and destroy mission that the current associate minister has embarked upon by way of this bill, if it is passed, is something that I think all Albertans should have their red alert lights on. This Red Tape Reduction Act has a red alert notice to me because it doesn’t seem on the face of it to have any real purpose unto itself, yet if you dig a little deeper and you think a little bit longer about what, in fact, the government is empowered to do by using this tool, it’s a pretty dangerous act and has far-reaching consequences in every ministry.

It doesn’t matter whether it’s social services, doesn’t matter whether it’s in the Education ministry, could be environment, any

ministry where the government feels it wants to adjust regulations quietly, more quietly than they might otherwise be affected had they gone headlong and changed directly a specific act that was embedded within a certain department. I think that they figure this tool is going to be a way of giving them a better political cover to do things more quietly than they otherwise would have had to do them without this piece of legislation. So I'm very, very fearful that we're going to see some pretty dire consequences, and it's going to be up to us as opposition members to make sure that the government doesn't quietly get away with things that they otherwise would have to loudly do in the face of the public. We intend to do that very, very diligently, Mr. Speaker, over the course of the next four years.

I also expect, Mr. Speaker, that the Auditor General will have his or her antennae up very high regarding this piece of legislation because there are a lot of smart people in the Auditor General's office, and they can see through a piece of legislation like this. They know that its intent is really something other than what it's purported to be. I think that their first report on this ministry is something that I anticipate quite highly, and I look forward to reading it and debating the findings of the Auditor General, who, as I said before, is probably drawing straws with all other auditors in the office to see who gets to tackle this particular topic. So I look forward to that report.

5:10

I know there are lots of other risks that are inherent in this piece of legislation. There are things that could be destroyed, simply by allowing regulations to be taken away without as much consultation as they otherwise might receive, by employing this act. As I said, it seems to me to be a special ministry for searching out and destroying regulations that have particularly political overtones.

I think the public should be very much warned and alarmed that this tool is going to be something that's going to be used by this government in a way that they have done other things: to limit, first of all, the role of the private members in this Legislature. Now also, I think, in furtherance of that same type of an attitude towards any type of resistance to this government, this government is looking at using this Red Tape Reduction Act to minimize the role of the public and the visibility that the public has of what this government is actually trying to accomplish in adjusting the way that the economy is run and also the way that we are able to monitor the environmental protections that we have come to expect in this province as well as the social protections and protections of the most vulnerable – as the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood mentioned in her remarks, the protection of the most vulnerable is also something that is really, I think, in the sights of this government as well – so that they can avoid public scrutiny.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), I saw the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley up.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been sitting here listening to the comments from the opposition there, and one of the most common comments I hear is: what do we mean by red tape? What red tape? Well, I just opened up my phone and looked up in Wikipedia what the definition of red tape is

Red tape is an idiom that refers to excessive regulation or rigid conformity to formal rules that is considered redundant or bureaucratic and hinders or prevents action or decision-making. It is usually applied to governments, corporations, and other large organizations.

So there, the mystery is solved.

When we have a Red Tape Reduction Act, what we would like to reduce is excessive regulation or regulation that's considered

redundant or hinders or prevents action or decision-making. That's exactly what it says. Now, if the members from the opposition could read Red Tape Reduction Act, they would actually understand what the bill is about. Now, it's actually also in here where it says, "initiatives to eliminate and prevent unnecessary regulatory and administrative requirements." Mr. Speaker, I think it's very clear.

It's actually bizarre that we're sitting in this Legislature right now and the opposition is arguing against removing things that hinder and prevent action or decision-making, things that are redundant. We're sitting here having this argument, and each one of the members opposite has stood up and argued against this.

If we look in Wikipedia, too, in red tape reduction: "The 'cutting of red tape' generally refers to a reduction of bureaucratic obstacles to action." We're talking about cutting red tape, reducing obstacles to action. Now, I would wonder what we're doing here in this Legislature if we're not trying to perform some sort of action. We're trying to influence things, we're trying to make things happen here, but obviously the members opposite don't want things to happen. They don't want any action. They want to continue to obstruct everything.

Now, it goes on to say: "Business representatives often claim red tape is a barrier to business, particularly small business. In Canada, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has done extensive research into the impact of red tape on small businesses." It goes on to talk about the European Commission and their plans to reduce red tape and even have, like, an award for the best idea for red tape reduction.

Mr. Speaker, I'm just amazed that we're sitting here talking about this. Now, I've had to sit here and listen to the Member for Edmonton-South talk about: well, maybe we're going to remove the requirement to have PPE, personal protective equipment. Are you serious? Are we serious that we're sitting here . . .

The Acting Speaker: I will take this moment to re-remind everyone in the House to ensure that when referring to other members, do so in the third person.

Mr. Loewen: Okay.

Is he serious? I can't believe that he would get up and suggest that we would be removing personal protection equipment in the workplace.

Now, if they took the time to read the bill, in the number one paragraph in the preamble, it says:

The Government of Alberta recognizes that a consistent, transparent and efficient system of regulatory and administrative requirements is necessary to protect the public interest, including health, safety, the environment and fiscal accountability.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-South went on to say that maybe we'd be removing the requirement for handwashing in the workplace for restaurants and things like that. It's unbelievable, this discussion we're having here right now.

The Member for Edmonton-McClung just finished saying that there could be dire consequences. Is he serious that there could be dire consequences from removing redundant, bureaucratic, and hindering regulation? Dire? What could be dire about that? The absolute definition of red tape doesn't fit that description at all.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

We're sitting here talking about this day after day after day, and the members are getting up there and they're talking about red tape, and they're actually supporting red tape. They are supporting excessive regulation. They are supporting regulation that hinders or prevents action or decision-making.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have to begin by speaking directly through you to the Member for Central Peace-Notley, who was just speaking, who was just emphatically making fun of possible dire consequences. He did that while quoting to us from the red tape Wikipedia page. Allow me to continue reading that page for him because it outlines that people died in the Grenfell Tower fire, and it has been tied directly to the red tape reduction efforts that were made because fire inspectors, instead of spending six hours, were only spending 45 minutes. That's from the page that he brought up. And then making fun of the dire consequences – people die.

I can see him smiling at me. He thinks it's funny. He thinks it's funny that sometimes when a government fails to do its job of protecting the health and safety of its citizens and those people die, that that can come from misguided government policy, to simply speak to some – let's use the words "red tape." Let's talk about that very unspecifically. The result, in a very real circumstance, referenced from the page he brought up in this debate, is the deaths of citizens who were not protected by their government. When we are talking about dire, perhaps this could be one good example, and I would thank the member for bringing it to my attention by bringing up that very important red tape Wikipedia page. It really shows that when you read something through to the end, you can find out about the positives and the negatives of something going forward.

Now, Madam Speaker, I've started on a very dramatic note. My reaction to this bill is one of concern. I know from my time as a minister working within a ministry that was responsible for health and safety protections for our citizens and enforcing minimum basic standards, like employment standards, or through our arm's-length agency, the Workers' Compensation Board, making sure that workers are protected when they are getting hurt and injured and that they get the fair compensation that they deserve, that all of these things touch on regulation, and to have regulation painted as a wholly bad thing that is red tape that needs to be removed leads to potential health risks.

5:20

There are a number of examples of this in jurisdictions that have adopted red tape reduction exercises. When I look at the very thin Bill 4, I am concerned that the bill doesn't have targets, doesn't have timelines, doesn't have definitions, and seems to be just wanting to have that great photo op that my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora rightfully complimented – beautiful – without doing the hard work.

The Member for Central Peace-Notley seems to imply that if a government isn't willing to sign on to a ridiculously titled production, that they aren't serious about making life better for Albertans or business. That couldn't be further from the truth because I know – and I will speak just to my very direct experience – that we were able to completely transform how long people were waiting for an Employment Standards Code complaint to be dealt with by going through a process called operational excellence.

This is one that has also been used widely throughout our Alberta Health Services, AHS, organizations. It involves talking directly to front-line workers and people who are interacting with government to find out where those pain points are and working to smooth them out. Sometimes that will become a regulation change up at that level, but oftentimes there are ways that we can improve the experience, improve the process, and remove that red tape, which isn't necessarily a regulation but perhaps it's a poorly designed

form. I'm aware that our colleagues in Community and Social Services were able to radically adapt and improve some of the forms for people applying for services within Community and Social Services. That type of user experience change can significantly improve the delivery of government services.

I am a strong advocate of trying to use empathy when improving these things, thinking about the perspective of the person who's coming to use the service and how we can make sure we streamline that. Whether that's the business owner who is applying for a new business permit, whether that is the vulnerable Albertan who is about to lose their home and needs to fill out government forms in order to get assistance, I think using empathy and thinking about the experience can be an incredibly productive thing. In my time as a government caucus member and minister there were a number of initiatives to reduce those challenges that businesses and Albertans experience.

To say that the NDP doesn't believe in red tape reduction or doesn't believe in facilitating the services government provides to its citizens: that is completely incorrect. We are maybe just not ready to get behind a big red ribbon with some scissors and call it a job done because there's so much more to fall behind it. There's so much more that needs to be done because it's critical that we protect the health and the safety of our environment, of our citizens, of our communities, and very often regulations are part of that. To call them all bad or to suggest that there's unnecessary duplication – I'm at a loss for words a little bit, Madam Speaker.

Let me approach this from another perspective. I know from first-hand meetings with CFIB and other stakeholders, who are strong proponents of these red tape reductions, how difficult it can be to get them to tell you an example of a regulation. Now, members in this Chamber have stood and told examples of people who are frustrated with interacting with government, whether there was a regulation that was the bottleneck or maybe it was a form that was incomprehensible or another piece. I don't believe that Bill 4 is going to get to most of the pain points that are involved. I can tell you that regulations are not made equal. There are regulations that are huge, giant – the occupational health and safety code as an example – and there are regulations that are very small, that do a very specific thing. I question the idea that one in, one out is the best way to quantify this. Do we count the OHS code as one? Do we count a one-page regulation as one? The measuring of success – and I think it's really important for a government to be able to measure success – is really critical, and in this case we have an undefined report from the minister.

The minister, as I understand it, at his news conference and again in question period, could not give an example of the 17 regulations they've removed so far. I appreciate that, I understand, he's committed to making sure that they are publicly available on the website in the future. I think that transparency is really important, especially for a government that is doing a victory lap and saying: 17 gone already. Citizens deserve to know which 17. How will this impact their lives? What does this look like? That type of transparency is really, really important, and we haven't seen that yet, so making sure that Albertans are aware of what is being discussed is really important.

Now, the process to get to this list and to remove these regulations. Bill 4 is going to create a new minibureaucracy, not only the minister and his team – as my colleague referred to it, three jobs created already – but the crossministry working groups, the teams of people that are going to be sitting down to build the regulations to go with Bill 4. I assume that those regulations will then necessitate the repeal of other unrelated regulations in order to be introduced.

Also, within each ministry the process that that will be going through there, within each specific area, and then, as my colleague for Edmonton-Glenora was talking about, the machinery of government and this report to cabinet: all of this work is going to take a lot of people doing things. I can tell you that our Alberta public service, filled with amazing, talented, upstanding workers, has a lot of other things to do, especially with this government's current continued hiring freeze, and a lot of work supporting a brand new government happening. So I'm making sure that we are just really painting that picture for Albertans about how much work is going to be going on behind the scenes to achieve the goals of the Red Tape Reduction Act, Bill 4.

Now, I did begin, off the top, with that Wikipedia page, which I'll maybe clarify with the table: if the member opposite tables that tomorrow, does that mean I do not need to? We'll deal with that separately. I think it's good to have it on the record, now that we've identified some of the potential dire consequences that the member opposite was laughing about.

Making sure that we do not have any failures here in Alberta is really important because there have been failures in other jurisdictions that have implemented red tape reduction strategies. In some cases those failures were minor, and in some cases they were the deaths of citizens. What protections will the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction be putting in place to make sure that that doesn't happen here, that the attempt to reduce red tape and free up time so that instead of a six-hour inspection, it can be done in 45 minutes so it's not such a hassle doesn't end up with an out-of-control building fire? We don't know what protections the minister might put in because, of course, this bill doesn't really tell us what they're looking at, what their criteria will be, how they will be doing this, how they will be prioritizing.

There's so little information in this that we can only be left to wonder and, as I often like to do when considering decisions, look to other jurisdictions. Can we learn good things, bad things from other jurisdictions? Red tape reduction strategies have been used in many, many other jurisdictions. I know that my colleagues have discussed a few examples where we've seen issues with red tape reduction strategies in other places. In British Columbia both Gordon Campbell and Christy Clark were working for red tape reduction strategies, reducing oversight and provincial responsibility for environmental monitoring. This sounds like it might touch on what my hon. colleague was talking about when he was talking about a gravel pit approval. Potentially, it might be similar. It impacted a number of different projects in B.C., including a dam that caused widespread environmental damage, where the B.C. Auditor General went in and found that "almost every one of our expectations for a robust compliance and enforcement program within the [Ministry of Energy and Mines] and the [Ministry of Environment] were not met."

5:30

Under an administration that was actively looking to reduce red tape, to reduce the regulatory burden, to make things easier for companies, we have an unmitigated environmental disaster. I think it's really important, and my question to the minister as we move into later stages of debate would be: what work has he and his team done to look at other jurisdictions, and is he prepared to have a conversation about lessons learned where things have gone poorly? And how do we make sure that that doesn't happen here in Alberta? Is he prepared to consider any amendments that the opposition may suggest that might help to protect citizens, environment, or to put a framework around it to make sure that red tape reduction is not taking place in an unmitigated way?

It could be policies and process, perhaps not even necessarily an amendment, but I would certainly like to hear from the minister around how we can make sure that that doesn't happen here in our jurisdiction. As you well know, Madam Speaker, environmental damage, once done, is very difficult to undo, and obviously harm to our citizens or death of citizens is inexcusable when we're looking at these.

I have found, in my experience with . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I've been greatly appreciating the comments from my colleague here, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, and particularly in light of, I think, her deep experience having served as the minister of labour in this province and, I think, having done a very admirable job in that position. I appreciated the reflections that she brought to the table in terms of the dire consequences that can result, indeed the importance of thinking things fully through, reading, for example, a Wikipedia page from top to bottom and fully understanding everything that it contains.

What I was wondering, a question that I would have for my colleague. From her own experience, I guess, having brought in significant improvements to labour protections and occupational health and safety, some of which had been neglected by governments in Alberta for a number of years, I know that she'd spoken about doing crossjurisdictional analysis, talked about other research. I was hoping that perhaps she could enlighten the House as to the amount of work that goes into creating a regulation and the consideration that goes into determining what will be brought into law and how that reflects on what due consideration might need to be given when looking at removing the same.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, and thank you to my colleague for the question. My experience as a member of Executive Council is that a great deal of work does go into the creation of any new regulations or protective pieces, but my experience also tells me, particularly when it comes to occupational health and safety, that there's often a bit of a misunderstanding around things like the OH and S code.

A lot of the idea that this is red tape that needs to be removed: oftentimes it just needs to be clarified. Not everybody needs to have an oil and gas level health and safety program. That's not the minimum standard defined in our regulations. I know that when I was working with different industries on their health and safety programs, they would often look to oil and gas, for example, and say: we have to do the same thing they do, and they have binders and binders of documentation everywhere. That's not what occupational health and safety actually requires in a lot of situations.

It talks about doing reasonably practical things to protect the health and safety of your workers, something that universally employers agree with. Do reasonably practical things to keep people safe? Yes. Employers do not argue against that. The mechanism to get to that – I would say that our oil and gas industry is a top performer. They've got very rigorous systems. But that is not what the OHS code prescribes to a small-business owner. The reasonably practical application and their understanding of that and being able to work with business owners to help them fulfill those minimum requirements to keep people safe are what's needed, not

exempting small-business owners from health and safety or repealing that regulation.

I would also just like to add, Madam Speaker, that the new youth wage differential is going to be additional red tape for employers. It's going to add enforcement and administration burden that is not there. It is going to add additional complications. We've seen in Ontario that a lot of employers don't fully understand the student wage. They apply it to nonstudents because they're under 18, or they continue to pay someone a student minimum wage after they turn 18 because it is additional red tape, more work on those business owners to try and manage.

I see that Bill 4 is about reducing red tape, yet Bill 2 is about adding red tape. The bill that was just introduced, the Education Act: adding more red tape. More bureaucracy is going to be inserted through that legislation. I would recommend to this minister on this particular bill that we need more clarity on exactly what's happening and how we're going to protect our citizens. And I would strongly recommend that he look into the work that our public servants are already doing to make things more efficient and more usable and accessible for our citizens through operational excellence, through different user experience practices because there's a lot of good work happening.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, would the hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction like to close debate?

Mr. Hunter: I close debate.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:38 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery McIver Rutherford

Ellis	Milliken	Sawhney
Glasgo	Neudorf	Schow
Hanson	Nicolaides	Schulz
Horner	Orr	Sigurdson, R.J.
Hunter	Panda	Singh
Jones	Rehn	Stephan
Loewen	Reid	Walker
Long	Rosin	Williams
Lovely	Rowswell	Wilson
Madu		

Against the motion:

Bilous	Goehring	Phillips
Dach	Gray	Sabir
Dang	Hoffman	Schmidt
Deol	Irwin	Shepherd
Ganley		

Totals: For – 31 Against – 13

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

Bill 2

An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business

[Adjourned debate June 4: Member Irwin]

The Deputy Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is up to speak if you would like. No? Okay.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Madam Speaker, obviously, we've had some great discussion over the last few hours. As I look at the clock, we are only just a few minutes away from our dinner break. I fully expect a robust conversation is about to take place from 7:30 p.m. onwards throughout the night, so in an effort to make sure that we're well nourished and ready to go for 7:30 p.m., I move that the House adjourn until 7:30.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m.]

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