



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, December 2, 2015

Day 27

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
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New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 2, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 6

Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act

[Adjourned debate December 1: Ms Phillips]

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak to one of the most important bills that this Legislature has faced this particular session. I'm pleased to see the leadership taken by this new government, leadership that was decidedly absent in the last government, who talked about it for years, did all kind of committee meetings, consulted, consulted, consulted, heard many different views, including the international community. It even went to the UN and the Queen of England, who actually sent support to the Farmworkers Union here in Alberta and sent her support for change that was long overdue. The civil liberties group in Alberta and nationally has sent its support, so not only once Albertans learned that we are still in the 19th century with respect to enforceable standards in agricultural workplaces, including the largest industrial operations anywhere in Alberta and right down to the so-called family farm, which actually employs many, many people in many different risky activities.

I applaud this government for having the courage to step forward. I, too, regret the lack of good communication about the family farm and some of the impacts that could be expected on the family farm.

Interestingly, at a reception that I just now came back from, two dairy farmers came up to me and said that they've had WCB, and one of their workers got injured, and they were pleasantly surprised by the length of physiotherapy he was funded for, eight weeks of physiotherapy, which very few insurance companies are prepared to cover. Of course, other insurance companies don't offer the no-fault insurance, where the operator, the owner, is protected from lawsuit. You can't bankrupt a farmer if you get injured because WCB is no-fault insurance.

These two dairy farmers also commented that near Red Deer just last week a 50-year-old man was crushed by a bull, and he's been off work for a week. He's getting back on his feet, but that farmer had no insurance, so this worker has been on his own, struggling. His wife is worried about income. They've got no income this week because he's been off work.

I can give you a number of stories over the years that I've gathered just because I took an interest in this early on after I got elected. I started to hear stories about Mexican Mennonite kids in southeastern Alberta who ostensibly are home-schooled. Their parents get a thousand dollars a year for home-schooling. What they're actually doing in summer months is quite different from going to school, though. They're actually out helping with potato gathering. They're helping with bean cropping. They're helping with animals in some cases. Of course, they're such a vulnerable population in some ways. They have some language challenges. They have some cultural sensitivities. They have some financial problems, and many of these Mexican Mennonite families don't

like to speak up. When they get injured, they just keep it all behind closed doors.

So not only do the children end up being placed at risk because the families need the income – and there are no child labour laws on these operations, so they can slip their children in to help them with the . . . [interjection] Yeah, I can actually introduce you to some Mexican Mennonites, and the chief of police down there in Taber and the head of the school district will tell you exactly what's happening down there.

Then, of course, there's Philippa Thomas, who has been in the news in the last couple of years. She had what looked like a minor finger injury in her workplace, a horse-riding stable in Calgary. It got infected, actually, some kind of serious nerve damage that went up her arm and has continued to go into her spinal cord and caused what's called a sympathetic dystrophy, that has left her incapacitated with pain. She's on long-term pain management, is unable to work, and this has been about 20 years now. They've spent about \$80,000 of their own money on trying to get the help she needs and the rehabilitation she needs and the financial support. Fortunately, her husband has a good job, and they've been able to manage this.

Then the famous story that was alluded to today: Lorna Chandler, whose husband died on Father's Day eight years ago. No coverage for him or the family, so she had to take him to court. She had no money, but fortunately she found a lawyer who was compassionate. For six years they went to court together. She finally got a settlement, and it bankrupted the feedlot that he was working at.

All these incidents and the increased awareness across Canada about the anomaly that is Alberta around farm worker safety, compensation for injury, labour code standards, obviously, child labour issues, have come home to roost. In spite of all these issues over 44 years the previous government managed to just push it to the side because that was their voter base, of course, and many of them didn't want to see a loss of their voter base even if it meant – especially if it meant, I guess – the farmers having to pay a little more than what they were.

They actually have to take out WCB, which is really quite reasonably priced. When I heard some of the prices that they're quoting, it's really pretty small, a few cents per hundred dollars of wage. And, of course, if you don't have an accident, you get a refund from WCB at the end of the year. All kinds of good reasons to take care of farm workers, and most farmers, most operators do that. They're responsible. They value their employees. They take care of them. They make sure they get holidays. No question that this is not a majority of farmers we're talking about or big operators even.

Another interesting anomaly down in Brooks is that the meat-packing plant on the north side of the road employs hundreds of workers, and they're all covered by workers' compensation.

An Hon. Member: Where?

Dr. Swann: The meat-packing plant on the north side of Brooks. All covered by insurance, all covered by WCB, all covered by occupational health and safety standards. You go across the road to the feedlot: 40 Mexican and other community workers there, no compensation, no occupational health and safety standards. Same company, but they can get away with it because the meat packing is not considered an agricultural operation. It's an industry. So there are these interesting inconsistencies that raise questions.

With respect to consultations, in my 10 years here the government of the past has attended many consultations with farmers, and they always came back with the same conclusion:

more education, more education. There's nothing wrong with education. It's an important element of safety and health.

As Judge Barley said after the Kevan Chandler inquiry – and this was unusual, to have an inquiry after a death because occupational health and safety cannot investigate deaths on agricultural operations. They do not have any jurisdiction. Whether you're electrocuted, poisoned, or crushed on a farming operation, OH and S cannot go in there. Sorry. It's out of our scope, so we actually don't investigate many of these deaths. We don't find the preventable changes that we could be putting in place. We don't learn from these accidents, and it's repeated to the tune of, on average, 18 per year, including three to five children every year. Can we do better? Yes, we can.

As Judge Barley said in his decision around the Kevan Chandler case: education is a key element; the other element is legislation. He called for legislation around standards. The government has done consultations. Every agricultural group in Alberta has had some consultations around this issue. The only question is: was the government willing to do anything? Actually, not.

7:40

I have a letter here from the crop sector working group from May 2015 where they talked about the March 23 meeting, the farm safety working group meeting.

In the last several months the most acceptable compromise we can see with this new government is option 1. This involves full coverage under the OH and S Act. With no technical rules initially agriculture's exemption from the act will be withdrawn. Initially OH and S officers would not have any rules upon which to issue orders or apply penalties. The industry in collaboration with OH and S would develop a set of core industry practices within a specified time frame. OH and S officers could then apply those sector-specific rules. This option would give the industry the leeway to work collaboratively on technical rules that could be broad and common to farming activities and specific to farming systems.

That's the crop sector, March 2015.

I've spoken repeatedly with the Alberta Federation of Agriculture. They represent over 40 producer groups. They've been at the table for many years, and they two years ago in their annual meeting said: pass a resolution; we want universal WCB. That's what the Alberta Federation of Agriculture said, and they want child labour standards. They find it offensive that children in southeastern Alberta are working in unsafe occupations just because the families need them to and are not going to school as they're supposed to be as home-schoolers because there are very few people to enforce home-schooling.

Those are a few anecdotes that have led me to the place where I am today, to say that the whole question about the small family farm and intrusion on the small family farm is a red herring. It is a red herring. This is not going to interfere. This is only going to make things safer, and the rub off from the rest of the operations will eventually trickle down to the small family farm. It is not going to impede children being involved in the chores, children being trained.

By the way, I was a ranch hand for five years in my late teens and early 20s. I know some of the risks that are associated with farming and ranching – my dad was a rancher for about 25 years – and will never forget being on the back of a hay bailer when the linchpin slipped out of the tractor hitch and I went careening down the hill in the front of the stack of hay. I was wondering whether to stay there and wait for the thing to catch into the ground and then get thrown off or whether to jump. I eventually decided to jump, fortunately, because that hay bail just did a complete flip, and if I had been in there, I certainly would have been injured if not something more serious.

I was quite game to drive tractors. I loved to drive tractors. I was 17 at the time, so I had some maturity. Gee, I drove on side hills. I didn't know what angle I could handle, so I just kept testing it and testing it. Finally, I said: this doesn't make much sense because if it does tip over, I found out what the angle is that it can't tolerate, but I may not live to tell the story. So many risks. I guess I would say that as a child, as a young person without experience, without much training – I knew how to drive; I knew how to drive a car, and I had driven tractors for several years – I was always testing the limits. I was always trying to do more and wanted to please my boss. For me to say, "No; I can't do that job; that doesn't look quite safe to me," that would never enter my mind, to say no, because the boss, who hired me for the summer, should know what I can do, and if he's asking me to do something that's a little bit extra and dangerous, I'll try it, not really realizing the level of risk that I was taking.

So from that point of view I feel very strongly that getting a sense of what this bill is really about is important and not being distracted by the notion that it will cost a little more. Yeah, safety costs a little more. Workers' compensation, protecting the owner and the ranch hand does cost a little bit, but it protects people from longer term suffering and, really, financial breakdown, financial collapse in some cases. You know, treating staff fairly means in some cases a holiday, in some cases giving them the evening off even though it is harvest season and you want to get through as much as you can, recognizing when people are fatigued and they might be at risk of injury just due to fatigue and acknowledging that. When it's all about production, when it's all about finishing the crop, then safety sometimes comes second, and I understand that. Injuries happen. But let's be reasonable about what are, in the 21st century, decent labour standards, employment standards, child labour, compensation, and occupational health and safety standards. Do we know what is reasonable in the various work sites across Alberta? No. I don't think we do, and we've got a year to find out.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You're questioning under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Ceci: I am. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View: when you read out that crop sector letter to us that was on your computer, it sounded to me like their recommendation mirrored exactly the approach this government is taking. Would that be your view, or is there something I missed there?

Dr. Swann: I would have to look more closely at what they are agreeing to. They said option 2. I don't remember correlating option 2 with what your government is doing. What I'm saying is that they were consulted in March. They agreed that this would be the direction they wanted to go, one of the two options your government presented. I'd be happy to table that, Mr. Speaker, to let everybody see.

Consultations have been going on. The beef producers have been in consultation with this government over health and safety and compensation issues. I'm sorry; the claim that there hasn't been any consultation: there's been a decade of consultation. This government has made efforts to consult, and it's only been a few months that they've had a chance to consult. They haven't had anything like the 10 years that this government had to consult, the 44 years, in fact, but they've done a credible job in attempting to

get through the tremendous array and variety of ranching and farming operations.

The Speaker: Any other questions? The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, hon. member. We share many of the same positions here. You know, I wanted to say, too, that this bill doesn't do anything to – we don't want to change the family farm. Okay? So – listen – we're going to delineate between what it means to be a parent on a farm and what it means to be an employer on a farm.

The Speaker: Hon. member, could I clarify? Standing Order 29(2)(a), please.

Mr. Coolahan: I'm going to ask a question, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry.

The Speaker: Please.

Mr. Coolahan: I haven't been around as long as the hon. member, of course, but maybe you could enlighten us on this. When a lot of the labour legislation came into being here, when it was written, I'm assuming that a lot of the professions that have some exemptions, like police officers and whatnot, on working hours and working days were likely given basic rights first, and then the consultation happened afterwards, where you can decide what exemptions are required for specific industries.

Dr. Swann: Well, indeed. Almost every bill we pass in this House is incomplete in the sense that the regulations have to follow the legislation. There are details. There are fine points. We always say that, of course, the devil is in the details. Let's wait and see what they're actually going to do.

But we need some guidance. We've got some guidance about this, and with the amendments that this government is going to bring forward, I think that if we're not politicizing this thing totally out of whack, we should be able to move this forward.

The Speaker: Are there any other questions for the member under 29(2)(a)?

Hearing none, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to rise and speak against Bill 6. It is always a true pleasure to represent the views of my constituents here in this Assembly. I just wish I could be doing so today under better circumstances. Wouldn't it have been nice if the views of all farmers and ranchers could have been expressed before we got to second reading of this bill that so drastically impacts their lives? Wouldn't it be nice if we were sitting here discussing carefully crafted, respectful proposals that were created with the input of our experts in the industry, our experts the farming families? Instead, we are discussing a litany of flaws, concerns, and short-sighted ways in which this legislation does not reflect the way of life you'll see out there on our province's farms and ranchland.

7:50

I'd like to remind my colleagues of Dwight Eisenhower's wise words: "Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil and you're a thousand miles from the corn field." Well, Mr. Speaker, we're much closer than a thousand miles away from our province's wheat, canola, and barley fields. You see them the minute you head out on the highways in any direction from this building. You know what? You find these shared values within the city limits as well.

Farming influence runs deep in this province. Keep in mind that most urban centres today were once small agricultural towns many years ago.

Mr. Speaker, you and I jointly represent the urban area of the city of Medicine Hat, and I'm sure you're hearing about this issue every bit as much as I am. My office has seen over 1,900 e-mails and letters from deeply concerned citizens of all stripes just since Friday. This isn't a rural-urban issue. I've seen this, and I think you have, too. This is a trust issue. This is an issue of a government more concerned with ramming through its out-of-touch agenda than actually listening – listening – to what Albertans want.

Given the realities of farm life that surround us, how much more inexcusable is it that this government did not bother to go out and consult with those for whom farming runs in their blood? If the government is now surprised by the outcry we hear just outside these Legislature steps, it can only be attributed to the fact that this government never bothered to ask in the first place. And make no mistake: the lives of farmers and ranchers are intrinsically tied to their business and to their land. Their families are not just workers on a job site; they are so much more. They are stewards of the land, the best stewards. They are caretakers of, in so many cases, multigenerational farms that have been tasked through the decades with sharing some of the most valuable skills and values imaginable. Mr. Speaker, the grandfathers and grandmothers of these families came here many generations ago, when there was far less than you now see.

I'd like to share a story from one of the thousands of concerned constituents that I've heard from. As you know, the railway opened up this land to settlers and homesteaders, but in the early 1900s there wasn't much else greeting these people when they arrived. This man told me an incredible story of how his family arrived by rail, then walked 25 miles with all their belongings and children to their plot of land, a plot of land that they had never, ever seen. This man has no recollection of that long, hard walk because he was just a baby at the time. Can you imagine? Can you imagine that, Mr. Speaker?

I hope that stories like this will demonstrate to the NDP members across the floor exactly why the people of Cypress county, the county of Forty Mile, Medicine Hat, Redcliff, Bow Island and Foremost are so darned proud of their heritage. I hope you'll see why they care so deeply for their way of life and what was so painstakingly earned. They carved these fields out of rough, untamed wilderness to provide abundance for all, and provide they did. They provided blessings for posterity as they fed the province, the country, and other parts of the world.

Today we are left with 47,000 farms, and it's with a heavy heart that I say that this number is shrinking. It's shrinking because the local family farm is becoming more and more of a challenge. I can assure you that I've heard this from scores of my own constituents in Cypress-Medicine Hat and many across Alberta, that this government's actions have already hurt our farmers and our ranchers. Sometimes it feels like they and indeed all of the productive sector are being hit from all directions. From drastic labour market meddling to tax increases on their inputs like gas and utilities, they find it harder to build each and every day. They find it harder to innovate and grow every day. They find it harder to prosper, provide, and share their abundance every day.

Mr. Speaker, now we face sweeping, broad, incompletely considered omnibus legislation that makes it harder for our farmers and ranchers to even pass along this way of life to their children. Again the struggles mount. I cannot stand by as an entire way of life, that has carried this great province for so long, comes under fire by a government that is fundamentally out of touch with Albertans' values. They deserve a voice, and if the government and

this Premier won't go out there to meet them, I will bring their concerns here.

I know that we heard about the consultation sessions across the province, but from what I've seen, these have produced many more questions than answers. Government officials seem to be doing more damage control than actually providing an opportunity for constructive input. Any so-called consultation that may occur once the bill has reached its final draft is patronizing, at best, and a meaningless show, at worst. For those lucky enough to get into them – and I can assure you that the Cypress-Medicine Hat meeting filled up within hours – it seems they are more pronouncement sessions than consultation sessions.

Mr. Speaker, the horse has left the barn. It's long gone, in fact, and the government's solution seems to be proudly boasting and making a big show of this government's ability to close the gate.

I'd like to share with this Assembly a variety of concerns I've heard. They are common themes, so common that I cannot believe the government is now so baffled to be hearing them. One constituent, writing about her greenhouse operation, says, and I quote:

Increases projected to minimum wage plus the cost of Bill 6 plus increases in corporate taxes will make greenhouse operations totally unprofitable. Prices received for greenhouse product are subject to supply and demand and have not increased in many years. Last year was our highest production year, with a very low dollar return. The family farm cannot pay wages, holiday pay, corporate tax, loan payments, et cetera, with money it cannot generate. We have recently transitioned our family farm to our children, and we have great fear they will not be able to sustain themselves.

End quote.

8:00

I've also heard from two brothers, ages seven and eight. If I'm not mistaken, they're from the Leduc area, so I'm sure that their hon. member on the government side has seen this as well. Together with their family they've reached out to us because their own government MLAs refuse to speak for them to the NDP leadership. With some help from his mom the first young boy writes:

I like to go and catch my own horse to ride or help move cows. Every spring I look forward to petting and playing with the baby horses and calves. I like fencing during the summer. Living on a farm lets me learn how things work and how to fix them. I look forward to joining 4-H in the future. I hope these chances are not taken away.

His younger brother writes:

I like riding my horse, checking cows with my papa and at my nana's arena. Every year I look forward to feeding the baby calves. In a few years I hope to join 4-H. I hope this isn't taken away.

And still another concerned mother writes:

As parents it's our duty and privilege to raise our children to be responsible, respectable members of society. Parents, children, grandparents, extended family, and neighbours work together to manage the land and provide food for society. It is a wonderful way for our children to learn this responsibility. The family that works together is stronger and beneficial to all of society.

You see, Mr. Speaker, farmers have understood for many years that to be successful, you must rely on your family, your community, and your neighbours. Given this emphasis on community and family do you not think that farmers care every bit as much about safety as we do in this House? Some may see farms and ranches as simply workplaces to be regulated, but I can assure you that these farmers and ranchers see them as their homes first and foremost. They take pride in their operations, and their love for their calling extends to wanting to see their way of life protected

and their families protected. Not one of us here could care nearly as much as a parent raising his or her child to grow up and follow in their footsteps.

To impose vast, ill-defined regulations on these groups is to risk cutting out all those elements and values that make the family farm successful and that have made Alberta successful. Do we restrict the home life of a child who contributes to his family farm? Do we tell neighbours chipping in for their friends that they cannot contribute to the harvest if they first do not meet every single requirement of a complex code that was never written to apply to farms and ranches in the first place?

I've heard this government claim that they will iron out all these complex details and more if you just write them a blank cheque and give them authority to fix all this through rules and regulations. No, Mr. Speaker. Since the election we've discovered a number of previously held NDP ideals that suddenly become – how should we put it? – flexible. One of these previously held ideals from their time in opposition was staunch opposition to the previous government's overuse of the practice of writing broad, undefined legislation, then using regulatory . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Under 29(2)(a), which is to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech, are there any questions for the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat?

Mr. Cooper: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The question I have for the member is: would he like to continue concluding his thoughts?

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, hon. member. In the three and a half years that I shared the opposition lounge with the four members, it is disheartening that a shared desire to have a government that was more open, transparent, listening, and fully consulting has been totally disregarded.

Mr. Speaker, one of these previously held ideals from their time in opposition was their staunch opposition to the previous government's overuse of this practice of writing broad, undefined legislation, then using regulatory authority to carve out the details. These four opposition colleagues at the time were right to oppose this. Decisions of such scope and magnitude were meant to be discussed in public, not behind closed doors. Previous cabinets had become dependent on this way of governing, to the detriment of the province and democracy and, as I heard a bit of last night, to the detriment of the party itself. How things change when you get to the other side of the aisle. It's sad, but that's what it seems.

They asked us to trust them to get it right behind closed doors once the bill passes, but I have to marvel at just how much trust the NDP feels is still out there. With backdoor PST taxes on everything, rapidly hiked costs of utilities, and now attempting to slip this bill past our farmers and ranchers without any oversight from the very citizens it affects, I think it's safe to say that the reservoir of trust has been greatly depleted. Mr. Speaker, if this government hopes to earn that trust back, I hope they will tap the brakes on this bill, hear the concerns of those they govern, and get this right.

It makes me think of before I was elected in 2012, when the PC government had put in bills 19, 36, 50, and 24. Here we are, a new government later – obviously, the voters spoke and showed that it was time for change – and we are doing the very, very same things. In Cypress-Medicine Hat, Mr. Speaker, in our Cypress Centre, in opposition to Bill 36, the last government called a town hall and did exactly what I think this government did in Grande Prairie three or four days ago. They had about 300, 400 landowners in the building, immediately divided them up into five or six smaller groups, didn't give them a chance to convey their thoughts in full, and at the end

of the meeting the government consultant went to the middle of the room, and the words I remember were these. “Albertans, we have heard you loud and clear: kill Bill 36.” Well, we still have Bill 36, but we do not have a Progressive Conservative government.

What I heard from 1,500 people on the steps of the Legislature, what I heard from 1,900 e-mails from Cypress-Medicine Hat and Medicine Hat in just four or five days was: kill Bill 6. We weren’t offered the full chance to be consulted. We are concerned about how this affects our ability to live our lives, raise our families, and share our prosperity with our communities, our neighbours, our country, and the world. I remember before the 2012 election a sign with a line through the PC. Today I see a line through Bill 6 and the New Democrat logo. Are we repeating the past?

8:10

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Under 29(2)(a)?

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) has passed.
The Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak on this bill. I want to say first of all that I believe that in this entire Chamber there’s not a single person that wants a bill that’s going to make life worse for any farm family in this province. I think the members across the aisle know that you’ve got a lot of goodwill here. I think that you guys are kicking butt on the social issues – you are – but you’re not kicking butt on this one. You’re not.

I will say that everybody has a different lens through which they view these issues. Certainly, we’ve got a lot of members from my colleagues over here to the right who come from a rural background, and they get that visceral reaction about this bill from their constituents: thousands of e-mails, calls, that sort of thing. I will also say – and I don’t want to do any inflamed rhetoric here – that there are certainly members across the aisle, despite what some folks say, that certainly have that rural knowledge and those folks in rural areas. I know what you’re hearing in terms of feedback as well. And then someone like me, who’s an urban girl, comes from a slightly different mindset. We all have a different lens, you know. I look at a lot of issues through my lens as a journalist for 25 years and as an urban MLA.

I was lucky enough to go with our former ag minister and spend some time touring the Medicine Hat area. I was particularly taken with some of the things the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat said about his experience in talking to some folks out in that area. In fact, that’s where I had my first television job, at CHAT television in Medicine Hat. I did the news, the weather, the radio, everything. That’s what you do in a small town when you’re starting out in broadcasting.

I had lots of opportunities to talk to people out there. I think that every urban MLA should have the opportunity to do that, to get on a plane, commercial, and go out to some of these rural areas and have those discussions with people. You can call them consultations if you want. I don’t really think of them as consultations. I think of them as going out and meeting the folks that live in your province that have issues in different areas and talking to them, in fact, about some of the successes that we’ve had from our agriculture ministry in the past.

I talked to a guy out in I think it’s the Little Bow area who had a family farm that was failing. He got some grant money from Agriculture Alberta. He switched his crop, and now he’s one of the largest exporters of lentils and hard peas to India. Fantastic stories of success out there. There’s a family farm out that way where they

make a hundred per cent of North America’s catnip, something I didn’t know before. Some wonderful stories I heard out there.

You know, when I listen to those stories, when we visited the folks with the greenhouses out there, I particularly had an affinity for them because there were some good Dutch families out there in the greenhouse business. Certainly, they’ve got a lot of concerns. I a hundred per cent agree with the idea that when you’re working your butt off 16 hours a day in a greenhouse and then you’re hit with a whole bunch of tax changes and things like that that affect your business, you’re going to feel pretty crappy.

I think, you know, that in order to be able to launch into this whole consultation piece, we have to talk about the fact that when we went out on these tours, the idea that we were sitting down and listening to people was one of the most important things we did as MLAs. When my colleague for Calgary-Mountain View talked about the Mexican Mennonite children and the child labour and safety codes and standards, I don’t think that there’s anyone who will disagree that those things are important and that we have to have that conversation. I think it’s an important conversation to have, and I don’t think anyone is arguing that you shouldn’t have that conversation. I do respectfully have a bit of a problem with: the reason the PCs didn’t do anything was because we were worried about losing our voter base. I don’t really like to consider the term “voter base.” I’d like to consider those folks as farm families, who have a challenging job out there, and maybe we shouldn’t call them the voter base. Maybe we should call them Albertan families who are working really hard to make a living and are worried about that living being taken away from them. It’s not politics.

You know, when we talk about a rural versus urban issue, it’s an issue for all of us. What happens in these areas is an issue for all of us. I came upon that demonstration, the protest with the 1,500 families. I walked through the crowd at the back for a little while, and I came upon the agriculture minister having a very heated conversation with a number of farm families. I felt bad for him because I don’t believe for a minute that he had bad intentions with this. I don’t at all. But I also think – and I want to take you back to a little episode from my past that I like to call Bill 10.

An Hon. Member: It’s that week.

Ms Jansen: Yeah. It’s that week.

You know, here was a situation where some folks with the best of intentions came up with a piece of legislation, and we all jumped in there to try and make something out of this dog’s breakfast, and that wasn’t an easy thing to do.

Dr. Swann: These folks may need a brief explanation.

Ms Jansen: Of Bill 10? I don’t think too many people need an explanation of Bill 10. That’s just a hunch.

I’ll say this. Then all of a sudden everybody had their hair on fire and were running around going: oh, my God, let’s throw some amendments in there, and we’ll make this better. In fact, it just became a bigger dog’s breakfast, and the Premier was out of town, so there’s a weird parallel there as well. I remember thinking at the time – and this is a cautionary tale, and I say this in the whole framework of trying to be helpful – that you do have to live with history you make.

There’s going to come a point in time where, we’ve already seen now, that some amendments are coming in. For some of the things that got some of these hard-working farm families so upset, now we’re seeing amendments: “Oh, we actually didn’t mean this. We’re going to do this.” I get that. You’re trying to fix something because you know that it’s flawed, and that’s a natural reaction.

The thing is that as much as we talk about consultation, when we bring something in and then we decide to consult after the fact, you're going to have a front yard full of angry people, hurt people, people who feel betrayed, and people who feel like: why did we have to drive 12 hours here and back to raise our blood pressure on the steps of the Legislature in order to get someone to finally listen to us. That is a problem. We faced it, and you're facing it now.

You have an opportunity, and I say this to all the folks there. I know that there are folks on that bench who are looking at the way this whole process has been unfolding and are saying, "Good grief; we didn't talk to any farm families?" or "We didn't talk to enough farm families?" They're feeling like that was a mistake, and I get that because we lived the Bill 10 experience, and finally, when Albertans stood up and had their say and said, "We're not going to take this; it's not right," we then pulled it. We went back, and a consultation process began.

I think that there is an opportunity here. I believe that intelligent leadership is the ability to say: "You know what? Look, we're all going to screw up all the time." So over the course of the next four years it's going to happen many times where we misjudge. We misjudged on our legislation. We go in with the best of intentions, and then we have to turn around and say: "You know what? That wasn't the right the fit. We tried to consult with as many people as possible." But when the ag minister was standing out front and was talking to these families, families were saying to him, "Who did you consult with?" He was offering a list of the folks that he consulted with, and they said to him, "Well, why didn't you consult with any of the farm families?" He didn't really have anything to say, and I felt bad for him because I'm not sure that he was in complete control of the consultation process, and that happens sometimes.

8:20

So there is an opportunity here. There's an opportunity to pull this, to go back, and to sit down with these folks, who want good legislation. But they know, as we know, that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all policy, that we need to sit down and have conversations. There are some amendments coming down the pipe. I know that my colleagues have some. We have some. I know that you folks have some amendments. That's good, to have that conversation. We're at the end of our legislative session now.

Ms Hoffman: Only if you stop talking.

Ms Jansen: I'm not yet. I'm not stopping yet. I'll stop when the bell rings, and that's my prerogative.

What I'll say is this. There is such a short period of time now to talk about these issues, and I think that there are some important conversations to be had and there's some goodwill to be won back. Why not take a little bit of time and sit back down at the table, let cooler heads prevail, have that conversation, and bring in a stronger bill in the spring session? I think that there's an opportunity there to say – you know, you can say that everyone can shoulder the blame for this. There are lots of folks: "We all should have done more consultation. We all should have asked more questions." But if we walk away now and take some time to consult, then everybody has a chance to have their voices heard. I don't want to stir up any: this bill is doing this, and this bill is doing that.

All I'm saying here is that we have an opportunity here to say: "Look, let's take a closer look at everything. Let's let everybody have their say." We've got 1,500 to 2,000 farm families who stood out front and said, you know: why wasn't my opinion respected and valued in this whole process? They're upset, and they have a right to be heard.

I think that for those of us city folk who are watching this unfold, you know, from my experience in the consultation process I know that – and we've learned the hard way on this – when you present people with a solution before you've articulated the problem, then you've got a problem. That, essentially, is what we have here. This is one of the things that – I will be quite honest – our government was terrible at. We often provided people with a solution to a problem they didn't know they had.

I'm saying that here we have an opportunity to sit down and to have that conversation. It doesn't have to occur over a long period of time. We're back in session in mid-February. I would bet you any money that we could sit down in January, have some very good conversations with people, look at the nuances of this so that we're not looking at a one-size-fits-all policy, talk about the amendments that you folks have on the back burner, talk about the amendments that my colleagues in the Wildrose have, talk about some of our amendments, and, especially, talk to the farm families, who are directly affected by this, and some of the other stakeholders who are now coming forward and are upset. Let's have that conversation in another venue and then come back in the spring session and take another crack at this.

The Speaker: Are there any comments or questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Member for Calgary-North West for her comments. I thought it was a pretty good insight from one of the veteran members of this Legislature. I thought her comparison to Bill 10 was quite apt, all content aside, in terms of process, in terms of perhaps consultation going wrong and losing track of things and the need to sometimes step back, recognize your mistakes, consult with those whom you haven't consulted with, talk to those who have maybe been your opponents. If she could talk a bit more about her experience in that process. I know that she was intimately involved with it. I think there are valuable lessons for this entire House from that process.

Ms Jansen: I thank the member. You know, I want to talk a little bit about having a large caucus and having those conversations about what happens around the caucus table and all of those voices you have. Everybody wants to have an opportunity to speak to this. You feel the pain of this, whether you live in an urban area or you live in a rural area. I'm guessing that there are some folks on the other side who maybe feel differently about this bill but have been encouraged to vote a particular way and not express the opinion they really feel, because you've been told that you're part of a team, and as part of a team you've got to do what the team wants to do. We've heard that narrative before, and I think that we experienced that on Bill 10. There were certainly folks who had differing opinions but, you know, had that narrative: we've got to do this for the team.

I would say that there's going to come a point down the road where you're going to be in conversations or you're going to be looking at re-election, and folks are going to be saying to you: why did you not speak up? I think there's going to be a come-to-Jesus moment there for you. You have an opportunity now to say: "Look, I'm not being disloyal to my government when I say that I'm not comfortable with this. I'm not comfortable with it right now. It doesn't mean I don't think we're headed in the right direction, but I want to take another crack at this, to go back and look at it again." If you are one of those members who wants that, please, you know, seize the moment and express yourself. At the end of the day, you have to go back to your individual constituencies, and you have to answer to the folks who live in them. Your first job is to be a legislator – a legislator – not a member of a party and not a member of a team. It's to be a legislator.

And every piece of legislation – and I don't vote with my caucus all the time. I think that's obvious. As a legislator, for every motion – and I've voted with the government on certain motions – that comes across my desk, the first question I ask myself is: is this good for the people in my constituency and the people in this province? If I can't answer yes, then I'm not going to get up with the team and support an idea that might be good for their constituents. That's our job, to be legislators. We are elected not by the rest of our team but by the people in our constituency, and we have to answer to them.

I would say in response to the member's question that probably the biggest take-away that I had from the whole Bill 10 experience was to trust your instinct. You are here because you have that political instinct. Use it. Trust it. Trust that inner voice, and when you look at every bill, every motion, every piece of legislation, every amendment that crosses your desk, keep in mind that your first responsibility is to provide good legislation for the people in this province.

Mr. Coolahan: I want to ask the hon. member: is this bill good for paid farm workers and their families?

Ms Jansen: I thank the member for the comment. As I said before, there are good pieces of this bill. I don't think this is a bill you need to throw out wholesale, but I think that there are pieces that are flawed, and there's a consultation process that didn't happen the way it needed to happen. By getting folks back to the table, you can keep the strong pieces, and you can build on the pieces that are flawed. In that way, you go back, take a little bit of time, and take a more measured, thoughtful approach.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'd ask the indulgence of the House. I've been asked for a brief introduction. I need unanimous support to allow the member to introduce a guest.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: I recognize Calgary-South East. Please proceed.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks, members. I'd like to introduce Bill Jarvis. Bill Jarvis ran against myself as a Wildrose candidate in 2011. You know what? It was the first election I ran in, and I must say that he's a gentleman. I know he's a dedicated father and husband. He's been a successful trainer and has trained many professionals. I just wanted to introduce him and ask for the warm welcome of the House. Please rise.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you'll let me, actually, Bill Jarvis is here representing the Calgary-Foothills constituency office. Thank you, Member for Calgary-South East, for beating me to that introduction.

8:30 Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 6

Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act

(continued)

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, you may be wondering why a guy from Calgary cares about farming.

Mr. Yao: Well, you like to eat, right?

Mr. Panda: Yeah. Being a 30-year oil and gas guy, I was in a dilemma about this bill in the last couple of weeks. When we talk about safety, it's above all. It is nonnegotiable. For someone like me, a member of APEGA, it is unethical to compromise the safety of anyone, whether they're in your care and custody or not. But there are a few things, Mr. Speaker, we need to consider here: trust, fairness, equity for all. What I'm hearing, myself and my constituency office manager, from my constituents is that they feel that farmers are being discriminated against.

It seem this government is applying a double standard for one sector of society versus the farmers. Specifically, I'm talking about the climate change plan. Not very long ago the Premier announced that plan, and she claimed that they had consensus among all stakeholders. She had nice window dressing behind her, lining up all the people from downtown Calgary and environmental activists and so on, but in this particular case the stakeholders are missing. They are coming here to protest, so that moved me to speak in their support.

Also, after hearing from the Member for Calgary-North West that legislators should listen to their constituents, being her MLA – I actually have constituents in this House. After listening to her speech, I suspect I'll be in trouble if I don't speak along the same lines that she spoke a few minutes ago, particularly after she expressed her own experience of supporting bills unknowingly in a wrong way during her last term. So she actually gave words of wisdom to all the new NDP MLAs: pause and do the right thing. I'm taking her counsel, too, on this. I also have an extra benefit of sitting next to veterans like the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, who is a lifelong agrarian, so when he says something, there is credibility and authenticity. I have lots of respect for him.

From my own experience, Mr. Speaker, I grew up in a village in southern India, and my family did farming. Those are very fertile lands there. Unlike in North America, we don't have large-area farms there. By law the size of the farms there are limited to units of 40 acres for a household of wife and husband. I was actively involved in farming. I still have some family land there which belongs to me, so I'm proud to say that I'm a farmer, too. When I grew up, as a kid I worked on the farm helping my dad. I grew up in a joint family with my uncles and my cousins. We all worked together, and every day before I went to school and after I came back from school, I helped on the dairy farm and also the agricultural farm.

So with that background I feel strongly about the issues and concerns raised by the farmers, and I'm not supporting Bill 6 for the reasons that I'm going to explain to you now. Of all the departments that government is administering, agriculture is the most diverse. You know that, Mr. Speaker. You come from Medicine Hat, and southern Alberta is predominantly an agriculture-based economy. That is why it is so stable now as opposed to the cyclical economy of oil and gas. You know what goes on in a farmer's life day in and day out. Safety on the farm is of utmost importance, and the loss of just one life or any injury is simply one too many. We all agree about that. I know that members opposite feel strongly about that, and we are not disputing that. We support them on that. We are here to help. We'll help them to make the bill right.

Farmers and ranchers, we all know, put the food on the table that Albertans and Canadians eat each and every day, three times a day in my case. I remember that every time I have food, and Calgarians are telling me that we should not bite the hand that feeds us. Mr. Speaker, there is no farmer in Alberta who doesn't want their operation to be as safe as possible. Nobody cares more about farm

safety than the moms and dads who operate them and call them home. The gap between the NDP's Bill 6 and common-sense Alberta farmers is that this bill is legislating first and consulting next. That's what I heard from the farmers on Monday.

An Hon. Member: Educate, not legislate.

Mr. Panda: Yeah, educate. Legislation is not the ultimate solution.

Agriculture is a vital part of Alberta's economy, which makes it shocking that the government has decided to introduce legislation as comprehensive as Bill 6 without in-depth consultation. There may be some consultation, but it's not enough. That's what we are saying. According to the NDP plan they'll be implementing this bill and its wide-reaching impacts in less than 45 days from the time it was tabled in this Assembly. Looking at the calendar, realistically, we'll be lucky to have five days of debate in this House before we end the fall session.

For example, these changes include participation in WCB. The WCB is an institution that even the current government has said needs reform. Then why not fix it first before making farmers and ranchers join it. In any case, farmers have been telling us that many of them have private insurance well beyond the scope of WCB and that in many ways it is superior to what WCB provides to injured workers, but Bill 6 doesn't care. Every January 1 they'll be paying for WCB, whether it is better or worse than what employers already have. Has this government done any consultation with these farmers and ranchers to ask how they currently operate when it comes to insurance for their workers? Perhaps, if this government had focused more on listening, they would understand the widespread processes already in place.

8:40

The focus on WCB in this legislation is especially puzzling because on October 30, 2012, the now Premier stated:

What we've heard from a number of members, at least on this side of the House from all three parties, is that we're all very acutely aware that the [WCB] does not function in the way we would like it to – there is a fairly broad understanding amongst injured workers that it's pretty hard to get a fair shake out of the Workers' Compensation Board – and that, really, what we would love to be doing is reforming the system as a whole.

This is from *Hansard*. That's what the current Premier said then, Mr. Speaker.

So if this board is deeply flawed and deserves to be reformed, as the Premier has stated in the past, then why not fix it before forcing farmers into it? Is this government not doing a huge disservice to the tens of thousands of Albertans you're now burdening with forced WCB coverage, especially when Albertans, as she said, can't get a fair shake out of it? The Premier has actively demonstrated against the WCB. So what are we to conclude the government thinks of farmers when this government has no problem making WCB mandatory for them a month from now? With the additional costs through increases in electricity rates, gas taxes, unknown OH and S compliance costs, and now mandatory WCB costs there is no question that this government's policies will be pushing farms out of business. It's just a matter of how many.

Bill 6 doesn't care about that. The manner in which the bill has been proposed, Mr. Speaker, has the appearance of making up the rules on the fly. At the very least, Bill 6 should go to a legislative committee so they can hear from the actual producers and industry members in order to mitigate the possible unintended consequences. The NDP government quite simply cannot afford to neglect consulting stakeholders prior to crafting the legislation. The Alberta NDP government must recognize the distinction between the small family farm and the large commercial operation, which

will help them gain an understanding of the multitude of differences in the way that they function.

What we are seeing is this government, which vowed to be more open and transparent, doing just the opposite. After they came to power, they're just doing the opposite.

This past week we have seen hundreds and hundreds of farmers protesting at the Legislature, at the government's own consultation session in Grande Prairie, and at the numerous town hall meetings throughout Alberta. The grassroots momentum against this bill has yet to peak, Mr. Speaker, has yet to peak. We'll see that tomorrow. We're seeing a strong surge of Albertans demanding consultation on this legislation. The Premier should not make it a prestige issue. We should do the right thing of listening to the farmers and fixing the bill before we implement it.

Mr. Speaker, our provincial neighbours have working legislation models that make clear distinctions between large commercial operators and family farms, that could and should be studied to understand what does and doesn't work. The truth is that farming legislation cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution. That's what the Member for Calgary-North West also said.

What is needed more than anything with farm safety legislation is the time to make sure that we get this legislation right. Alberta has one of the world's most productive agricultural economies, supporting the livelihood of tens of thousands of Albertans. Agriculture is also responsible for a great deal of the province's renewable revenues and billions in economic activity, this even before we count the tremendous spinoff benefits to other sectors, Mr. Speaker. Agriculture has existed sustainably as one of our enduring industries since much before our time, even before our inception as a province. So it is safe to say that all farmers and ranchers would agree that their livelihood is one that goes beyond nine to five – it's not a routine nine to five job – and one that poses many challenges and risks.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, my sole question to my hon. colleague is: would you like to complete your thoughts?

Mr. Panda: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The dedicated people who devote their lives to farming and ranching in Alberta deserve nothing less than the due diligence of proper, proactive consultation on any legislation of this importance. Drafting legislation and then consulting is simply putting the cart before the buffalo, I say, because that's how I grew up. On our farms we had cows and buffaloes back in India. The bulls were used for tilling, so I would say that it's equal to putting the cart before the horse.

Mr. Speaker, now it's all about the fairness. Are we here to just bring some legislation, whether it is complete . . .

Mr. Yao: I don't think he's listening.

Mr. Panda: I'll wait.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I thought you had so much more to say.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I was just wondering: is it the right thing to ram through the legislation which is incomplete, which is not fair to the farmers, who are feeding us every day, day in and day out, or should we take a pause and then consult them, listen to the experts? That's the right way to do it, and if the government is taking credit for bringing in the climate change plan after thorough consultations with everybody, why not do the same thing with the farmers? Why are we applying double standards? Why are we treating them as

second-class citizens? Is it the fair thing to do? Is it a Canadian value? I don't think so. One of the reasons I moved to Canada is that we treat everyone, including the farmers, fairly, but in this case that's not what I'm hearing.

I suggest and I encourage my neighbouring riding members from Calgary-Hawkwood and my young friend from Calgary-Shaw and other members on the opposite side to do the right thing. In fact, the Member for Calgary-North West actually eloquently explained her own personal experience when she supported a bill which now she has second thoughts on, and she shared something on social media of her pain going through those forceful commitments to support a bill which she didn't actually buy in to. If you are going through the same dilemma, here is your time to speak your inner voice and do the right thing and to be fair to the farmers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, hon. member. I wonder if you would give us some insight into whether you've ever worked on a farm where there was no occupational health and safety standard or compensation for injury. Have you worked on a farm with that?

Mr. Panda: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. I know you are a doctor. I'm an engineer. Let's play to our own personal experiences in life. I actually worked on the farm. I don't know whether you worked on the farm or not.

Dr. Swann: Did it have occupational health and safety?

Mr. Panda: I'm coming to that.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think it best that you direct to the chair.

8:50

Mr. Panda: Thank you, sir.

When I talk about farmers' issues, Mr. Speaker, I am talking from my personal experience, from my own involvement. As a doctor the hon. member might have given birth to babies here, but as a farmer's son I actually helped my dad in pulling out the baby cows and all, so I feel very strongly about farmers' issues.

Coming to OHS, I... [Mr. Panda's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Hon. members, as the hour gets on I find that the tensions get a little higher as the clock ticks by. My apologies to the member that I wasn't entirely listening to the comments that were going through me to the House, but I was looking for some guidance with respect to a clearer definition of 29(2)(a) but wasn't able to do that.

In the meantime I'd heard three members in the House reference Medicine Hat, so that brought some things – as I thought about 29(2)(a), an old saying came back to me, which was stuck in my 4-H days: head to clearer thinking, heart to greater loyalty. I couldn't remember the third one. Health. Health to better living.

Mr. Panda: You are taking up with the farmers, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. I am thankful for that.

The Speaker: Thank you. An observation.

The next member is – my apologies for that departure – the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good evening, everyone. It's a pleasure to be here with you tonight and talk about this very interesting bill that we've had delivered to us in the past few weeks in such a robust fashion, to say the least. I have to say

that I'm pleased to get a chance to speak to this proposed legislation.

You know, I don't think I've heard more from my constituents on any other bill since I was elected in 2012. I don't think I've ever seen on TV or on radio – and I asked, actually, some of the very experienced people here that work for this House if they have ever seen anything in the past 15 years, and they said they had not except for one health issue. I believe it was way back when and around 2001. But let me get back to this bill.

You know, I've never seen a bill that looks like this, that is so thin. It is, I see, a white bill like normal, and it has a little bit of stuff in the front that never really seems to mean much to anybody anyway. As you get inside, then you find that there are one, two – there are three – four, I guess there are actually five pages that have caused so much rebellion in this province in so short a period of time. I can't actually believe it. When I look at it, I see that all it is is a bunch of amendments to existing legislation, a bunch of amendments that will cause all of that, and we're trying to ram this through in so few days without giving the key people that will be affected any consultation prior to even bringing this forward. It is absolutely shocking. I am sorry, but I just needed to say that and get it out because it has not yet been said tonight, and it needed to be said.

The constituents are very concerned about the speed at which this bill has been rushed through, as we all know. Like all Albertans they want to make sure that we get this legislation correct, so they want us to take the time to make sure we get it right the first time. That's what I'm going to be talking about. They want to make sure that their voices are heard, that their insights and experience are considered by this Assembly in the crafting of this legislation. Every one of them is concerned that this is not happening. I think we've heard that time and time again in these protests and all of these speeches that we've heard in this House in the past few days. The government is, as I said, pushing this through without considering those voices and the very needs of the people it will most affect.

We talk about 50,000 to 60,000 – I can't remember the exact number – of farms and ranches in Alberta. How many people does that affect? It's not the number that was quoted in the document that was on the website here just a few days back but now has mysteriously disappeared, that was about 11 or 12 pages with all of the rules. It's probably in the neighbourhood of 300,000 to 400,000 to 500,000 people it's going to affect.

Farming and ranching is fundamental to Alberta's economy and culture, as we know, and this is as true today as it's been for generations. Our province grows wheat and barley, canola, alfalfa, oats, and peas. We raise cattle and horses and chickens and pigs, as we all know. We grow vegetables and berries. We have orchards and wineries and honey farms, just to name a few. The abundance of our farm and ranchlands provide the province, much of the country, and even many parts of the world. There are 43,000 farms in the province, as I just said a moment ago, and up to 60,000. Much of our population has some connection to these farms. Much of our population. Not just in the rural areas themselves, not just in the towns and the cities, but all over Alberta people are being affected.

And this said, it's important to note that farming is not just solely an aspect of rural life. Urban citizens are increasingly rediscovering the satisfaction themselves of growing things, growing plants, and raising animals for food, from backyard chicken coops, even, to community gardens. I know they're allowing chickens to be raised in the town of Turner Valley. Well, the town is in my constituency now, Mr. Speaker. Municipal governments are actually encouraging this kind of shift, and this Assembly is considering a

private member's bill to encourage local food production because Albertans recognize the value of farms.

I've received, as I'm sure all the members of this Assembly have received . . .

Dr. Turner: Safe farms.

Mr. Stier: The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud wants to interrupt, I gather, but I'll continue on without answering your stuff.

I received, as I'm sure most of the members here have, hundreds of letters and e-mails from Albertans asking the government to slow down and to consult with stakeholders before ramming it through. You would think that these all came from rural constituents only, but that is simply not the case, actually. I would like to quote a letter from a self-identified Edmontonian.

I appreciate the intent of Bill 6, and daresay even support the spirit of it, but it is short-sighted and requires much more consideration and time than it is being given. While I truly believe the desire is to protect farmers, their families, and their employees, in its current state it has the potential to do more damage than good to farming communities.

Given that farming and ranching are so important to Alberta and Albertans, it would seem self-evident that we should carefully consider how we can best protect the people who work so hard doing it. Rather than legislate and consult, we should consult and then legislate. It makes simple sense. You don't plan a house without going out to the people who want the house to see how many rooms they want, to see how many bathrooms they're going to need, to see how many cars are going to be needed in the garage. For a government that was swept to power on the promise of change, this seems more like the same old, tired, top-down, well-known, best style of governing that Albertans thought they had shown the door.

I want to stress that no one – no one – in this province opposes safety on our farms. Opposing this bill is not opposition to the safety and security of our province's farming community. Not one farmer, not one rancher, not any MLA thinks that farms should be less safe. Not anyone wants to see themselves or anyone working with them to get hurt. No one cares more about safety on farms than the moms and dads who own and run them, and I'm sure members on the other side of the House would not disagree with that. This is not in dispute, and neither is our concern that all employees can go into work every morning knowing that they will be afforded protections to ensure they'll be returning to their families at the end of the day.

While this government may have some good intentions towards a goal that is shared by all, then, we don't believe this government's actions towards attaining that goal are the appropriate ways, nor have they been fully considered. By the way that this bill is written and the way that the other side is rushing into it, it concerns me, and it concerns my constituents.

Number one, there are no provisions to differentiate large commercial farms from small family farms. It's not in these five pages that are in that little pamphlet we got.

Number two, there's no distinction between a feedlot and a hobby farm.

9:00

Number three, there are no provisions recognizing the long days that calving or harvest necessarily bring with them. [interjection] No, it's not there, Minister of Municipal Affairs. It is not. They've taken it off the website. It's gone.

Number four, there is no recognition of the role that children and teenagers play growing up on family farms, helping with chores around the property, and learning about farming safety and life from their parents while doing so. There's no guidance for distinguishing

the home from the work site on family farms, where each is so often blended into the other.

There's no recognition of the long culture of neighbourliness in our farming communities, where everyone helps each other as they're able to do so that they can get everything done and finish ahead of their deadlines. How neighbourly can you be when helping out might hit your neighbour right in the pocketbook?

My constituents and I just have so many questions on this bill. By the way, my constituency has 22 towns. That is 22 communities, 14 councils. Not one public hearing was scheduled in my constituency – not one – and it is the largest and most choice farming area and ranching land in Alberta. There are not a lot of answers forthcoming from the government. The government should know better.

The Premier said the following when announcing the royalty review, quote: we have outlined a mechanism that includes transparency, consultation, a careful, considered approach that takes into account the fulsome contribution of our industry partners. Well, let's talk about that. Firstly, a considered approach, Mr. Speaker. That is what she promised to our oil and gas industry. Why should our farming families be treated differently than big oil and gas companies? Why? Why, Premier? Why should they do that?

Secondly, consult before you legislate, Mr. Speaker. If the government had made efforts to consult with farmers and ranchers before they introduced this bill to the House, they wouldn't be worrying about miscommunication on it, but they're sure worried about miscommunication on it now. The government could have chosen to do right by Albertans and gone out and held town halls and consultations and asked for advice while they were formulating the bill. Certainly, this bill and all the thought that might have gone towards it would have been started some time ago. You would have thought that would have allowed them time to go and do that. But they chose not to, and now they're surprised by the backlash that their arrogance and their mistakes have caused.

They shouldn't be surprised since they themselves so often commented on the previous government failing in exactly the same way. If I may, I'd like to quote the current Government House Leader, who said the following just last December on a different piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker. He said:

Because of the clear problems we're hearing about this bill and the utter lack of notice and complete consultation with all concerned stakeholders, we would like to see the legislation delayed.

He said that. He said:

It's been pushed forward too fast, and not everyone has had their voice heard.

One of the members that is in the room this evening on the government side has heard those quotations before because he was sitting with the Government House Leader when he said that. I see him shaking his head a little bit right now. I couldn't agree more with him, Mr. Speaker.

I don't understand how the other side can't understand that our concerns with this are not with the intent of the legislation but with the way the government wants to legislate. I hope that common sense will prevail on this matter and that this government will send this legislation to committee, where it can be studied, reflected on, and where Albertans can testify and advise on it. We've talked about this throughout this week in question period and through other statements. It is where this House can get it right the first time if we do that. There's no need and no excuse for sowing the confusion and discord that has rocked our province on this issue, especially an issue where it should be so easy for all of us to find agreement.

What is their reason for not wanting to consult ahead of time? Why don't we take this extra time? Can anyone over there bring me a valid reason to bring this into effect without doing . . .

Dr. Turner: Seventeen farm deaths per year.

The Speaker: Hon. member, through the Speaker, please.

Mr. Stier: Again the Edmonton-Whitemud member wants to interrupt, Mr. Speaker. If he wants to bring that up, he can do it all the night. I don't really care, but, you know, we'll finish the speech. Thank you.

The moms and dads on our farms are more concerned than anyone about safety, and if this government had engaged with them, consulted with them, and drafted legislation with them in mind, there wouldn't be demonstrations on the steps of this building, there wouldn't be thousands of letters pouring into the constituency offices, Mr. Speaker, there wouldn't be hundreds and hundreds of people driving up the highways in their farm machinery to come to this Legislature, and there wouldn't be hundreds lined up at the door when this government could not even plan to hold proper meetings and actually book rooms that would hold more than 40 in some cases.

Our party has advocated for weeks, since this started up, on the education. Earlier on the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View had mentioned that for 10 years the past government had talked about education. They did that for a reason: because they were right. If they're going to have safer operations, people need education. You were right, hon. member. They need that education.

There's no disagreement that safety and a fair workplace are deserved by everyone in the workplace. This means that we can do it in many ways, though. We have choices. We can have insurance, yes, but we can have choice in that insurance. We can have different companies proceed with that.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To my hon. colleague here: the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View spent some time telling this House that the government of Alberta has been consulting with farmers for 10 years and that it's enough. Could the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod please explain to me and to this House, especially the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, how it could be that with that 10 years of consultation, we had 1,500 farmers on the steps of this Legislature claiming that they had never been consulted? Could you explain to us how there have been thousands and thousands of e-mails and letters, thousands and thousands of farmers attending these rallies who are all saying the same thing, "Kill Bill 6; it's going too fast, and we have not been consulted"? How could this possibly be if there have been 10 years of consultation as claimed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake for that question. It's always strange to me how people can make statements about previous governments and not have been participating directly in them and say that they fully understand what has taken place.

We've had so many statements regarding consultation, and so many times we've heard from various entities that consultation was done for years and years and now is the time to go ahead and smack in legislation. Well, how can you say that you have consulted on the

legislation currently when you're not talking about the same type of considerations? We weren't talking about this before. So I don't think it's fair for the Member for the Calgary-Mountain View to have made those statements in that way.

Certainly, I can say this. We have considered this pretty carefully. We have our own set of solutions, and we believe that – you know what? – there is a strategic approach that we could look at. There is a very good strategic approach we could look at. First of all, we have to figure out what we want as an outcome. We should probably develop some comprehensive income insurance for farm employees when they are injured, disabled, or worse, something that is going to cover them very well.

Now, most farming operations already have those kinds of things in place, and most big commercial ones, of course, have in the past gone with WCB, which is fine. But we can recognize that WCB is only one of several options that might be available. There are other comprehensive and more cost-effective insurance tools that some operations are already using, Mr. Speaker, and I think that these could be used in a creative manner so that we could find unique and individual needs and solutions for those situations.

9:10

The next outcome we want to talk about is reducing the frequency of farm accidents. It seems as though one of the members across the way has that on his mind, so we have a solution for that. We want to encourage farm safety behaviours that result in low accident rates. We want to educate employers and employees through education and a certification program. Instead of having punitive measures, we could take the time and the dollars spent and invest those dollars in an education program designed specifically for agricultural operations. We could even involve courses on the Internet. We could involve testing. We could even involve what I had to go through for my boating card. It's not that hard to take all the energy that this government has and the expertise and put them to good use and create those programs, that we do apparently seem to need.

We could work with all the farm organizations we have in Alberta and try to supply some sort of a support mechanism for those education programs, Mr. Speaker. We could use previous farm accident data, and we could actually make very good use of that data to help us manage and understand accident prevention. We could develop and communicate acceptable employment standards for farm workers. We could recognize that both employers and employees accept that long and variable hours are part of the job and that they work together, so we could tailor our program to meet those specific needs.

We could also recognize and support positive farm labour relations. We know that we could create a relationship between employees and employers tailored to these specific situations, that would provide us with respect, productivity, and satisfaction. With the Internet and social media, Mr. Speaker, we can provide all that and more.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. I hope that I can just take a moment in the House. I wanted to offer a sincere apology to a woman – her name is actually Isabelle Fournier; I hope it's okay to say her name in here – who had received an e-mail from my staffer today.

The Speaker: You're making . . .

Mrs. Aheer: I'm just doing an apology for something that happened earlier, and it's just before I dig into Bill 6. It has to do

with that. I wanted it to just be on the record. It directly relates to Bill 6, and I'll get to that. Just on behalf of my staffer, if you don't mind, I'd like to read the letter that was sent, which, of course, will have . . .

The Speaker: This is with respect to Bill 6?

Mrs. Aheer: Absolutely, it is. Thank you, sir.

Earlier today I received an e-mail from Peter. I was obviously insulted on a personal level; but mostly a little hurt. I was hurt because the e-mail made me question Wild Rose's stance on Bill 6.

I reacted, and posted the email on social media. As the Liberal leader would say "it's 2015".

I was then contacted by a friend, who spoke [out], and urged me to call him. Which I did.

At any point in one's life, we have choice words for people. I know, I have had my fair share. What I haven't done though, is apologize for some of those people who I may have insulted.

Peter reached out thru facebook and my friends, urging me to contact him. While speaking with him, I realized he is just a man. As overworked as we all are during these trying times. We are both fighting the same fight. We both have the same goals.

I also realize he is only human. He reminded me of my grand father who worked his land, day and night. Who also had words for us kids when we were making too much noise or being annoying.

I believe that Peter deserves the chance to prove himself with the Wild Rose party. Because he has . . . more qualities than any NDP'er; and Honesty and Integrity. His apology was honest, and I am more than happy to have had the chance to have a conversation, with a great man; who hit "reply all", in a moment of haste.

Peter and I will be fighting this bill 6 side by side at the Legislature tomorrow. Because together our fight will only be stronger.

That's in regard to Bill 6, and it is with humility that I stand here to speak on behalf of farmers in my constituency

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I'd like to also bring to light that yesterday in our banter the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville had sort of pointed across at me and asked if I had actually talked to anybody in my constituency. Yeah. I mean, I've had like everybody else hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of letters and e-mails and phone calls. I mean, it's actually impossible to keep up with everything that's going on. Everybody wants to have their point spoken to, and I have so many things to share with all of you. I'm sure you're excited as I am to tell you all about that.

An Hon. Member: We are. Can't wait.

Mrs. Aheer: I know, right?

I've been in Chestermere since 1979. One of my greatest memories, actually, as a child was when I was asked to come in and help out with some calving. I actually only got the opportunity to do it once. I have long, stringy arms, so you can imagine what my job was that day. I got to go in and turn and help. It was amazing in a very odd and sort of weird, strange way. But one of the more beautiful things that I saw was when that little guy came out, and we saved him. I don't know if you've ever seen a calf. When they're first born, they're absolutely stunning: beautiful, beautiful creatures with big eyes, long eyelashes. I immediately fell in love. You know, had my father let me, I probably would have taken him home and, like one of my favourite movies, called him Norman and dragged him around from place to place. It's one of my favourite memories.

Where I lived, there were a couple of jobs that you could do. You could babysit, or you could help out with farming. Depending upon what the job was, I was quite often on some of my friends' farms. Not being a farmer myself but living in a farming community, I was able to do all manner of things. I wasn't able to lift the heavy hay bales, but there was a lot of rock picking and other things that you can do, which I was very good at.

Just to elaborate on my moment of being with my constituents. Originally, I had planned to have a meeting with my constituents, with our farmers this Friday. But when all of this started coming to fruition, I phoned one of my friends who's in my constituency – his sister actually taught me when I was in school and is actually teaching my son now – and they managed in under 24 hours to get together just under 200 farmers. That was on Saturday, November 28, with less than 24 hours' notice.

I mean, I must have held – I don't know? – seven or eight town halls during the election, and I can tell you that I probably didn't get that many people in all of them at any of those times. I really thought, you know, that people would come out and want to talk to me about what I was doing. But this was unbelievable. It was in Indus, and not only did they show up in fine form, but they had also signed that petition as well, to kill Bill 6.

As a new MLA I look to my colleagues for wisdom, and I've heard so much in here, on this side especially. We would love to hear from you on your side, especially because there are so many of you that do have farming communities. It would behoove all of us to have you stand up and have an opportunity to speak on behalf of them. As has been said in the House previous to myself, it's an imperative side of understanding what we do to have both sides of that story. You owe it to yourself and to your constituents to make sure that you are supporting them. It may not be what you think is right. But as has been said in the House previously, we are seeing massive amounts of reaction to this. Please don't ignore this.

Madam Speaker, if you don't mind, I'd like to share some other sentiments from my constituents via the hundreds of phone calls and e-mails and letters. The central point that I see and hear time and again is that they feel that this process has been a backdoor approach. I think that that speaks to the mentality of how – they're feeling like they've been betrayed. This is another term, I'm sure, you've heard over and over again. I think it's worth saying. When a person feels cornered and attacked and they feel like they haven't been consulted, this is the kind of reaction that you're going to get. I mean, there's so much frustration and anger out there that would be easily handled by some moderation, by some thoughtfulness on this part.

I have to say, again, that all of us in this House are after the same goals when it comes to safety. Every single one of us. Having been in a farming community and having had the privilege of spending time on a farm and spending time with the people who do these amazing jobs and bring food to our tables, we owe them that respect of listening. We owe them that respect of slowing down.

9:20

Again, I beg you just to consider that it's not so much about – we know that it's about safety, but you need to take a step back. Please just take some time and think about what it is that you're actually trying to accomplish here. As the hon. member from the party to the left of me here had said earlier, if you had the opportunity to go and spend time on the farms and breathe in that environment and what that actually means to people, it's just a different mentality. It would be like bringing somebody into any of your other jobs that you had previous to this one and having them spend a day on the job with you to understand how hard you worked at that and who you were at the core and how that defines you.

What you're actually saying right now is that that definition doesn't matter. You're saying that who they are, how they're parenting, who they are as people doesn't matter. You are giving them the impression that that doesn't matter. I honestly don't think that that is your intention, but that is what is transferring out to the people of this community. They feel disrespected. I would love nothing more than to be able to say that that's not the truth, but that's exactly how it's being interpreted.

Ultimately, that responsibility of how that's being interpreted lies on your shoulders, and the opportunity has been presented to you in a thousand different ways, as many times as we can, to give you the opportunity to make this right. How is it that that can be ignored on so many different levels and so many times? I mean, as a parent, you know, I sit and I do the circle talk, a typical mom thing, until my kids get the idea of what it is that I'm trying to get through to them. I don't know how many times it will have to be repeated, but we will continue to repeat it on behalf of these people that we represent until you hear it. Don't just hear it; listen to it. Take it in. We're asking for moderation. We're asking for consultation.

I have to give a small shout-out to the Member for St. Albert. In a bill that she's going to be presenting, she is asking for consultation with regard to PDD, something that is very close to my heart. That's the way it should be done, and congratulations in advance. If that member has that ability to think about how this is going to impact a very important group of people in society, why is that any different than what we're trying to accomplish over here? You need to actually answer that question.

Some of us aren't even sleeping at night because we feel nauseated by what our farmers are going through. We understand at a cellular level, I guess, for lack of a better word. I'm not sure which minister had mentioned earlier – I think it was actually the hon. member to our left here that . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me, hon. member. I just have to interrupt here at this point. According to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, debate at second reading needs to focus on the principles of the bill, not on your personal feelings and emotions about situations that are going on in here.

Thank you.

Mrs. Aheer: Sure. I'm sorry. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will continue on the principles, then.

The bill has been pushed forward, thrown in the faces of family farms, and it looks as though it will be rammed through without appropriate consultation. The government needs to slow down, revamp the process, and go and talk to the people most drastically impacted. Make no mistake: the 40,000-plus farms will be impacted. Just in case that number has not resonated with you, it's 40,000-plus family farms. When seeking votes, the government had promised to stand up for farmers, to review federal transport, and to keep it fairly priced. Now, we are hit with this platform bait and switch.

When we speak about safety, as many have said, we all agree that safety is of the utmost importance, but rushing in and imposing legislation on family farms is not the way to do it. Education is key, awareness, training, materials. These farms are unique and diverse, like a thumbprint, all the things that create the fabric of this province, things that I think the entire House can agree on. This is transformational rural legislation, the most transformational in a generation, and it's proposed to be done in 45 days, start to finish. Think about that just for a second, 45 days to talk to 40,000-plus farms. That's just under a thousand farms a day, that I'm sure will not be consulted. We would suggest that you tap the brakes. How can you expect to get it right when so many voices are neglected?

Farming is a lifestyle. Perhaps, the government should be spending some time with these families and consulting with them. Farming is also uniquely seasonal and very much at the mercy of nature. I've heard from many that the amount of hours on a farm during seeding or bringing in crops can hit 90 hours a week. Running a farm does not adhere to regular times, and they can't stop for statutory holidays. The work gets done – it's needed – or livelihoods are put on the line. It is the civic duty of government to reach out to constituents and make sure that we are doing right by the people and families affected before we rush into legislation.

The list of concerns goes on and on and on, and the government would understand if they had bothered to ask. How are neighbours supposed to help neighbours? This is more than just a culture. This is a lifestyle. It's been said before, and I'll say it again. It is a lifestyle, and it is one that has always involved the help of community and neighbours. It is the fabric of this province.

I've spoken with my friends, the farmers in my constituency. You know, it's funny. They're usually standing beside a friend of theirs going: well, this is my neighbour Bob who helps me with calving. That's how they introduce each other. I heard it over and over and over again outside on the steps the other day. This is a community of fellowship, and like safety, these are all important aspects that we can agree upon. These are in all parts of our constituencies. Farming or not, it's about community.

Inappropriately crafted OH and S or labour relations stop this culture from enduring, the culture of passing the skills learned by the father and the mother on to the son and the daughter.

The Deputy Speaker: Just before we go on to 29(2)(a), hon. member, at the beginning of your speech you read a letter. Would you be prepared to table that tomorrow in the House?

Mrs. Aheer: Absolutely. Thank you so much. I'd be happy to.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to ask my constituency neighbour a question here. You know, she challenged us during her statement to hear some of the stories, to take in the stories and see how people are affected by this kind of legislation. So my question to her would be – I'd like to read her some stories here of some people who have been affected, and after hearing those stories, I wonder if she might consider changing her mind on the bill.

The first story I would like to read – and I'm prepared to table these documents tomorrow in the House, Madam Speaker – is about Philippa Thomas, whom the Member for Calgary-Mountain View mentioned earlier. Philippa is actually – I believe she's one of my constituents, but she's very close to yours. We border each other's constituencies. So I'd like to read some of the story to you.

Six times a week Philippa Thomas heads out from her Cochrane home with her dog Gaffer to go for 12-kilometre walks through woods, meadows and cow pastures.

Thomas's four-hour treks are her moments to meditate; to put out of mind the agonizing pain she has endured since she injured her thumb almost seven years ago while working as a farm worker at a local equestrian facility.

At first the injury was just a small cut but it morphed into complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS), a chronic progressive disease characterized by severe pain, swelling, and changes in the skin. It progressed to her wrist, elbow, shoulder, and then to her neck. Ultimately, the condition rendered her right arm useless.

"I never knew a body could handle this amount of pain. My back teeth are all broken as I grind. I vomit every day, copious amounts," . . .

To combat her CRPS, a spinal cord stimulator has been implanted in her back. She must wear morphine patches and take four daily doses of methadone for the pain.

"This is a forever thing. I will never get better."

9:30

Madam Speaker, I'd also like to read to the member a bit of a story from the public fatality inquiry, that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View mentioned earlier, on Kevan Chandler. Here are some of the circumstances surrounding his death. I'd be prepared to table this document as well tomorrow.

The deceased, Kevan Chandler, was an employee of a feedlot. Just before noon he went inside a silo to clean out grain that was encrusted on the inside wall. He was attempting to knock down the grain when it collapsed, burying him and causing his death by smothering.

It goes on, Madam Speaker. I'll skip to some of the more germane points here.

A Fatality Inquiry was ordered after the Fatality Review Board recommended that one be held to determine if the death of Kevan Chandler was preventable, and address the advisability of having the Occupational Health and Safety Act investigators involved in farming accidents that occur on large farming and livestock operations.

Go figure.

It was noted that Mr. Chandler had expressed concern on the morning of June 18 as to the danger of clearing out silo 7. However, Mr. Chandler was known to be eager to please, and confident in his abilities.

Much like the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

The opinion of the co-workers was that Mr. Chandler made an error in judgment, caused by his enthusiasm and lack of experience.

I'll skip to the end here, Madam Speaker, where the hearing tribunal makes an explicit recommendation. This is in regard to the applicability of the Occupational Health and Safety Act to farms. It is recommended that paid employees on farms . . .

Mr. Hanson: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: You raised a point of order, hon. member? Go ahead.

Point of Order Question-and-comment Period

Mr. Hanson: Under 29(2)(a) it allows members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead, Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Madam Speaker, this is not a point of order under 29(2)(a). Any member in this House has the opportunity to comment or to ask a question, and there is much precedent in this House of members that are setting up some background, some context before they get to a question. Simply, the member standing up on a point of order is pre-empting the member here from getting to his point, to his question. This is not a point of order. This is standard practice in this House.

The Deputy Speaker: I will point out that earlier the Speaker did allow a great deal of leeway on the use of 29(2)(a), which, if you

strictly interpret what you just read from there, hon. member, doesn't really allow for the original speaker to finish off their dialogue. But it has been used in that way, and there has been traditionally a lot of leeway given in this House. I believe that the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane is reaching a point. He did say that he was looking for the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View's opinion, so I feel that there isn't a point of order on this particular matter.

Debate Continued

Mr. Westhead: Thank you. I'll finish up quickly here. It was recommended that paid employees on farms should be covered by the Occupational Health and Safety Act, with the same exemption for family members and other nonpaid workers that apply to nonfarm employers.

An Hon. Member: What was the date?

Mr. Westhead: This was from 2008, I believe.

Again, to the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View: after hearing these stories and the explicit recommendations of a judge here, have you changed your mind?

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you so much for taking the time to tell us those stories. I think, again, it comes back to some of the same things that we've been talking about. [A timer sounded]

The Deputy Speaker: I believe I have next on the list Strathmore-Brooks. Is that correct?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam Speaker, this week has been extraordinary. This week I have been swamped by e-mails, phone calls, letters, and visits by farmers who are extremely upset about Bill 6. Right now the phone on my desk is buzzing with angry e-mails and Facebook messages from farmers who are angry that they have not been consulted about a bill that affects their way of life.

The majority of these concerns are about the way the government has gone about imposing Bill 6 rather than the nitty-gritty of the contents of it. Hundreds of my constituents are astounded that a new government, elected on a platform of transparency, would impose changes that affect their lives and livelihoods without speaking to them first. Sure, the NDP government belatedly decided to hold a few token meetings in a small, select number of towns across the province. The majority of these meetings have been scheduled for after the NDP had planned on passing this bill. I have a feeling that they're not going to meet that deadline anymore. These are not town halls; these are town tells. These are not consultative sessions. These are sessions where they tell farmers and ranchers how to comply with the bill and not find out what farmers and ranchers want in the bill.

Let me quote the dictionary on the definition of consultation for the members on the government side. Quote: a meeting with an expert or professional such as a medical doctor in order to seek advice. Earth-shattering stuff, Madam Speaker. How could one put advice to use if the bill has already been rammed through the House and passed into law before we solicit the advice?

Our job as MLAs is to be the representatives of our constituents to the government, not representatives of the government to constituents. Now, I wonder what the constituents of the 11 ridings represented by NDP MLAs who are rural or partially rural think right now. Do their constituents really believe that their MLAs are representing their views to the NDP government, or do they think that those MLAs are representing the NDP's views to their

constituencies? We are not voting machines. We are representatives of the people.

There were over 200 people protesting Bill 6 on the steps of this Legislature last Friday. There were between 1,500 and 1,800 people protesting on the steps of the Legislature on Monday. How many are going to have to be here later this week before the government will listen? How many people will it take before the government realizes that they are not doing what is right for farmers and ranchers?

My office has been swamped by farmers and ranchers in my constituency who want to discuss Bill 6 because I'm their representative. Unfortunately, the government held no consultations whatsoever in Strathmore-Brooks. Nothing. In one of the most agriculture-intensive constituencies in Canada not a single government consultation with my farmers and ranchers. So you know what I did, Madam Speaker? I did what every member of the NDP caucus representing rural constituencies should have done. I called my own town hall meeting. I booked the Bassano Elks lodge for 2 o'clock this coming Sunday. I found out very quickly that we are not going to have enough space in the Elks lodge.

I've had constituents who have gone out with their own money and bought local radio advertisements in Brooks informing people about the town hall, out of their own pockets. A constituent of mine went out to put up some posters around the county telling people about the town hall. You know what that constituent found? That constituent, in going out to put up her printed posters, found that random constituents, unprompted by me or my office, had gone and put up their own posters telling them to come on out to our town hall because that was their only chance to tell the government what they thought of Bill 6. Rural Albertans are waking up to this, and they're not happy with what they've found.

9:40

The Bassano Elks lodge is likely to be too small for what we had, so we've had to scramble to find a larger venue. We've now had to move it to the Bassano school gymnasium. There this Saturday I've invited farmers and ranchers in my constituency and adjacent communities who have not been consulted to tell me what they think we should be doing about Bill 6. Has a single member of the government side of the Legislature done so as well? Has a single member of the government side of this House representing rural or semirural constituencies held an open forum in their constituencies for farmers and ranchers to come and tell them what should be done about Bill 6? The silence is deafening.

This is what we do in a democracy. We listen to those we represent in our constituency, and we represent their interests to the government, not the other way around. Is it not the purpose of this House to listen to the people and be their representatives, or did that notion, once held by the NDP in opposition, change once they won power? How many signatures on petitions asking this government to stop Bill 6 will it take for them to listen? Will it take half the farmers in Alberta to sign a petition? Will it take every single farmer to sign a petition before they'll listen? How many thousands need to stand outside these doors before we'll do what they need us to do?

Judging from what I've heard from my constituents so far – and I've heard a lot – the reaction has been almost unanimous. Let's look at two historical examples in Alberta of what happens when the government ignores or disrespects farmers and ranchers. In 2008 the Premier of the day pushed through a series of laws that violated the fundamental property rights of landowners in this province. That set in motion a long chain of events that led to the ousting of that Premier and the creation of the Wildrose. But in looking further back, Alberta's first Liberal government – and, I

might add, last Liberal government – thought that they knew better than farmers and ranchers and governed like they didn't matter. In short order farmers organized into the United Farmers of Alberta and swept that old government from office. Governments worthy of this province must respect both urban and rural Alberta. No government worthy of its office should treat one or the other as second-class citizens.

This government did get one thing right. Every single farmer wants to have a safe farm that their children can live and prosper on. Every single mother and father wants to ensure that their child is as safe as they can possibly be on the family farm. After years of no mandatory WCB or OH and S officials on the farm, Alberta still has the lowest fatality rate per capita in Canada. Now, one fatality is one too high, but this is not a record that should be overlooked. This is because Alberta farmers do care about safety, and they take it more seriously than any government bureaucrat possibly can. The workers on farms are the sons, daughters, aunts, uncles, grandmas, grandpas, moms, and dads of rural Alberta. These people care more about each other than any OH and S bureaucrat ever will. These people will do anything possible to ensure that every single member of their family comes back from work safe and secure every single night. They've been doing it for generations.

In fact, the government should know this. There have been numerous studies done on this topic by the government. And you know what they said? They said that OH and S does not necessarily need to be legislated. They said that more education would be beneficial for the agricultural industry but that imposed legislative changes to their way of life are not recommended. This government does not even listen to their own research, nor are they listening to the Albertans who stood outside those doors protesting just the other day. What will it take for this government to listen?

We could all agree here, every member of this House, that safety is a priority. The way this bill is being rammed through this House, however, is not ensuring safety. We must consult with the experts – the farmers, the ranchers, the people who live and breathe agriculture – to ensure that we're getting this legislation right the first time. This cannot be done by legislating first and consulting later. By forcing this bill through the House without proper consultation, this government is doing a disservice to all Albertans, urban and rural.

If my point has not yet been made, I'll make it now. Bill 6 should not be rammed through this House at midnight without any due consideration for the people it affects. This bill, like several others that we have seen in this session, should be sent to a committee for review and consultation. By sending it to committee, we can ensure that everyone who wants and needs to be consulted is consulted. Unfortunately, the only farmers who will participate in this debate in the Legislature are the farmers on this side of the House because there are none over there. By sending this to committee, we can ensure that this bill is what Albertans want, not what the union organizers and the NDP want.

The NDP has insisted on sending opposition bills, private members' bills, to committees for study, bills that, while important, do not fundamentally alter the character of half the province. If those bills proposed by us, that have already had significant consultation done before they were introduced, should be going for further consultation at committees, then surely an omnibus piece of legislation that will have significant consequences for everyone in rural Alberta should also go to committee to ask rural Albertans what they think.

On December 5 I will be in Bassano to listen to rural Albertans, to listen to my constituents. The NDP might be waking up to it now. They have lit a prairie fire in Alberta that they cannot undo.

I urge all members of this House, especially those members on the government side representing rural constituencies, to do what they know is right, to listen to their constituents, and to kill Bill 6.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Yeah. Madam Speaker, as I was listening to the Member for Strathmore-Brooks talk about his constituents – well, I was sitting, and now I'm standing, so I'm going to ask the question. I wondered how many cards and letters or e-mails you've got. I know you've probably consulted with your constituents, your farm constituents. You're going to consult with them on the 5th, I understand. I intend to be there myself.

You know, I don't know that it sinks in. I don't think that it's sinking in around here, what these people are telling us. We keep telling the people across the way there what people are saying here, and it just doesn't seem like they're listening. I'm hearing: "Time. We need time. We need consultation. We need someone to care. We need our government, that represents us, to slow things down, and to be compassionate and try to understand where we're coming from." I just wondered if you're hearing those things in your constituency, hon. member.

9:50

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you to the Member for Little Bow for the question. Little Bow is probably the closest, adjacent riding to mine, and Bassano is quite close to many of his constituents. He can correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm also of the understanding that the government did not hold any consultations in his constituency, in many of the constituencies, especially on this side. I invited the Member for Little Bow to attend my town hall meeting in Bassano because it's close to many of his constituents who are farmers, who are not being listened to.

[The Speaker in the chair]

You know, members on the other side have tried to fearmonger and say that the Wildrose has just whipped the farmers and ranchers into a frenzy. [interjections] They say that we whipped farmers and ranchers into a frenzy. You know what? The hundreds of calls and e-mails and Facebook messages that I've had come into my office whipped us into a frenzy to fight for their interests.

You know, this was an uphill battle. We did not think that this was going to be an easy fight. Pretty much every major province-wide media outlet endorsed the bill before they read it. They thought it was a slam dunk politically. We all knew that this was a bad bill and it wasn't doing the right thing, but we listened to our constituents, and they told us what they wanted us to do. They told us what they wanted us to do.

I don't have an exact number, Member for Little Bow, but it was hundreds of calls. My two constituency assistants, one from Strathmore and one from Brooks, are in town for training today, and I talked to them. We had a sit-down. I said: what's it been like? And they said: we don't have enough lines in the office to even take the messages that people are leaving. They don't even have enough lines to take the messages. Rural Alberta is standing up. They're mostly modest folks, who don't get too angry about a whole lot, but when you do something like this, you're going to hear from them, and we heard from them on Monday.

What are they saying? They say a few brief things: don't treat the family farm like a big corporate factory. They're saying: consult with us. They're saying one thing unanimously right now: kill Bill 6.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just curious to know if my hon. colleague might elaborate. One of the things that I'm hearing a lot from the constituents in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills is that their primary concern is actually around the lack of consultation on the regulations when it comes specifically to OH and S and the labour code. Many of my constituents have been quite sympathetic and willing to have this conversation around WCB and ensuring that appropriate insurances are in place. But the real concern isn't on that half of the bill; really, it's on the regulations. From all accounts it seems that the government is intent on saying: "Don't worry. Trust us. Over the next year we promise not to have any misinformation get out around the regulations, and the regulations are going to be okay for you."

The Speaker: Hon. member, your question was so brief that you used all the time.

The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to be able to stand in this House and speak to this proposed bill, which I consider a threat to the viability of small farms, family farms. I live down in the south part. You and I have had discussions before. You know where I live. I live in a little area called Feedlot Alley. I've been getting calls from all across my constituency on this Bill 6 issue.

Firstly, regarding feedlots, most if not all feedlot operations in the area already carry private health and safety, death, dismemberment, disability, and critical illness insurance for their workers, and my constituents report that these are very good insurance products, better than the coverage and support provided by the Workers' Compensation Board. Feedlot operators are watching these debates on this bill, getting ready to potentially have to drop their far superior insurance products due to being mandated by government to adopt Workers' Compensation Board insurance.

It costs hard-earned money to try to carry both a superior insurance product and a mandated insurance product, a mandated subpar product, I might add, that the Premier herself said was not a great creation. I think she said that the Workers' Compensation Board is the most miserly workers' compensation board in the country. That's from a few years ago, but she was standing in front of the building and making a speech and stated that this was some of the worst insurance possible. Why the Premier would believe that this is something that she should force on someone else, I'm not sure. If one is mandated, obviously that's the one that the employer would have to use and workers will have to live with.

I should say here that farmers and ranchers and feedlot operators alike would like to have a choice as to what kind of insurance they carry. I had an owner of several feedlots in my office here in Edmonton on the day of the rally, and he was explaining that the insurance he's carrying for his employees has much better coverage and is available at a better rate than Workers' Compensation Board insurance. The part that he liked is that if there were an unfortunate incident, the insurance simply kicked in for, he told me, 16 weeks or so. It was no muss, no fuss, no arguing with the insurance company, as there is, it's well documented, with WCB claims. It just worked as you would hope insurance would work.

So how about that, Mr. Speaker? The government is mandating workers to be worse off, insured less, and takes more of the business profits. I wonder what ever happened to the old adage: do no harm.

Mr. Speaker, speaking of insurance, it seems there must be a problem over there at WCB. Since being elected, I've lost count of how many individuals I've seen protesting in front of that building, at the corner of 107th Street and 99th Avenue. Then my constituency assistants get calls at the office from individuals who,

unfortunately, have had an injury, are not healed from that injury, are still not able to go back to work, and Workers' Compensation Board calls and tells them that their benefits have been dropped. They're told: you're all done; get back to work. Yet these folks aren't able to work because of that injury. I think it's clear, the issues with WCB that claimants have had over the years. It's known very well as a one-sided insurance.

At that point it gets interesting again. Those workers that can't go back to work do their best to try to get on a different government program like AISH, for instance, and they get denied that because the Workers' Compensation Board says that they can go back to work. It's like a never-ending circle of problems; it never seems to end. It's just unbelievable. Look on the Internet. You'll have no trouble finding people who have had bad experiences with WCB.

I received a letter from a constituent about Bill 6 that was actually pretty short, but I want to share a couple of lines from that e-mail. It says: I understand that farm safety is a top priority on Alberta farms, but I strongly disagree with Bill 6. Farmers understand that safety is paramount on farms. I mean – good grief – all farmers and ranchers do. This legislation is ramming something down the throats of the very folks that it affects. That they have no input into this legislation is the ultimate problem here. Just to get back to that email, the last line says: I refuse to support Bill 6, that has no definitions, and I refuse to support the undemocratic process by which this bill is being implemented. That's a common thread with the hundreds of e-mails that I've received.

Another e-mail that I received puts it differently. These particular folks have a small family farm in southern Alberta, that has been in their family since the '40s. It's a quarter-section farm, and they're looking to do their best to hang onto it and see that it gets passed to another generation. I want you to hear the words of these folks. I quote: we are writing out of desperation and frustration as this government, which is supposed to be working for us, seems to be not listening to the very stakeholders that this Bill 6 is supposed to be for. End quote. You know, Mr. Speaker, I can clearly hear the frustration in that person's voice through the letter that I got from him.

10:00

Another letter, that I received about five days ago, speaks to several generations of a family living on a farm and working together. I'll just share a couple of sentences from it.

To understand my reasons in opposing Bill 6 I must fill you in on my personal . . . background. I grew up on a family farm in southern Alberta. We were a mixed cattle and grain operation that included my Grandfather, my two uncles, and my Dad. My cousins and siblings were all involved in the daily operations. Currently my brother is a 4th generation farmer as our cousins . . . have taken over their [family's] farms [as well] . . .

I do understand why the NDP government believes that this bill is important, ask any farmer and they will agree that farm safety is important. However the way the government has gone about in getting this bill passed . . .

Those are the words that are written there.

. . . and everything it includes it is flawed. By creating a bill that combines, WCB, OHS, Labour Code and Employment Standards you are mixing safety, insurance labour and employment issues. Some of these should be together [but] others should not.

The safety of everyone on the farm and ranch setting is important no matter what group you are talking about, be it farmers, family, workers or neighbours. As in all industries those who are on the ground working are the experts, you need to take this into consideration. Listen to the farmers and ranchers, their families, and workers.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 6 is, well, to put it politely, bull manure and heifer dust.

An Hon. Member: What did he say?

Mr. Schneider: Sorry. Bull manure and heifer dust, for those that didn't hear me. You should hear what my constituents are calling it. Because I'm a gentleman, Mr. Speaker, and because you would run my backside clearly out of here, I can't repeat the anger that my constituents are relaying to me through their e-mails and letters.

There's another rally on the steps of the Legislature tomorrow, right outside that door. Mr. Speaker, I know that it will be a peaceful event. Farmers are angry and confused and demanding answers, but they won't be unruly here tomorrow. But before this is all done, it would not surprise me in the least if a few truckloads of bull manure were spread on the lawn of the Legislature. Not that I'm promoting that.

In other provinces there are varying exemptions recognizing that farms are unique workplaces given that they are often a family's home. As of yet there are no distinctions made in Bill 6 as to what a family farm is.

I have another e-mail here. I'd just like to read one paragraph.

A family farm is an excellent place to live and to learn and to love. It is often two or three generations living and working together. Children have the experiences of watching and learning how to get along and work with others. They are taught many different skills; it is like an apprenticeship where you learn about working well with others, learning business skills, mechanics, animal husbandry, driving and operating equipment (at a proper age) and yes even about Safety. Accidents do happen and this is heartbreaking, but accidents happen in urban areas as well.

With the haste that this bill is being pushed through this Legislature, it is crystal clear that this government has no intention of consulting with farmers in Alberta, that all have an opinion on this bill. That's right, Mr. Speaker. The very folks that this bill is intended to serve have absolutely no input as to its outcome. Oh, sure, the government will stand up and say that they're having consultations with farmers in nine different centres or whatever the number is throughout the province. That all sounds great in a newspaper article or on a television news program, but the part that is never mentioned is that those consultations basically take place after the bill has been passed. Considering what's going on now, the consultation meetings that are being held across the province while we stand in this House and debate this bill are really ending up being anything but consultation meetings. That's not a consultation meeting; it's an information meeting and barely that. On behalf of farmers all across this province I say: thanks a lot.

One more. I have another e-mail here I'd like just to read a paragraph from.

Bill 6 has serious impacts on how farmers operate their business and how they work with their families on the farm. All I am requesting is that the current Alberta Government asks the agricultural industry for input before the Bill is passed to ensure proper and complete legislation and regulations are created. This will ensure producers have access to and understand the details of the legislation which will enable them to properly implement and support Bill 6. At this point the Alberta Government has handed us a box and said "here, this is Bill 6. You must follow it." When we open up the box and look inside it is empty. Without all of the details of Bill 6 an environment that breeds fear-mongering, distrust and animosity is created.

I feel that I need to explain one thing, Mr. Speaker, because I, honest to God, don't think that the folks on the other side have any kind of understanding of the life of a farmer. The operations include seeding, spraying, haying, harvesting, feeding cows, calving cows. These things all have seasonal work requirements . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, it's been drawn to my attention – and I think it applied to others – that if you have some documents like

e-mails, letters, et cetera, you would table those documents during daily Routine. Are there other comments that you'd like to make?

Mr. Schneider: Regarding that?

The Speaker: Other than the letters that you're reading.

Mr. Schneider: I'm not reading from letters now. I read from a letter before, Mr. Speaker. I'll be tabling 400 letters tomorrow, and these will be included if that's all right.

All of those seasonal working operations are not seen in other workplaces. Now, Mr. Speaker, you've heard the saying: making hay while the sun shines. Well, it's true. Farmers work long hours. All of those jobs that I just mentioned require a lot of hours at the correct time of year in the life cycle of grain production or animal husbandry or the like, and the hours that a farmer absolutely has to work in order to get those jobs done cannot be legislated. A farmer works until the job is done. Sixteen-hour days are normal fare in those busy times, and farmers do it because they love it, and those that work for farmers are generally there because they love it and the lifestyle that it provides.

I'm sure the government can go around and say that farm groups were surveyed and consulted for years, and studies have been done and reports have been written, but the push to get this legislation in place is reminiscent of the behaviour of a previous government. They would ram legislation through, find a mistake, and amend the legislation at the next session ad nauseam.

In an ideal world I would suggest that important legislation like this would be sent to a legislative policy committee for study. Even though age-old consultation may have been done, going to committee is the final discussion, the final meeting, the final conference to make sure we get things right. On an important piece of legislation like this, that affects so many family farms, so many family ranches, so many Albertans, family farms and ranches that are the backbone of this province, consultation with those people and expert opinion are paramount.

Even the Premier, in the debate last session on Bill 2, the Alberta Accountability Act, stated:

So what we need to do instead is refer this matter to an all-party committee so that we can look more expansively at those parts of legislation that would at least get us to the base camp of the mountain that needs to be climbed by this government in its effort to ascend to minimal levels of trust, integrity, and accountability to Albertans.

Well said. I commend her on saying it. It just doesn't seem like she remembers, several months later, saying it here.

I firmly believe this bill needs to be sent to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, where expert witnesses can be called, comparisons to neighbouring jurisdictions done, and real, living, breathing farmers can come before the committee to report on the impact that this legislation will ultimately have on their lives. But it's not enough to have committee meetings and to have people come in. No, Mr. Speaker. We need to go out to rural Alberta and have committee meetings there and be accessible to the people that this legislation will impact.

I can see members in the back row of the majority benches shuddering over there – shuddering – at the thought of interacting with real people and getting a dose of reality from those people. The hallowed walls of the academy and the institution they dabble in . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Opposition House Leader, do you have a brief question?

Mr. Cooper: A very brief question, Mr. Speaker. One brief question: would you like to continue with some of your thoughts?

10:10

Mr. Schneider: Oh, my goodness, would I ever.

Mr. Speaker, what if I have children on my farm? You know, my farm is their home, too. The ridiculousness of this proposed legislation is that when OH and S applies, I would have to submit paperwork to some bureaucrat in Edmonton outlining that I'm going to have my 12-year-old child go milk the cows or feed a couple of pigs, collect some eggs, maybe run out on the quad and fix some fence so that the cows don't get out. Now, that bureaucrat is probably going to look at a list of chores, and because it's not on his list . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, the answer to the question that was asked of you: would it be yes or no? If that was the question to be asked, it would be a one-word answer, yes or no.

Mr. Schneider: He asked if I would like to continue with my thoughts, Mr. Speaker. That's what I'm doing.

The Speaker: So the answer to the question would be yes or no?

Mr. Schneider: I said that, absolutely, I'd love to.

The Speaker: Okay. Now, do you have another question, hon. Opposition House Leader?

Mr. Orr: I have a question.

The Speaker: I have one right here. Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Orr: I'd like the member to just clarify for me. I think I heard in your earlier statements what I interpret as a conflict of interest for the government. If the government is to mandate monopolistic, WCB, poor-quality insurance and the government is under obligation to try and save some money, I think that puts them in a considerable conflict of interest if they're also supposed to be supporting and caring for workers. It means, then, that they, in fact, have to reduce their costs and cut benefits for injured workers. Whose side are they on here? Are they on the side of saving money, or are they on the side of caring for the workers? You know, in law the same lawyer cannot represent opposing parties normally. Why is this so in this situation, and does this, in your opinion, contribute to the dysfunctional aspects of WCB? Would private insurance actually be a better choice?

The Speaker: The Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You're welcome.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you very much, sir. As I mentioned, an owner of three or four feedlots was in my office the other day, and I have to believe that what he was saying was true. He said: "We don't use WCB. We use private insurance because WCB is so onerous and troublesome." All the data would state that certainly there are lots of success stories with WCB, but it does not take four minutes on the Internet to dig up 30 where people are having trouble. The bulletproof glass on the building would let me assume that there may have been issues at one time and that there may be issues in the future, so I would have to say to the hon. member that private insurance has got to be a lot more beneficial, probably cheaper, with a wider range of protection and coverage for employees.

Can I continue with a different thought? There's one organization in this country called 4-H. The 4-H program has a mission statement

that states, “Learn to Do by Doing.” Learning through experience is a key objective of 4-H. At all levels of 4-H members are encouraged to learn through active participation. 4-H is young people and adults learning project and life skills, co-operating and having fun together, sharing leadership, and learning to do by doing. 4-H has been around in Alberta communities since 1917. This is an honourable organization that teaches children life skills by allowing them to do.

We don’t want the government telling parents how to raise their children on family farms, farms that have operated safely and without government interference for generations. It’s education in the home and schools and in the media that is the best way to encourage worker safety. Education, not legislation. No amount of bureaucracy and red tape can make a workplace one hundred per cent safe. There’s always going to be something getting by all the due diligence implemented.

You know, Mr. Speaker, if anything or everything that I’ve just talked about will not appear in the legislation and the legislation will not be more in line with what farmers and ranchers in Alberta would expect from a compassionate government, then there’s only one entity, only one source, if you will, that needs to take the blame for that, and that is the government, that is pressing this bill down the throats of farmers and ranchers in this province. This government has had a great opportunity to engage the people that this bill affects. It has had a great opportunity to prove to the farmers and ranchers . . .

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

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I prefer today, actually, to speak mostly to my constituents because I have the very real sense that the members across the floor aren’t really listening anyway. They say that they’re consulting, but they aren’t actually listening to anything that’s said, and I do know who elected me. So to my friends in the riding: that’s who I’m speaking to, Mr. Speaker.

As they already know, agriculture is our second-largest export industry in this province.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you direct your comments through the Speaker.

Mr. Orr: Yes, sir. I did think I said “Mr. Speaker” several times, but I’ll try and focus that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Orr: According to the 2014-15 Agricultural and Rural Development annual report there are actually 62,000 farm operators in Alberta, and then they go on and point out that of these many operators 90 per cent of them sell a gross net of less than \$500,000 a year, which means that if they manage to keep even 10 per cent of that, they’re making a very modest income in many ways. So 90 per cent of them truly are family farms and farm families. The numbers actually tell a story that I think probably most of the farm people in our communities actually know already, and that is that the vast majority of these ranches and farms are small, owner-operated businesses.

Now, there’s something that needs to be said there. What that means is, Mr. Speaker, that these are free-enterprise endeavours. They are free enterprise to the core, to the heart, and to the soul. If I may, I would like to take a minute and explain to my riding people why it is that the members across the floor, although they say that they hear, aren’t actually listening. I’d like to explain to my members what is at the heart and soul of an NDP mindset. I know that our owner-operated farm businesses are free enterprise at heart,

but if one is reminded and goes back and takes a few moments for a little bit of a history lesson, the beginning and the birthplace of the NDP government is in a document called the Regina Manifesto.

If I may, I would like to quote a couple of lines from that manifesto because it is the guiding document and the heart and soul of the NDP Party. The manifesto states, “We aim to replace the present capitalist system.” Now, the word “capitalist” in modern language, up-to-date language, is free enterprise, so their intent is to replace the free-enterprise farm system. Part of the reason they cannot and they will not listen to you, no matter how many protests you make, is because their intent is to replace the very system by which you exist. I’d like to quote a little bit farther from the same document. Their intent is one “in which economic planning will supersede . . . private enterprise.” Now, if farmers are not private-enterprise individuals, I don’t know anybody that is, but their intent is to supersede you entirely. You could translate that to say: destroy you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, the “you”: is that the Speaker? Direct it through the Speaker. When you use the phrase . . .

Mr. Orr: I’ll speak to you. You don’t want me to speak to my residents, to my riding?

The Speaker: I want you to speak through the Speaker if you will, sir.

Mr. Orr: I’ll speak to you. They can hear me.

Mr. Bilous: Point of order.

The Speaker: Excuse me.

You have a point of order? Proceed.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Bilous: I am citing from 23(j). The member is clearly trying to use language of a nature to create disorder. I’d also like to clarify, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. member is referring to a document that is not adopted or created by the Alberta NDP, so inferring that what he is reading is the policies of this party is incorrect and needs to be corrected for the record.

10:20

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, I’m rising to speak in defence of my colleague from Lacombe-Ponoka. He is reading from a document, one of the founding documents of the NDP. The NDP is a federated party that has no distinction from the federal or provincial levels. It is a single party registered at different levels of government, but it is structurally a federated party. The CCF is a founding, constituent part of the New Democratic Party of Canada and the New Democratic Party of Alberta.

He is quoting from its founding documents and founding principles. It is highly pertinent to this debate. It is a factual document. If the NDP members wish to disassociate themselves from Tommy Douglas and the CCF and their own history, which they proudly proclaim regularly, that is a different issue, but this is highly pertinent. This is not intended to create disorder. If the members across have any issues with members on this side quoting their founding documents, then I recommend they disassociate themselves from their own founding documents.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I do not believe that this is a point of order. However, I would ask, firstly, that the members direct their comments – you must use the first-person you; it’s the Speaker that

you're speaking to. And I would ask, as this hour draws on, that you cease and desist from using the kind of language that's going upset the House.

Please, hon. member, let's get back to Bill 6, please.

Debate Continued

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, I truly do not believe that this is irrelevant to Bill 6. The reason that Bill 6 matters to farmers is because they are free enterprise in their heart and soul, and the reason that the members opposite cannot and will not listen to them is because they are socialist in heart and soul. We're talking about a political, social difference here. It's history. It's the reality. I'm not trying to be inflammatory. It's just a simple reality of history. Their name, NDP currently, was previously CCF, and that's their history. I'm just drawing a point to it. I'll move on from that. Obviously, I've hit the heart and soul of the issue because it's gotten a tremendous response.

Alberta farms are not just workplaces. They are free-enterprise places, and they are also homes and communities. For the families that work the land, it isn't just a job; it's a way of life, as we've already heard. I don't feel like I should need to repeat these kinds of things over and over and over, Mr. Speaker.

Farmers do rely on their community, their neighbours, their friends, their extended family to get the job done. Not that this government has expressed any interest in it to date, but I highly suggest that they go and ask some of these people, sit down at their farms and ranches, and learn this from them or go ask how it is that, by community, they harvest each other's fields. Running a farm often means helping your family or your neighbour run their farm, too. Everybody pitches in, and they get the work done in a single season with long hours. Now, that seems to require that we have labour laws to prevent them from working too many hours in the day or hiring people to do that.

I'd like to pull an example though, of the vitality and the excitement of long hours from a completely different field. My oldest son works in hi-tech venture cap. down in Silicon Valley, and he tells me that one of the most energizing, exciting, moving parts of being involved in that is the fact that they are a team, together working and creating something new. They are creating things that nobody's ever worked on before. They work, literally, sometimes 24 hours a day. They work day and night. They don't even pay attention to hours. The whole point of it is that it's so exciting, there's so much camaraderie, day and night. It's a triumph. It's a celebration. It's an incredible social thing that they do together, and he says: I wouldn't trade it for anything or any amount of money.

Farmers experience the same thing. This legislation wants to take that away from them. It's their culture. It's their life, and they will not allow it to be taken away from them. Yes, there's a big amount of work that is needed to run a successful farm. It can be unfathomable to those who are used to working a 9-to-12 and having all kinds of rules and regulations that they shouldn't have to do anything more. But, Mr. Speaker, the long hours, which are often harsh working environments, that do pose serious health and safety risks to farmers, are something that they understand and that they embrace. [interjections] Safety is always top of mind for them, and I would like to point out that although they understand – yeah. See? They're not listening, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'll be sad with you. Please keep going.

Mr. Orr: Okay. Fair enough.

The reality is that they know this risk, and they embrace it completely.

Now, I'd like to draw another illustration from our current society. We have today a social phenomena, that's often spoken of in regard to family, called helicopter parents, who seek to bubble wrap their kids and protect them and keep them from anything that might be any risk at all. I'd like to suggest that this legislation wants to bubble wrap our farmers and wants to be a helicopter government to our citizens. We have a generation of young people who have grown up in a bubble-wrapped world and who actually crave some adventure. My second son is actually one of these young men who hates the sterile, safe, controlled environment of modern society. He's a rock climber, and today we have all kinds of young people who take all kinds of risks, with whitewater kayaking and snowboarding off the zone where they should be and taking endless kinds of . . . [An electronic device sounded]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please. Does somebody have a phone on in here?

An Hon. Member: The member from Lacombe has his phone on his desk.

The Speaker: Okay. So there is not or there is?

An Hon. Member: It's vibrating, possibly.

The Speaker: Carry on.

Mr. Orr: The reality is that in a bubble-wrapped society we have young people in droves who crave some risk and some danger, and why? My youngest son articulates it with so much more passion than I do: because I finally feel alive.

Psychologists have actually pointed it out in a large number of articles, actually. One from 2011, *Evolutionary Psychology*, published an article on risky play. We're talking about farm safety and risk here. It's entirely relevant, risky play. It's quite widely spread. They actually argue that without some risk in life children have an increase in eroticism and psychopathology – the doctors should appreciate this – in a society if children are hindered from partaking in risky play. Over the past 60 years we have had a decline in risky play, a continuous, gradual, ultimate, dramatic increase also in all sorts of childhood mental and emotional disorder. Risky play helps develop the ability to regulate fear and anger and creates healthy beings.

A University of British Columbia study recently published by the child . . . [interjections] This is about farm . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm having some difficulty in trying to make the assertion. Please be seated. Please be seated. Please be seated. Hon. member, please be seated. I'm speaking. Please be seated. Thank you.

Please, can you make more clear how your story ties to Bill 6? It's been a very scenic route. Could we get to the substance, please?

Mr. Orr: This bill is about farm safety, the fact that farm children are at risk. If we put them in bubble-wrapped society, we are in fact putting them at risk because they grow up with less ability to cope.

The University of British Columbia study says that where children take risks, they have increased social interactions, increased creativity, increased resilience, and are more healthy adults. Farm families know this. They embrace the risk, and quite frankly they do not want their children put in a bubble-wrapped society. Unfortunately, I understand that accidents will happen. The

psychologists and the authors from around the world who talk about this acknowledge that, yes, there is some risk, but we can't live in a nonrisk world. It just isn't out there. It's a fantasy. Too often it does cause some harm.

But let's talk about the harm to farm workers. Research has showed that in Alberta the number of farm accidents that happen to hired workers versus family owners is 9 per cent hired, 91 per cent family owners. That's the reason why farmers are opposed to this, because 91 per cent of them are actually family owners.

10:30

Yes, farm safety is extremely important. It has to continue to be at the top of the priority list. Immigrants should be protected, no question about that. But farmers do not want their lives or their culture destroyed, and adding red tape doesn't improve safety, but increasing awareness and sharing best practices does. The agricultural community has a lot of knowledge that is immeasurably important in this, and beginning from an early age, farm kids are taught about how to deal properly with livestock and other farming methods and all kinds of things that actually make them the best children in this province.

Speaking about children growing up, which is what this bill is all about, their safety, with regard to 4-H, will this government be including these clubs under this policy? Will children at farm clubs be subject to OHS and WCB?

Some Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Orr: Yeah. They say no, but I would like to read to you from the WCB website. If you are operating a for-profit farming operation, which almost all of them are, it is defined on the website as one which sells goods commercially to individuals or other organizations: you must cover any unpaid workers including family members and children performing work on your farm. WCB website. Don't tell me it isn't there.

When a child is learning about how to look after his 4-H cow, is that labour? What I just read off the WCB website seems to say that. I come up again. How is the bureaucrat that goes on the farm to administer these rules going to deal with the 12-year-old who has used his 4-H profits? He bought six cows just this fall. He actually only bought five because he didn't have that much money, so his grandmother bought the other one with him, so now he learns how to be in a business partnership. How is WCB going to administer that when they come on the family farm, which is a for-profit farm, and the cows are mixed up with his father's? Are six cows not WCB liable, and the rest are? Are they going to have to have a separate barn? Are some of the cows subject to OHS and labour legislation? What about . . . [interjections] Don't tell me it isn't there. It's written on your WCB website.

What about the three little girls, seven, nine, and 10 years old, in my riding who have 70 chickens and sell the eggs and make a pretty good profit from them?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Under 29(2)(a), are there any questions to the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka? The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you. I might just add a few comments, if I might, as 29(2)(a) gives some latitude around comments or questions, and the hon. member might have an opportunity to respond should time allow. I hope that I'll be able to be concise enough so that he would be able to respond.

I heard the hon. member talking about the importance of the family farm, and we had the opportunity to receive a little bit of a history lesson around the family farm. Certainly, we've seen an

attack on that very way of life, and we've seen some real vagueness on behalf of the government when it comes to regulations and exactly what those regulations will look like. The government has made a commitment to consult on these regulations, and there's a significant concern amongst family farmers. Many of those family farms employ multiple people, but they still remain a family farm, with friends and neighbours helping.

The challenge that I've been hearing – and my question to my hon. colleague will be around the consultation on these regulations. We have the regulations that will come into effect in a year and consultation around the OH and S regulations as well as the labour standards. I've been hearing a lot that this is real concern for farmers, that they're not being consulted prior to . . .

The Speaker: The question, hon. member.

Mr. Cooper: Yes. I'm moving in that direction.

The Speaker: Yes. Faster, please.

Mr. Cooper: I still think that these comments have been brief; 29(2)(a) gives about five minutes of brevity.

The Speaker: Hon. member, ask the question, please.

Mr. Cooper: The question, I guess, is around this consultation. If they haven't been consulted prior to the coming-into-force date or until the law passes, which is creating the fear and the concern . . .

The Speaker: You've said that already. Ask the question.

Mr. Cooper: Is the hon. member hearing similar concerns from Lacombe-Ponoka around this consultation issue?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Could we have the answer to the question?

Mr. Orr: Absolutely. The answer, Mr. Speaker, is that the people do not trust that they are being heard. They absolutely do not trust a government, if I may refer to the history again, that comes out of the roots of a socialist background, and . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, there was a question about the people of Lacombe that the hon. member asked. Could you answer the question?

Mr. Orr: The people do not trust the consultation. They do not trust the government. In this particular case, NDP governments in other provinces have continually proven that – those that are for free enterprise are not prepared to trust this government to write willy-nilly rules after the fact. They are not prepared to give a blank cheque and then trust that when they send out legions of bureaucratic police to enforce it all, it's all going work out in the wash in the end. They don't trust this government and its history and what it stands for in its heart and soul. That is the answer.

There are all kinds of complicated issues for which there are no answers, and they're not prepared to trust a blank cheque. They want to be consulted. They want to know what the answers are going to be before. For instance, right out here on the Legislature grounds the other day I was approached by a farmer who said to me, "Okay. I own a U-pick berry farm." He says: "How are they going to value that? Pickers are paid in berries. They're going to charge me WCB on that? Can I pay my WCB in berries?" That's what he asked me. There are so many issues about this whole thing that are absolutely not clear. It's impossible.

Another farmer right out here the other day asked me about rodeos. In Ponoka we have the second-largest rodeo in the province. Is this going to kill rodeos? At the moment WCB . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and talk about this bill. You know what? I'd like to begin by discussing duty. You know, the first thing we have to do is talk about duty. We have a duty to consult, a duty to go out to our riding, to our constituents and consult. "Duty" truly is a term that conveys a sense of moral commitment. I have to repeat that – moral commitment – because I'm not hearing enough of that out of enough people. Let's put it that way.

You know, it's also an obligation to someone or something. This moral commitment should result in an action. It is not a matter of a passive feeling or of mere recognition. All too often I've heard this government saying that they've heard, but are they hearing? They're listening, but they're not hearing. I'm not getting that. This moral commitment: you've got to embrace this, and you've got to internalize what you're hearing. When someone recognizes a duty that the person theoretically commits to himself for fulfillment without considering their own self-interest, that's part of this duty.

10:40

An Hon. Member: How does this relate to the bill?

Mr. Taylor: Okay. Let's go to consultation. How about consultation? This is part of the duty, you know. Consultation, on the other hand, is a conference at which advice is given or views are exchanged. You consult first, and then you can look to see if it's a good bill or not. If you're making proper consultation, you'll have gone out to the people in your riding. That's what I would like to be able to do, to go out to our riding and ask the people in my constituency, and I would hope that you would want to do more of that consulting. And if we kill Bill 6, you'll have an ability to go out there and consult with your constituents. You can take this time off and use that time . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, through the Speaker, please.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry. I should be making sure that I'm addressing you. My apologies. I'll do that. Sorry.

Mr. Speaker, anyone conducting an undertaking has a duty to consult so far as it's reasonably practical with workers who carry out work for the business or undertaking who are likely to be directly affected. If you look out there, with the farmers, the ranchers, these people are actually directly affected, very much so. Farmers and ranchers are by this definition very directly affected. They're the ones that work on the land, work with each other, are tightly knit together with their families and communities.

But for some reason they're being left out. They're being left out of the most important process and are in no way having real consultation. That's what I'm hearing. I'm getting phone calls. My office in my constituency is getting phone calls. I'm getting phone call calls. I'm getting e-mails, letters. On the last day that I talked to my assistant back in Battle River-Wainwright, he told me that he had 200 letters that came in with regard to this.

Where does this duty lie, Mr. Speaker, with the farmers and ranchers? Why does this government not want to have this first go to committee – I think it's a reasonable question – and have this pass with consultation, meetings with our farmers beforehand? You know, it would sure make our lives a whole lot easier, I think, in

this whole process if we went to committee first. It would make your lives a whole lot easier.

The nature of consultation means that information, Mr. Speaker, and matters must be shared with farmers, and they must be given a reasonable opportunity to express their views and to raise health or safety issues and to be able to contribute to the decision-making process related to this matter. They need to be able to contribute to the decision-making process. That's an absolutely important part of this consultation. This must be done in an open forum, I believe, before a decision has been reached. Otherwise, you are basically forcing an act upon them. Farmers and industry stakeholders have been in this profession for many years and have a lot to offer when it comes to considering the whole range of operations in the province in ways that, I believe, this government has not thought through.

A small family farm, Mr. Speaker, does not operate the same as a large-scale operation. I believe that the government is leaving out the most important part. They are removing the part for the right of the people to have a say. Without taking time to get this right the first time, I think that this government will learn that you have to come back and redo this and redo it if you don't take the time to properly consult and send this to committee. It needs to go to committee, or it needs to be killed. One of the two things needs to happen. Kill Bill 6. I heard "kill Bill 6," chant after chant after chant, and I'm sure that anybody in the NDP that went outside heard "kill Bill 6" as well, shouted from the steps of the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, forcing compliance before discussion will only serve to create a situation where farmers feel hostility towards the government. I don't think the government wants to have those ill feelings, you know, thrown at them, but this is what's going to happen. Well, this is what has happened. I shouldn't say, "going to happen." It has happened. What does the government have to hide that they're trying so hard to pass legislation without proper consultation?

Mr. Speaker, history has proven that a safe workplace is achieved when everyone involved in the work communicates with each other beforehand. So let's consult and get it right. Farmers are the first to understand safety on their farms. They don't want to have anybody injured. They don't want themselves injured, they don't want their children injured, and they don't want their workhands injured. They don't want anyone injured, and I believe that's what both parties agree on, that we want safety. We want safety in this workplace. Safety is critical to farmers and their families and their friends, to their lives. It's absolutely important to them. You know, nobody cares more about family farm safety than the moms and dads that work on the farms. They want to improve the lives of their families.

You know, by drawing on the knowledge and experience of the workers that are out there, more informed decisions can be made about how work should be carried out. If you're going out and you're relying on the information and the knowledge that they've garnered over decades, you're going to learn something from farmers, and this legislation could be that much better if we took the time to consult and just asked the farmers about what they think and what should be done. You know, Mr. Speaker, it's about education, not legislation.

Mr. Cyr: Educate, not legislate.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. That's right. That's what I meant to say.

Education is absolutely the most important thing that we can do. It doesn't matter what happens with legislation if they don't understand what the process is, Mr. Speaker. If the process is to be safe, they have to understand that. Farmers understand that farming and ranching is diverse and dynamic and can be a high-risk

environment. They absolutely understand that, but they would like this government to also take into consideration their thoughts on safety instead of just ramming through this agenda.

This Bill 6, as was pointed out earlier, has only five pages. It seems like not very much information is being sent out to the farmers, and it seems like there must be a hidden agenda behind this. Farmers have said that at these town halls. They go to town halls, and I'll be having a town hall meeting in Kinsella this Sunday at 2 o'clock at the Kinsella centre to discuss with farmers. This is part of the consultation. At the town halls they've been saying to slow down, and that's what I've heard when I've talked to farmers over the phone and heard about the other town hall meetings that were discussed already.

These farmers love to do what they're doing. Why don't you want to listen to them? Mr. Speaker, I heard this government say that they're working in partnership and listening for feedback, but it seems that they're not. All these people are asking you to kill the bill. That's what I've heard. Kill Bill 6 and reconsider consulting with them first and come up with better safety practices. Government should be trying to foster positive relationships because understanding the views of others leads to greater cooperation and trust. Farmers are trying to communicate. They're trying to communicate with this government, but it seems that this government is just not listening.

10:50

Mr. Yao: Say what?

Mr. Taylor: This government is just not listening.

Why does this government repeatedly say that they are consulting with farmers when we know that this is not an absolute truth or a fact? The government is telling the farmers that they're consulting on something to change their lives, but you're not in consultation with them and taking into consideration their issues. At best this NDP government has put on information sessions, which, up to just a couple of days ago, the members have not attended. They have let the folks from WCB and OH and S run these information sessions. How is this fair, how is this consulting, and how is this transparent for these farmers?

I have not heard, Mr. Speaker, that there have been any consultations coming from these meetings. These farmers and ranchers are just being told what information the government wants them to hear. The farmers have been told: this is what's going to happen on January 1, 2016. That's what they're being told. That's what it says at the end of the bill, that in 2016 this is going to be passed. That's what they're concerned with, that they don't have a chance to have that consultation. They don't want you to go ahead and implement this bill on January 1 the way it's worded. That's what I'm hearing time and time again.

Mr. Speaker, they would like this government to stop this process, start consultations, and come to a reasonable agreement, which includes cultivating a safe, fair, healthy workplace for Alberta farmers and ranchers. This government is confusing consulting with informing. Finalizing and submitting plans: that is not consultation. This government is choosing to ignore farmers.

Mr. Speaker, they need to apologize for their mistakes and commit to working with these farmers. These farmers have spoken. Frankly, they're angry that you're not consulting with them. I should say "the government." I shouldn't say "you," Mr. Speaker. Sorry about that. For these farmers, opposing Bill 6 is not opposing farm safety. They are disagreeing with the ramming through of this legislation without truly understanding the family farm.

If this government had consulted with special-interest groups, which they have, who have an interest in one thing, to make a profit

off these farmers – it seems like that's what's happening. I'm sure these consultations are one-sided. This government needs to hear all sides.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Hanson: Yes, sir, 29(2)(a). Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A question for the member. As elected officials it's our duty and responsibility to represent the concerns of our constituents and to listen to their concerns and opinions and bring them forth to this Legislature. Our job is to provide a voice in government for the people we represent.

Now, my constituency office for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills has been fielding calls from outside of my area. Specifically, residents from Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville and Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater have been calling my office because they don't feel that they're being represented fairly, that their voice is being heard. Their members in the Legislature are not standing up and speaking for them. They don't feel that they can get through to the office. They're not getting the answers that they want.

I was just wondering if you're experiencing the same thing from surrounding areas in your constituency office. How many calls are you getting? How many letters are you getting? [interjection] Sorry, Mr. Speaker. How many letters are you getting? How many calls are you getting, if you are, from outside your constituency? Could you just expand on that a little bit?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With regard to the letters and the communications that I've been getting – the phone calls, the letters, and the e-mails – frankly, it's been literally hundreds of e-mails that we're getting, and the phone goes nonstop. We've had to put an extra person on staff while this Bill 6 has been going through just to be able to field all the calls and to be able to help communicate with the different ranchers and farmers out there.

There's a great concern for the people that are out there. They're looking and they're questioning; they're wondering what's going on. They don't trust what's happening, Mr. Speaker, what's going on. They don't trust the process. The process has not been communicated to them well. The process is broken. It's broken down and it's confusing and it's causing them to be angry. It's causing them to want to come over here. It's great to see the people that are coming out to the Legislature grounds because it's showing that they're very concerned. It's good to see that they have a unified voice saying: stop this bill; kill this bill.

At the very least, take it to committee. Let's stop and communicate this more fully. Thank you.

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

Mr. Piquette: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I've got a question for the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright. In his address he talked about us having a hidden agenda behind, you know, our proposed changes to Bill 6. I'd just like to know the member's opinion on whether he thinks that's a constructive and helpful way to characterize what we're doing and to present that message to the constituents in his riding and, indeed, our ridings as well. I mean, the hon. opposition has been saying over and over again that we need to have respectful, careful, reasoned consultation. I just wonder what his opinion is on inflaming passions and, I guess with his colleagues as well, making assertions which they know are not true because of the press releases that our minister of jobs and our

Premier have put out. I'm just wondering: why is he implying that we have a hidden agenda, and how does he think that's helpful to us getting through this debate?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. You know, really, this is about consultation. When you ask that, it's about the consultation. Where's the consultation been on this? Being able to go out to the different ridings – I don't know if any of these members have gone out and consulted. The Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose has, I believe, 1,955 farmers in his riding, and I would ask: has he gone out and consulted with those farmers? Has he held a town hall meeting? That's where this becomes very questionable. The document itself, like it was mentioned before, has only these five pages. Without proper consultation and without . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great sadness that I rise today to speak on behalf of the constituents of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre against Bill 6, the so-called Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act. Now, I say "with sadness" because I'm so very disappointed, I don't have to tell you, with this current NDP government, which has chosen to force through this legislation without proper consultation. Now, I never in my wildest dreams thought that a day would come in Alberta when a government would so blindly ignore our critical farm and ranch communities and force through wide-sweeping legislation without even taking the time to talk with the farmers and ranchers that it affects. This current government in particular, in my view, should be ashamed because it was elected in part due to public anger over the previous government's frequent use of similar practices.

11:00

Now, Mr. Speaker, these duck-and-cover tactics in support of blind ideological belief tend to breed turmoil, and I think we're seeing it now across the province. I must say that I'm heartbroken to report that in the case of both my communities back home in my riding as well as communities across the province, this is the case. Travelling back home this past weekend to my constituency, I was shocked to hear from my own children that kids in elementary classrooms are worried about what this government's policies mean for them, mean for their families, mean for their parents' livelihoods, and mean for their homes. My kids are getting phone calls and e-mails from their friends begging them to ask their dad to make the government listen. While it's great to see youth engaged with the political process, I wish it was under much better circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, this is just one indication of the level of frustration and fear among our farm and ranch families. In every community I stopped in while back home this weekend, I heard the same thing. People are mad. They're shocked and extremely concerned about this government's move to force this legislation through this House in less than two weeks and into law within a month. It's not just farmers and ranchers who are worried. It's entire communities, from coffee row to church parking lots. The people of our communities know just how important farmers and ranchers are. We're proud of them, and we stand with them.

Our farmers and ranchers are rightfully outraged that no one has talked to them about this bill. They are furious at these so-called town hall meetings where the government claims consultation is

supposed to be taking place, but it has not happened in any meaningful way. Instead, these meetings have featured bureaucrats telling farmers and ranchers how it's going to be. Now, Mr. Speaker, does that sound like consultation? Displays were set up to provide information on the new law and rules yet with no opportunity for stakeholders to speak or ask questions. Again, does that sound like consultation? Farmers and ranchers are demanding better. True consultation demands better than handing out brochures, patting people on the head, and pledging to help them set up WCB accounts.

My constituents back home and the hundreds of Albertans who are contacting my offices from across the province are infuriated that this government has asked this Assembly to put through a piece of legislation that is essentially a blank cheque. Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what this bill accomplishes when it opposes OH and S and the entire agricultural sector without providing any OH and S agricultural standards. What will these codes entail? Nobody knows. Essentially, this government is saying: hey, just trust us; we'll fix the things you're worried about after we pass the law. This is a ridiculous miscarriage of the legislative process and an affront to the oaths we have taken as servants elected to represent the public interest. There simply can be no major advancement in farm safety or on any other major policy initiative the government demands when they're asking for blind trust and no consultation for the people it affects.

The hard truth is that at the time of the last general election the vast majority of people in my riding did not trust this government. That's the truth, Mr. Speaker. This certainly has not changed in the past six months, which have seen this government systematically attack every employer, large and small, and every major economic sector. Yet blind trust with this bill is what this government is demanding.

Since this bill was announced, the government has systematically denied that any and all concerns raised by the public are valid. Rather than engage, discuss, or consult, the government chose to immediately leap into fear-and-smear mode. We have witnessed the Premier of Alberta stand up in this Assembly in front of all of us and accuse farmers and ranchers of forcing people to do unsafe work. She said that she was trying to rectify this great wrong that has been taking place in Alberta. Does she really think, Mr. Speaker, that farmers and ranchers have been systematically forcing our friends and neighbours to do unsafe work, tasks that these folks are pleading not to do? Does she really think so low of farmers and ranchers?

Whether she truly believes this or not or is just cranking up her ridiculous rhetoric, she really needs to get out of her office and meet the farmers and ranchers of this great province because, Mr. Speaker, they are some of the finest people this province and country have to offer. Let's be clear. The Premier's rhetoric has become unnecessarily provocative. To gain support for her government's actions, she has cast farmers and ranchers in a poor light, turning Albertans against Albertans. I'm willing to concede that that is perhaps not her intention, but this government needs to understand the consequences of implying that farmers and ranchers are improperly or selfishly motivated. Farmers and ranchers are proud of their operations and remain committed to the safety and well-being of all who work and live on their land. These farms are also their homes, and no one desires any less than the best for his or her family.

This Premier and this government certainly should apologize to farmers and ranchers for the unfortunate rhetoric being produced as well as trying to force this bill through the Legislature without proper consultation. Now, Mr. Speaker, through you I challenge the Premier to stand up right now and admit that she got it wrong, admit

that this process is hopelessly flawed, and at the very least send this bill to committee for proper consultation. She should stand up and make it clear that she is going to ensure that family farms are protected like they are in other provinces. She should stand up and make it clear that she'll make sure that kids' agricultural involvement will be protected. Perhaps most importantly, she should make clear that all the OH and S and employment standards will be fully transparent and completed in full before this bill proceeds so farmers, ranchers, 4-H clubs, rural communities, and all Albertans know exactly what this legislation will require.

I can tell you this, Mr. Speaker. Demanding blind trust without consultation is a recipe for disaster. In fact, as soon as I saw this bill from this government, I knew trouble was brewing. I knew folks at home would be upset, that hundreds of thousands of Albertans would be livid. The sad part is that this government is so out of touch with some parts of this province that they simply did not know. They really didn't see it coming. They only saw things from their own point of view, and they had no idea how entire communities could be so upset, so hurt, and so angry. I believe the word for that is arrogance. They didn't realize that this would anger even more people than the former government's horrific property rights bills a few years back. In less than a week I received more than a thousand phone calls on this issue and more letters and e-mails than I can count, and they're still coming in even as we sit here.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, is simply unacceptable. This government would be wise to step back from this course of action and commit to working with the communities affected to get this right. The bottom line is that the government's campaign of misinformation against ranchers and farmers is not making anyone safer. The folks who can actually take concrete action to improve safety are farmers and ranchers, and they're willing to help, but they cannot get anywhere with those who refuse to take into account what real life is like on a farm or ranch. In short, they want this government to work with them. Why won't the government work with them? It is an affront to them when they see this government take steps to ram this legislation through the process.

They aren't stupid, Mr. Speaker. They know that the provincial and federal governments regularly send bills to committee to allow expert testimony and consultation. They have seen this government send matters to committee to ensure that legislation is well thought out and that any and all ramifications have been addressed. They know that this NDP government put together a special committee on ethics and accountability and has sent relatively simple private member's bills to committee for review. Farmers and ranchers know all of this, and they're asking why Bill 6 is different, and I have nothing to tell them.

The fact is that Bill 6 is the most wide-ranging and important piece of legislation ever written with respect to agriculture in this province. Depending on how the OH and S and employment standards are written, this bill could end the concept of family farming as we know it, yet this government can't see fit to send this bill to committee and ensure that farmers have an opportunity to consult. For shame. Mr. Speaker, through you, shame on this Premier, who promised a better approach to the legislative process, and shame on these rural MLAs in this NDP caucus, who are not stopping this behaviour by this government for their constituents.

Now, I know that they're getting the same calls and the same e-mails that I am about this bill. I know that the bulk of their constituents are saying: hey, wait a minute. I'm sure of this because the same folks are calling me for help. Their constituents are calling me for help. They're calling my colleagues for help. Now, think about that, Mr. Speaker.

I challenge them through you, Mr. Speaker, all NDP rural MLAs, to stand up in this Assembly and explain why they think Bill 6 needs to be forced through with no consultation.

I ask them through you, Mr. Speaker, to explain to their constituents how the so-called town halls are in any way adequate.

I challenge them through you, Mr. Speaker, to explain why they think farmers and ranchers should blindly trust bureaucrats to protect family farming.

I ask them through you, Mr. Speaker, to stand up and explain, and if they cannot, then do their darn jobs and stand up to the government.

11:10

Mr. Speaker, through you I remind them that they are supposed to represent constituents' views on these bills and make sure that constituents' views and interests are on their minds first and foremost, not their Premier's. They need to explain right now why this bill has to pass this House at lightning speed, because I guarantee you that they will face questions during the election, not to mention every single day between now and then. This will not just go away. Duck and cover is not a legitimate long-term option on this one. Now, I understand that some of them are conflicted with the orders from the Premier's office, and I truly hope that they reach for the courage necessary to stand up against this. However, in the past we have seen government backbenchers choose to toe the line, abandon integrity, and cling to talking points.

Now, I certainly hope that is not the case here because the government's talking points on Bill 6 are truly ridiculous. How ridiculous is it to ask Albertans to trust this government after it attempts to force major legislation through the process without talking to farmers or ranchers? How ridiculous is it to refer to these town hall meetings as consultation when there is no dialogue other than to seek advice on when it would be most advantageous for unions to strike on farms? That's consultation?

How ridiculous is it to say that consultation isn't necessary because the previous government consulted four or five years ago? The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that thousands of farmers are coming forward right now, and they're telling us that they want their say, and no one from this government has bothered to ask their opinion. This flawed argument also ignores the fact that the last government chose education over legislation precisely because it did consult.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we're going to talk a lot about this in the coming days, particularly in Committee of the Whole, but with the limited time I have left to speak in second reading, I want to talk about why this matters. This bill in its current format hurts family farms. It hurts farming, it hurts ranches, and it hurts rural communities. You see, in Alberta farming is primarily a family enterprise. Only a small percentage of all farms and ranches sell more than half a million dollars a year. These farms and ranches are not just places for work; they are homes. The people who live in these homes are not just farming as a job but as a way of life. It is who they are. It is their family's identity. It is who their neighbours are, and it is crucial to their community.

Representatives of this government like to stand and accuse farmers and ranchers of forcing people to do unsafe work and say that all other provinces have the same legislation. Now, what they do not tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that other provinces also protect the family farm, and this bill does no such thing. Now, we've heard some vague promises over the weekend, as farmers and ranchers began to register their anger, about this government considering steps to protect family farms after the bill passes. I have not found one person in my riding willing to entrust the future of their home and their livelihood to the empty promises of this government. They need this bill to provide a hundred per cent ironclad protection for

family farms immediately upon implementation of this bill, and anything else is unacceptable.

The success of family farms relies on the help of not only the family but of the entire community. As a farmer from my community wrote to me:

When family farms have a major project, everyone pitches in. The neighbours and friends, and families pitch in. We do not pay each other, we help each other out. Let me please say that again. We do NOT pay each other, we HELP each other out! This is one of the greatest aspects, of farm life. The tremendous community support system we get to enjoy. This may not make sense to people from the city. But, it is because of this great support system that small farms and ranches are able to exist, and keep costs to a minimum. Many hands make light work.

Mr. Speaker, what will this legislation mean for the way that family farms are operated and how they interact with their neighbours? Under Bill 6 OH and S applies to volunteers, and it will have an impact. There's nothing in this bill that says otherwise. Pass this bill as currently worded without fully written employment standards, OH and S, and you risk attacking the very foundation of the family farm. Full stop.

I've heard from my constituents. This is a big deal.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any brief questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to ask the hon. member – you know, in my time as a paramedic I've seen certain things, and there are always certain trends around times and eras. When you think about the farm and how it's evolved, there's a lot of use of recreational vehicles versus horses, and there's also that part of the tradition of riding a horse to do some of the work. Now there are kids on ATVs and that sort of thing. One of the pieces in this legislation that I'm not clear on – and maybe the member can speak to it a little bit – is that as we go through this, statistically I don't know that any of that was vetted out in this process in terms of consultation. Now, one of the things I can commend the government on is the mental health review board that they put in because they understand that mental health is complex. What we're seeing here and what we're seeing play out in this Legislature and in this province is that this issue that the government has brought up with Bill 6 is a complex issue between the family farm and the corporate farm.

I mean, having had an uncle and a family farm that I used to go to – that work is complex because it's part of your day-to-day life. It is part of your enjoyment. It is this labour of love. It is everything that you put into it, your whole family. That's how you're raised. You know, there are traditions. There's tea, which I used to love. Grandma used to make the best chocolate cake. I remember being a kid. When I walked out the door, I walked out the door in a pair of running shoes, shorts, and a T-shirt. The first place I went to was the corrals and to the hay bales, and I ran around when I was old enough. The thing is that when I think about the complexity of this, statistically wouldn't it be wise – to the member on this question. We've talked a little bit about some of the changes in the evolution of the family farm and how complex it is, but there's a lot of grey area, a grey area that I think the family farms would want to know about.

Then, secondly, you know, how are we going to vet this? [interjection] Thank you, Member. Ultimately, at the end of the day, this is a good thing. If there are occupational hazards, let's identify those. Let's educate farmers, like the former government did. Thank you for that shout-out because education is always better.

Here's the other thing, to the member. There are a lot of questions on this, hon. member. I ask the hon. member: if this bill goes through, can you not see a lot of family farms just stop reporting incidents and driving a lot of this underground? This is the last thing we want. I'd ask the hon. member that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Nixon: Well, I only have a little bit of time left, so I'll just probably touch on the one main area. Given the hour I assume my children are in bed sleeping before school tomorrow, but at any other time of the day, if you ask me where my kids are, they're either attempting to get on a horse or thinking about getting on a horse at home. We live in the middle of cattle country, just outside of Sundre, and there are major ranches all around us. Their highlight is when they get to go participate in branding or to be able to participate in cattle drives, and that's how kids are all over my community.

In addition to that, you often see my neighbour – there's water that we share between our livestock and their livestock – as she's working her cattle and checking the fences, travelling with her youngest child on the front and another child on the back of her ATV as she checks the fences and does her chores. That's because, obviously, she's being a mother. She's taking care of her kids, but she's also being a farmer. That is how life is on a farm. You work at your home, and your kids are at your home, and you need to take them with you. She can't leave the kids at the house. It's intermingled. It's every part and every aspect of being on a farm or a ranch when you're on a family farm or a ranch because that's what your life is. You can't predict when a calf is going to come. You can't predict when one is going to need to be pulled. You can't predict when your spouse is away and you're going to need help from a neighbour to come over and do your chores.

You know, there are a lot of issues with this bill that need to be answered for farmers and ranchers. One that I think is unique – and I think the member was hinting at this area – is respite milking. That happens in all of our communities. When a dairy farmer gets sick, other neighbours and people in the area will work their farm. They'll milk their cows. They'll make sure that their operations can keep going. They'll do it when they go on vacation. Dairy farmers don't get to go away a lot, and if it wasn't for respite milking, they wouldn't be able to go away. How is this bill going to affect it?

The problem with this bill is that there's no explanation. You could drive a truck through the holes in this bill. It's wrong, Mr. Speaker. What the government should do is send this to committee, talk to farmers and ranchers. Kill Bill 6: that is probably what they're going to tell you. But at least get farmers and ranchers around the table and find out what they need. Find out how this bill can accomplish the goal that we're trying to accomplish.

We're all for safety. Every farmer and rancher I talk to in my riding: no problem; they want to make things safer. Nobody cares more about their kids than their moms and dads, Mr. Speaker. I think we can all agree on that. How do we do that? I don't know how you can determine regulations and rules around an industry without talking to the people in the industry.

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

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to second reading of Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act. It's a bill which will force family farms to be covered under traditional OH and S and WCB legislation, the Employment Standards Code, and the Labour Relations Code.

Mr. Speaker, with family farms, a way of life is under attack. I do not claim to be an expert in farming, but as a parliamentarian I

believe that it is my duty to approach every issue with an open mind, consult with many people, absorb as much information as I can before I make a decision on any issue. This government is quickly falling out of grace with Albertans and branding itself as an ideological force that does not care to consult with those affected.

11:20

Yesterday as hundreds of farmers gathered on the steps of the Legislature to voice their concerns, I was listening, and so was the entire Wildrose caucus. I heard from grain farmers, cow-calf operators, dairy producers, honey producers, and others across this industry. The thing they all wanted most was just real consultation.

Mr. Speaker, this government, in an attempt to mitigate the damage caused by their agenda, set forth to host various town halls across the province seeking input on this legislation. However, they were not allowed to voice their concerns with the bill. They were only allowed to speak to suggestions on implementation. The message was clear: the NDP government will not listen; they will only impose. Many of my colleagues in this House have noticed this trend as well, with the speed and limited debate with which we are moving through these motions. This bill has obvious concerns and many for which the government does not have answers other than: trust us; it will be addressed in regulations. My constituents of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo did not elect me to vote for legislation which gives more power to ministers and bureaucrats to decide on a whim without consultation.

These are decisions which affect the livelihoods of thousands of Albertans, and it is important that when this legislation is introduced, all consequences are realized. At Monday's protest insight was shared with me as to how the employment standards regulation will apply to family farms and, in particular, to the children on the farm. While the NDP are prone to extremes, exploiting accidents and other personal tragic situations, it is not necessarily representative of the truth. In part 5 of the employment standards regulation it places restrictions on employees under 18 years of age. An adolescent is defined as an individual that's 12, 13, 14 years old. Adolescents may work in the following approved jobs: delivery person for flyers, newspapers, and handbills; delivery person for small goods and merchandise for a retail store; clerk or messenger in an office; clerk in a retail store; certain jobs in a restaurant and the food service industry, with restrictions.

My list is the approved list as defined by the code. To one farmer this means that he will now be in contravention of the act. You see, Mr. Speaker, this parent and rancher owns a small dairy farm, and a large portion of his day is looking after livestock. Filling up the trough with water from the hose is now a prohibited action and in contravention of the code. There's even, quite certainly, no harm posed by this, but he could be charged under the act.

Just so that everyone in this House is aware, these are not charges to be taken lightly. Section 132 of this code lays it out quite clearly.

- 132(1) An employer, employee, director, officer or other person who is guilty of an offence under this Act is liable,
- (a) in the case of a corporation, to a fine of not more than \$100,000, and
 - (b) in the case of an individual, to a fine of not more than \$50,000.

As if this was not bad enough, when I think of myself when I was 15, 16, 17 years old, I remember being quite responsible, and I'm sure that is the case with many young adults these days as well, as the member opposite can attest to.

In this code the 15- to 17-year-old age range is defined as young persons. Here the code stipulates what they cannot do rather than what they can. Some are common sense – no selling of liquor, as was pointed out – but many are not in the context of a family farm

such as working without the continuous presence of an adult from the hours of 12 a.m. to 6 a.m. When you're working on a farm, you're dealing with living, breathing things that do not follow the government-imposed schedule.

For this I was given a story of cow-calving. I was told the story of a gentleman's 17-year-old son who was left alone in the early hours of the morning while his father was out. When the dad returned, the son had successfully helped deliver his first calf. This is a typical story of pride, ownership, and responsibility for many ranchers, but to this ideologically driven government it is an unlawful act of child labour. Farm life cannot adhere to stringent codes, and if they are policed in this manner, the legislation must reflect the real-life situations they face.

I'd like to quote a letter addressed to the agriculture minister from one farmer who opposes Bill 6.

Please consider the effects Bill 6 could have on what farms and ranches in Alberta look like. Right now we are the family farms, who cannot afford to be legislated off the land. Does the government really want the people growing our food to be employees of land-owning corporations who may not care about the land like a family member, who has the knowledge and wisdom of generations who cared for it before him? I beg of you: do not rush this legislation through. Take the time to ensure that our shared core values are at the heart of how it will affect those in the field. We all want to share the utmost safety of every person involved in raising our food and fibre. Let's do it in a way that will not force family farms out. Please engage in meaningful consultation with farmers and ranchers about what they need and what they want from a farm safety bill.

I echo these concerns and sentiments and those also raised by my learned colleagues. I strongly urge the members of this Assembly to refer this back to committee so that you can consult or to just vote outright against it. The point is that you have to do your due diligence. You have to ask the people. This is bad legislation. In fact, all your stuff is bad legislation because you are not consulting a lot.

Mr. Speaker, you know, the NDP was in opposition for such a long time. Why are they trying to rush everything through right now when they understand that they have to do their due diligence when they're writing these bills, that are going to affect so many people?

Mr. Speaker, if I might give an analogy that perhaps they can relate to a little bit more, when you don't ask the right questions or when you don't ask any questions, when you don't consult properly, it can impact anything regardless of the subject matter, regardless of the profession. It doesn't matter whether you're a school board trustee, a social worker, a geologist, or a paramedic; you have to ask the right questions to do your job.

When we talk about due diligence, if I might speak from my own experience from my previous life, it's the simplest of phone calls to 911, and we're responding. It's for someone who's not feeling well. I get to this call. If I might relate it, it's more of the atmosphere around here, just so they can relate to it a bit more. I went to respond to a fellow by the name of Jack, and he was kind of not feeling very well. You know, we do our due diligence; we start asking him some questions. We ask him his name, what happened. "Do you know where you are right now?" He's, like: "Oh, my name is Jack." "What happened?" "I don't know. I was listening to the budget by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, and some hard feelings started to come down." "Do you know where you are right now?" I ask him these kinds of questions. "Yeah. I'm in the House; I'm here in the Legislature." "Do you know what time it is?" "I know it's very late. I thought this government was going to promise us none of these night sittings, but here we are." I ask him questions about: did this happen before? He'll respond to all these questions. He'll tell me his name is Jack. He tells me what happened, that he was listening

to the budget. He tells me he knows where he is, right here in the House. He knows what time it is, and he knows what he was doing before this all happened.

Some people might just call it a day right there and say: "You know what? I've asked you enough questions. Let's get you on that stretcher, and let's slide you on out." But if you're doing your due diligence, you're going to ask a lot more questions. You're going to try to get to the root of the problem, figure out what the causes are, try to address all the issues. You know, I might be asking him: "Why did you feel so uncomfortable? What's going on?" "Well, I'm having some discomfort." "Some discomfort, you say? My goodness. Can you describe this discomfort?" "Well, it's a pain, something in my chest." "A pain in your chest? My goodness."

11:30

It's a good thing I'm asking these questions because right now we're going to find out what provoked this pain, what's the quality of this pain, what's the rate. We're looking at little tricks like his rate of respiration, the rate of his pulse, some little things to give us some indications of what's going on with this fellow. I'm asking for severity: "On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you rate this discomfort in your chest?" I'm going to ask him, "How long ago did this start?" and he'll tell me, "An hour ago, when that budget started." You know, we're going to go on and on with all these questions. I'm going to keep on asking more questions.

I'm going to do an assessment on this patient. I'm going to feel for the pulse. I'm going to continue to ask him all sorts of stuff. Is he allergic to anything? Because all these little questions that we have to ask might give us an indication of what is going on. "I'm not allergic to anything." "Are you on any medications?" "Well, I'm on nitroglycerine." "Pardon me? You're on nitroglycerine, you say?" Well, that's telling me now that he might be having some heart issues, and I'm going to ask about his past medical history, sir.

Mr. Speaker, these are important questions to ask, and they're questions that you have to ask. You can't just ask a couple of questions and walk on by. You have to make sure that you're doing a thorough job. I'm going to ask him about his medical history. He's going to tell me that he might have been having some heart problems in the past. Maybe's he's at McDonald's lots. Maybe he smokes a ton of cigarettes. Who can say for certain? But these are the questions that we have to ask because we have to find the root cause of what's going on here.

You know, I'm going to ask him things that might seem irrelevant, like a last meal. Why would you care, if you're having chest pain, that I'm going to ask you when you ate last? Because it could be something as simple as indigestion. Again, it's about asking the right questions, Mr. Speaker. We're going to ask for the events leading up to it. We ask all sorts of things. We're going to put things on this person, and we're going to assess him, in the same way that when they're looking at legislation, they should be looking at all the angles. They have to look at the measures and take a look at certain things.

But in the case of where I was, you know, we're putting on things like an electrocardiogram. We're checking his heart, looking at the patterns there with the electrical impulses. I'm getting his blood pressure. I'm taking his pulse. Because all of those things contribute to what could be going on with this fellow. I'm going to be counting his heart rate, and it's not just: do I feel a pulse or not? It's: is it a strong pulse, or is it a weak pulse; is it fast; is it regular, irregular? We have to ask all sorts of these kinds of questions, and I know there are people in this room that can account for all these things here. The questions. It is so important to do that consultation, ask

those questions, come up with all those answers so that you can come up with that perfect solution.

When we're talking legislation, when we're talking something that can impact so many people, we have to make sure that we do it right and we do it once. I'd be proud to be in the opposition and work with this government on a bill if they would do that proper consultation, if they would do that proper management of what this legislation is, what these documents are, because they do impact so many people. You know what happens when you're a paramedic and you don't ask all those right questions? Your patient dies. It's a pretty frustrating situation to be in. Fortunately, I didn't really encounter that too much because I was doing my due diligence.

Sir, I have to tell you that it is such an important thing that they do this due diligence because this does impact so many people. No one believes more in safety here. Commercial operations, those big ones: yes, we recognize that there need to be some things there. But these small farms run under a totally different operational mode.

I can personally talk to being and working on a farm. I worked on the only farm in Fort McMurray, owned by Mr. Jack Peden. I grew up with these folks. They would take me quadding and triking. Actually, they had trikes back then, highly illegal today. But we were safe. His father taught us all the most responsible things on how to operate this machinery.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I know that under 29(2)(a) we're going to hear how Jack made out.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Sure, Mr. Speaker. I was just wondering if the member would like to elaborate a little more on where he was going with those comments.

Mr. Yao: You know what? Growing up in Fort McMurray – you all might not think of it as a city, but it is a city – we were very close to being exposed to that country flavour, for sure, if you want to differentiate between them all. I was very fortunate to grow up with the Peden family because – you know what? – they had cows, they had horses, they had chickens. We helped with everything. His parents were so good to me. They guided me along. They taught me so many rules.

My parents – my father is a physician; my mother is a nurse – met this family, had been out at that same farm. They respected the fact and they enjoyed the fact that I would go out there because they knew that I was being taught some really good lessons about safety and respecting animals and livestock, respecting nature. There is no one that believes in a healthy environment more than this team over here. I can tell you that.

The simple things, like fishing, I might say. He even taught me how to tie a line properly, a lure, and how to take a hook out of a fish without jamming my finger on that hook, how to hold that pickerel properly without getting chewed up by its fins.

An Hon. Member: They're nasty critters.

Mr. Yao: They are nasty.

It was great fun. You know what? I learned how to use a knife. He taught me how to use a knife properly, so I could whittle a stick and have a hot dog, and we could start our own fire without cutting ourselves. It's a lifestyle that when you're in it, no one emphasizes safety more because no one wants anyone to get hurt. I mean, we're all people. We're all humans. We all believe in the same base things. When you put legislation on certain things, you can sometimes have an adverse cause and effect to what your intent was.

So do we understand your intent? Yes, we all recognize safety. We are all on the same team in that regard. But when it comes to legislating the backyard, your kids playing in the backyard and maybe helping mow the lawn or shovelling the walk – as bizarre as that sounds, that’s certainly what the impact seems to be on the small family farms – if you would provide that clarification in your legislation, you would make this all go away. That’s all we are asking you to do, to provide that clarity in your legislation. Again, your legislation, like everything else, is really vague.

The Speaker: Hon. member, again, your comments through the chair, please.

Mr. Yao: Apologies, Mr. Speaker.

I guess my point is that, you know, this legislation is very sparse, and they have to admit that. It’s like the budget they gave us. They want us to provide a shadow budget. I can’t provide a shadow budget. I know something about business, and there’s not enough detail in there for me to be able to provide a budget of any sort. It would be a lot of guessing, to be quite honest.

Mr. Hanson: Looks like that’s what they did.

Mr. Yao: Yes. Yes.

Mr. Speaker, I’m very disappointed by all the folks on the other side that represent these areas that we consider to be more rural areas. You know, maybe they should just step up and step out of that closet and recognize that they’re not country mice; they’re city mice. They certainly are not representing their country mice cousins. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member, any other comments?

Mr. Yao: I just want to say that it’s really disappointing that they aren’t taking this seriously. Really, this is legislation that they can refine. They can avoid a lot of this conflict if they would just recognize and listen to the people and perhaps consider adding some amendments, tweaking it. Sending it back to committee would be the best thing so that it can be properly assessed. Consultations are so important.

That is the challenge. Mr. Speaker, I challenge you to ask these fellows and ladies to speak up.

11:40

The Speaker: Are there any other comments?

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think you need to say that with a little more enthusiasm for the evening and for the event that we’re going through tonight and for the topic that we’re discussing. However, I can understand. The last time we were together this late at night, I seem to remember some of the young pups on the other side saying: are you sure that you can stay up; are you going to be able to get up in the morning? So this old dog over here is going to try to do his best to talk to you and through you to the people of Alberta on this pretty important topic.

I have to admit that being born in the city, perhaps somebody could accuse me of not really knowing what country life is like, Mr. Speaker. But I have to assure the House that I come from good rural stock, that my family homesteaded in this part of the world around 1908, 1909, 1910, and that I, too, know what it feels like to be in the southern parts of this country where the wind blows and you can see your dog run away for the next five days.

I want to start, maybe, by talking a little bit about an experience I had tonight. I had to leave a little bit earlier and then come back to the House tonight. One of the things that I was doing was talking

with a young man, a young fellow in about grade 4. He wanted to know a little bit more about what Bill 6 was all about. He wanted to know what was happening in the House with regard to Bill 6 and how it was working, and I had to try to sit down and help him to understand that, you know, when we come into the House, there’s first reading and second reading and Committee of the Whole and how this all works and how it relates to Bill 6. He was just in grade 4 or grade 5, yet this has touched him.

I’ve had, as many of the members in this House have said already, lots of people calling, lots of people phoning, some pretty frustrated. Sometimes you have to explain to people that, no, you can’t have a petition to call a general election. That’s not the way our system works. But that’s how angry they are sometimes. They’re looking for a way to try to have an impact on this bill and on this issue. They’re frustrated, whether they’re that young man that’s in grade 4 or grade 5 or whether they’re a senior who’s ranched all of his life and just wants to get rid of a government that he doesn’t think is listening to him, and I have to try to explain to him that, no, that’s not the way it works in our system.

In my short term as an MLA this bill has by far been the one that I think I’ve received the most feedback on, well, I know I’ve received the most feedback on, from my constituents. They’re extremely worried about this bill. Mr. Speaker, I want to start with this. Lots of people have said this, but I want to reiterate it because I think it does tie to the commonality that we have in this House. No one – and I mean absolutely no one – that earns a living through agriculture, no one in this House, no Albertan wants to see workers hurt or maimed on the job.

I can speak to personal experience from my own family history on this. Everyone on my dad’s side of the family are farmers and ranchers, every single one of them. You know, I can speak to an incident, about 25 years ago now, where my uncle was working out on the field and his bailer gets clogged up with hay. He jumps on top, and he thinks, “Oh, if I just grab it, if I just get it out of there,” and he got sucked in by the wrist. The belts are burning his wrist off. They were cutting through his wrist, and the only thing he can do to try to save himself from being sucked into that bailer is to try to grab the knife that’s in his pocket and cut his wrist off. That was the choice: get sucked into the bailer, or cut his wrist off.

An Hon. Member: Did he get compensated when he was injured?

Mr. Smith: Excuse me. It’s my turn to speak right now.

So when he’s trying to save his life, he dropped the knife, and he got sucked up to his arm, here. And he had to stay there for half an hour while the belts on that bailer burned through his arm, burned through the bone. Eventually, he was pushing himself so hard that when they finally gave way, he flew 20 feet off the bailer. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to create a problem there, but I bring that to your attention because nobody here wants to see that happen.

When I look back on that experience my uncle faced, I’m not sure – I mean, my uncle farmed all his life. He knew the dangers of being around a round baler. He knew he should have shut off that PTO. I’m not sure that legislation would have solved that problem. Education, maybe. Maybe. But in the real world that we live in, we know that we can all be educated and we can all have really good laws and sometimes we’re still going to make the wrong choices in life. That’s just the nature of life, isn’t it, Mr. Speaker? We’ve all been there, haven’t we? We’ve all been in those situations where we’ve known what to do, we’ve known we should or shouldn’t do something, yet sometimes we make the wrong choice. My uncle made the wrong choice.

You know, on a little more humorous side, I never had a chance to go out and do any of the branding. For some of you maybe over

on the other side you've gone out to brandings and you've been a part of that side of the farm culture and farm life, but I never had that opportunity until I moved out to Drayton Valley. I was a teacher, and we had some families in our church that were farm families, and I got invited out to a branding, and I got to learn what it was like to be on the back end of a cow and to have to sit down there and see the hooves smacking around the top of my head and wondering how I was going to get out of this. They took a great deal of pleasure, Mr. Speaker, in watching this civified teacher running down the end of a rope and grabbing the cow and putting him down on the ground and having to try to figure out how to keep this cow from killing me. Well, you know, I went home with an awful lot of bruises that day. Went home with an awful lot of satisfaction that day, having learned what it was like to be out on the farm and what farming life is really all about.

I learned about 15 years later, after becoming a vet, at every branding and castrating in our little area and in our church to keep my mouth closed because we went from slamming the cow down on the ground to having the cow run into a chute or a cattle squeeze and flipping that cattle squeeze up. One of my best friends in Drayton Valley, a mechanic: we were working, and the farmer was castrating a calf, and somehow that calf had scours, and I'm sure that if he'd had to do it over again, he would have kept his mouth shut because he actually got very sick and almost died. I don't know how you legislate that. I don't know how you legislate keeping your mouth closed so you don't get it full of something, okay? So the reality is that sometimes in this life you're best not to legislate; you're best to just let experience teach you what to do and what not to do.

I'll give you an example here again. Just last October my uncle had his 80th birthday, so we went down to experience this 80th birthday. It was really quite tragic because my other uncle, who was in his 90s, passed away on the same day as the birthday, so it was really quite awful. But as we were down there, you know, as families do, you get together and you try to have some fun as a family even in those hard times, Mr. Speaker.

I've got one cousin that has got a ranch that's 64 sections of land. Now, for those of you that don't know what that means, that's like one square mile. A section of land is one square mile. I mean, that's large. You understand that, Mr. Speaker, because down in your area you need about like 3 sections of land to feed a cow, right? You know, that's the way it is down there. To get to his farm, you actually have to drive like 15 kilometres.

So we get out there, and what are they going to do? Well, I've got all my cousins with all of their kids, so there are about 25 kids out there. What are they going to do? They're going to have a great big paintball fight. They've got this whole yard with old machinery in it that they can hide behind, and we've got kids from four years old to 15 years old going to paintball. He's got 20 paintball guns. You know what impressed me? It wasn't the paintball. I was too scared to go out there. I don't need to get hit by paintballs. What impressed me was that from the four-year-old on up, every one of those kids knew how to operate a quad, a bike, and a paintball gun safely.

11:50

When they came up, they put their vests on and their coveralls, and they had their neck protectors on and they had their helmets on and they had their visors on, from the four-year-old on up. When that four-year-old was given that paintball gun, that four-year-old already knew to keep his finger off the trigger and keep that gun pointed down, at four years old. Why? Because in the farming culture they start to teach their kids young how to behave safely on the farm. That's the truth.

I'm not sure that sometimes we need to legislate as much as we need to just educate. Nobody here, whether they support this bill or whether they have concerns with this bill, wants to see people abused. Nobody here wants to see people treated unfairly from unsafe or hazardous work sites on a farm. So any discussion on the merits of this bill or the problems surrounding this potential piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, must start from the recognition that all Albertans are concerned with safety and all Albertans are concerned with safety within an agricultural community and on a farm. I think we have to start there.

Let's understand something. I don't think that you believe this, and I know that I don't believe this. I know that it's not a lack of compassion, it's not a desire to maximize profits on the backs of farm workers that has held this legislation back. We've talked about 98 years to legislate. Well, I don't believe that it's been a lack of political will that has held back legislation in this area. Rather, legislation has been slow because of the complexity of farming, which makes it difficult to enact legislation that will adequately recognize the needs of the various sizes and types of farming units.

You know, I've talked a lot about my family. I'm very proud of my family. I've got one cousin that has a predominantly mixed farming operation: a grain farm, some cattle, that kind of thing. I've got an uncle that was a dairy farmer for most of his life. I've talked about the one cousin that's a cattle rancher. You see, they don't fit the same style of farming.

My one cousin, Mr. Speaker, who was a dairy farmer for many, many years, decided that because of his diabetes he had to get into another line of farming, so he's joined his farm together – and it's a corporate farm. He's got three or four other farmers that have all joined their farms together, and they farm as a corporation, very different from my other cousin who's got the old family homestead and who's got nine sections of land and farms very, very differently. You can't always put them together the same way. They have different needs, different desires, different ways of operating. I don't know if the legislation that we're trying to pass here with Bill 6 is recognizing the differences and the complexity of farming. I think that's a weakness in this bill.

The current government, I think, to a certain degree is – and I don't know if this is too strong a word or not; I'm going to use the word "baffled" although that may be a really awful word to use. I don't know. I'm not sure that you really understand some of these things that come as a result of a farming lifestyle. I think that perhaps some of the lack of progress that we're seeing in initiating this bill and understanding what we're doing comes from a cultural difference there of not understanding sometimes.

What this government has not acknowledged sometimes is that the farmers themselves who live and breathe and work in agriculture have challenged this legislation. They've challenged legislative proposals, not only this one but through the long history that we've seen of trying to find appropriate legislation for farm families in this province. It's not the city people that are protesting this so much as it is the farmers themselves. I think we need to realize that either the past legislation or today's legislation is probably not adequately addressing the realities that the farm families of today face. You know, I grew up in a city, but we always went back to the family farm.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Really quick, a little question I'd like to discuss. One of the big things we're hearing around this is around kids and agriculture, and it's created a lot of controversy. It's causing a lot of people to be upset. I can tell you, living in an

agriculture community, that kids participating in agriculture is important. It's important to farmers and ranchers. It's important to their communities.

I know that tonight we heard the Member for Calgary-Mountain View talk about slave labour and stuff in regard to the kids, and I don't think he's meaning it, you know, about all farmers. I get it. But it's really not a nice way to talk about farm kids. My friend, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock has raised five kids: four girls and one boy. I've had the privilege of meeting some of them. They're great kids. Farm kids all across the province are excellent. What we need to do is talk about why people are concerned about kids.

This is the question I'm getting to, Mr. Speaker, with the member. This minister of labour yesterday said: the government has always planned to exempt children and other unpaid workers on family farms from mandatory WCB coverage. Now, this bill deals with a couple of the areas, OH and S and the labour side, but I just want to talk about WCB for a minute. That's what she said yesterday in Okotoks. But in the middle of November this was what was on the website about Bill 6. It states this about the implications of Bill 6: if you are operating a for-profit farming operation, i.e., one who sells goods commercially to individuals or other organizations, you must cover any unpaid workers, including family members and children performing work on your farm. That was posted there.

You, the minister's staff, and the people putting this out were wrong, or they've changed it after the fact. I don't know. But it's caused a lot of confusion, a lot of frustration. And this was on the WCB side. The OH and S side gets even worse, very, very confusing. But I'd like to ask the hon. member – you know, he has a riding that borders mine, and we share many of the same farms and those types of areas – to elaborate a little bit on how ridiculous it is that after this type of stuff, talking about farmers' children, something so important to our communities, this government would ask for blind trust to pass a bill that is a blank cheque. Maybe just explain why farmers aren't going to go for it. A blank cheque is not acceptable to them at all.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Smith: Thank you to the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre for asking me the question here. You know, I've taught rural kids all of my life, Mr. Speaker. I had the chance to start my career in Drayton Valley, and probably about a third of the kids in our high school were kids that grew up in a rural environment. You could absolutely tell the difference between a student that grew up in a rural environment from one that didn't, and I was always very, very impressed with the kids that came from a rural environment, from a farm. They seemed to be so strong and independent. They learned at a young age how to work, how to be responsible. I saw that, for instance, when I was dealing with them in the classroom. Somebody doesn't bring his homework. "Excuse me. Where's your homework?" "Mr. Smith, I was doing chores last night. I'm sorry. I'll get it done." And they always made sure they got it done and showed it to me.

The farm breeds a different group of kids, a different culture of kids. I think that perhaps one of the problems that we're facing here is that when you try to impose legislation on people that are strong-willed, independent people that are used to solving their own problems, that are used to being able to make their own choices and their own decisions, when you don't engage them in the right way, I know in my family their backs get up, and the conversation ends. You have to go a long way to regaining that trust, and you have to go a long way before they're going to start to listen to you about whether or not they're going to give you the

permission. Government has to ask that permission. We really do. We have to earn the right to be able to pass legislation that will govern people.

12:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It truly is an honour to stand here in front of you today. I'm here to talk about Bill 6, in case anybody isn't sure what we're talking about.

An Hon. Member: What's the title of that bill?

Mr. Cyr: The title of the bill? It's the no-consultation bill, a bill given far less thoughtful and informed consideration from this House than it deserves.

I would like to read just a paragraph from *Beauchesne*. It's not because I'm looking for a point of order or a point of privilege. I think that it's important to understand, when you're looking at the Legislature, to be actually looking through these texts that we use all the time. I myself have heard this book being referenced so many times that I decided that I wanted to start reading my way through it. Paragraph 1 on page 3 is the one I want. It's just going to be a short paragraph.

The principles of Canadian parliamentary law are . . .

The Speaker: A quick comment. You ought to get a life if that's what you're . . .

Mr. Cyr: Pardon me?

The Speaker: I'm sorry. It's after midnight.

Mr. Cyr: I do agree that, apparently, I've got too much time on my hands if I'm going into this book.

But to get back into the book on paragraph 1:

. . . To protect a minority and restrain the improvidence or tyranny of a majority; to secure the transaction of public business in an orderly manner; to enable every Member to express opinions within limits necessary to preserve decorum and prevent an unnecessary waste of time; to give abundant opportunity for the consideration of every measure, and to prevent any legislative action being taken upon sudden impulse.

This was written by Sir John Bourinot.

I think that what we need to focus on here is that we truly are blessed to be here. When we're looking at these texts that we go to, we usually only pull parts of these texts to go into defences against things that may have happened in the House. So I think that everybody here should consider reading this book. It has so far been a very informative read.

But to get back to Bill 6 and to relay this back to what I'm trying to get to, I feel strongly as the chosen representative for Bonnyville-Cold Lake that I need to bring forward and represent all the silenced voices that need to be heard in this Legislature, and that's what I'm trying to get to in paragraph 1. We need to get the voices of our constituents out into our Legislature. I'm not seeing these voices in Bill 6 being heard. I have farmers in my riding that are saying right now and sending me letters right now that are stating that they are not being heard.

Now, I did table several letters yesterday. I'd like to refer periodically to one of those letters. Now, to start off, this says that "I have contacted both my MLA," the minister of agriculture, "and Premier Notley with no response from either. Now I am looking to all MLAs for clarification. Thank you for your time." You know what? I sent a letter back to her saying: I'm listening. That's what we want to be going to our farmers and saying, that we are listening.

She goes on to say:

I am a 20 year old female that until recently worked as a safety consultant in the oilfield, upholding various OH&S standards to help people have a safe workplace. I realize the importance of safety in people's day to day lives and applaud you for trying to make people's lives better. There is always room for improvement and I understand that.

I am also ranch born and raised. Since learning to walk I've been outside, bottle feeding calves at all hours, branding cattle, chasing livestock. I've been riding horses and chasing cows since before I could walk. . . . I've been called redneck, short-sighted and uneducated. Sometimes it's a really tough hill to climb. There are challenges I face every day, accidents waiting to happen. You do the best you can to make it a safe environment but when the first year heifer is calving at 2 a.m. on Easter Sunday, you plow on, because lots of farm situations are choosing another animal's life over your comfort.

Now, it's important to clarify here – and many of my colleagues have mentioned this, actually all of this side of the House – that farming isn't just a job. Farming is a lifestyle, a lifestyle that has gone on generation after generation. I have that in my riding, a constituency that is proud farmers and ranchers.

To go back to the letter:

It taught me that your life has value beyond what your bank account states. Allowed me to gain bonds with my animals that gave me confidence to be my own person no matter who stood in your way. That hard work and dedication are always appreciated, because it doesn't matter if you're not the best, so long as you try your hardest. It showed me that you can have a competition, but that at the end you had to be able to shake hands and walk away friends. These are invaluable lessons that I learned on the farm, from my family and from friends whose bonds are thicker than blood.

Now, this is important because what we're looking at here is a person that is describing what living on a farm is like. Again, I'm going to get back to the point. This isn't a job; this is a lifestyle.

Now, I say that because, unless this bill is put aside for consideration and further consultation, the farmers will have no voice in matters that will affect them, their families, and their communities. I have been going out and talking with my local farmers. I have been wanting to hear what my local farmers are concerned about with this bill. The fact that they're being consulted after the fact that it was tabled in this House is insulting. It needs to go to committee or . . .

An Hon. Member: Kill Bill 6.

12:10

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. We need to kill Bill 6.

Now, to go back to the letter again, to say that this constituent of the agriculture minister has stated:

I feel like your bill is completely disregarding my voice, and yet I am the newest generation. We are the ones you want to instill confidence in, want to push to succeed, keep encouraging to keep on keeping on because when you leave you're handing it over to people like me [the next generation]. It's my life this bill is affecting. But you're not allowing my voice heard. You're trying to push it through without allowing us anytime to weigh in or make any changes that effect my lifestyle. I want to see a more open discussion about Bill 6. I want my voice to be heard.

Why can we not bring these conversations to communities that will be affected, make it easier for us to help you. This is important. She's actually saying that they want to contribute. They're not given the opportunity. We're hearing that there are meetings being put on right now and that there are not any notes being taken at all at these meetings. That's not consultation; that's information.

We're feeding them information on what we as a government are going to force on them, and that's not okay. She goes on to say:

We are really a humble group and all we want is to have our voices heard and make sure that we can still pass our traditions and way of life on . . .

to the next generation. I don't think that's unreasonable.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, the government wants to pass this bill a few days after being made public. We're looking at last Thursday. It's a week, and we're already at second reading. This is crazy. This bill is one of many reasons why they previously passed motions for the House to sit. Now, they are passing the legislation too fast. We're not getting through the consultation that we need to, and consultation, as we heard from members over here, is of the utmost importance.

The fact is that I would consider every one of us to be a person that really wants to do what's best for our constituents. Right now what's best for our constituents is to actually listen to the constituent. Our constituents right now are saying: consult. They're also saying that education is better than legislation. We need to be making sure that is out there. A bill of this magnitude, that affects hundreds of thousands of people, needs to be dealt with in a proper way and should only be completed with extensive consultation with those who are affected.

Now we've heard from across the aisle here that there's been 10 years. Well, my question. Ten years: how come you got it wrong? How could we have gotten this wrong? Did you just ignore everything that the past government did in consultation and just throw this together? This is just another way that this government is reminding rural residents that their voices do not matter.

If they won't go to farmers, I want to see the farmers bring their voices here. Their voices need to be heard, and if that means on the front steps of the Legislature that we will finally start to listen, then they need to come here and help the Wildrose push forward the fact that they have not been consulted.

Again, it's important to realize why this is so important. It's because of the fact that this is a lifestyle. These farmers tell me that farming is not just an occupation or a job.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for his presentation. He has a big riding like mine. He has one less name in it, which I know makes it easier for people when they are addressing him. Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, besides having three towns in its name, is an area that encompasses 25,000 square kilometres. It's about an hour south of Edmonton and about an hour and a half northwest of Calgary. At the bottom it goes to the B.C. border and east to the shores of Sylvan Lake and Gull Lake.

Now, I tell you that, Madam Speaker, because I just want to give you an idea of the area that I have to cover when I want to consult with my constituents. I have farmers all across those 25,000 square kilometres who are trying to talk to me right now. This government has brought forward a bill that will impact them drastically, I would argue the largest agriculture bill, definitely, that we've seen in my lifetime, possibly in Alberta history. I have to say that as the elected representative of over 40,000 people in the riding of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre I am offended by this government's behaviour. I'm offended by them bringing forward a blank-cheque bill and then not providing MLAs in this very Assembly enough time to properly consult with the people back in their ridings, to properly take the time to hold town halls.

Again, I've described the area that I have to deal with. I know that you, Madam Speaker, have a large area to cover as well, and it's very unreasonable to do that to MLAs but not because of work.

I want to work. I want to go back to the riding, and I want to talk to a lot of farmers, make sure that I know what's going on. We're going to be asked in the coming days to vote on a bunch of amendments now, as the government has indicated, and we're not going to be given a chance to consult with our constituents yet again. Farmers in my riding are being punished. They're not being given adequate opportunities to give their feedback to this Assembly.

Through you, Madam Speaker, I ask the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake how he feels about that and, you know, if he's as offended as I am about this process and the challenges that he has in the tight timeline that the government is providing to push this through at, I would say, lightning speed – they're trying to put this through now, not giving anybody opportunities to talk to their constituents – and if he feels that that's an appropriate thing.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, did you want to contribute under 29(2)(a)? [interjections] Oh, I apologize. Sorry. I didn't realize there was a question. I thought it was just a comment.

Go ahead.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would thank the hon. member for the question. The question that I heard, that he brought forward on these amendments that we are having thrown in front of us – we have, like, an hour to consider them. Some of them come in with four or five pages of literature there. The fact is: how can you be working as an effective opposition when you've got an amendment that hits your desk and you're voting within an hour or two later? This means that we can't go out to our farmers and say: what is it you think? No. Well, obviously, the fact is that we can't even fully get through the amendment without even being able to come out and say: "What is it you're trying to do? Obviously, you made a mistake with the original bill. Now you're coming forward with an amendment that we barely even get to see in a short window."

12:20

It is offensive. My colleague is right. This is offensive, and we're going to be doing that when Committee of the Whole starts. They're going to drop – who knows? – 10 amendments. The fact is that when you're looking at these amendments, we need time, and that means we need to send it to a committee like a standing committee. The fact is that when we're looking at what we're doing with these bills, they're going too fast. The fact is that this bill, in the way it is currently worded, may well be beneficial in some capacity to corporate farms but will severely affect the small family farm, who is safe. Let's be very clear: they're safe.

Now, when we're looking at what actually needs to happen, it comes down to consultation again. If there are concerns with safety, then why didn't we ask what exactly is . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to welcome everybody to a brand new day at 20 after 12. I am very, very pleased to stand up and represent the constituents of Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills with regard to Bill 6. This bill is about lack of consultation. We can call it the lack-of-consultation bill.

Albertans want this bill sent to committee or shelved completely. That's what we're hearing, "Kill Bill 6; kill Bill 6," everywhere we go, every time that people show up on the steps or go to – what do they call it? – a consultation meeting.

Mr. Cooper: A come-and-be-told meeting.

Mr. Hanson: A come-and-be-told meeting. That's what it is.

Anyway, as elected officials it's our duty and responsibility to represent the concerns of our constituents, to listen to their concerns, their opinions, and bring them forth to this Legislature. That's exactly what I'm doing. I'm here talking because I'm representing the people in my riding that have phoned me and sent me e-mails and sent me letters. I have some of those letters here. As a matter of fact, I'm getting calls from other areas outside of my constituency.

An Hon. Member: Really?

Mr. Hanson: Yeah, from 1,430 family farms in the Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville area that don't feel that they're being represented in this House, from 1,159 farms and ranches from Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater that also feel that they are not being represented in this House because they're not hearing from their MLA. I've actually gotten a phone call from as far away as Slave Lake. Our job is to provide a voice in government for the people we represent.

This government never ceases to amaze me. Just last week in debate I spoke about the government members' lack of consultation with their constituents with regard to Bill 4 and the overall budget. If you're not willing to stand up in the House and speak for or against the legislation, how are you actually effectively representing your constituents? We were all elected to be a voice in this Legislature representing our constituency. If we are not consulting with our constituents and then representing those opinions in this House, we are simply filling a chair and not acting in the best interests of our province or Albertans.

Madam Speaker, today we are addressing another example of how this government refuses – and I repeat that: they refuse – to consult with the people that elected them. If the government was serious about getting this bill right, they would have actually consulted with the stakeholders prior to proposing the legislation, not dropping wide-ranging, omnibus legislation that will have a huge impact on the 60,000 people who make their livelihood in farming.

Farming and ranching have been a way of life in Alberta since the very first settlers arrived in this area, the people that opened up this country and who have made it the wonderful province it is today. They should be exempted from the bureaucratic nightmare that this bill represents. This is totally unfair. This NDP government has already aggravated Alberta's largest industry, the energy industry, with drastic tax increases and economic uncertainty by their various policies and regulatory changes, and now we're going after another one of our most important industries and bringing in these changes that will affect the daily lives of farm families too hard and too fast.

Madam Speaker, if they intend to make this bill take effect January 1, 2016, there will be no opportunity for effective consultation or dialogue with farm and ranch families, period. They feel that this is being shoved down their throats.

Madam Speaker, this government intends to have this bill passed through the House by the end of the session in early December, and we're already there. We're getting very close. Most of the scheduled consultation sessions are taking place after December 3. What the heck is the point of asking people for their input to help craft legislation after the legislation has already passed?

Madam Speaker, is this the NDP version of democracy? Let's not forget that the D in NDP stands for democratic. Is this indeed the new democracy? Really? Really? Stand up and tell us. Is this indeed

the new democracy we can expect until the day this government is defeated, which I hope is damn soon? [interjections] I'm sorry. I'll withdraw that comment.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

An Hon. Member: He's talking about the Springbank one.

Mr. Hanson: Yeah, the Springbank dam. It fell right in here. Sorry about that. [interjections] Who writes this stuff?

Madam Speaker, this new law will make massive changes to the way farmers conduct their daily operations. Is the ultimate goal of this government to see the end of the family farm? That's the question on a lot of people's minds. When the government lumps together occupational health and safety and workers' compensation legislation, the Employment Standards Code, and the Labour Relations Code into one bill, it demonstrates quite clearly that they do not understand the complexity of what they are trying to enforce. The cost to farm families for the WCB portion alone will put financial burdens in place that will make it impossible for many smaller operations to continue. I've heard from one family in my area that they figure that, based on their gross income, it's going to cost them \$15,000 a year just for the man and his wife.

In many cases these are families that have operated for four generations in farming. Their families, grandfathers and grandmothers, came to this country and endured many hardships to build up their operations so that their children could have a better way of life and share in the abundance this land provides, not so that their lifestyle could be turned on its head without any consultation whatsoever. I don't know of any farm families that have asked for this government to step in and save them from themselves. I don't know of a single family that doesn't care as much about the safety of their own farms as we do here in this Assembly.

Madam Speaker, now farm families are stepping forward by the hundreds to stop progress on this bill until proper, democratic consultation can take place. This government had best pay attention to these voices, or it risks wading into an unfamiliar area and causing any number of unintended negative consequences. Nowhere in this bill is there a recognition of the differences between small family-run farms and large commercial operations. Other provinces have this legislation in place, and they do exempt small family farms.

Madam Speaker, while there is definitely the need to bring in some sensible, reasonable regulations for larger operators, we are disappointed there is no recognition of the special nature of the family farm and the contribution that they make to our society. Farmers and ranchers have the right to have their voices heard when it comes to legislation that will affect their ability to operate and prosper.

Running a family farm in no way resembles running an industrial fabrication shop, a packaging facility, or a major greenhouse operation as we see in, for example, Redcliff, Alberta. Family farms need to be treated in a different way. Madam Speaker, we should be encouraging the next generation of farmers to stay on the land, not make it such an insurmountable task that they give up before they start. I've been contacted by locals that expressed concerns over the high cost of the WCB premiums they will be subject to, premiums they have no control over. They are concerned about the implications of the OH and S regulations, that can be very confusing, even to industries that have dealt with them for years. Part of the problem is that a lot of the people that are working on farms in my area also work in the oil patch. They've seen the

cumbersome OH and S regulations and paperwork that has to be filled out, and it really hasn't changed safety a bit in their industries.

One family expressed the concern that according to new regulations their 15-year-old daughter in 4-H would not be able to work unsupervised with her 4-H horse. She would not legally be able to help out for more than two hours on a weeknight and then must be supervised, and that includes her 4-H program time.

12:30

Madam Speaker, busy farm mothers during harvest time will no longer be able to take their children with them in a harvester, in an air-conditioned closed cab. It's no different, really, than a person taking their children on a car trip to the grocery store or on a road trip.

Madam Speaker, many farms are run by moms and dads and maybe temporary hired hands during peak times. What right does this government have to interfere with how they teach their children on the farm operation? I truly believe that farm parents are way more concerned about the safety of their children than this government, made up mostly of people from urban areas. Parents do their utmost to protect children and families.

Pushing confusing, vague, expensive, and at times inappropriate legislation onto the backs of our hard-working farm families is not what we were elected to do. We're just asking for some time. Push it to committee, or scrap the bill completely. We hear it all the time: kill Bill 6. Implementing this bill without consultation on the true needs of farm operators will only serve to be a huge windfall for WCB, and it will not affect farm safety one bit and will undermine our democratic process. Bill 6 must be sent to committee to allow for actual democratic consultation and to give the Alberta farmers involved a real chance to have their voices and concerns heard by this government.

Madam Speaker, I've got a couple of letters here, that I will be happy to table tomorrow, and I would just like to read you a few notes from them.

This is against Bill 6 and asking why it's being pushed through the Legislature before all of the details are laid out. It says:

I am from Warburg Alberta. I have been raised on the family farm and my husband and I are presently farming.

She goes on to say:

Farming teaches responsibility and commonsense. Something many people do not learn in other workforces. Growing up on a farm you learn how to care for animals and to be aware and safe around them. You learn how machinery works, the dangers around equipment and to be aware of your surroundings. You accept that you work with what Mother Nature has in store for you that day, no matter how long the day may be, not having to watch the clock for the amount of hours that legislation has allotted you.

Further down she says:

I understand the government has a very difficult job [to do], but please use your commonsense when implementing legislation . . . Implementing the Farm Safety Program in schools in Alberta is a great idea. Education of our children, whether they are on the farm or not, with this type of program is important. Pushing legislation through that treats the family farm like a 9:00 - 5:00 job is impractical. Take the family farm out of this legislation as it has been done in British Columbia.

Another letter came from La Glace. She says:

I live on a working cattle ranch located near La Glace Alberta . . .

I am opposed to Bill 6. I feel [that it will] affect my way of life greatly. Also if any changes are to be done, they must be done with as much feedback from fellow producers as possible . . . Farming and ranching is a way of life. It is not a job, it is a lifestyle.

She goes on to say:

We don't wake up every day and head out to work. We wake up every day to live our life. It is our life, it is the way we live . . . We are pro efficient people, we work safe. We love the land and we love our stock. Only we understand that accidents do happen and at times are unavoidable, just as accidents happen in your home and in your vehicle. Bill 6 will not change this.

She concludes with:

If you guys truly care about Alberta and her farmers/ranchers this bill would be dismissed. I myself cannot differentiate work from home. My work is my home, this is what I live for. Why can you guys not see or understand this? It feels as though we are losing our rights. Our rights to raise our kids as we were raised. And to share our knowledge with our children. And our way of life. How is this a just cause?

Another one is an open letter to the hon. Premier and the hon. ministers and CCed to the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. It's from St. Brides. He says:

You were . . . elected on the platform that the former government had a sense of entitlement, which may very well have been the case . . .

Mr. Rodney: No.

Mr. Hanson: Sorry. I'm just reading from the letter. Bear with me, sir.

. . . but if you fail to consider all involved with this bill, and any other bills, you are just proving what we all know and that is [that once] you become a government that sense of entitlement comes with the job. Please prove me wrong and stop this Bill till all have been consulted and [before] you destroy an industry that feeds you all [and] provides employment for thousands of Albertans, and just wants to have a way of life.

Another letter:

I write today in protest of Bill 6 . . . I am 29 years old, and a fifth generation farmer from the James River area. Which is about ten minutes North of Sundre AB. My family has been farming in this area since 1904 . . .

As a mixed farmer, you need to be educated. Not only on what the price that your commodities are selling for. But, also you need to know what fertilizer, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, to use on your crops. You need to be able to diagnose illness in your herd, and also what the best form of treatment is for your animals. You have got to be able to treat and maintain your herd. You have got to be able to fix breakdowns on equipment . . .

[Mr. Hanson's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud under 29(2)(a).

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is actually a great honour for me to stand and speak under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. I've been waiting for this opportunity for some time. My impression is that the members opposite actually are blocking rational questioning of their statements.

Just to establish my bona fides, I am actually a fifth-generation family farmer, who continues to operate the farm. I actually have farm income listed on my ethics disclosure, unlike, I think, everybody that's sitting across the way. There is one of your members that is a full-time farmer, but he – I can't say it.

I actually consulted with my family farmers that are renting the farm that I own. These are fourth-generation family farmers. They live in Manitoba, which has an enlightened government, which, many of us know, is an NDP government. That jurisdiction, like all the other jurisdictions except Alberta, has effective – and they're

well received by the farming community – OHS, WCB, and labour regulations for paid farm labour. I consulted with my family farm tenants, and they told me that what they saw of the reaction in Alberta was completely over the top. In their experience this gives the protection to their business from lawsuits in the event that an accident does occur. They have actually never had an OH and S inspection on their farm because they actually operate a very safe farm.

My question to the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills is: how can he justify the fact that Alberta does not have this kind of farm safety and financial safety provisions in its legislation, and why is he slowing down the transition of this bill to Committee of the Whole?

12:40

Mr. Hanson: Actually, I'm not trying to slow this bill down to Committee of the Whole, Madam Speaker. I'm trying to stop it completely for the people of Alberta, and if it takes dragging my feet on this for another four days in this House and another 10 hours, I'll do it.

Every one of these letters that I have – and I said that I will be tabling them along with probably another hundred that I have on my desk – has talked about nothing more than consultation. They're all happy to talk to you about safety, but they want to be consulted. They don't want this stuff rammed down their throats. They want consultation, true consultation, not somebody throwing a bill at them and giving us four days to consult in here and drag our feet on it. They want true consultation, where their people sit at the table and discuss issues that affect them daily and how best to deal with them. Some of these people have their own insurance policies, that are far better than the WCB policies that you guys are trying to push on them.

I'm going to end this with page 5 of the letter from this fella. He calls it "The Farmer's Creed."

I believe that a man's greatest pride is his dignity and that no calling bestows this more than farming.

I believe that hard work and honest sweat are the building blocks of a person's character.

I believe that farming, despite its hardships and disappointments, is the most honest and honourable way a man can spend his days on [this] earth.

I believe that farming . . .

[Mr. Hanson's speaking time expired] Oh, I'll finish it up tomorrow.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 6. You know, some will say that this side of the House is trying to slow down debate, but let me be clear. If there's one thing that I've heard from the people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, it's that they would like to have strong representation that is willing to rise in the Assembly and speak to legislation, that best reflects the people of that area. That is exactly what this side of the House has done today. Many, many, many of my hon. colleagues have risen in this place to defend the interests of the constituencies that they represent, and I'm proud to stand with them. I'm proud to stand shoulder to shoulder and arm in arm with them along with the 45,000 farmers and ranchers across this province.

Let me be clear. Every single one of those farmers and ranchers wants a safe farm. In the consultation that I've done, I have heard some relatively positive comments about sections of the bill. Not all farmers are adamantly opposed to all portions of the bill, and I've heard many of them speak to me about the reasonable

possibility that some form of insurance, be it privately held or WCB, can be a positive step forward. But the way that this has taken place is unbecoming of this government and communicates a lack of trust. It is exactly what this government promised they wouldn't do when they were in opposition. I can tell you that there is a significant amount of disappointment from the people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

I am proud to rise and speak immediately after my hon. colleague from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills because in his remarks he provided a lot of context and comments around the need to send this bill to committee. So it's my pleasure to rise and offer that very opportunity to this government.

I plan to move an amendment, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to hand it out myself. I know that the hour is late and that our pages have gone home. So let me just say thank you to the Legislative Assembly staff and security, who have given of their time to ensure that the important debate on Bill 6 can continue. That is exactly what we're doing here this evening, important debate on an important issue that drastically impacts hundreds of thousands of Albertans.

I rise to move an amendment, that the motion for second reading of Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

This should be no surprise to this House. In fact, I have risen on numerous occasions to talk about the need for the use of committees, to talk about the need for proper consultation, the opportunity for expert testimony and witnesses, and that is exactly what this amendment does. Madam Speaker, I have chosen the Resource Stewardship Committee because this committee currently has no tasks before it, so there is a wide open slate of opportunity. In fact, the committee could begin meeting tomorrow, should it be called. But the point is that this committee would have the opportunity to do meaningful consultation right across this province, tap the brakes, as a prominent blogger in this province said – and some would call him a left-leaning blogger – on this bill to ensure that trust can be restored. I can tell you right now that the trust of many rural Albertans and, certainly, farmers and ranchers has been broken by this government. I can tell you that that's not good for them. It's not good for this province because we need everyone in this province pulling in the same direction right now. Right now they have a government who's working against them.

If I might just take a moment to talk about the importance of consultation, the important work that committee does and provide some context for the House. There have been many great people that have spoken in this House prior to all of us here. Many of them believed in proper consultation, the use of committee, and many of them believed that in a very, very similar situation as we're in today.

So I'd just like to take a couple of moments. In fact, I won't go through them all, but I have about 85 points of reminders, over 10 pages of comments made by the NDP on this exact matter. I hope that the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview will have the opportunity to listen because it brings me a certain amount of joy to be able to reflect upon some of the words that he's used in *Hansard*. There's no real need to table these words because they are well documented in *Hansard* on December 9, almost a year ago to the day.

I think it's important that Albertans are reminded that there are many examples of bills that have been brought forward hastily, poorly written, and without adequate and proper consultation,

which then have to get yanked or paused or repealed, Madam Chair. I mean, a great example of this was Bill 10 last week, that has been put on hold because it falls into that category of hastily written, inadequate, and improper consultations. And here we are repealing Bill 1 from the spring.

Mr. Jean: Who said that?

12:50

Mr. Cooper: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview just last year on the importance of proper consultation.

I think that it's important to note that he's not the only one that believes in proper consultation and sending pieces of legislation to committee.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be supporting the amendment. I do think that it would be very useful at this stage to have some open public consultation.

The Minister of Infrastructure, *Hansard*, December 8, 2014, on the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014.

That same day from the hon. minister:

Because of the clear problems we're hearing about this bill and the utter lack of notice and complete consultation with all concerned stakeholders, we would like to see the legislation delayed. It's been pushed forward too fast, and not everyone has had their voice heard.

The Minister of Infrastructure and of Transportation, *Hansard*, December 8, 2014.

I think that I might have heard those same sorts of words being spoken by members of this side of the House earlier today. The same things. We would like to see the legislation delayed. It's been pushed forward too fast. Not everyone has had their voice heard. There are thousands and thousands of farmers and ranchers that feel exactly like that.

I'll go on to quote from November 26, 2014.

So we will be seeing those this afternoon sometime, I'm sure, in due course.

Certainly, we oppose this lack of consultation, first and foremost, that came up with this WCB portion of this omnibus bill.

The Minister of Culture and Tourism.

While we're on a good thing and speaking of the former NDP caucus, I'm quoting here from *Hansard*, May 7, 2014.

A week ago this PC government apologized to party members for its failure to listen to the grassroots. Yesterday they backtracked again, this time on pension rollbacks, because they failed to listen to Albertans. It's clear that they still don't get it because now they plan to ram through an omnibus bill without written briefings to Assembly members and without listening to Albertans.

The Premier of Alberta when she was in the fourth party, just in 2014. The similarities are startling. I don't quite understand how we've gone from believing in consultation, believing in taking time, believing in listening to stakeholders to today: this bill needs to be passed before the Christmas break so that we can turn our backs on consultations and listening to farmers. What farmers and ranchers are concerned about is, Madam Speaker, the fact that this legislation gives a blank cheque on regulation. The good news is that I have some quotes on regulation and passing legislation and dealing with the regulations later. Hopefully, I'll have the opportunity to get to those. Farmers and ranchers are concerned that their trust has been broken. How can they trust to get the consultation on the regulations right when they can't even get the consultation on the bill right in the first place?

I'd like to quote one or two more because I think it's just so, so relevant to the amendment that's been proposed, an opportunity for the government to do the right thing and to tap the brakes on this. I know for a fact that there have been thousands of e-mails, phone

calls, and letters received by members on all sides of this House from workers quite frustrated with this government and rightly so. I mean, for a government that loves to talk about the word “consultation” and how they speak with folks, their actions don’t seem to live up to their words. Although I could stand here and give numerous examples of where consultation never took place even though it was asserted, I won’t do that.

I just wanted to say, Madam Speaker, that once again we’re in a position where this bill should be . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Three Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Two Hills.

The Deputy Speaker: Two Hills. I’m seeing double at this point.

Mr. Hanson: It’s getting late.

Anyway, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the member. You had mentioned that you had some references to regulations. I was wondering if you could expound on those a little bit for us.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, hon. member. I will be happy to get to that, but given that I was just in the middle of a sentence – maybe I’ll just start this sentence over for the sake of ensuring that we have the full context of the quote.

Madam Speaker, once again we’re in a position: should this bill be referred to committee? I do see that as a positive step, but I do need to voice my frustration with the fact that once again it’s another example of the government putting forward poor legislation then being stopped in its tracks by the public and by opposition parties and forced to go back to the table. If it was done with adequate consultation in the first place, then we wouldn’t have to be here constantly going in circles. We’ve seen examples of this from the amendments to the municipality act, where, again, amendments that the NDP put forward were voted down originally last year, and then amendments to the bill came forward and – surprise, surprise – half of the changes were the exact amendments that we put forward.

The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade and all of the other things that he is responsible for in *Hansard*, November 26, 2014 – I think that it’s just so unbelievable that we can go from

the exact spot we’re in today when the hon. minister stood on this side of the House, railing against the government of the day about lack of consultation, about lack of committee to a point where today the government front bench is essentially silent other than to say: some of the bureaucrats have provided misinformation. To not stand up and take responsibility for the bureaucrats is one thing, but to continue this narrative that they are on the side of angels in this is absolutely flabbergasting, to know that just last year they stood and said the exact same things that members of the opposition have been saying for going on 14 hours today.

1:00

This is an incredible chance to do the right thing. This government, to their credit, on at least three occasions have been going in the wrong direction and said: “I’m sorry. We weren’t doing what was right. We promised that when we were doing the wrong thing, we would stop, turn around, apologize, and do what’s right.” That’s exactly what farmers and ranchers want. They’re not saying that they don’t want safe operations. They’re not saying that they don’t want a safe home and workplace. What they’re saying is that they want to be consulted and assured and know that they can trust the government, that the regulations that come into force at the end of next year aren’t going to be a surprise, aren’t going to do all of the things that the opposition is concerned that they might do.

The only way forward, the only way that that can happen is if this government taps the brakes, sends it to committee, or even better, kills the bill altogether then comes back once they’ve consulted. They can provide a clear view of what the regulations look like, and then they can start this process over. One thing that I am very confident in is that if they choose not to do that, the rest of the quote from the hon. minister will also come true.

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I think we made quite a bit of progress tonight – very interesting debate – but seeing as the hour is late, I will move that we adjourn.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 1:03 a.m. on Thursday to 9 a.m.]

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