



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, October 28, 2015

Day 11

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)	McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
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Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)	van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)	Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)	Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)	
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)	
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)	

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1

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Brian Mason	Minister of Transportation, Minister of Infrastructure
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, October 28, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us reflect. As we begin this sitting, let us reflect on our good fortune as a province and as a nation, our good fortune of having such a well and diverse world, rich with people of different faiths and different cultures, people who make us stronger by sharing their celebrations with all of us, celebrations such as the Hindu Diwali, the festival of lights. For it is light that allows us to see more clearly, and it is light that allows us to make decisions that bind us together, not divide us.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, it's my delight today to introduce to you and through you a wonderful group of students from St. Theresa school, a grade 6 class. They are sitting up there in the members' gallery with their teachers Ms Stefanie Kaiser and Mr. Sam Marino. I just wanted to point out that I'm so delighted that St. Theresa school is here because this school had forums for both the provincial and the federal elections, and grade 7 students took some of the lead in asking questions and moderating. I'm glad that the students here in grade 6 have a chance to observe the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I will not ask the students how the vote turned out.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three groups to introduce quickly here today. First of all, 21 students from NorQuest College with their teachers Armando Bavaro and Ellen Robb.

I also have some students here from the Cultural Connections Institute – the Learning Exchange with their teacher, Ellen Joanne Campbell. We have Nina Voloshyn, Daniela Lopes, Pablo Lizzarago Lamas, Olivier Tanguy, and Enjuli Zemerak.

I also have four representatives here today from the Central McDougall parents' group and the heroes of 107th project: Kristina de Guzman, Mohamed Wali, Daryn Baddour, and Jermaine Curtis.

I would ask all those that I've named to stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.
Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly two groups of guests today. The first is a young family who lives in my riding of Edmonton-McClung. Mr. Eric August, Mrs. Dagmar Skamlova, and their daughter Madeleine are here today. They recently moved into the riding. This family is keenly interested in social justice, in being involved with their community, and they are deeply interested in how the Alberta government is working for families like their own.

Mr. Speaker, I'm further honoured to introduce to you and through you Mr. Elmer Brattberg, owner of the Academy of Learning; Mr. Charles Jarvis, general manager of the Academy of Learning; and Mrs. Coryne Yacucha, operations manager of the Academy of Learning, whom I have met and connected with

through their fantastic work at the Academy of Learning institute in my constituency. I would ask all of them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you today a wonderful group of community leaders from the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary and the United Ethnic Leaders Council. I had the pleasure of meeting with many of these along with the Member for Calgary-Cross to discuss their concerns and dreams for their communities. These people work on a myriad of issues, from family violence to addressing class size, and they're all doing just a wonderful job. I am going to read all of their names. I will do it as quickly as possible and strive not to mispronounce them. They are Linh Bui, Lovella Penaranda, Mandy Zhu, Qiao Lin, Fobete Dingha, Ernestine Bissou, Feruza Abajobir, Ameera Abbo, Khor Top, Basem Snjar, Amir Ahmed, Ekhlis Elibaid, Biftu Mohammed, Amartii Warri, Urga Adunga, Makana Dug, Amtul Khan, Arzouma Kalsongui, Zaheer Chaudhri, Patricia Chaudhri, Lieu Nguyen, Jenny Vu, Aliya Shahzad, Sukhwant Parmar, Tazim Esmail, Nizar Bhaloo, Connie Genilo, Essie Roxas, Allyn Abanes, Tabitha David, Yasmin Pradhan, Yvonne Thai, Olufemi Ojo, Shahid Parvez, and Asjad Bukhari. I would like to thank all of them for the work they do as community leaders. They make such a difference to our communities. I would ask that they rise and all receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms Miller: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you my friend Jennifer Vanderschaeghe. Jennifer is the executive director of the Central Alberta AIDS Network Society. CAANS is a central Alberta community-based organization which works to prevent sexually transmitted infections and hepatitis C as well as support a range of people, including people living with HIV; gay, bisexual, transgendered people; sex workers; people who use drugs; and people who are street involved. Jennifer has worked in HIV and harm reduction work for 23 years in Alberta. Jennifer, would you rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly members of the Alberta bioenergy producers group. The group met with members of the government caucus today to discuss opportunities for economic development and innovation in the bioenergy sector. They are seated today in the public gallery. I ask them to rise as I call their names and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly: Bridgette Duniece, Doug Hooper, Brent Rabik, and Len Sanche.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and introduce you to two heroes from St. Albert. Steve Murdoch is a firefighter, paramedic, and a son of St. Albert. He's been working with St. Albert fire and EMS since 2011. Adam Colameco is now with the St. Albert fire department and is also an EMS worker and previously worked in Fort McMurray with the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. Please rise, Steven and Adam, and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks and Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests. Lisa Lambert is one of my constituency managers, and she is also a sessional instructor at the University of Lethbridge as she completes her PhD in political science at the University of Calgary. It is not easy to be a member 500 kilometres away from the capital with two small children, and it requires good staff to make sure that all the wheels stay on all the buses at all the right times. That is what Lisa Lambert does for me, and I thank her for it every day. I would not be here without her.

With Lisa is a key volunteer from my campaign, Gabe Cassie. Gabe is a third-year student at the University of Lethbridge, and while we have tried to persuade him that political science is the best degree, he seems to have been convinced to study philosophy instead. He also contributes to his students' union council and is an active member of the community, Mr. Speaker.

I'd ask them both to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Rob Boulet. Mr. Boulet contacted my office because he wanted to be here to witness question period the day after the budget was tabled, which he characterized as a historic event. I was pleased to be able to facilitate his visit, and I ask Mr. Boulet to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my good friend Mr. Dave Kirschner, a truly great Albertan. Mr. Kirschner has done tremendous work advancing the interests of northern Alberta both as a past member of the Northern Alberta Development Council and as a now retired member of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo council. Mr. Kirschner has made a huge impact both within this region and across the province, and his hard work on a long list of boards, advocacy groups, and committees goes to show it. I ask that we please show the warm welcome of this Assembly to my friend Dave Kirschner.

The Speaker: Does any other member have any more guests to present? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms McLean: Thank you, sir. I would like to introduce to you and through you a somewhat unexpected guest who is prone to dropping in on me without notice, my mother, Margaret McGinn. Accordingly, her introduction will be short as there is far too much to say about my fantastic mother. I ask her to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Members' Statements

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

Provincial Budget

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everyone in Alberta is now poorer as a result of this budget. Families sitting around the kitchen table watching their bottom line are seeing the government raise taxes. Bringing in record deficits will put the province \$47 billion

in debt. There is no doubt about it: higher debt will mean less money in the pockets of all Albertans, who will be forced to pay for escalating interest payments.

And what about Albertans hoping to hold on to their jobs in the energy sector, who are worried about the dangerous economic policies of the NDP? They received no good news from this budget, that is jam-packed with risky economic ideas. Yesterday's budget speech all but predetermined the work of the royalty panel. There's no doubt about it: the NDP want royalties up and soon. There seems to be zero consideration about the damage being done to the economy or the massive job losses for those who are relying on the energy sector for their livelihood.

Despite Alberta having one of the best environmental regimes in the world, the NDP signal clearly more taxes, more regulations, more damage to the viability of our businesses. The NDP seems completely clueless about what life is like for Albertans in the private sector right now. For every high-paid consultant, bloated bureaucrat salary they want to protect, there are thousands of Albertans who are looking for work.

Jobs don't just create themselves. Our energy producers need a market that's competitive, but the NDP continues to cut them off at the knees. The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers recently estimated that 42 per cent of the provincial economy is tied to the energy sector. Yes, let's diversify the economy. Let's have more good jobs that can withstand the pressure of low-priced oil. But let's stop knocking the industry that has created such prosperity in our province, and let's stand as proud Albertans.

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

Heroes of 107th Avenue Project

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Spanning three Edmonton communities, 107th Avenue from 95th to 116th Street is known as the Avenue of Nations. Offering low rents and easy access to government, community, and transit services in neighbourhoods around this avenue has provided a new start for thousands of refugees and immigrants from Italy, China, Cambodia, Vietnam, and, more recently, Somalia, Somaliland, Ethiopia, and Eritrea as well as indigenous Albertans from rural areas or reserves. These men and women have invested in this community, opening businesses and cultural centres where they celebrate and share the rich cultures of their homelands and offer each other a taste of the familiar in an unfamiliar place.

Yet some miss 107th Avenue's rich culture and community, the residents' hard work and courage and see only preconceptions of poverty, danger, and crime. Heroes of 107th Avenue project was founded to combat this prejudice by sharing stories from the lives of the residents of our community. Through story circles, photo sessions, and one-on-one interviews Kristina de Guzman, Daryn Baddour, Jermaine Curtis, Suraj Khatiwada, and Kristy Lee are working to create a graphic novel that celebrates the lives and experiences of the men, women, and families who call 107th Avenue home. This collaborative work will give voice to new Canadians, allowing them to share their stories of hope, struggle, and the journeys that brought them here. Its visual format will transcend language and literacy barriers and make the stories more accessible to youth.

I thank these community leaders for their work and the timely reminder that Alberta draws strength from the richness and diversity of our cultural communities, communities that will greatly benefit from the proposals put forward in yesterday's budget.

Thank you.

Progressive Conservative Opposition

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to stand today in support of the thousands of Albertans who continue to believe that the Progressive Conservative Party best represents their values. It is a myth that the PC Party is down and out. We are alive and kicking.

We were the government for 44 years because we worked with Albertans to build this great province. Although we may look a little different today, that is what we continue to do. It is not by chance that we were elected for decades. One loss in 44 years does not mean that we are done. People thought the federal Liberals were done after the last election, and they just formed a majority government. We are still standing. We are rebuilding. We have three years to rebuild, and we'll be back stronger than ever. We have the strongest constituency associations, stronger than any other party. We will take direction from the constituencies across Alberta made up of all kinds of people, not just the unions of Alberta.

We do not wish to see a failing government because that's not what's best for Albertans. We will work with this government to make Alberta stronger, and we will hold them accountable for their policies and their budgets. We will advocate for the future of this province, for our children and our grandchildren. We will continue to criticize government spending that we can't afford and that our children will have to pay for because this government did not spend Albertans' money responsibly. Our caucus has the best experience in this House. We will use our knowledge to critique government policies and help develop policies that are best for Alberta.

The opposition pundits and media say that we are dead. This is not true. They don't speak for Albertans. I have spoken with Albertans, and we have great support for this party and what it stands for. It is far from over. You don't have to believe me, Mr. Speaker. Ask the people of Alberta.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Government Revenue Forecasts

Mr. Jean: My first-ever question to this Premier was about a provincial sales tax. I was trying to be helpful and let her kill that rumour right off the bat. She said the right thing, but when I look at this budget and its fantasy revenue projections for fiscal 2018-2019, I cannot figure out where all the government revenue is going to come from. The dean of Alberta's political journalists says that a sales tax is in our future. Does the Premier still commit that she won't introduce a PST, an HST, or a sales tax of any kind whatsoever on Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the opportunity to talk about yesterday's fabulous budget. We introduced a budget which has three pillars. The budget will protect the public services that Albertans rely on for their families and their communities. The budget will map out and does map out a plan to balance. The budget will focus on the very job creation that members opposite were talking about.

Also, that budget or any other budget in the term of this government does not and will not include a PST.

Mr. Jean: I notice there was no reference to any other type of sales tax, so not quite helpful.

But it leads to a much, much harder question. You see, no one that I can find has a credible explanation for how this government is going to bring in \$55 billion in revenue in fiscal 2019. In our best-ever boom years we never got anywhere near that number. It would take a boom of outrageous proportions to bring in that much revenue for Alberta. Is the Premier banking on another boom, and if not, where is all this money going to come from?

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin, of course, because I did run out of time: PST, HST, or any other sales tax will not be happening.

In terms of the revenue projections in this budget we took a very cautious and conservative approach. National Bank Financial has noted that our government's energy price projection is more conservative than the consensus forecast. They've also noted that our projections for the difference between the different kinds of oil are higher than the consensus forecast and, therefore, are much more conservative. Overall we are using conservative revenue forecasts. That's what Albertans count on us to do.

Mr. Jean: No conservative budget I've ever seen looks like that.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the budget, it appears that this Premier is clearly planning for a superboom starting in 2018 and carrying through the election year. Revenues are projected to be at all-time records, but so will spending. Even with the Premier's projected superboom, she will just barely balance the books and she will still be borrowing for infrastructure. To the Premier, through you, Mr. Speaker: does she ever plan on paying down any debt?

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed we do, and that plan is included very clearly in the budget, a plan that includes capital spending and operational spending that was endorsed by a former governor of the Bank of Canada, who identified something that these folks over there seem to have missed. We have had a massive drop in revenue in this province, and what we need and what Albertans have told us they want is a government who will act as a shock absorber. We have a boom-and-bust economy. We do not need a boom-and-bust government.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Well, she dodged that question.

Provincial Debt

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, this may come as a shock to the NDP, but paying back your debt is very important. Albertans have to do it. When you borrow to pay back debts, creditors start to actually charge you more interest; they lower your credit rating. That makes everything the government does far more expensive. That leaves less money for Albertans and the Alberta services that we need. This budget has too much debt and no plan at all to pay it back. That puts our triple-A credit rating at risk. Why is the Premier risking the future well-being of Albertans with this budget?

Ms Notley: Well, very much contrary to what the member opposite is saying, this budget is investing in the future well-being of Albertans. The drop in the price of a barrel of oil should not be something that every teacher looks at every morning to find out if they have a job that day. Our kids, our seniors, our young people need to know that they have universities and schools and hospitals there for them when they need them. We need a government that will ensure that those important services are kept in place and will walk a stable path through tough times and won't get hysterical and react in here. [some applause]

Mr. Jean: Thank you for the applause.

This morning Moody's rating agency warned on Alberta's big-spending, big-borrowing budget. They call it "credit negative". They note that the projected debt burden surpasses Moody's previous expectations. They've said that if Alberta's debt exceeds 60 per cent of revenues, our credit rating may drop. This budget has debt exceeding 80 per cent of revenues. Does the Premier worry that our credit will be downgraded just as the NDP is taking us towards \$50 billion in debt?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, these guys are always looking for an angle to find something to criticize. Fair enough; that's their job. Two days ago they said: you know, what we need is to make sure that we maintain and protect our 15 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio. So yesterday my government introduced a bill which legislated a 15 per cent debt-to-GDP cap. That, Mr. Speaker, puts us at one-half the average debt level of all the provinces in the rest of the country, so that is an exceptionally responsible, careful way forward. It's what these guys asked for a mere two days ago, but apparently it's not good enough.

Mr. Jean: Three years from now, your own projections suggest, you're going to blow that cap and violate your own legislation. This budget is a shamble. We are borrowing money to pay for government salaries for the first time in a generation. Think about that. If the NDP killed every dollar of infrastructure spending, they would still need to borrow to balance the books. The budget's energy revenue projections are even crazier. Moody's says that the government may be overprojecting oil prices by as much as \$20 a barrel. Is the Premier not worried that the credit rating agency thinks she got the spending, the revenue, and the borrowing in this budget all wrong?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we did responsibly in putting together this budget is that we went to the experts on energy price projections. Those experts gave us a conservative estimate, and that's what we adopted.

Let me talk about something else, Mr. Speaker. You know, these guys are all about cut, cut, cut, and critique, critique, critique. The solution that they would propose would be to slash teachers, slash nurses, and the cancer centre that I announced the construction of today would not be happening.

The Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, please proceed.

Infrastructure Project Funding

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, let's go to the Dodge report. This NDP government paid him \$64,000 for a report on infrastructure spending. Not surprisingly, he said: go for it; spend on infrastructure. He laid out various scenarios for spending. This NDP government decided to spend even more than his upgraded capital plan. Why is the Premier spending even more on infrastructure than is recommended in the Dodge report?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, in fact, Mr. Dodge actually proposed that we increase what was previously planned by 15 per cent, which is what this government did. One of the things that was very exciting about that was that I was then able to go to Calgary today and meet with patients and their families and talk about a hospital that they have been begging this government

for in Calgary and southern Alberta for 15 years. This government was the first government to actually say: we will build it. That's because of the capital budget that we have introduced and will move forward on. I think Albertans are in favour of that.

2:00

Mr. Jean: The Dodge report says that the capital plan should be pulled back a little in a low-priced environment because there's too much debt but then increased if oil bounces back, yet the NDP's plan is for record spending over the next three years and then pulling back on capital in 2019, when they project things will pick up again, exactly contrary to his report. Why is the Premier ignoring this high-priced advice? Is it because waiting on the lower priority projects until we can afford them means she won't get to cut enough ribbons before the next election?

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to respond to the hon. member's question about the Dodge report. Now, we had a lot of discussions with Mr. Dodge during the development of his report and subsequently, and if the member is not aware, Mr. Dodge did support and endorse the approach we're taking. Overall, over the five-year period we're actually spending less on capital than Mr. Dodge recommended, a little more at the front end and a little less at the back end, but that was something that was discussed with Mr. Dodge and something that he supported just yesterday.

Mr. Jean: When you pay \$64,000 for a report that's an edited report from another province, I'm not surprised he would endorse your position.

This budget was delayed for political reasons, but even with the delay, the government isn't giving Albertans a detailed list of the projects we are going into debt for. It would be helpful for Albertans to know what infrastructure projects this NDP government is taking on debt for; \$4 billion worth of projects are just listed as other projects. Wildrose has always called for a public list of infrastructure priorities. That's not in this budget. To the Premier: why is her government borrowing billions for projects . . .

The Speaker: I would acknowledge the leader of the third party. Excuse me. The Premier. Sorry.

Ms Notley: That's okay. If he would like to answer it. I don't know.

Well, you know, that's certainly a very good question. In the election we talked about the fact that – because we actually had some similar points as the opposition across the way on the issue of clarity of infrastructure priorities and infrastructure criteria. So there was a tremendous amount of backed up infrastructure projects that we needed to go forward with right away, but we also knew that we had the time to do the good due diligence, to do our homework, to consult with Albertans, and to come up with those clear criteria, that we collectively have called for in the past, and to share those with Albertans before we announced the remaining . . .

The Speaker: Now the leader of the third party.

Provincial Debt (continued)

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, in the tax, spend, and borrow budget introduced yesterday, Albertans heard that the deficit is projected to be \$6.1 billion and that for the first time since 1993 the province will borrow for operating expenses. This NDP government cannot even pay for the groceries or keep the lights on without imposing a mortgage on Alberta's children, and the NDP has no plan to pay it back either. The minister spoke about supporting families in this

budget and then in the next breath saddled those families and children with a burden of debt. To the Premier: how will creating \$50 billion worth of debt with no plan to repay it support Alberta families?

Ms Notley: Well, I have to say that I am very proud that our budget is not the budget those folks over there introduced in March. Let me be very clear. Not only did that budget take a billion dollars out of health care this year with no single idea about how to do it, but then in following years the way they were going to balance the budget was by taking extra billions and billions of dollars out of health, out of education with no plan for how to make it happen. What that would have done is that it would've created absolute chaos, and the fundamental health and security and safety of Albertans would have been jeopardized. So I'm very glad that our budget does what it does.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the NDP say that they'll limit borrowing to 15 per cent of GDP. It sounds okay except that the current rules limit it to about 4 per cent of GDP – 4 per cent – and this government will increase it to 15. This is a tax, spend, and borrow government at a time when Albertans need their government to provide solutions for the many Albertans that have lost their jobs since May 5. For the thousands of Albertans who have lost their jobs and others at risk due to this government's policies, tax increases, and minimum wage changes, how will making Alberta less competitive help them get jobs and create new jobs?

Ms Notley: Well, I'm not quite sure what the question was there. Nonetheless, here's the thing. For years this government thought capital investment meant cutting ribbons and putting out press releases. For instance, at the Baker centre, where I was today, we were on about the 10th announcement without a single shovel hitting the ground over about 12 or 13 years. That kind of approach to capital investment is what creates the kind of infrastructure debt that Albertans are struggling with today, which in itself is impeding and interfering with investment. So that's what we're trying to change, and that's what we will change.

Mr. McIver: Still the Premier avoids the question. I'll try it again. The NDP government yesterday put in black and white, their words, that it would not even develop a plan to pay back the nearly \$50 billion of debt until it has a surplus. In black and white they said that they wouldn't have a surplus till 2020 and that it would only be \$1 billion. Again to the Premier. Give Albertans a break here. What kind of magic do you have to fill a \$50 billion hole with a \$1 billion surplus five years from now? Please tell Albertans.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, as I said before, what our plan outlines is that we will remain below 15 per cent of a debt-to-GDP ratio, which is half the national average, and that's what it will be five years from now as the economy is recovering. That is in contrast to what this party over there, the former government, had planned, which was to take billions and billions and billions of dollars out of the budget without giving Albertans any idea of how they were going to have to pay for that. That's not what we're going to do. Our plan allows for a plan back to balance, and that's what we'll have.

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

Infrastructure Capital Planning

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's budget left us with more questions than answers. Now, fortunately,

I have some answers for you here in the Alberta Party alternative budget, which balances in three years' time. This government announced tens of billions in new infrastructure spending but is still not clear exactly where these dollars will be spent. To the Premier. In the past you've called for transparency, and in your own campaign platform you promised an infrastructure sunshine list. Where is the list, and don't you think you should have created one before you committed to spending billions in infrastructure?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think I've already answered this question once, but I'm certainly happy to do it again. When we talked about infrastructure spending and clarity and transparency in the election, we were talking exactly about coming up with clear, accountable criteria that Albertans could evaluate and see and weigh, and that's what we're in the process of doing. So it was not necessary to go through all of that in the space of three and a half months because we had so much pent-up infrastructure that needed to start getting approved and moving ahead in this year that it gives us time to do exactly what the member opposite has asked about, and that is what we will do.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: will you release a detailed analysis of the economic impact and exactly how many jobs will be created by each project so Albertans know they're getting good value for their money?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think that the budget did in fact include an estimate of the overall number of jobs that would be created through the infrastructure investment, so that's what we'll go on. I think that information is already there. I think the other thing, of course, to remember is the benefit to Albertans that comes from that infrastructure being built. I can tell you today again, as I was saying earlier, that the patients and their families who I met with today are very pleased that after over a decade someone is finally moving forward on building the cancer centre for Calgary and southern Alberta.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I'm certainly pleased that the Calgary cancer centre is moving ahead, I can't help but note it will be nearly a decade before it's completed.

To the Premier: will you commit here and now that any of the construction jobs created directly by Alberta tax dollars will not be eligible for the ill-conceived \$5,000 job-creation grant program so that companies cannot double-dip with Albertans' money?

Ms Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to speak about that as it has to do with my ministry. Certainly, we are supporting Albertan entrepreneurs, innovators, and job creators to have an environment where they can create jobs here in Alberta. We're very proud to bring that forward. Up to 27,000 jobs will be created by this project.

2:10

Human Services

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, as a social worker I know first-hand how important it is to ensure good social programs, especially during these economic times. These programs support the well-being and success of individuals, families, and communities. To the Minister of Human Services: what is the government doing to support and maintain prevention and early intervention programs across the province?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It makes sense that government should invest in key social programs during tough economic times. What we have done in terms of prevention is that we have increased FCSS, family and community supports, program money by \$25 million, which has never increased since 2009. We have increased funding by \$15 million for women's shelters. We have restored the cuts made to family and community supports programs. All these prevention efforts together will help make Alberta a better place.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is the government doing to ensure the funding for critical social programs keeps up with the population increase in communities across Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member. As I said, for instance, the family and community support services program, FCSS, money has never increased since 2009. Due to that increase and in response to the population growth, Airdrie received \$1 million more in this budget just to meet the needs of the growing population.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many of Alberta's hard-working front-line staff are already overwhelmed due to declining budgets in the past, again to the Minister of Human Services: what is your ministry doing to ensure that front-line workers are getting the supports that they need?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Let me begin by saying that at the heart of the success of Human Services lies the hard work and professionalism of our front-line staff. We are absolutely committed to providing all needed supports to our front line so that Albertans can get the quality services that they need and they deserve.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Infrastructure Capital Planning

(continued)

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It appears that there's quite a bit of concern about a certain list that was to be passed out here at some point, and with no apology I intend to ask about it, too. During the campaign the NDP promised to take the politics out of infrastructure and finally do what the Wildrose has been asking for for years: end the backroom deals and publish a prioritized infrastructure sunshine list. But an Infrastructure budget with \$34 billion of debt financing over five years has come and gone with no indication. To the minister: where is the prioritized sunshine list that we were promised?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. The member is absolutely correct that this was a commitment of our government. The work is almost complete, and we expect that this infrastructure list will be introduced during this session of our Legislature.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, this government is planning on spending a record amount of money on infrastructure. The question is: will we actually get the infrastructure value for all the money we are going to spend, all of it borrowed money, money future generations will have to pay back with interest? Alberta Infrastructure

has a poor track record overseeing capital projects. Just look at the school builds we've had to delay. Does the Premier really believe that her government has the capacity to manage more capital spending than B.C. and Saskatchewan combined?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for the question, hon. member. The difficulty that we've seen in terms of the management of capital projects stems largely from the habit of the previous government of making political announcements, including price tags, before any work in terms of analysis and design had been done; for example, not asking the question: can we build all those schools at once? This is a critical question. Announcing hospitals without assessing what the need is and actually planning it carefully before making a political announcement, forcing the department to then design to the political announcement, resulting in projects that are either too big or . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, the minister is going to spend \$34 billion of borrowed money over the next five years, but can taxpayers trust that he's making decisions free from political influence? We have no list, we have no timelines, we have no priorities, and the minister clearly doesn't feel any need to be accountable for the spending. To the minister. We've heard all the rhetoric. Now Alberta wants to know. Was there ever any intention to publicize the prioritized sunshine list that was promised?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that question, Mr. Speaker, but I believe I answered it in the first response to the hon. member. There is going to be a sunshine list. The work has been under way for several months. The work is almost complete, and we'll be introducing this sunshine list in this session of the Legislature.

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

Public Service Compensation

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For the first time in about 22 years the government is going to be borrowing for operating expenses, and at the same time public-sector wages are going up by approximately \$1 billion, as noted on page 22 of the budget. To the Premier or the Minister of Finance: do you not see how increasing total operational expenses when you don't have the money to pay for it will push Alberta further into a structural deficit?

Mr. Ceci: The situation with salaries: we did not negotiate those contracts; those contracts were negotiated by the previous government. When they come open, we will negotiate fairly with our unions across the government of Alberta, and we will make sure that we are achieving our targets in this budget.

Mr. Bhullar: Well, then, Mr. Speaker, I will ask this. There was a contract that was negotiated in September where folks at the University of Calgary were getting 2.25 per cent increases followed by 2 per cent increases. It's a three-year contract. How, sir, do you account for that? I asked questions in this Assembly in the spring about your strategy for negotiations. How do account for that raise that was just given? How do you plan on paying for all of this?

Mr. Ceci: Postsecondary education has a budget. We give that envelope to those universities. They negotiate their own salaries.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, they do have budgets, but the budgets are set by you, sir.

My question, quite frankly, is this. You have an allocated amount of nearly \$25 billion for salaries. Is that going for new wages, for new employees, or is that going to pay for the wage increases for existing employees?

Mr. Ceci: There are a number of things in that question. What I will say is that the labour costs in this budget are the most significant, largest cost, of course. We have a number of contracts that are coming open for negotiation. We have to meet our 2 per cent growth overall, year over year over year, and we have to look at our wages as being a part of that. We have to hit the 2 per cent to achieve our targets.

2:20

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, this government's budget saddles Albertans and Alberta businesses with \$2.7 billion in new taxes. The budget tabled yesterday proposes to increase the cost of the pay and benefits to the government sector by \$2.2 billion. That means that 80 per cent of every new tax dollar will go straight into higher government salaries and benefits. In a time when private-sector workers and taxpayers are losing their jobs, does the minister feel that this is reasonable?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I must confess. I got lost in the Fildemath. When contracts are open for negotiation, we will be very much looking at making sure that those contracts fit our budget. We have a plan, we'll stick to the plan, and that's what we'll do.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, it's our platform that wasn't off by \$6 billion.

We believe that it is unreasonable that 80 per cent of this budget's tax hikes will go directly to higher government pay and benefits when the private sector is bleeding jobs and wages. Will the government commit to freezing government-sector pay and benefits across the board until we finally get back to a balanced budget?

Mr. Ceci: You know, contracts are there to be respected. We're not going to break contracts because the member opposite wants us to break them. We will stabilize important services, front-line services for citizens in this province. We will get back to balance in 2019-2020, and if the economy picks up, we'll get there sooner.

Mr. Fildebrandt: So 2017, 2018, 2019, 2029: they don't know.

Given that we have already run eight consecutive consolidated deficits as a province, wasted the sustainability fund, and are on track for \$50 billion of debt, will the minister commit, without laying off any front-line workers, to showing solidarity with hurting Albertans and freeze government-sector compensation?

Mr. Ceci: No. I will not break contracts, and I will not do illegal things with labour in this province.

The Speaker: I've been reminded and I would advise the House that as you desire, all of you collectively, to use this time efficiently so that many questions can be asked, I want to remind you again to be cautious about the preambles that are consuming time.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Government Policies

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday was a historic day or, as the members across the House like to call it, an Orange Crush

day. And they are absolutely right. The day was absolutely crushing for millions of concerned Albertans. Where there was once pensive hope, there is only the stark reality of what we must face for the next three and a half years under an NDP government. To the jobs minister. Australia tried a massive minimum wage hike and, as a direct result, has a 14 per cent unemployment rate amongst the young. Is a 14 per cent unemployment rate amongst our young acceptable to you?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our government in our platform made a commitment to raise the minimum wage to make work for low-income Albertans more fair, and that's what we've done. It was a modest increase this year, just a little bit less than 10 per cent. We're moving forward on that, and that will help everyone because low-income folks will put money back into the economy and support stimulus.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Minister, given that minimum wage was never intended to be a living wage but instead was supposed to be a starting or a training wage and that a large percentage of young people will not get a chance to receive this necessary training due to these massive minimum wage hikes, where do you suppose they will get this training in life from?

The Speaker: Madam minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, and thank you again to the member for the question. Of course, we're moving ahead with evidence-based research regarding this, looking at indicators as we make prudent steps forward. This is going to help many vulnerable people in Alberta, and we're very pleased to be able to support them.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Monday the Minister of Infrastructure stood in this House and told us not to light our hair on fire due to some covert socialist agenda. Well, Mr. Minister, if yesterday's expanded government, expanded taxes, and expanded debt is not a socialist agenda, then I don't know what is. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Now that the covertness has been put aside – in this budget you've given us basically the full Monty, as it were – do you still maintain that there is no socialist agenda?

Mr. Mason: I don't even know how to respond, Mr. Speaker. I think sometimes people opposite think that public education is a socialist option. I just don't know.

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

Addiction and Mental Health Capital Funding

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was encouraged to read in Budget 2015 that one of the priority initiatives in Human Services was to partner with Health to improve mental health and addictions supports for children and youth. In a province where one drug alone, fentanyl, has claimed the lives of close to 170 Albertans, it is a crucial priority for this government. That's why I was shocked to see in the government's capital plan that they intend to reduce funding for addiction and detox centres by \$13 million over the next

five years. This seems counterintuitive to me. To the Minister of Infrastructure: can you tell me what that thought process is?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that question, hon. member. Yes, Mr. Speaker, there is a view in our government that we need to evaluate the projects carefully and make sure that they are justified, first of all; secondly, that they are meeting the needs precisely that are out there, that they're in the right place, that they're at the right prices, all of those things, which the previous government didn't do very well in many instances. So there's a view to take a look at capital projects, a bit longer view, and make sure that we're getting it right the first time so that we don't have problems like the school delays that we've seen . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, getting it right is building the beds. We don't have enough addiction and detox beds in Alberta. Families are forced to send their kids out of the province for treatment. Can the Minister of Human Services now tell me why we seem to be offering supports to families with one hand and taking them away with the other?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is doing what Albertans asked us to do. We are stabilizing the services, and the example I will give is the FCSS program, which helps Albertans to focus on prevention efforts, which were never increased by the members opposite when they were in government. We increased those dollars. Women's shelters, which provide emergency shelter for women fleeing from violence, were never increased since 2004. We increased that by \$15 million. Family and community . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We actually did increase that in our government.

But on to the question at hand, which is addiction and detox beds. We need the facilities in order to help families in this province. Again to the Infrastructure minister: will you commit to providing the capital funding so that we can get those addiction and detox beds now, when we need them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. As I indicated earlier, we want to make sure that we get it right. Simply because some projects no longer appear in the capital plan does not mean that there will not be similar projects coming forward. Once we've had a chance to evaluate it and based on what we hear from the public and what I hear from the ministers, we will develop a very strong capital plan that we can justify and will meet the needs of Albertans in all areas.

2:30 Queen Elizabeth II Highway Congestion

Mrs. Schreiner: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's economic diversification needs infrastructure. The QE II artery of transport between Calgary and Edmonton continues to experience a huge increase in traffic. Congestion is an issue. This is a concern for many of us. Many Albertans constantly have to drive the QE II for work from their homes in Calgary, Edmonton, and Red Deer. It can be a scary experience, driving the QE II. To the Minister of Transportation: what are you doing to address the future need for improvement on the QE II highway?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for the question, hon. member. Mr. Speaker, we have issued a request for proposal to undertake the planning and implementation of a study to determine the future needs of the QE II. Given that the current volumes on the corridor far exceed average annual daily traffic guidelines, this is an important step to take, and we're undertaking this study to determine cost estimates for upgrades now so that we can begin to address congestion on this economically vital corridor.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the update. Given that the thousands of people who use this highway will be pleased that the government is moving forward with studying improvements, can the minister please inform the Chamber on how the future needs of the QE II will be determined?

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much for that question. There have been a number of various planning and design studies on different portions of the highway over the last 10 years. The latest study will consolidate that data and will provide an implementation plan that will include cost estimates for various projects to improve the flow and capacity of that highway. It will also consider municipal development plans and future growth projections for our province, and that will enable us to consider sustainable traffic solutions as we go forward.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Aside from six-laning and eight-laning the highway, can the minister please inform the Chamber what other methods of congestion management this study will be considering?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, one of the things that we need to do is to consider it as a transportation corridor rather than merely a highway. The objective of that corridor is to move people and goods, not necessarily vehicles, so we have to look at different alternatives. The high-speed train between Edmonton and Calgary is something that we're beginning to ask about. There's potential for public transit, additional lanes around congested areas. A variety of things will be considered in order to make sure that we have the best answer, not necessarily just perpetually widening the highway.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Job Creation Grant Program

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is inviting Alberta's employers to apply for a grant that awards up to \$5,000 for each full-time job they create. However, even David Dodge, this government's own expert, says that it sounds great on paper, and it's a great idea in theory, but it's very hard to manage to be sure you're getting much incremental employment. To the jobs minister. The Peace Country is losing jobs because your government keeps experimenting with these risky ideas. What evidence do you have to suggest that this new experiment will work when even your own expert has his doubts?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much to the member for the question. Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the advice given to us by Mr. Dodge, but we made a commitment to Albertans to ensure that we would create a jobs plan to create jobs for Albertans. We are up to the challenge, we have that plan, and we'll be rolling it out shortly. Thank you.

Mr. Loewen: Small business is the lifeblood of the Peace region, but entrepreneurs in the Peace region are being forced to raise prices, cut hours, and trim staff because of this government's risky economic ideas. The minister is trying to offset her government's bad economic policies by creating a new bureaucratic job-creation scheme that will only serve to create new jobs in government. To the minister again. The Peace Country is losing jobs because of your government's risky ideas. Why do you think another dubious idea is the solution?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the member for the question. Really, the people who make jobs happen in Alberta are the entrepreneurs, the innovators, and the job creators. We as a government are working with them to create an environment that's conducive to that. We're happy to do that, and that's what we're going to do.

Mr. Loewen: It's evident all through the Peace region that businesses are finding ways to cut costs. Unemployment is on the rise, and our population is shrinking. To the minister: why do you think fantasy job-creation schemes that will only create more bloat and more bureaucracy are the answer?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the member for the question. This job-creation package is about supporting businesses, small businesses from Peace River to southern Alberta, all across the province, and we're very happy to roll it out. It's about supporting people in the communities to create those jobs, those good, mortgage-paying jobs, for Albertans.

Affordable Supportive Living Initiative

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, as of today 2,600 Alberta seniors continue to be at risk due to continued NDP funding delays. Given that yesterday proponents of previously approved ASLI projects found out through the media that their projects have now been put on hold indefinitely after having been left hanging for months pending a review by this government and that funding is conspicuously absent from yesterday's budget, a full construction season is now lost. This morning the Seniors minister told reporters that an announcement would be made in the near future. To the minister: when will you tell Alberta seniors, not the media . . .

The Speaker: Madam Minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I can't give you an update today about each individual project, not because I don't want to but because we think the right thing to do is to have due diligence, connect with the actual proponents, and I want to make sure that we have an opportunity to do that outreach. But we have wrapped up the review. Our staff worked diligently through the summer, and I'm really grateful for that and also to the proponents for being patient with us. What they want is to make sure that there are 2,000 beds built, long-term care beds. That's what we committed to, and we are moving forward with that commitment.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister has continually said that her department needs to do a review and given the fact that the same staff who advised us when we were in government that these spaces were needed are advising the current minister, I hope this delay in the review is not politically or ideologically motivated because it doesn't seem to be in the best interests of Alberta seniors,

whom government is supposed to represent. To the Minister of Seniors: what do you still need to do to move these projects ahead?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Seniors helped build this province, and they will get long-term care beds, like we committed to in our platform. In terms of the ASLI promises that were made in the months leading up to the election by the government that was thrown out, it did exactly what the Minister of Infrastructure referred to, at least I suspect it did, which was to make many announcements, cut many ribbons, and pretend that it was going to be moving projects forward. We need to make sure that they're evidence-based, that we know there's actually demand in the various communities, and that these are the right proponents before we throw money at these individual contractors.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, we believe in shovels in the ground. This government seems to pride itself on the consultation process, yet we are hearing that the review process is a monologue, not a dialogue. To the minister again: when are you going to release the review criteria and actually start talking with these people, who are desperately trying to provide much-needed care spaces to Alberta seniors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our staff have been meeting with the different proponents throughout the summer months and leading into the fall, and I'm really grateful that they've taken the time to have that conversation, because what's important is that seniors get the right care when they need it. The other thing that's important is that we're able to fulfill the 2,000 bed commitment that we made. We were elected to do that. Other parties maybe campaigned on cuts and delays. The Official Opposition wants to cut billions of dollars, which would create chaos and refuse to allow seniors to live with respect and dignity. Our party is fulfilling our campaign commitments, and I look forward to updating this House very soon.

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

2:40 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2007 the United Nations introduced the declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples to protect the collective rights of indigenous peoples that may not be addressed in other human rights charters around the world. This summer my constituency of Stony Plain was home to one of the largest celebrations taking place on National Aboriginal Day, and I heard from countless constituents that day and in meetings since how important adopting UNDRIP was. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: how has the government been working on that priority?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. I was very excited recently to engage in introductory meetings between treaty leaders and the Premier. We've also had some focus meetings in terms of working on implementing the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. We'll be working

with First Nations and Métis groups going forward to fulfill that commitment that was in our platform.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that ministers have been meeting with First Nations and Métis to find direction and set priorities on implementing UNDRIP, to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations again: how will the government take their input into account as it moves forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. We will be working with First Nations, moving forward as true partners. We are working on setting up some relationship agreements so that we can set some common goals together so that we both have input into the process, and in that process we will be working with them and listening to them.

Ms Babcock: Thank you. I'm so glad to hear that.

Given that the Premier has asked all ministers to consider the articles of UNDRIP and how they impact their own ministries, to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations again: how will you ensure that ministers continually work on implementing UNDRIP?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Well, as outlined in the Premier's letter, all ministers are currently working on this project. We have been receiving initial submissions from ministries already, and we have been working through Aboriginal Relations with them. We do intend to move forward in February with that cabinet report to identify some key areas. We think it's critical that we work with First Nations as true partners, so we will be working with them to set some common goals.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as we end Oral Question Period today, the hon. Minister of Health would like to supplement an answer given in Oral Question Period yesterday in response to a question posed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. To the members of the House, this is, as I understand it, a process that may occasionally happen in the future. The hon. minister will get an opportunity to make that point, and then the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat may respond if he chooses.

Ms Hoffman: Just to clarify, Mr. Speaker, he asks a question that I can also address: is that correct? I correct the record, a question can be asked, and then I respond to the question?

The Speaker: Yes.

Alberta Health Services Performance Measures

Ms Hoffman: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for this opportunity to correct the record regarding AHS performance measures, as asked by the member yesterday. I misspoke when I said that AHS is seeing growth in every single one of the performance measures. The outcome is that AHS is seeing positive trends in the majority of the performance measures, which is good news, but we know that there's still more work to do. Our government is committed to working with AHS and investing in our health care system to make the much-needed improvements in terms of the other outcomes as well.*

Thank you.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to thank the Health minister for her service to Albertans and her clarification of this question. Just briefly, I'd like to ask what personal oversight she is going to put on ensuring that these matrixes move forward in a positive way so hard-earned tax dollars get full value?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I did meet this morning with the CEO and official administrator for Alberta Health Services to touch on this as well as with department officials. The member yesterday talked about a desire to have more than 17 measures. One of the areas that may not need to be in a quarterly report but that I think is better actually as a more timely measure on the website for the capital region for Edmonton and zone: you can check on current emergency room wait times immediately rather than having to wait several months down the road. I think that's something that's serving Edmontonians very well. I know that I've checked the website before I've gone to a hospital to find out where I'd have the shortest wait time. We might be able to expand that to other areas of the province.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

First Responders

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First responders are the men and women who run towards dangerous situations that we would flee from. As a part of their job they frequently witness traumatic events well beyond our normal experience. They are everyday heroes.

On August 11 I was able to join a St. Albert EMS crew for their shift. St. Albert emergency services are unique in that all of the EMS crew members are also firefighters. I joined the crew of Adam Colameco and Steve Murdoch, who are here today. There was no easing into the day. Minutes after starting their shift, they were called out to administer life-saving medical intervention to a St. Albert resident. The next call was picked up immediately following the first, and the shift continued that way. As I rode along with them, I was overwhelmed by the compassion, skills, professionalism, and camaraderie that they shared with each other and every single person they encountered.

The last call of the day was one that demonstrated to me the enormity of the skills that these first responders have. When we arrived on scene, we found a person who had died by suicide. Adam and Steve immediately began securing the site for the RCMP while supporting family members of the deceased person. There are no words to describe the compassion and the support Adam and Steve shared with the people they encountered on that call. During the worst moment of someone's life they were present and present in every way a person can be.

All of the firefighters and the EMS workers I spoke to on that day expressed their gratitude for being able to serve their communities. That spoke volumes to me. I would like to express my gratitude for all of the men and women who every day give so much of themselves to keep us safe and well.

Thank you.

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

*See page 323, left column, paragraph 15

Academy of Learning College Edmonton West Campus

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today and especially note that all members are sporting their poppies once again on this day, when you, sir, presided over the first poppy presentation ceremony earlier today to begin our week of remembrance here at the Legislature and throughout the province and the country. It's nice to see us in common remembering our fallen soldiers.

I rise also today, Mr. Speaker, to say that on September 29 I had the pleasure of cutting the ribbon for the grand opening of the Academy of Learning College Edmonton west campus in Callingwood in my riding of Edmonton-McClung. It was an exciting day for the Academy of Learning. Their new campus, serving students in west Edmonton, expands their scope and accessibility as community leaders in postsecondary education. With this, their eighth campus location in Alberta, Academy of Learning has certainly grown from its days in Thornhill, Ontario, in 1987. Now reaching tens of thousands of adult learners across Canada, the Academy of Learning offers more than 35 diploma programs for prosperous new careers in health care, office administration, hospitality management, business, technology, and much more.

With consistently high rates of graduation and programs that run for less than a year, it's no wonder the Academy of Learning has prospered. The quality of their services has been recognized by the consumer choice awards for northern Alberta for over 15 consecutive years.

Beyond being a popular choice for postsecondary studies, the Academy of Learning is also very active in the community. Their efforts include fundraising for the juvenile diabetes research foundation, taking donations for Edmonton's Food Bank, and hosting various drives to help those experiencing homelessness.

It is with great honour that I was able to share in the grand opening of this new local institution. In today's business world, where quality training is essential to career success, the Academy of Learning stands out as an affordable, convenient, and well-established option for Edmontonians to get their postsecondary education.

A warm congratulations to Elmer Brattberg, the owner of the west Edmonton Academy of Learning, to Charles Jarvis, general manager, and to Coryne Yacucha, operations manager.

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

2:50

Elizabeth Fry Society

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to be speaking once again in this Chamber. I am proud to represent the riding of Calgary-Currie, home to parents and their children, retired couples, single people, immigrants in the process of setting up roots in Alberta, and to organizations that serve the ever-growing population of Calgary. One such organization is the Elizabeth Fry Society, where I recently visited to mark their 50th anniversary.

The Elizabeth Fry Society provides a number of programs for women, including aboriginal cultural supports, court programs, community awareness programs for immigrants as well as legal and prison community outreach.

I was most impressed with their work helping women transitioning out of prison, working to get them integrated into the communities upon their release, as these women often come from our most vulnerable populations.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Elizabeth Fry Society of Calgary on their 50 years of compassionate service to women and the community, helping people navigate the justice

system, improving their communities, and for improving the social conditions through dedicated advocacy in the interest of promoting a higher standard of citizenship.

It is a privilege to have dedicated organizations like the Elizabeth Fry Society blazing a trail towards a fairer Alberta for all. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

Ms McPherson: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 99 the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petitions that were presented on Tuesday, October 27, 2015. As chair of the committee I can advise the House that the petitions comply with standing orders 90 to 94.

Mr. Speaker, this is my report.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, please proceed.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice pursuant to section 15(2) of the standing orders that at the appropriate time I will be rising on a point of privilege regarding the obstruction of the work of this Assembly and also the independent Members' Services Committee by actions of the Minister of Finance and members of his department. I have the appropriate number of copies of the letter that was provided to your office by the required time this morning.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 203

Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 203, the Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015.

During my campaign I made a promise to my constituents that I would do my best to improve the quality of debate and restore ethical conduct back into this Legislature. I am humbled to have the opportunity to sponsor this private member's bill, which I believe holds true to my promise. This bill will ensure that the government does not use its resources to aid in partisan campaigning in an election period. The bill is modelled almost word for word on Manitoban legislation passed nearly a decade ago. It prohibits the government from publishing announcements during a writ period.

The impetus for this bill was the inappropriate use of government resources we saw during the by-elections held last fall. The need for this bill has been recognized by both opposition and government, and it is high time we acted. While this bill isn't trying to split the atom, I believe it is critically important if we wish to lay the groundwork for meaningful change in the culture surrounding politics in this province.

I look forward to fulsome debate on this critically important bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Mason: I would like to table, please, the regular required number of copies of the fall 2015 budget main estimates schedule.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of the Alberta Party Caucus 2015-2016 Alternative Budget. It contains detailed calculations of how we would arrive at a balanced budget within three years, and I would sincerely hope my colleagues in the other opposition parties would table the same in the coming days.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

The Speaker: I'm advised, hon. minister, that that's after Orders of the Day. There are some other matters that we need to address first.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

The Speaker: Hon. members, yesterday I only briefly spoke to one of the points of order raised by the Official Opposition House Leader. I concluded that there was no point of order. I want to be clear that both points of order raised yesterday afternoon were raised in response to very similar statements; therefore, consistent with yesterday's ruling neither of these statements constitutes a point of order. Members routinely comment on the policies of other caucuses. Sometimes you may even do that more often than once in this House. Undoubtedly, there is no disagreement on the interpretation of these policies. This is a matter of debate, not a point of order.

I would also recognize the House leader for the Official Opposition concerning a point of order from this afternoon. Please proceed.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on a point of order arising out of question period. Section 23(j) states, "language of a nature likely to create disorder." Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate your ruling, some have said that if you repeat something untrue enough times, people will begin to think it's the truth. We have set the record straight on a number of issues that the government likes to continue to raise, making statements like we heard today, that we would be cutting billions of dollars in infrastructure, when, in fact, it is just not true. The continued use of that language, language of a nature likely to create disorder: we saw today that that's exactly what happened. The Minister of Health continues to choose to make statements that do not accurately reflect the truth and, in fact, are the opposite of many things that the Official Opposition campaigned on.

3:00

Yesterday we also heard the Government House Leader talk about the fact that they're not picking one member on which to make accusations about, but in fact they make accusations about all members on this side of the House when it comes to Wildrose cutting front-line services or massive cuts to infrastructure spending, both of which are categorically untrue.

Now, while I appreciate the fact you have said that you believe that yesterday that was a matter of debate, we continue to see the government make statements that are not true, that do not reflect the truth and, as such, will continue to create disorder in this House should they do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would argue, consistent with my argument yesterday and consistent with your ruling yesterday and today on this matter, that this is a question of debate; this is a disagreement as to the facts between members.

We know that the Wildrose has urged significant budget cuts in order to balance the budget. We know that they're against all tax increases. We know they're against royalty increases. We know that they're against borrowing. We also know that we're down \$6 billion this year in revenue due to the international price of oil. So the Wildrose can't have it both ways. They can't say, "We're absolutely going to do nothing to increase revenues, and we're not going to borrow money" and at the same time argue that they're not going to support very large cuts in expenditures.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it is our view that these large decreases in expenditures that the Wildrose is proposing or at least willing to accept mean substantial cuts to programs and probably substantial reductions in investment in infrastructure. It is our view that the Wildrose is either mistaken in how it sees its policies affecting the economy of the province and the government of Alberta or they're being somewhat disingenuous. So I'll be generous and suggest that they're just simply mistaken about the impact of \$6 billion worth of expenditure reductions and that they don't think that that's going to affect front-line workers, don't think that that's going to affect the capital budget but, of course, obviously, will have a very large impact on those things.

I know that the hon. Opposition House Leader is convinced that the repetition of those views on the part of our government and our members will create disorder, but I would urge them, Mr. Speaker, just to control themselves a little bit and not get so disordered with the normal cut and thrust of debate. You know, I will note that the Wildrose opposition has hurled many allegations at our government and our government's budget, blaming us for everything from the increase of unemployment in the oil and gas sector or, you know, the collapse of western civilization as we know it, but we don't stand up here and make points of order over and over again because of the normal cut and thrust of debate in this House.

I'm finding these particular points of order to be a little bit repetitive and not a good use of the House's time, and I would strongly submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that there is no point of order. There is just a disagreement as to the impact of the Wildrose's policies, economic policies and financial policies, on the operation of the government of Alberta and on the people of Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, to ensure that I understand the point that you were making, essentially, as I understand it, it's that the repetition of the comment and that it applied to the whole party was seen from your perspective as disharmony to the House. Have I understood that correctly?

Mr. Cooper: Yes, Mr. Speaker. That's exactly correct. I don't think that it's a matter of debate because the record has been corrected. We have stated clearly the position, and we have never said any of those things. So to continue to say that we would make those cuts and lay off front-line workers is in fact not the truth and, as a result, is not only misleading this House but misleading the general public as well.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I have determined that, in fact, again, I haven't heard substantially different from the point that I ruled upon and the comments made yesterday, so I would rule at this point, unless there's something that I've missed in your comments, that this, in fact, is not a point of order.

I'm seeking guidance again from the table. Apparently, I was maybe not as clear as I intended. I would rule that this is not a point of order. Thus, my ruling on your second point of order today.

Now, hon. members, let me go to points of privilege.

I believe, hon. member, that you have another matter that you would like to speak to. I'd recognize the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Privilege Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today pursuant to Standing Order 15 to raise a point of privilege due to the action of the government interfering with the independence of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services to set pay for cabinet and MLAs.

I'd like to start, first, with preliminary matters. Points of privilege must be raised at the earliest opportunity. The relevant remarks were made yesterday afternoon, and our notice went to the Speaker's office this morning. As such, it is our view that the point of privilege was raised in a timely manner and is in accordance with Standing Order 15(2).

With that settled, Mr. Speaker, the facts of this case are quite straightforward. Yesterday afternoon, while the Minister of Finance was delivering his budget, his department officials issued a press release wherein they claimed that Budget 2015 will be responsible for freezing the pay for cabinet ministers, MLAs, and political staff "for the entire term of this Legislature." I stress the use of the words "entire term of this Legislature."

Now, even in the remarks the minister said, "Our government will propose that Members of this House agree to freeze the salaries of the members of Cabinet, MLAs and political . . . positions for the entire term of this Legislature – in other words, until after the next election in four years."

"Our government," not our caucus, not our members on the Members' Services Committee but "our government."

3:10

Now, members may not be aware, but only members of Executive Council are considered to be part of the government. Speaker Kowalski stated on May 1, 1997, that "in the province of Alberta the executive is composed of the members of the Executive Council, all of whom have taken and subscribed to the oath for cabinet ministers." So here yesterday we had a member of Executive Council, who is not on the Members' Services Committee, anticipating a decision of that committee. He did such both in his speech to the Assembly and in a press release to the public. Not only is he making an assumption that one of the members of the Standing Committee on Members' Services will likely introduce a motion to that committee that would include such an action to freeze MLA pay, but he, in fact, is assuming that you, Mr. Speaker, as the chair of that committee will be calling a meeting of the Standing Committee on Members' Services.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would never want to assume that you are going to be doing something that you have not yet said or decided that you would do. That would be wildly unfair and totally inappropriate and, in fact, a breach of privilege. It would in fact go against every tradition of this House and our entire Westminster system, which brings me to *Beauchesne*, sixth edition, page 25, where it has this to say about privilege. "It is generally accepted that any threat, or attempt to influence the vote of, or actions of a Member, is breach of privilege." This can be found on page 25 of the sixth edition in section 93. I encourage all members to brush up on their *Beauchesne*.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it would be careless in discussing this point of privilege if I didn't go back to November 27, 2013, when a very similar point of privilege was successfully argued in this very Chamber by none other than the member for Edmonton-Strathcona, our current Premier. On that day the now Premier, the then House leader of the third or fourth party – I can't remember which one it was – said these things.

Erskine May describes privilege as "the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively . . . and by Members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions.

You can find that, if you're so inclined, in *Erskine May*, 24th edition, on page 203, for those of you who are following along in your program.

I'll proceed with the comments from that day of the then House leader of the NDP caucus.

As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, at the commencement of the First Session of each Legislature a number of committees are established, including the Members' Services Committee, as per Standing Order 52(2). This committee is empowered under the Legislative Assembly Act to make on its own important decisions on issues such as the amount MLAs are paid. I would refer you in particular to sections 33(1), 36, and 39 of the act.

. . . the precedent in this House has been to recognize a so-called tradition of this Legislature . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I note that the Minister of Finance is not present. Many of the comments you're making are with respect to the statements that he made.

To the Government House Leader: do you wish to proceed without the Minister of Finance present?

Mr. Mason: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Please proceed.

Mr. Cooper: Just for clarification purposes, I'm currently quoting from *Hansard*: the Premier, the leader of the . . .

An Hon. Member: Former. Start the quote again.

Mr. Cooper: Yes. Perhaps I could start again from the beginning if you'd like. [interjections] I won't start again.

. . . which is to assume that committees are to be treated as though they are populated by private members who toil on these committees on behalf of the Legislature as a whole. Accordingly, the Members' Services Committee is often described as an "independent committee of the Legislative Assembly." I would refer you to the Speaker's ruling on April 17, 2007. As such, it is understood that members are free to consult with anyone, including their fellow caucus members, but are also free from partisanship or influence from Executive Council. The principle and general understanding that these committees are independent has been established by numerous rulings made by the Speaker of the Alberta Legislature as well, quite frankly, as statements to this effect by various Premiers and cabinet ministers.

Now, perhaps the government of the day is going to stand up and claim that it said that Budget 2015 is freezing salaries for MLAs and cabinet ministers because of a previous Members' Services Committee vote in 2013. At that committee meeting they voted to freeze the pay until March 2017. What they did not vote on, sir, is to freeze the pay for the entire term of the Legislature, which is exactly the comments that we heard and read yesterday on the government's website.

This is where the minister and his department, a department that he is ultimately responsible for, have breached the privilege of

every member on the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services. They are presupposing a decision of the committee, a decision that is not currently on the committee's agenda, a decision that is not for the government or Executive Council itself to make but a decision of that committee.

Now, as a member of that committee, I may and do in fact believe that freezing the pay for all members of the Assembly is a noble goal, and at an appropriate time, when the committee has the opportunity to, hopefully, address this issue, I as a member of that committee hope to offer some additional suggestions that can provide some leadership on this file. But what we had yesterday was the Executive Council presupposing that I would want to make that decision, and in fact, sir, that is a clear breach of my privilege as a member of that committee.

3:20

I refer you to the successful point of privilege from November 27 by the current Premier, when she stated:

However, the fact of the matter is that the committee has so far only deliberated upon a one-year wage freeze. So by talking about a multiyear wage freeze, it is clear that this brochure is anticipating a decision of the Members' Services Committee which has not yet been made, and that, Mr. Speaker, is a clear breach of privilege.

I couldn't agree with the member more today. We have seen this exact same thing yesterday in the House, and we have significant – significant – precedent to indicate that this is wildly inappropriate.

It is clear that the press release and the comments made by the minister from yesterday anticipate the decision of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, which not only has yet to make a decision but doesn't even have its first meeting scheduled. I go back again, Mr. Speaker, to my earlier point that as the chair of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services you have yet to call a meeting of the committee, and it is not the responsibility or the realm of the Minister of Finance, it is not the realm or responsibility of the government to determine what the decision of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services will be or even if that should be an item for discussion at the next meeting. That privilege, if you will, belongs solely to you and the members of that committee.

I mentioned that the point of privilege that the Premier brought forward on November 27 was successful. What I mean is that on December 2, 2013, former Speaker Zwozdesky found a prima facie breach of privilege, and he said:

It is clear to your chair that the advertising in the brochure I referenced earlier did presume that a decision had been made by the Members' Services Committee, to which the Assembly has delegated the ability to make decisions about members' pay and benefits. That decision had not been made, in fact. That decision had not been made until the following Friday. Let me make sure I said that correctly: I am of the opinion that the advertising in the brochure presumed a decision that had not yet been made by the Members' Services Committee.

I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that that is the same thing that has occurred here – the government has presumed a decision that as of today has not yet been made – and that this, in fact, has been found to be a prima facie breach of privilege. I believe that I have outlined numerous reasons why the minister's actions yesterday, including his speech and the press release from his department, were a breach of privilege for all members of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, including myself.

In terms of other precedents there are numerous examples whereby the Speaker has ruled that the proceedings of the committee cannot be directed or represented by the government. One example of this is from May 14, 1992, when the Speaker ruled out of order a

question proposed by Ray Martin pertaining to whether or not the Premier would agree to direct the proceedings of the Members' Services Committee in a certain decision. In his ruling the Speaker at that time stated, "the government cannot answer on behalf of the whole committee . . . the government certainly cannot direct what happens to all the committee." That's *Hansard*, May 14, 1992.

Interestingly, Mr. Speaker, members of Executive Council in this House have relied heavily on this principle. On October 23, 2012, the then Premier described in detail how she understands that it is not her place to direct the proceedings of the Members' Services Committee. With reference to that issue she stated in *Hansard* on October 23, 2012:

My understanding is that the work of that committee was to review the recommendations of the Major report. I understand that that's what they did, and I don't understand that it's my role to direct the members of the committee to do anything.

She went on to say:

Mr. Speaker, as you have so rightly said . . . this is not a committee of the government. This is a committee of the Legislature that at some point will make a decision that we as MLAs will consider . . . That's why we have a Members' Services Committee. It is the job of MLAs, not the government.

Interestingly, on October 31, 2012, the then Minister of Human Services, speaking on the issue of MLA pay, said, "There is not a government policy with respect to MLA pay. That's the purview of the members, and that's a debate that's held at the Members' Services Committee."

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that we once again have a government who doesn't understand the importance of the role of individual MLAs and seems to show those individual MLAs the same contempt that has been the trademark of parliamentary democracies in Alberta for some years, as we have laid out. Once again we seem to have a government who feels the need to dictate to members of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services what they should be doing and how they should be doing it.

Now, I know that when the Premier was on this side of the House, she believed strongly that all MLAs, including those that belong to the government caucus, should have the independence granted to them in our great parliamentary tradition. I have no doubt in my mind that the Government House Leader also believes that all government backbenchers that are on the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services should have the independence to make decisions on important issues of the day, and I trust that, just like when he was in the opposition, he will recognize this as a prima facie case of a breach of privilege that has occurred.

Mr. Speaker, since I believe there is a breach of privilege – and we have laid out that here for you today – and since we have seen a systematic abuse of the Members' Services Committee by Executive Council year over year over year, one can only begin to question whether, in fact, this is actually an issue of the mechanisms of government and the bureaucracies of the days, that also don't have the respect for the independent members and all MLAs that are not part of Executive Council makeup.

So it's with that in mind that I would be prepared to move this matter to be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing for study, to allow the opportunity to report back to the Assembly. It is important because the committee should explore why there appears to be this systematic issue within the government, presupposing decisions of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services. That's exactly what seems to be happening time and time again.

It's my hope that it was a mere oversight by the Minister of Finance, perhaps the Premier, the House leader while they were reviewing the documents or the brochure of the day. But the

challenge is that we have seen a very consistent behaviour brought forward into this Assembly that breaches the privilege of all members that don't make up Executive Council. When we see Executive Council trying to run roughshod over the committee, it creates a lack of respect in the House for all members that have been duly elected. It's certainly a breach of privilege, as we've seen in the past in very similar cases for the members of the Members' Services Committee. So I hope that we can ensure that this sort of thing doesn't happen again.

3:30

With that, Mr. Speaker, I trust that you will find this a breach of privilege for exactly what it is and that this will be the last time that something of this nature happens. I trust that the government will take notice of this, learn from their mistakes, and that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing will study this issue with the due diligence that it deserves. We saw the previous Speaker find a breach of privilege on December 2, 2013, and unfortunately the issue was not referred to the committee. Merely an apology was asked for and granted and then subsequently given by the minister.

But, good sir, we need to set the course for this Assembly in the future, one that doesn't merely look back at past mistakes and say: well, this is exactly how we did it in the past. We've begun to see some of those things from the government. But I digress, and I will stay with the matter. Sir, this is exactly why we need to ensure that this issue is referred to the standing committee: so that it can debate this issue, report back to the House, and so that appropriate actions be taken.

The Speaker: Before I recognize other hon. members who may wish to speak to this matter, I want to ensure, if I might, hon. member – and I'll just clarify – that I understood some of the points that you had raised. As I understand it, one of the first points that you were saying was that the statements made by the Finance minister yesterday were, in fact, a direction to the committee. Did I understand that correctly? That would be my first one.

Mr. Cooper: Well, Mr. Speaker, the statements that were made by the Finance minister certainly presuppose the decision that the committee would or might make. I would be more than happy to provide my speaking notes today or suggest that there is a discussion with Parliamentary Counsel. I encourage you to take some significant time to rule on this important matter.

The Speaker: Hon. member, that I will do.

Are there other members that would like to speak to the matter of privilege raised by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, the Official Opposition House Leader, for his rather exhaustive point of privilege.

I want to begin by recognizing that the rights of committees are a very serious matter, something that we have raised on a number of occasions with varying degrees of success in the past. Privilege is a very important matter, a very serious thing that can be brought before the House. As the Opposition House Leader has said, *Erskine May's Treatise on The Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament* defines parliamentary privilege as "the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively . . . and by Members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions."

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, the 2009 edition, edited by O'Brien and Bosc, goes further to lay out categories of rights and immunities enjoyed individually by members. It lists:

- freedom of speech;
- freedom from arrest in civil actions;
- exemption from jury duty;
- exemption from being subpoenaed to attend court as a witness; and
- freedom from obstruction, interference, intimidation and molestation.

Mr. Speaker, the principle and general understanding that our committees, in particular this committee, are independent is something that we take seriously. It's a principle that's been established and reconfirmed by numerous rulings made by Speakers throughout the years. However, in this particular case it's very clear that the independence of the committee and the rights of its members are not in question.

The hon. Official Opposition House Leader has quoted an interesting case, indeed. We received the ruling of the Speaker on December 2, 2013, and it was, as he indicated, a response on a question of privilege raised by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, at that time the NDP caucus House leader. The House leader opposite has talked quite a bit about the role of the Finance minister and his speech with respect to this. What the Speaker at that time talked about was that the government had issued advertising, in this case a brochure, that had "created the impression that legislation was in effect concerning public service salaries, when, in fact, the bills had not been introduced." He also said that advertising the brochure that he referenced earlier did presume that the decision had been made by the Members' Services Committee. The word that the Speaker used was not "anticipation" or anything; it was that the government had presumed that a decision had been made when, in fact, it had not.

I will submit, Mr. Speaker – and I'll keep this very short and to the point – that what has occurred is that the Finance minister has signalled an intent to request a decision from the committee, not presuming that the committee has already made such a decision or that it must make that decision but that it will be requested.

If we look, for example, Mr. Speaker, at the excerpt from the release that the hon. House leader referred to in his letter to you, it says:

Budget 2015 takes a careful and responsible approach to managing government finances, steadily phasing out the deficit without reckless cuts to the frontline services Albertans rely on. This includes:

- Prudent management of expense . . .
- A salary freeze for Cabinet ministers, MLAs and political staff for the entire term of this Legislature.
- A comprehensive review of Alberta's Agencies, Boards and Commissions.
- Hiring restraint . . .

and so on. Now, does that presume that this committee is going to follow the government direction? Does it presume that the decision has already been made? I would submit that it does not.

I will go now to the excerpt from the speech by the Finance minister yesterday, his budget speech. This is a very key quote, and I notice that it was passed over a little bit in the presentation from the Opposition House Leader. It says:

Mr. Speaker, this Legislature is going to lead by example. Our government will propose that members of this House agree to freeze the salaries of the members of cabinet, MLAs, and political staff positions for the entire term of this Legislature; in other words, until after the next election, in four years.

That's very critical, Mr. Speaker, in my view. The government intends to propose to members of this House, represented in this

case on this committee, that we agree to freeze the salaries. That is entirely, in my view, within the purview of the government, but it is up to the committee to determine the actual decision with respect to that. I would submit that there has been no intent to interfere with the rights of members of that committee or of this House to make that decision freely.

But it is also an important matter of policy with respect to the government that restraint needs to be shown and that we should lead by example. We are hopeful, I am sure, that members opposite will see the wisdom of that approach when the committee meets. However, in my view, this does not in any way constitute a question of privilege. It does not interfere with the rights of members to do their duty, and I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that there is, in fact, no breach of the privileges of members by the Finance minister in suggesting that they will propose this to the committee.

Thank you.

3:40

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

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. I'm going to perhaps fail to come up with the bravado of my colleague to the right here and replace it with some brevity. While his comments and his research are certainly all correct and were certainly in terms of the definition of privilege and the requirements in terms of the timing of the submission of this particular motion for consideration of a point of privilege all correct, the comments by my colleague the hon. Government House Leader are absolutely correct. This is a proposal. In fact, the entirety of the budget is a proposal.

Now, we could say and we can certainly presuppose that because of the majority situation that the government finds itself in not only in this Assembly but also in the committees as a whole, this is perhaps a foregone conclusion. Nonetheless, the Assembly committees are indeed independent. They must remain so, and that is a critical element and one that I certainly agree with the hon. Opposition House Leader on.

Nonetheless, in this particular case, it is clear from the Finance minister's remarks in the House that this is a proposal and not a foregone conclusion, which was, in fact, the case in 2013 and was, in fact, the reason why Speaker Zwodzesky ruled, and I believe correctly, that there was a breach of privilege. That was a different situation, and it was a situation whereby there was, in fact, a statement and, in fact, not just a statement but a release in a pamphlet that was mailed out in large numbers across the province.

What I do certainly agree on, though, with the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills is that it is absolutely critical that our Assembly committees remain resolutely independent. I have had some experience with what it feels like when there is some feeling that those committees are not as independent as they should be, and I will tell you that that is problematic. If the Assembly should decide, perhaps not specifically on this issue, that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing should meet in order to discuss the perceived decrease in privilege that the hon. member describes, I would as a member of that committee certainly welcome that discussion.

As I've stated in this Chamber before, I've been somewhat of a student of parliament in the past and find these questions actually rather interesting rather than somewhat boring, and I do think that it's critically important for the maintenance of our parliamentary tradition that we do that. But from my standpoint and from the arguments that I've heard and from my examination of the question here, the point that is raised by the hon. Government House Leader is a critical point, and that is that this is indeed a proposal and not a

foregone conclusion. Therefore, I do not believe that the decision of the committee has been presupposed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

Are there any other members who would like to speak to the point of privilege raised by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills? I understand from standing orders that a particular member does not get an opportunity again.

Are there other members who would like to speak to this? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. Please proceed.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am rising as a member of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, which the Premier is not a member of, and I'm pleased to speak in support of my colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills on this point of privilege. Let me be clear. There is no question that we need to take action on entitlements for politicians. This is not at all what the issue that we are debating here today is about. What's happening here is a continuation of the disrespect for this Assembly that started with the previous government, now the third party. I had great hope that things would be done differently under our new Premier, but clearly this is not the case.

Mr. Speaker, it's only been six months since the last election, and this government has fallen into the same disturbing habits as its predecessor. This, in my view, is arrogant and is certainly disrespectful, and it directly interferes with our work as private members. It is shocking to me that it has taken only six months for the Premier to epitomize everything she once said that she despised while she was in opposition. What type of message does this send to Albertans, who were looking forward to a Legislature that would work differently, that actually respected democracy? All of the new Albertans who engaged in the democratic process for the first time wanted to see what an actually functioning Legislature might look like not gripped with the same skeptical politics of power.

Alberta committees are already in an embarrassing state of disrepair, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure the NDP knows, based on all of the important staffers they've taken from Ottawa, that this is not how real democracy functions. Committees should be independent. They should contribute to legislation. They should allow for open consultation with the Alberta public.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, when speaking in this Assembly and then later in a press release, the Minister of Finance indicated very clearly that Executive Council would freeze salaries for all cabinet ministers and MLAs. Now, I assure you that I would love to vote for such a motion as a member of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services. My party has long been fighting for measures such as these. However, the government is attempting to predetermine the outcome of this decision and completely undermine the very purpose of this independent committee of the Legislature.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the reason I'm so shocked and why I had so much hope that things would be different under our new Premier is that when she was a member of the opposition caucus in the previous Legislature, the hon. Premier raised a very similar point of privilege to the one that is being raised today by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. She clearly indicated in her speech at the time, just a couple of years ago, that she did not think it was appropriate for the government to order a wage freeze ahead of a Members' Services Committee even having a chance to consider the proposition. Now, that leads me to question: is this government doing the very same thing that our Premier once spoke so strongly against?

In this scenario the former Speaker ruled, and I might say rightly so, that by issuing such statements, the rights of members of the committee had in fact been infringed upon, and the Speaker at the time ruled that there was indeed a valid point of privilege. Mr. Speaker, I ask that you please review the previous point of privilege, that the now Premier passionately argued in favour of, and protect the integrity of the Legislature from the Premier's office. We want to help the Premier take action on overly generous entitlements for politicians, but we simply must insist that we follow the proper procedures of this Assembly and ensure that our independent committees of this Legislature remain truly independent and not disturbed by the heavy-handedness of the Premier's office.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would be prepared to bring new points with respect to – hon. member, while I'm speaking, if you wouldn't mind . . .

Mr. Fildebrandt: Pardon me?

The Speaker: Wait until I'm finished speaking, hon. member.

Is there new information that would assist me in ruling on this matter that has not yet been heard?

I will give the hon. member an opportunity. I wish to underline to him, though, that you have not been in the House, so you may not have heard all of the points that have been raised. I want to underline to you that I'm looking for new evidence or information that would assist me in making this decision.

Please proceed, hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

3:50

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was certainly listening to this debate. I, too, am rising as a member of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, and I am pleased to speak in support of my colleague's point of privilege. Let me be clear that there is no question that we do need to take action on entitlements for politicians. This is not at all what is at issue here today, though. What's happening here is a continuation of the disrespect for this Assembly that has been long standing. I had great hope that things would be different under a new government, a new Premier, but this is not the case.

Mr. Speaker, it has only been six months since the election, and the government has fallen into the same disturbing habits as the last one. This is arrogant, this is disrespectful, and it directly interferes with the work of private members. It's shocking that it has taken only six months for the Premier to become what she once would attack in opposition.

What kind of message does this send to Albertans, who were looking forward to a Legislature that worked differently, that actually respected democracy? All new Albertans who are engaged in the democratic process for the first time are wanting to see what an actually functioning Legislature might look like not gripped with the same skeptical politics of power.

Alberta committees are already in an embarrassing state of disrepair. I'm sure that the NDP knows, based on all of their imported staffers from Ottawa and Winnipeg, that this is not how a real democracy should function.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, please.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Point of Order Repetition

Mr. Mason: The hon. member is giving almost verbatim the same rhetorical speech that was just given. He's not speaking to the points contained in the point of privilege. He's not quoting any citations. It's just a rhetorical smear job, and it's not appropriate.

The Speaker: The hon. member raises a point in which I would ask, as I indicated in recognizing you before, hon. member: is there new evidence or factual information? Could you please address that more quickly than you have rather than a generic statement? I'm prepared to listen; however, I want to hear some additional evidence that will assist in the decision-making.

Debate Continued

Mr. Fildebrandt: Very well, Mr. Speaker. As the chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts I have a particular appreciation for the independence of committees in this Legislature. As the Standing Committee on Public Accounts is the only committee of this Legislature that is chaired by a member of the Official Opposition, I consider this a special matter of importance. It is critical to our job as parliamentarians, as members respecting our constituencies. Inasmuch as we were eager to see the government's budget, we know that it is presumptive for them to assume that we would do exactly what they expect us to do.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other members that would like to speak to this matter? Again I underline. The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. Please proceed.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are debating and considering a very important matter. I feel that this is a very important matter for this House to recognize, for the Assembly to recognize. All independent members of this Assembly need to recognize their role in holding government, Executive Council, to account.

Mr. Speaker, I witnessed a little over a month ago in committee how things can just continue to be pushed through and appear to be pushed through by people being dictated to, of not recognizing the role of individual members in their committees. I truly do believe that we need to be careful that we are not abusing the powers and the responsibility of each and every committee.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I urge again. I think I've heard that several times, as the House has. Could you assist me in terms of making that with any new evidence that you would suggest is a major influence on the decision that needs to be made?

Mr. van Dijken: I think it's very important, Mr. Speaker, that we recognize and that the whole House recognizes and that the Speaker also recognizes that we have to be careful in how we proceed.

The Speaker: Hon. member, let me say to the entire House that as far as I'm concerned in this capacity as Speaker, there can be no other more important aspect that we may rule upon than with respect to privilege. It's that principle that the members of the House have the privilege of representing their constituency.

I do not hear anything else with respect to comments than that I've heard with respect to the last two speakers and, therefore, would rule, at least for the time being, that I would like to take the comments under advisement. I will return to the House in due course.

Orders of the Day
Government Motions

Amendments to Standing Orders

19. Mr. Mason moved:
- A. Be it resolved that the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta effective November 18, 2014, be amended as follows:
1. Standing Order 3(1) is struck out and the following is substituted:
Sitting times and sessional calendar
3(1) Subject to suborder (1.1) and unless otherwise ordered, the sitting hours of the Assembly shall be as follows:
Monday: 1:30 – 6:00 p.m.
Tuesday: 9:00 a.m. – noon, 1:30 – 6:00 p.m.
Wednesday: 9:00 a.m. – noon, 1:30 – 6:00 p.m.
Thursday: 9:00 a.m. – noon, 1:30 – 4:30 p.m.
(1.1) From the first day of main estimates consideration by the legislative policy committees until the day for the vote on the main estimates in Committee of Supply, the Assembly shall not meet in the morning from 9:00 a.m. – noon.
 2. Standing Order 4 is amended
 - (a) by adding the following after suborder (2):
(2.1) When there is a morning sitting, at noon the Speaker adjourns the Assembly until 1:30 p.m.
 - (b) in suborder (3) by adding “or (2.1)” after “suborder (2)”.
 3. Standing Order 7 is amended in suborder (1) by adding “shall commence at 1:30 p.m. and” after “Assembly”.
 4. Standing Order 8(2) is amended by adding “During morning sittings and” before “On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons”.
 5. Standing Order 15(2) is amended by adding “afternoon” before “sitting”.
 6. Standing Order 30(1) is amended by adding “afternoon” before “sitting”.
 7. Standing Order 32 is amended
 - (a) in suborder (2) by striking out “10 minute” and substituting “15 minute”;
 - (b) by striking out suborder (3) and substituting the following:
 - (3) Subject to suborder (3.01) and (3.1), a Member may, after at least one division has been called in Committee of the Whole or Committee of Supply, request unanimous consent for the interval between division bells on any subsequent division during that morning, afternoon or evening sitting, as the case may be, to be reduced to one minute.
 - (3.01) After the first division is called in Committee of the Whole during consideration of a Bill, the interval between division bells on all subsequent divisions relating to that Bill shall be reduced to one minute for the remainder of Committee of the Whole consideration for that morning, afternoon or evening sitting, as the case may be.
 8. Standing Order 52.01(1) is amended
 - (a) in clause (a)
 - (i) by striking out “Culture and Tourism.”;
 - (ii) by striking out “and Service Alberta” and substituting “, Service Alberta and Status of Women”;
 - (b) in clause (b)
 - (i) by striking out “Agriculture and Rural Development” and substituting “Agriculture and Forestry”;
 - (ii) by striking out “International and Intergovernmental Relations, , Innovation and”;
 - (iii) by striking out “and Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour” and substituting “Economic Development and Trade, Culture and Tourism and Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour”;
 - (c) in clause (c) by striking out “Environment and Sustainable Resource Development” and substituting “Environment and Parks”.
 9. Standing Order 59.01 is amended
 - (a) by adding the following after suborder (3):
(3.1) During consultation with the Government House Leader under suborder (3), the Official Opposition may designate 4 ministries for which estimates shall be considered for a maximum of 6 hours per ministry provided that the Official Opposition also designates 3 ministries, not including the Executive Council, for which estimates consideration shall be set at 2 hours.
 - (b) in suborder (5)
 - (i) in clause (a)(ii), (iii) and (iv) by striking out “noon” and substituting “12:15 p.m.”;
 - (ii) in clause (d) by adding “subject to suborder (3.1),” before “the estimates”;
 - (c) in suborder (6) by striking out clause (d);
 - (d) by striking out suborder (7) and substituting the following:
 - (7) If a ministry’s estimates are scheduled to be considered for 2 hours, the speaking times shall be as follows:
 - (a) the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister’s behalf, may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes,
 - (b) for the next 50 minutes, members of the Official Opposition and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister’s behalf, may speak,
 - (c) for the next 20 minutes, the members of the third party, if any, and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister’s behalf, may speak,
 - (d) for the next 20 minutes, the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent Members and the Minister, or the

- member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (e) for the next 20 minutes, private members of the Government caucus and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak, and
 - (f) if there is any time remaining, to the extent possible, the rotation outlined in clauses (b) to (e) shall apply with the speaking times set at 5 minutes as provided in Standing Order 59.02(1)(c).

10. Standing Order 59.02(1)(b) is amended by adding "and 59.01(7)(a) to (e)" after "59.01(6)(a) to (e)".

- B. And be it further resolved that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing shall meet to review and assess the operation of the morning sittings of the Assembly brought into force by part A of this motion and report to the Assembly with its recommendations by October 27, 2016, and the committee may without leave of the Assembly meet during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued.
- C. And be it further resolved that the amendments to Standing Order 3 in section 1 of part A of this motion shall take effect on November 24, 2015, and the remaining amendments in this motion shall come into force on passage.

The Speaker: I am clarifying with the Clerk that all members have been provided with the verbatim details of this motion. They have.

Speaking to the motion, are there any members who would like to speak? The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Mason: I moved it, Mr. Speaker, so I may as well go first. I just want to . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I am calling upon the Official Opposition House Leader to speak. I need clarification from the table.

I am advised that we would not require the Government House Leader to read it verbatim, that all of the members have been provided it, too. Unless the minister has some details that he'd like to add to the motion. We have time to speak to that.

Did I misunderstand? Hon. minister, do you wish to use your time? You, in fact, have 20 minutes to speak. I understood when you sat down that you didn't need any. Were there no additional comments that you wished to make?

Mr. Mason: No. I moved the motion, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good.

The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Just let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. As the mover of the motion, I move the motion. I wait to be recognized to speak to the motion. I speak to the motion. Then the opposition speaks.

The Speaker: That's my understanding. Go ahead. I understand you wish to speak.

4:00

Mr. Mason: I do. The amendments to the standing orders that we are proposing do a number of things. First of all, they institute morning sittings of the Assembly. This is something we've had quite a bit of discussion on. It was originally proposed to us by the Official Opposition, and we have undertaken to try and reduce the number of sittings that take place in the evenings in order to be more friendly towards people with families, with children, and so on.

That's been a direction that we've been pursuing, and we've had conversations with the House leaders of the opposition caucuses. At the request of the PC caucus we have dispensed with sittings on Monday mornings because members travel often on Monday mornings, so we want to be able to accommodate that. We've extended the proposed morning sittings, from 9 a.m. to noon. Routine, including question period, will take place at the same time it does now, that is at 1:30. It is our hope that on most days we can dispense with evening sittings.

There are some other changes, I think, that are very important here, that have to do with the bells. As members know, opposition members and a significant number of government caucus members are now housed in the federal building instead of the Annex. Recommendations we've received from the Speaker's staff in terms of time needed to travel indicate that more time between the ringing of the bells until the calling of a vote will be required for members to actually get to the Assembly. What we're proposing is to extend the time for the bells from 10 minutes to 15 minutes.

In order that we don't use too much time in committee, where there are often multiple amendments and debates, motions, and so on, we're proposing that the first bell in a given afternoon or given morning or given evening, if that occurs, will be 15 minutes, but once the members are here, the subsequent bells, for that afternoon only or that morning only, will be one minute.

We've also indicated that the Official Opposition has the ability to designate four ministries for additional time during estimates, not the usual three hours but six hours, and we've also agreed that there will be three ministries designated for two hours instead of three. We have received the suggestions from the Opposition House Leader as to what those ministries will be.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that those are the main pieces. We are proposing that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing meet to review and assess the operation of morning sittings of the Assembly and report to the Assembly on October 27, 2016, and that the committee can meet in between sessions in order to accomplish that review.

Those are the main aspects of the standing orders, Mr. Speaker, that we are proposing. I'm happy to have any debate that there might be.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the chance to debate this motion today. We all come here to work hard on behalf of our constituents and all Albertans, and we don't take that responsibility lightly. However, the Government House Leader knows quite well that a lot of the work that takes place to make all of this happen actually takes place outside of this Chamber. There's no doubt that the Official Opposition certainly opened the door, if you will, or the avenue to having morning sittings. I'll table a document tomorrow at the appropriate time because I'll refer to it a little bit today. We think that in conjunction with a number of other proposals that we made, it could do many things to make the House work much better.

The Government House Leader specifically referred to some discussion amongst the House leaders, be it the third party or himself or myself. In fact, we had come to an arrangement to have a start time of 10 a.m. We agreed to this, and we were marching forward in the name of co-operation and joint agreement. Then much to my surprise, we received notification, after agreeing that we would sit at 10 a.m., of a notice on the Order Paper for 9 a.m. We had never, certainly to the best of my recollection, and I think the third-party House leader will concur – the agreement that was struck was for us to meet at 10.

Now we see meeting at 9 o'clock, and obviously that presents some significant challenges to smaller caucuses and to the members on this side of the House but not, importantly, just to members. We have many people who are committed to this Assembly. Many of their waking hours are for making this all happen, for democracy to happen. When we begin to move time into the early morning, we wind up downloading the additional hours onto our staff, who make it happen. So I was quite shocked, dismayed – disappointed perhaps would be an understatement – when I received word that the agreement that the House leaders had come to wasn't going to be honoured.

You know, the Government House Leader, who I have a great deal of admiration for – and some day, when I grow up, I hope to be as learned in this Assembly as he is – is the longest serving member of the Assembly. It's my hope that it was an oversight on behalf of the Government House Leader because we certainly didn't have an agreement. There's a long-standing tradition in the Alberta Assembly that we move forward based upon these agreements, so I'm hoping that this isn't the new way of doing things on behalf of the government.

I recognize – and he alluded to it – that he made some adjustments in the schedule for members of the third party because they had some concerns about meeting on Monday mornings and wanted that ability to spend extra time with their families. I fully recognize why he made the change, but it doesn't change the fact, Mr. Speaker, that the agreement that we had made was for 10 a.m., and now we are looking at a motion that says 9 a.m.

Our staff do a tremendous amount of work to make this happen. When I talk about staff, I don't just mean our colleagues in the Official Opposition caucus, but I'm talking about the staff that do work for the government, for the third party, for the three independent members of the Assembly, the staff that work for the Legislative Assembly Office, whether they're in *Hansard* or communications, HR, the Clerk's office, committee departments. The list goes on and on. They all work hard for us each and every day to ensure that this functions properly.

4:10

Beginning the proceedings of this Assembly at 9 a.m. would be unfair to many of these staff. I have no doubt that they would likely be able to complete their jobs as they are highly competent, but it would mean more time away from their families, certainly in our situation, because the requirement to be at work would likely be in the neighbourhood of 6:30 a.m. I think of the parents that would like to drop their children off at school or daycare on their way to the office. You see, Mr. Speaker, proceedings starting at 9 a.m. mean many more hours of preparation before we even set foot in this Chamber. Now, we were willing to make those adjustments based upon a 10 a.m. start time so that we could allow at least two and a half hours prior to arrival for our team to be prepared for us to come into the Assembly.

I believe in the importance of the work that we do here in the Assembly, and in order for us to do meaningful work with meaningful outcomes, there are countless hours that both we and our staff put together to make sure that we are as prepared as possible. I think my colleagues can agree with me that the research that goes into speeches, members' statements, even questions of privilege, sir, is extensive. We're here to represent our constituents and to be at our best to do that. I have serious concerns that this ability will be diminished or that the strain on our staff on all sides will be extreme if we move to 9 a.m. sittings. For a government that keeps talking about the Assembly working better for families and

for all members and staff, I think that this is a step in the wrong direction, particularly when it comes to working together.

It was my understanding that we had an agreement in place, and now we have a very different statement of facts based upon that agreement. The fact is, sir, that no other Legislature in Canada sits at 9 a.m. every day. When they do meet in the morning, the proceedings begin at 10 a.m. It's funny and interesting to me that it's 10 a.m., the time that we agreed to. Unfortunately, others chose to not keep this agreement. I am concerned that the government actually isn't interested in making the Assembly work better but, instead, in making things better for the government caucus.

Immediately after the election my Wildrose Official Opposition colleagues and I put together a proposal, which we shared with the Government House Leader. For his colleagues' sake, it was entitled Restoring Trust, restoring trust and strengthening democracy. What we have here today is not a restoration in trust but a breakdown in that trust. After 44 years of rule by the now third party Albertans expect the Legislature to be cleaned up, to work better in the interests of all Albertans. We shouldn't be rushing through legislation. We shouldn't allow the government to play games with things like the introduction of the budget and MLAs being back and forth to the constituency. We need to ensure that we are taking steps to strengthen our democracy. The recommendations that we made were intended in that exact spirit, strengthening democracy.

We made a recommendation for 10 a.m. sittings, but the reason why that recommendation was made was in conjunction with a large group of recommendations. Often the government will criticize the opposition for not proposing ideas, but we proposed ideas, and one of them was a 10 a.m. sitting. The reason why, sir, was so that we could expand the role of committees, so that we could be utilizing committees to receive expert testimony. When a difficult Justice bill came across the table, we would be able to bring witnesses from the department and legal experts to provide guidance and advice to committees. We didn't recommend opening the House at 9 a.m. so that the government could just spend more time ramming through legislation, just like we've seen over the last number of years.

A perfect example of that, sir, is in the estimates process. The third party would have never only offered seven days to debate estimates, but that's exactly what we saw earlier today. When the House leader introduced the estimates schedule, it was a schedule of seven days of debate of estimates. We are debating significant amounts of debt and spending, and we're going to do that in seven days.

The point, Mr. Speaker, is that one of the proposals when it comes to restoring trust is that we would have this opportunity to expand the role of committees, not shrink the role of committees by having the House sit every waking moment of the day and night, because we have done nothing to actually prevent the ability of government to have night sittings. In fact, we have opened all sorts of potential risks. I know that my hon. colleague from Strathmore-Brooks will speak about the fact that the PAC will be sitting, if this continues, at the exact same time that the House is also sitting, the point being that we had a real opportunity to make significant reforms to the Assembly, and what we have here is, unfortunately, a broken deal and a broken agreement that we had agreed to, which was 10 a.m.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is my intention to move an amendment to the motion. I will do that, but I will wait while it is distributed.

The Speaker: The amendment has been distributed?

Mr. Cooper: I think they're working on it. I can proceed if you wish, sir.

The Speaker: Yes. Let's proceed in the interests of time, which is so valuable.

Mr. Cooper: I move that Government Motion 19 be amended in part A, section 1, in Standing Order 3 as follows: in the proposed suborder (1) by striking out "9:00 a.m." wherever it appears and substituting "10:00 a.m." and in the proposed suborder (1.1) by striking out "9:00 a.m." and substituting "10:00 a.m."

Mr. Speaker, we have opportunity today to honour the agreement that was arrived at. We have the opportunity to go down that road of restoring trust, the trust that, unfortunately, is being taxed. I don't want to say that the trust is totally broken between the Government House Leader and me because that certainly wouldn't be an accurate reflection of where things are at, but of course that will be up to the Government House Leader. I am more than happy to continue to try and work with the Government House Leader, and I think a great opportunity to do that would be to accept our amendment, pass the amendment, and move forward with the original agreed-to time.

The Speaker: Clarification: you're now voting on an amendment to Government Motion 19. We're dealing with the amendment now, correct? I won't read it. I believe everybody has been provided a copy of that.

I would recognize the Member for Strathmore-Brooks, who would like to speak to the amendment.

4:20

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise to speak to this amendment on changing the hours proposed from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. It has always been the case that the government has recognized that the daily routine of members, depending on which side of the House they sit, is different and that opposition members are incredibly busy and incredibly committed in the mornings before Orders of the Day or question rotation begin.

That's just the way it is. That is the rotation of the day. They fully understand what it looks like for us. They fully understand our availability in the mornings . . . it can't be interpreted as anything but a very intentional decision to try and constrain the ability of the opposition to do its job, Mr. Speaker. That's all it can be seen as.

Those words are not mine. Those are the very words spoken by the Premier on March 5, 2013, when she was a member of the opposition.

I find it interesting and concerning, even alarming that the Premier has so quickly allowed herself to change her views on democracy in this institution. In opposition she fought vehemently for respect for opposition from the government, and she fought for the ability of her caucus and her staff and her team to be able to do the work that they had been hired by Albertans to do. How quickly things can change, or perhaps how much they can stay the same.

On May 5 the Premier stated: "Friends, I believe that change has finally come to Alberta." Mr. Speaker, clearly, some things don't seem to ever change. This is a reasoned and a reasonable amendment that will ensure that all Albertans in every constituency are served, regardless of which side of the House their MLA happens to sit on. This amendment will enable the opposition to fulfill its mandate and work effectively, which is something that several members, including the Premier and House leader, fought for every day. In the interest of Albertans and in the interest of a fair, accountable, and effective government I urge members to support this amendment.

Mr. Speaker, I think it would be a useful exercise to go through the start times of other jurisdictions in our country. In British Columbia, to our west, the time for ordinary meetings: the House

shall have two distinct sittings per day with the exception of Wednesdays. On Mondays they sit from 10 till noon and then from 1:30 to 6:30. On Tuesdays they sit from 10 a.m. till noon and then from 1:30 to 6:30. On Wednesdays they sit from 1:30 to 7 p.m. On Thursdays they sit from 10 a.m. until noon and then from 1:30 to 6 p.m.

Our neighbours to the east in Saskatchewan have ordinary sitting times as follows. On Mondays they sit from 1:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. with a recess between 5 and 7. On Tuesday they sit from 1:30 to 10:30 with a recess between 5 and 7. On Wednesdays they sit from 1:30 to 5. On Thursdays Saskatchewan's Legislature sits from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. On designated holidays the Assembly meets between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. Mr. Speaker, I hope that this insight into our two neighbours' sitting times will help us to contribute to our discussion on this topic.

Closer to here at home I serve as the new chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. That committee meets weekly on Tuesday mornings. This is a vital committee of this Legislature, that meets regularly to go through the Auditor General's reports, Measuring Up reports, and other documents that are vital to ensuring that Albertans get value for their hard-earned tax dollars. It is an all-party committee chaired by the Official Opposition, that has one of the most important tasks that we have here – and I enjoy it greatly – working collaboratively with members of all sides. So far we have worked as a team that as much as possible does not recognize party: the opposition, the government, and the third party, working the way Albertans want them to work, together.

[Mr. Feehan in the chair]

But also I happen to moonlight as the shadow minister of Finance for the Wildrose Party and caucus. That job requires me to be in the Legislature for all critical Finance debates. For me to do that job properly, I must be free in the mornings. I must not be called before the Public Accounts Committee to do the important work that they are doing there when I have equally important work to be done here.

Nobody is recommending that MLAs should not be working at 9 a.m. Most of us start long before then. Instead, we are asking that this amendment recognize that the important work of committees, private members on the government side, and opposition members on this side requires time beforehand. Ten a.m. is a reasonable compromise that will make this place more family-friendly for men and women and especially for parents but does not unduly harm the functioning of our standing committees and of opposition members. I am of the firm belief that 10 a.m. is the best time for our esteemed Legislature to begin the proceedings of the day as it will allow us to balance the many facets of our jobs as Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Does anyone wish to speak for five minutes? I recognize the leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm interested in the amendment that the House leader of the party with the third-most votes in the last election brought forward here, and I will say that it seems reasonable. I'm entertained by some of the previous commentary, particularly the comments around being available. I think people in this House from all sides work pretty hard and probably put in 12, 14 hours a day. So, for me, we're always available, and we have to plan our lives around the work. If there's any consideration, I think that what we need to remember is – and I'm in this category, so you can . . .

The Acting Speaker: My apologies. I just need to clarify with you whether you're responding to the previous speaker or you're speaking on your own terms.

Mr. McIver: Speaking on my own.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. McIver: May I continue?

The Acting Speaker: Yes, please.

Mr. McIver: All right. As I was saying, I think the big consideration – you know, I'm one of those people that does travel, and there are people from all sides of the House that do. But I would think that even those members that live in Edmonton would agree that a major consideration schedulewise is accommodating our colleagues from out of town. While I appreciate the concern for the local members to be home with their family or their kids or whatever, I find myself more concerned with those of us that are completely away from our family and our kids for three, four days at a time while we're here. No disrespect to those of us from Edmonton. I just think that that's a bigger consideration because many members of the House don't have that choice. The local members: bless your hearts. When you can get home to be with your family, good for you.

Having said that, whether we're in the House in the morning and preparing at the end of the day for the next day or, for me, in the House in the afternoon and preparing that morning for the House work that afternoon is kind of potayto, potahto. I'm going to be working all day, every day anyway, and I think most if not all members of this House are in the same position. At least, that's what I believe. I think we all work hard. We don't all agree, but I believe we all work hard.

I think this is reasonable, the change in start time from 9 to 10, so I may well support that. But I must also say that I don't intend to support the overall changes to the Standing Orders because I think they're actually pretty good the way they are, and they were developed over a number of years.

Having said that, I think this fairly minor amendment is a reasonable one. I heard the member that made the amendment, his explanation, and for the most part it sounded reasonable to me, so I'll support this. Again, not to give false hope to my colleagues over here, I think the current standing orders are pretty darn good.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

4:30

The Acting Speaker: Under Section 29(2)(a) does anyone wish to respond to the speaker? Five minutes.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened with great interest to what the Member for Calgary-Hays had to say about the proposed amendment before the House, and I had a few questions for him. I was just wondering if he could go into rather lengthy detail about the impacts that the changes to the standing orders, the amendment that has been proposed by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, would have on his morning routine.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. McIver: Extensive detail. Okay. Well, I'm not sure I can go into extensive detail. There are some things that we don't need to know about each other's morning routine. I think, hon. member, we can all agree on that.

You know what? It's a matter of, again, either getting up and preparing for the day's proceedings in the House or preparing the night before. That's not extensive. I apologize for that. That's what

you asked for, but I don't think there's an extensive explanation needed. I just think that we all have to adjust our schedules. I think we all work hard, and that's my extensive explanation.

The Speaker: I believe we're still on the amendment, which we will refer to as A1. I'm trying to catch up.

The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. Excuse me. The Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: It's okay. You're a great person.

The Speaker: You, too.

Mr. Cooper: You can call me whatever you want.

I'm just wondering if the member would be willing to comment. Given that there's no ability to limit a night sitting and given that it's possible that we might now sit at 9 a.m., then at 1:30, and then the House could still sit till 2, 3 a.m. – you know, you've experienced times in the House where you've basically been here all night. How would that affect your morning routine given that now you have to be at the Assembly by, say, 7 a.m. so you can prepare for a 9 a.m. start?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Okay. Mr. Speaker, well, you know, it's a good question. It's a great question, hon. member, and I think at the heart of it, it comes down to democracy. It's inconvenient for me and our party, and I would suggest that it's probably inconvenient for your party because neither one of us is in government.

Those with the most seats in here get to make the decisions at the end of the day. I recognize that. I've been on that side. I'm on this side. I do support democracy. One of the tools, weapons, if you will, mechanisms that you have in opposition to hold the government to account is to make it inconvenient for them when they're doing things you don't like. One of those methods, of course, is to keep them up all night. We have the ability to do that, and that ability will be there whether we start at 9 in the morning or 10 in the morning.

Actually, I recognize both sides of it. If the government actually believe they have important work to do, they need to get it done, and if the opposition takes a run at them and keeps them up all night, then I guess the government can respond in a number of different ways. They can fold to the opposition pressure, or they can stay up all night and get their agenda done.

You know, at the end of the day, if push comes to shove – one thing about it is that it's a little bit self-regulating, only because the human body is designed to sleep about a third of the time. So when those all-night events happen, of course, it will be inconvenient, perhaps, to get up at 7 to be ready for House sittings at 9. If we're up all night, getting up at 8 for 10 might not be all that dissimilar, at least for me, if I haven't had any sleep. For those that think I'm grumpy when I've had sleep, it doesn't get better when I haven't.

That's the best I can do for you.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) are there any further comments, questions?

Then I believe we proceed back to the discussion on the amendment, which I will refer to . . .

Ms Payne: Sorry. Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Ms Payne: My question would be particularly around: if the amendment is successful and we move to a 10 a.m., how would the

member expect that we would get through all of the business of the day? I think it's important to recognize that the business of the House in this Assembly does take a certain amount of time and that by allowing ourselves to begin at 9 a.m., that provides time for this important business.

The Speaker: It's my understanding, hon. member, that, in fact, under 29(2)(a) it's a total of five minutes, thus the reason I was moving to further debate on the amendment.

Mr. Orr: I really do support the intent, the goal of limiting the night sittings. I think it will contribute to the effectiveness of the House. But I suppose I would also like to speak on behalf of all of us on both sides of the House that our newbies – the planning and preparation before we come into this House truly is equally as important as what actually happens in this House. We do, all of us, I believe, need time. At least I know I do.

While I recognize the value of trying to move away from some of the night sittings, sometimes we swing the pendulum from one extreme to the other; therefore, I would speak in favour of the motion that 10 o'clock is probably the right solution; 9 o'clock might be a little bit too much of a swing.

I do want to see the House work productively, and we will not do our best work if we don't have adequate time to prepare for it. Of course, as has already been said, none of us arrive here just at 10 o'clock when we start now, and we won't arrive just at 9 when we start then or 10 if that's what it is. But I do fear that we might overreact and then find ourselves meeting for preparations and ending up, alternatively, having to shove committee meetings into the night, which would be totally counterproductive. We'd be right back where we were.

I really do think that 10 o'clock is probably the better median solution. If we need to meet on Mondays as well in order to get to that point between us, then personally I think that would be the right solution for us. We all have work to do, and part of our day is doing that other work, communicating, meeting with other people. Giving ourselves at least an hour in the morning to do a lot more of that work I think will make us much more effective as MLAs.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I know it doesn't show, but I, too, am a newbie here.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On a couple of, I would say, practical . . .

The Speaker: My apologies again. Under 29(2)(a) are there questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I noticed that the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka had referred to possibly working through Mondays to get the business of the House through. I notice that we don't have any amendments to the times that we are sitting on Mondays in the amendment that's been presented to the House. I was just wondering if the member agrees with the times that have been proposed in the amendment or if he's suggesting a further amendment to additional time that the House would be sitting on Mondays. I would appreciate some clarification on that point.

4:40

Mr. Orr: Good question. I think we should do one motion at a time, so I will retract that aspect of it, rather than muddy the waters, and leave it as it is for now.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other questions? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I'd like to address the hon. member. Why is it that you think that every other province meets at 10 a.m.? Short of Nova Scotia, I think they meet on Fridays at 9 a.m. Why do you think that – I mean, in all the other provinces that seems to work. It's a good function of those other Legislatures. Perhaps you could expand on why you think that that would be a good time. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I wish I had been in some of those Assemblies, but I have not been, so it might be a bit of a stretch, but I suspect it's for some of the reasons I've already said. I believe there is other important work to be done, and being well prepared for when we actually get there is probably one of the primary reasons.

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

Mr. Connolly: I would actually just like to clarify for the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View that Ontario sits at 9 a.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and on Mondays they meet at 10:30 a.m.

The Speaker: Any more questions under 29(2)(a)?

I would now again recognize the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In regard to this timing of 9 a.m. or 10 a.m. I would like to bring up a purely technical issue here, one that I've experienced myself, that might help us in the decision-making here. I have had a number of technical problems with the computer, phone, and printer early in the morning during preparation for the work that we do here. If we are going to move our time to start to 9 in the morning, I'm going to be here at about 6 to 6:30 to start my day. If I have a technical problem, you all know IT isn't going to be there to give me a hand, and I am technologically illiterate. I'm not going to be able to fix my computer, my printer, or whatever else in the world has managed to collapse on me in time for me to get my work done to scoot on over here and be ready for 9 o'clock. So from a purely and, I'll say, selfish motive, since I'm not 12 years old and I don't know how to run much of this stuff, I need time. I have had three technological failures in the morning so far, and we've only been here just a few months. I would be very concerned if we had to start at 9 o'clock and I have a problem and IT isn't really ready to get going until 8:30 in the morning. They are extremely good at what they do, but they are not Superman and Superwoman either.

The second technical issue is that every single one of us in this Assembly have things going on in our constituencies, and the things that happen in our constituencies don't stop just because we are here in session. Morning time is our time to talk to our constituency staff and catch up on whatever fires may be burning out of control, whatever major issues may have arisen in the night. We have had some major issues that have happened in the night: serious accidents, fires, things that we need to be prepared for, that the media is after us for a comment for their morning news show. There is much more that each and every one of us in this House does than just sit here and listen to great, long oratories and vote on things. We have stuff going on back home in our constituencies. Oftentimes that one hour or hour and a half in the morning is when

I talk to my constituency assistant so that I am brought up to speed on what's going on back home.

If we're going to be starting at 9 o'clock now, that just shoves everything back earlier in the day, giving us less time to do our job. I do not believe it is in our best interest as legislators nor as representatives of the people that we start any earlier than 10 o'clock. We need time to prepare, we need time to recover from technological failures – and they're going to happen to me – and we are going to need time to talk to our constituency assistants and get things sorted out down there that need sorting out. So please take these things into consideration before we start moving things to a 9 o'clock start time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments with respect to 29(2)(a)? Please proceed.

Mr. Cyr: To my colleague: when are you going to be able to get back to your constituents when you're in the House all day?

Mr. MacIntyre: Heaven only knows, Mr. Speaker, but it isn't going to be in a timely fashion. We have had in my constituency, in just the short time that we have been elected, three emergencies, two of which were in the morning, one of which concerned my own family, and I would not have liked to have been in this House when those things occurred. We dealt with them in a timely, quick fashion in the morning. I don't know about the rest of you, but I shut my phone off when I'm in this Chamber. I need that time in the morning – and I'm sure all the rest of you do, too – to take care of things back home. I hope I answered your question.

The Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, did you wish to speak to the amendment? Please proceed.

Mr. Cyr: For myself, I guess one of my concerns in all of this is the fact that we're going to be putting more of a load on our staff. The fact is that we've got contracts with all the staff. I'm wondering: with these changes that we're going to be doing as well as going to 9 o'clock in the morning and possibly to regular evening sittings, what are we doing to compensate these staff? Has it been worked into the budgets? This is something that we need to be addressing. As a father I know that I miss my family. These staff need to be recognized for the time that they're giving up.

Now, time in lieu of, obviously, is a wonderful avenue that many staff use, and this is something that has to be used within three months. So during the wonderful time right now, if they are doing time in lieu of, our staff need to use this time probably around January. For me, I would say that taking extra time off in January may not be the best thing for me and my family as my daughters are in school. What we need to be looking at is: exactly what are the impacts going to be to our staff, what are the impacts going to be to my colleagues, and what impacts are we looking at for the rest of Alberta? The question here that we need to be asking is: have the contracts been looked into to make sure that we are not going to be creating a whole lot more cost on the government? Are we looking at how we can mitigate some of these costs without impacting the family life of our wonderful staff and the MLAs? What we need to be working towards is limiting the night sittings and bringing up a consistent schedule that our staff can expect to go through.

4:50

Now, I would like to also mention on these changes we are making that we haven't consulted the stakeholders here, which would be the staff. Have we gone to the staff and asked them if this

is something that they're going to be willing to take? The fact is that these contracts are now written. The government stated earlier that they weren't willing to breach contracts. Well, that's fine. So now we've got contracts that we're going to need to alter. Has the government considered the fact that we may need to alter contracts that are coming up?

Now, I don't know about you, but whenever somebody starts telling me to alter contracts, I always get a little nervous.

An Hon. Member: What about public-sector workers?

Mr. Cyr: Public-sector workers, absolutely. The fact is that our legislative staff are public-sector workers, and they need to be thought of in this process. The fact is that when we're looking at who and what we need to do, we need to be looking at how it will impact them. What is it that's going to change?

When the Wildrose brought this forward, we were asking for two extra hours, and now we're looking at night sittings and three extra hours. This is significant. This is very significant. If we haven't gone to the legislative staff and gotten their opinions on exactly what they feel is appropriate, then this could end up having a lot of consequences that we are not actually looking into. Instead of being proactive, we're being reactive in all of this. In summary here, I would like to just ask: in the end, have we done the work that is needed to see if we are going to be impacting our staff?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Questions to the hon. member under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. The member seems to be suggesting that for the hours during which he is on the Legislature Grounds, his staff is here whenever he is. That seems to suggest that perhaps their current contracts have them here along with him until the early morning hours. Perhaps he can speak to whether or not this is something he already requires of his staff and provide further clarification as to whether or not this is going to be as onerous as he is potentially suggesting?

Mr. Cyr: Well, again, when we're looking at staff contracts, we all have to look into our own contracts as well as the government. The fact is that when we're sitting, we want to limit the impact to our staff. That is just a fact. We do have a few staff that are here with us, but most evenings we don't have staff. The fact is that when we are going through this, they're going to need to spend more hours, taken away from the hours that they've lost in the morning and the evening, and spend them working on our specific portfolios or questions.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to suggest to the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake to contact the IT department. They have a very strong training program, and you can avail yourself of the training there.

Also, to the Member for Drumheller-Stettler: the average age is well above 12. It is around 45 within our caucus.

Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

The Speaker: The point of order is noted. I agree with the member. When you are under 29(2)(a), you can only speak to, in this case,

the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, and you included another member's question. I would rule that your question is out of order.

We're still dealing with the member. Under 29(2)(a) are there any other comments with respect to that member's presentation? The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I understand the desires around when we might want to be at work, but there are realities around when we do need to be at work. I know from my experience in public education that all of our elementary schools start between 8 and 8:40, and families found it very feasible to be there. Teachers were often there hours before that preparing. These are some of the realities that we face as working people in Alberta. I'm proud for us to have the reputation of being working people in this Legislature, and I think 9 o'clock is not an unrealistic work time to start. I guess my question to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake is: what time does the member think is most appropriate for us to be emulating to members of the public? Most of them are at work far before the beginning time. The question to the member is around: what exactly is it that he thinks is unrealistic around a 9 a.m. start time for the formal beginning?

Mr. Cyr: Thank you for the question. We're always at work – it's just a fact – and expecting our staff to always be at work is a problem. Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other questions to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake under 29(2)(a)? Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you. Something that I hadn't thought of before, when I was talking about my constituency assistant, is that I have an employment contract with that person to start at a particular time of the day. If we're going to start at 9 o'clock, I can't alter that contract now, and I'm toast. What time does your constituency assistant's contract start?

Mr. Cyr: My constituency staff starts at 8:30. I'm fortunate.

An Hon. Member: Perfect.

Mr. Cyr: It is a wonderful situation. But the fact is that it's not my constituency staff or myself that I'm looking out for. There are other MLAs out there with satellite offices, and we need to be concerned about being able to get to those as well. Thank you for the question. That is a concern.

The Speaker: I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will rise to speak in favour of this amendment, and I do so to highlight some of the challenges those of us in smaller parties face.

Now, I concur with the opposition House leaders and other members who have raised the concern for their staff. I signed up for this. We all signed up for this. As we were reminded on the very first day, being an MLA in this Assembly and being an MLA is a 24-hour-a-day, 365-day job – we know that – and I say, in all sincerity, that my observation of every single member that I've interacted with in this Assembly, on both sides of the House, shows that to be true. We all work tremendously hard. This is not about what time we come to work because, as my hon. colleague has said, we're always at work.

However, I have an objection to the 9 a.m. sitting for the sake of my staff. I do believe that it actually impairs our ability to adequately represent Albertans and to do our job. It is already a challenge to come to this House adequately prepared. There is a

tremendous volume of information to read through, and there is simply a minimum amount of time required to do research, to be briefed, and to digest this information as we do that important work on behalf of Albertans here in this House. While I recognize the tremendous work that every member of this House does, it is especially true for those of us at this end of the House, who perhaps do not have colleagues that we can rely on to trade off work.

As it stands, owing to the late start of this session, the schedule for estimates has been compressed. What is usually undertaken in four weeks has been compressed to two, which is a direct result of the choice the government made to delay the sitting of this House and the presentation of the budget. Now, I don't know why they did that, but it is a fact that we are here starting later.

An Hon. Member: The election.

Mr. Clark: There is some suggestion that it may have had something to do with the federal election. But be that as it may, we are now required to have that compressed schedule.

5:00

Now, as a result, there are times when members will be in committee in the evening, have to sit at 9 a.m., attend Orders of the Day at 1:30, and then attend another committee meeting again later that afternoon or that evening. Again, I can handle that. That's what I signed up for. I think it's what we all signed up for. But for our staff, who need to be briefing us for estimates and briefing us for question period and bill debates, that's a tremendous burden. The extra hour from 9 to 10 will make a significant difference. In the end, it's about our ability to do the job that we've been elected to do, to represent Albertans properly, which is why I will vote in favour of this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any questions of the member under 29(2)(a)? I would recognize the Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my turn. Thank you. I'm pleased to speak to the proposed amendment. I know that in the past the third party was pretty loose and fast with the rules, but it would be nice to see some accountability in this system. We have a real opportunity here today. We had hoped that this new government would bring a new perspective, having previously served in the opposition role – you know very well – the difference being, you know, that “new” and “blue” is getting a little bit murky these days.

The Government House Leader previously told us that we would be sitting at 10 a.m., not 9 a.m. Now, I know it seems like an hour is not really a lot, but an extra hour can go a long way for our staff in preparing the day's activities. Meetings are often booked in the morning, before the start of the afternoon sitting, and now that we're sitting all morning, afternoon, and all evening, we have very little time to meet with stakeholders or concerned constituents.

Another concern that I have with the morning sitting as it is proposed is the committee meetings. Session is the ideal time to meet as the out-of-town MLAs are all present in Edmonton. By moving to all-morning sittings, this essentially eliminates any time to meet. Important committee work will be crammed into what limited time is available in this busy schedule. What? When – 6 a.m., 5 a.m. – are we going to do this important work?

Mr. Speaker, committees are meant to be a vital part of our democratic system. I did have sincere hopes that under this new government we would have seen a change, as did the rest of Alberta, and a move to more respect for the independence and importance of committees.

I touched on it earlier, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to return to the matter of staffing. An extra hour in the morning of sitting would give us in the opposition as well as the hard-working staffers on all sides of the Legislature just a little more time to prepare for the day, including whatever other morning routines we don't need to hear about.

The Premier said as an opposition MLA, "It is particularly necessary to respect the rights of the minority . . . when you have a small opposition, and they cannot simply be here for 18 hours a day." Mr. Speaker, we all know that burnout is a real thing. We want the best and the brightest to be coming to this Legislature to debate matters of vital importance in our province. As the Premier herself once suggested, 18 hours a day is not the way to do that.

A move to 9 a.m. start times could have the potential to be the start of a slippery slope. Votes in this Chamber are something that I take very seriously. I have a responsibility to the people of Airdrie to be the best representative possible. That includes making informed votes on legislation that appears before this House. With morning, noon, and night sittings it would greatly diminish the time to prepare and to make informed votes for all Members of this Legislative Assembly.

If there is one thing I know we need in this Legislature, it is to work on ways to improve our democratic system, not diminish it. I know we have a larger caucus than the NDP had when you were in opposition. However, the workload is still the same. Staff will have virtually no time to prepare for the upcoming session – as I hope you know, this is what they do in the morning – especially if we still have an evening sitting. With this proposal we will still be sitting 12-plus hours a day. There is no way our staff will be able to keep up with the crushing workload.

It's all well and good for the government to sit for 12-plus hours. You drive the agenda. You have the ability to plan ahead. Plus, you have an army of bureaucrats to call on for help. We in opposition: we're often reacting. Our staff help research bills and help draft speaking notes. With this constant sitting they will burn out.

An amendment like this was not even passed by the most malicious third-party government. As I had previously stated, I really had hoped that this session would be the start of a new way of looking at legislating and a collaborative approach, where we can all come together as Members of this Legislative Assembly regardless of our political stripe and make our system work better.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I hope you will consider my proposal.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I would urge you to think about using words like "malicious" based on other examples of that discussion in this room.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North West under 29(2)(a).

Ms Jansen: Absolutely. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the Member for Airdrie for referring to us as "loose and fast." It's not that I get called that very often, and I hope it improves my street cred.

I want to bring up a couple of things. First of all, the member stated that we shouldn't be here 18 hours a day, yet I think I remember back three years that filibustering by this party kept us here till 5 or 6 in the morning, so perhaps you ought not be mudslinging.

Then to the comment about the crushing workload of your staff: you know, having your bum in a seat for an extra hour a day does not constitute any workload for your staff. It means you've got your bum in a seat for an extra hour. So I will say this. It is a far worse use of our time to be frittering away the afternoon when we could

be doing responsible government business. This is the kind of behaviour that will ensure that you're never the government.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) are there any other questions with respect to the Member for Airdrie?

I would recognize the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's been a lot said about the time, whether we go at 9 o'clock or 10 o'clock, and I think that it's been an excellent debate. I guess the point that I want to make is that in this House we have gentlemen's agreements between House leaders. Three different caucuses are represented, from what I understand – and I am new here, so I'm not sure if there are other people involved. But an agreement has been made, a gentlemen's agreement, and it was broken. I think that that's important to state. Because it was broken, it's caused problems with the House.

We have people throughout Alberta that are looking to us for leadership, and one of the things that they look to us for is being honourable. One of the honourable points is being able to make sure that when we make an agreement, we keep it. That's how things work in business, that's how things work in families, and that's how things should work here in the House. I think that it's important for us to remember that the problem started because this agreement was broken. I don't think that that should be downplayed. We need to be able to set a high standard for the people whom we represent. They expect it of us, and they expect us to be able to act in a way that is honourable.

That's all I had to say about this. Thank you.

5:10

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) are there any questions for the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner?

I believe I would be now calling upon the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I managed to be elected to this Assembly, somehow, I knew that there would be a lot of learning that would be entailed in coming to this establishment, in trying to figure out how government actually works, and I knew that I would get opportunities to come before this Legislature and to speak and to debate and to try to convince and to listen to each other and then to respond to each other, so I find it a privilege to be here and to be able to be involved in this discussion that we're having today.

I believe that it's important that as MLAs we have the time to work into the issues that we face every day. I know that as a teacher that didn't happen while I was actively trying to teach in front of the kids, that there was a necessary period of time – I was very interested when the hon. Minister of Health talked about the profession of teaching. You were absolutely correct when you were saying, you know, that there is an element of time that's necessary for teachers to build in to be able to be effective in the classroom. I know that as a teacher I always appreciated and I respected those administrations and those superintendents that built in days for teachers to be able to meet with other teachers, to be able to engage in discussion, to be able to plan together, to be able to work together, to be able to help engage the students in my classroom.

Every institution has its own rhythms. In teaching, there's absolutely a rhythm to the teaching profession, to the classroom. For those of you that have ever been in there, you know that much of the work that we do as teachers happens outside of that classroom. I know that when, five years ago, I made the commitment to coach a basketball team and at the same time would have new courses in my class, it meant that I had to take the time in my summer holidays to come into the school. They trusted me with

a key; sometimes I wondered why. They allowed me into that school, where I could then sit down and plan my curriculum for that coming year. I know that I came in every day for three or four hours during the summer just to ensure that I had my 20-2 curriculum under control so that when I was in front of my kids and I was also trying to coach basketball, I would have the ability to do my job.

I guess the concern that I've got when it comes to the 9 o'clock start is this. I know it's been said by many people, probably far more eloquently than myself. It's just that as new Members of the Legislative Assembly we all have a learning curve that goes straight up. That's fair. That's honest. That goes on both sides. We need to consider just what the pressures are that we face as MLAs that will allow us to enhance democracy. That's what this is really supposed to be all about. This conversation is supposed to be about enhancing the ability of this House to be democratic.

I would speak to this amendment and to a 10 o'clock start because I believe that it will help me, personally, be a better MLA, and as I become a better MLA, I then can be a better democratic politician. I know that for many of you there are going to be times when you're coming into this Legislature having travelled long distances to get here. That 9 o'clock start is going to be an issue. That's just a reality. You all have talked about the fact that you've got kids, that you've got a life outside of this Legislature and this Legislative Assembly, so a 10 o'clock sitting: yeah, I think it's reasonable. I don't think that we're stretching the boundaries by saying: oh, you know, this Legislature is going to be significantly better if we start at 9 o'clock. As a matter of fact, I would argue that it's probably going to be just a little bit better if we're starting at 10.

So I would speak to this amendment. When I look at the committee workload that I have, the constituency work that I have to do, the travel distance at times coming from Drayton Valley-Devon, the fact that I've got to have time to study the issues and to consider the bills that are being brought before this House, that I have to be able to work with the LAO and my outreach officer, I believe that a 10 o'clock time would allow this Legislature to function a little more efficiently and effectively.

I know that we often had the discussion in my real life, when I was a teacher, about whether or not we should change the school year, whether we should change the semester system. I wish the Minister of Education was here because I really, honestly believe, after 30 years of teaching, that if we changed our semester system so that it ended before Christmas, it would be better for the students. I use that as an analogy to suggest that maybe a 10 o'clock start would be better for this House. It would make it run a little more efficiently and a little more effectively.

I believe that in a democracy we have to look for those things in this House that will allow for both a strong government and a strong opposition. Democracy works best when the government of the day and the opposition are both doing their roles, doing them effectively, and doing them efficiently. So if a 10 a.m. start allows us to do that – and I would argue that it does allow us just a little bit better to do our jobs both as a government and as an opposition – then that's good for democracy, and I would speak in support of this amendment.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, is your question with respect to the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon? Or you'll speak to the amendment?

Are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) with respect to the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon?

Then I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate on this amendment.

The Speaker: So as I understand it, you're asking for an adjournment of the debate on the amendment. Is that correct?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate on amendment A1 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:19 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

The Speaker: I'd like to remind the members that if they leave or enter the room, they must do so prior to the bell terminating.

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Horne	Miranda
Bilous	Jabbour	Nielsen
Carlier	Jansen	Payne
Connolly	Kazim	Piquette
Cortes-Vargas	Kleinsteuber	Renaud
Dach	Larivee	Rosendahl
Dang	Littlewood	Sabir
Drever	Loyola	Schmidt
Feehan	Luff	Schreiner
Fitzpatrick	Malkinson	Shepherd
Ganley	Mason	Sucha
Goehring	McKitrick	Sweet
Gray	McLean	Turner
Hinkley	McPherson	Westhead
Hoffman	Miller	Woollard

5:30

Against the motion:

Aheer	Gotfried	Pitt
Anderson, W.	Hanson	Rodney
Barnes	Hunter	Schneider
Bhullar	Jean	Smith
Clark	Loewen	Starke
Cooper	MacIntyre	Stier
Cyr	McIver	Strankman
Drysdale	Nixon	Taylor
Ellis	Orr	van Dijken
Fildebrandt	Panda	Yao
Fraser		

Totals: For – 45 Against – 31

[Motion to adjourn debate on amendment A1 carried]

The Speaker: I would recognize the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the adjournment.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate on the main motion.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Constituency Week

- Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that, notwithstanding Standing Order 3(6), the only constituency week for the 2015 fall sitting shall be held

the week of November 9, 2015, with the Assembly reconvening on Monday, November 16, 2015.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Did you wish to speak to the motion?

Mr. Mason: Well, Madam Speaker, this simply moves the week to the week that includes Remembrance Day, and this is with a view to the fact that I'm sure all of us have important events to attend to on that Wednesday in our constituencies, so we feel that it is a more appropriate week to take the constituency break. I hope that members will support that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any others members wish to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's been quite the afternoon here in the House, and I'm sure folks have had a fair fill of hearing from me this afternoon.

An Hon. Member: It's never enough.

Mr. Cooper: Never enough.

I will be relatively brief. In fact, if we can make this very similar to the budget speech, where every time I stop they clap, that'd be great. Let's try.

Madam Speaker, I rise this evening just because I want to quickly highlight a couple of things. Members on this side of the House will certainly be supporting this motion as we fully agree with the importance of being in the constituency during that critical period of time for Remembrance Day. The first poppy ceremony was a great reminder this morning of the important sacrifice that's been made by so many before us. In some respects, you know, what we do here in the House, hopefully, will honour those who have gone before us in defending some of those freedoms and our ability to have such robust debate and discussion.

I do just want to raise a quick point with you, something that I know the table officers and other staff of this place have identified as one of the things that could be very helpful to them. I'm sure that the Government House Leader will be aware of this as he has also received, I would guess, notifications from the Speaker's office in the past around producing a sessional calendar immediately following an election. One of the big reasons why we're here and needing to move stuff around is because the government of today chose not to or was unable to or, whatever the case may be, didn't do that.

5:40

There are a number of things – and we spent a lot of time today talking about making the House work better – and I think that this is one of them, producing a sessional calendar. One of the recommendations that we made, that I spoke about earlier today, in the Restoring Trust document, that I will be happy to table tomorrow at the appropriate time, is just that, producing a sessional calendar so that all members of this Assembly, both on the government and the opposition side, all members of your staff in the Speaker's office, all of the table officers can schedule the efficiencies of this House right around that calendar. Not only producing the calendar: we've seen in years past times where there has been very little desire on behalf of the government to stay committed to that schedule.

I just wanted to highlight that very briefly today. This sessional calendar would have been very helpful. We even could have fixed this challenge in the previous session so that all of the members of the Assembly could have already been planning as if they would be in the constituency. I just wanted to highlight that for you tonight, and we will be supporting this move.

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

Seeing none, the Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Mason: No.

The Deputy Speaker: No? Then I will call the question on that.

[Government Motion 15 carried]

Evening Sittings

16. Mr. Mason moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) commencing November 23, 2015, the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings for consideration of government business for the duration of the 2015 fall sitting unless on motion by the Government House Leader made before 6 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned to the following sitting day.

[Government Motion 16 carried]

Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

17. Mr. Mason moved:

Be it resolved that Standing Order 19(1)(c) be waived and that the Speaker put every question necessary to dispose of the motion for an address in reply to the Lieutenant Governor's speech of June 15, 2015, on December 2, 2015, at 5:45 p.m. unless the debate on the motion is previously concluded.

[Government Motion 17 carried]

Provincial Fiscal Policies

13. Mr. Ceci moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate October 27: Mr. Cooper]

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other member wish to speak?

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Cooper: I think we've made some good progress today.

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, with that in view and in view of the limited progress on a number of items that we've made today, I move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:46 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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