



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 6, 2016

Day 10

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature

Second Session

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

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

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

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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)

Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)

Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)

Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader

Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (ND),
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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)

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Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
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Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)

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Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)

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Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)

Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
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Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)

Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)

Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND)

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Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)

Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)

Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)

Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)

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Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)

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Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
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Party standings:

New Democrat: 54

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 6, 2016

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to introduce a class of students from Erle Rivers school in the town of Milk River in my constituency. With a population of less than a thousand people, the school draws students from other rural communities. They come from a school with a proud history dating back to 1909, almost as old as our province. I was pleased to meet this remarkable group of students earlier today. They have a clear interest in the work that we do here on behalf of all Albertans and how it affects them. Well, at least all but one of them. I would not be surprised if we saw many of them back here in this same place at a future date doing work remarkably similar to what we do here. In fact, one young man, when asked what he wanted to do when he grew up, stated without hesitation: I'm going to be the Prime Minister.

I would like them to stand as I read their names. I'm going to read the names of the teachers and the parents that have come to help, and I'd like the school to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. Mrs. Sharalyn Patching and Mrs. Cheryl Stewart are the teachers, and the parents that are helpers are Jody Miller, Lane Bellew, Connie Robertson, and Terra McCulloch. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. I met your class earlier today, hon. member.

The Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 35 grade 6 students from Crestwood elementary-junior high school. They're accompanied by their teacher and parent volunteers. Their teacher is Ms Ludwig. Their educational assistant is Mrs. Zyke, and their student teacher is Ms Drawbridge. They are also accompanied by two parent volunteers, Mr. Klassen and Ms Si. I hope I got it right. Anyway, please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I feel honoured today to rise and to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the grade 6 students and teachers of Holden school, but that also includes the towns of Holden and Ryley. You might be interested to know that Holden was named after James Holden. He was a former MLA. Today we have with us three teachers – Mrs. Cheryl Oslund, Ms Karen Arychuk, Mrs. Joanne Elliot – and two parents, Mr. James Bichel and Mrs. Lavonne Svenson. Could the students, the parents, and the teachers please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise in the House and to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the grade 6 class from St. Anthony school in Drayton Valley. St. Anthony school was just down the block from my high school, and I have spent many hours in the school gym coaching with and against the basketball teams from this amazing school. So it gives me great pleasure today to ask the students and the staff – Trudy Henley, Andrea Maduik, Colin Webb, Nancy Dodds, Lynne Motkoski, and Susan Huska – to please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other school guests here today, hon. members? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every year thousands of underground facilities in our province are damaged by digging. This not only interrupts services, but more importantly these incidents can lead to environmental contamination as well as injury or even death. I nearly lost my own job 10 years ago when I inadvertently came this close to hitting an underground infrastructure along highway 2. April is national dig safe awareness month, and several of our hon. members are sporting Dig Safe pins today.

It's therefore my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly members of the Alberta Common Ground Alliance seated in the gallery, sporting the bright orange safety vests. We've often heard, "Call before you dig," and that's awareness that this organization is trying to spread, advocating for the safety of workers and the general public. They're working hard to keep Albertans safe, running countless education and training programs to raise awareness of these issues. I'd ask all of the members seated in the gallery representing the Alberta Common Ground Alliance to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

To all the students in the building: remember to call before you dig.

The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly Ms Karen Bardy. Karen had the pleasure of being a parliamentary intern with NDP leader Grant Notley in 1982. She then spent her career in program development and community partnership work at the Edmonton public school board. She's a lifelong supporter of the NDP and an avid political enthusiast.

She's also the mother of my ministerial assistant, Kelta Coomber. My constituency staff for Calgary-McCall recently received the following feedback from the office of a colleague about Kelta. "Can you do me a favour and tell Minister Sabir that Kelta is an amazing MA and responds in crazy record time. Make sure that he knows that all of the [constituency assistants] love her." I agree with the statement, and Karen should be very proud of Kelta.

I ask Karen and Kelta to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you student members of our LGBTQ community from three Alberta schools. We have a number of students from Lindsay Thurber school in Red Deer, which was the first school in Alberta to establish a queer-straight alliance. We also have two

Forest Lawn high school students from Calgary, who are important advocates for human rights and have worked to build acceptance and understanding in their community. We also have a student joining us from Edmonton's Boyle Street Education Centre, where students and staff worked together to develop their LGBTQ policy, that they submitted to my office, to ensure that everyone in the school is in a safe and caring environment. These students should be commended for their efforts, and I would ask them to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly members of Citizens for Public Justice. This is a member-driven, faith-based public policy organization focused on ecological justice, refugee rights, and poverty elimination. CPJ has had a long history of working for the common good of society, and I'm proud to say that the organization was originally founded by people in Edmonton.

Joining us today are Dr. Janet Wesselius, professor at the University of Alberta, Augustana, and former chair of the CPJ board of directors; Mr. Mark Huyser-Wierenga, Crown prosecutor with Alberta Justice and a former chair of the CPJ board of directors; Kathleen Felix, an assistant to Mr. Mark Huyser-Wierenga; Mr. Wayne Groot, a farmer and a current member of the CPJ board of directors for Alberta and, I'm proud to say, a member of the MLA for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater's constituency association; and Dr. Darlene O'Leary, CPJ's economic policy analyst. I would like to ask them to stand and receive the usual warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour to be able to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the board of directors of the Ukrainian Youth Unity Council. My riding of Edmonton-Decore has a very rich and vibrant Ukrainian community. One of the pillars of this community is located within my riding, the Ukrainian Youth Unity Complex, which is owned and operated by the Ukrainian Youth Unity Council. It's been a tremendous honour to attend several events at the Ukrainian Youth Unity Complex, and I look forward to attending very many more. I would now ask that the board of directors please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my delight to introduce to you and through you representatives of some of the irrigation districts, who have helped create Alberta's aquatic invasive species conservation canine program in support of aquatic invasive species prevention. The program is a model of what successful collaboration between government and stakeholders can be. The partners provided the funds for us to create the first-ever conservation canine program focusing on detecting invasive mussels, a major threat to Alberta's environment and economy.

I'd like to invite the representatives of the irrigation districts to stand as their names are called: Mike Wind, vice-chair of AIPA and board member of Taber irrigation district; Tony Machacek, chair of Taber irrigation district; Harold Unruh, chair of Bow River; Richard Phillips, member of AIPA and manager of Bow River

irrigation district; Bob Chrumka, chair of the Eastern irrigation district; Carl Chomistek, member of the AIPA executive committee and board member of the Eastern irrigation district; Terrence Lazarus, manager of St. Mary River irrigation district and also my neighbour; Bob Dykstra, member of the AIPA executive committee and board member for the St. Mary River irrigation district; and Martin Van Diemen, board member of the Lethbridge Northern irrigation district.

Mr. Speaker, I have an additional introduction to make to you and through you because the Legislature has well and truly gone to the dogs today. I would like to introduce to you Hannah McKenzie, Heather McCubbin, and Cindy Sawchuck with the K-9 unit and, of course, our friend Hilo, who is a valued member of the Environment and Parks team.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that they all rise to receive a warm welcome from the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there any other guests or visitors? The Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my absolute pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly several staff and students from National Sport school, located at Canada Olympic Park in the constituency of Calgary-Bow. Founded in 1994 to support student athletes with Olympic potential, the school allows students to train and travel internationally, all while studying in school. I will be talking more about this tomorrow in my member's statement. Joining us today in the gallery – and I ask that you stand when I say your name – are Ken Weipert, the principal, Brooke Apshkrum, Carter Malyk, Rachel Thibeault, Kent Zado, and Leanne Topp. I ask them to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, any other guests or visitors today?

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

School LGBTQ Policy Update

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on a special occasion and to update this House on the important work that we are doing to support students and staff in Alberta schools. Last Thursday marked International Transgender Day of Visibility. It was a day to celebrate and embrace our differences and to stand together and support one another as equals. This day was also when I was pleased to inform Albertans that most of our province's public, Catholic, francophone, charter, and private schools had submitted their policies in an effort to support safe and caring schools for all students.

We know that the development of these policies has at times been challenging, but the most important things in life, Mr. Speaker, are not often easy to achieve. We know that our work is far from over as we now review the policies and discuss their contents with our school leaders. We will also work in the months ahead with students, parents, and teachers to support and educate each other. This House deserves plenty of credit as well in this endeavour as members voted to amend the Alberta Human Rights Act in the fall and, prior to that, approved An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, formerly known as Bill 10, legislation that received all-party support. Our work over these past few months now has been to align school board policy with these existing pieces of legislation.

It should also be noted that these laws would not exist without the tireless efforts of so many LGBTQ community members and advocates who have fought for years for recognition and to be afforded the human rights that everyone should be entitled to. It is their work in the face of adversity that has spurred a movement towards equality and social justice. I had the privilege of sitting down with a number of these brave champions earlier today, and I want to also thank members from the opposition parties for joining me in that same conversation. I think we all came away, Mr. Speaker, with a better understanding of the need to support our students fully in this matter. I hope each and every one of us will do our part to educate others in the spirit of peace and understanding, that we will reassure parents that they have been and always will be invited to be involved in all aspects of their children's education, and, working together, we will be able to protect and nurture all of our children in the province of Alberta. We will be the stronger for it, all of us standing together.

Finally and most importantly, to the dedicated LGBTQ advocates gathered here today and from around the province and in the light of last Thursday's commemoration, I want to deliver a simple message to you all. Our government sees you, we hear you, we are inspired by you, and we will do everything in our power to support you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Standing ovation]

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

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today the Wildrose shadow minister for Education and I had the pleasure of sitting down for lunch with the minister and a group of LGBTQ advocates. It was a great lunch. We discussed some issues that, frankly, LGBTQ children face in a school environment. Some are bullied, some are marginalized, and there are some who wake up in the morning to a feeling of dread at the thought of going to school that day. That's unacceptable. They don't feel comfortable, and they don't feel safe.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, there's not a member in this House who feels that this is acceptable. No child, whether they are gay, straight, transgendered, of a different race, religion, or ethnicity, should ever, ever feel unsafe at any school. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms is absolutely clear on this matter and all matters dealing with this, and it is absolutely right on these matters.

Now, over the last few months there has been vigorous debate on how to ensure that these rights are upheld in schools right across the province. There are actually some who believe that this debate ought to be shied away from or tempered. I disagree. Something as fundamental as ensuring the safety of all children in schools deserves fulsome and reasoned discussion by all of the members in this place. I, too, am very proud of the work this Assembly has done, and I'm proud of the efforts of my colleagues in the Wildrose caucus to ensure that the safety of LGBTQ kids remains front and centre in all the conversations that we have with children, with school boards, with parents, and amongst our colleagues in this House.

Today does not mark the end of this conversation. I expect there will be continued discussion on the best path forward to providing a safe environment for LGBTQ children, for all children, and I believe that these discussions ought not be looked at as destructive or as dangerous as long as they always remain respectful and productive, with the clear objective always being the creation and

the enforcement of a safe and caring learning environment for all of Alberta's children.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would request unanimous consent of the House to allow the leader or a designate of the third party as well as the two independent members to respond to the ministerial statement.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to join with all my colleagues in this House to recognize the fact that this province has never been more proudly inclusive. Like the minister and so many others, I was honoured to attend the International Transgender Day of Visibility. It was a fantastic event to share in, and it was an emotional one. The significance of so many members of Alberta's trans community gathering to celebrate proudly and publicly was lost on no one in that room and no one around the province.

I also rise today to thank so many people for the hard work and dedication that they put into fighting for equality, acceptance, and understanding in the LGBTQ community. As associate minister of family and community safety I was honoured to preside over the raising of the Pride flag for the first time at the Legislature. I was also pleased to bring forward the relationship statutes and the Vital Statistics Act, removing the preamble to the Marriage Act that states that marriage is between a man and a woman, and removing the onus to be 50 per cent of the way through gender reassignment surgery in order to get the sex changed on your birth certificate.

I want to send out a particular thank you to our Education minister. You have been incredibly inclusive, and I thank you for including us in the discussion about the LGBTQ guidelines. The progress that has been made on these guidelines is a great start. There is still, however, work to be done to ensure that our students, our staff, and parents in this province know that our schools are inclusive places of learning and acceptance. The Progressive Conservatives support the guidelines. We offer our full support and guidance to the government to get this task done.

Lastly, our deepest thanks to the many advocates in the LGBTQ community for their courage and for their dignity. We stand side by side with you now and in the future to ensure that the human rights afforded to every Albertan are your rights, too.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to speak on this historic bill near and dear to all our hearts, in particular to two Liberal members, Laurie Blakeman and Kent Hehr, who in this Legislature fought long and hard to put LGBTQ interests on the legislative agenda.

Last year this House, to its credit, rose as one to say that in Alberta there's a fundamental principle that as a matter of public policy all persons are equal. I was encouraged when watching the hon. minister pursue this mandate, which, as he has shared with us today, is now being implemented by most school boards in the province. However, it is the "most" in the minister's statement which causes me concern. Most school boards accepting the laws in Alberta isn't enough. Safe environments for all children, not for

most children, is the order of the day. It's not enough that most Albertans are equal.

I understand there are significant challenges facing the minister. Even greater are the challenges of the LGBTQ youth. Not everyone in Alberta understands the incredible difficulties that face these young people in school: the suicide rates, the bullying, self-rejection, mental anguish, and addictions in many cases because of being different and being judged to be different. Nonetheless, members of the LGBTQ community have fought for too long and too hard to accept anything less than the full implementation of the government's regulations.

The near-unanimous vote in this House was a clarion call for change in Alberta, and I for one will be watching to ensure that the spirit and the letter of the law are experienced by all children, present and future, who deserve our respect and our protection.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, there's an old saying that 90 per cent of life is just showing up. Now, that sounds easy, but it is not. Today at lunch we talked about the great work that goes on in GSAs and QSAs in Alberta schools, how students and staff support one another, and about the need to expand these important clubs to all parts of the province. Now, there's no doubt that a small group of determined people can make big changes, and it's important to recognize the work of these remarkable people when discussing inclusivity and human rights in our province. I want to recognize all of those who celebrated with us the Transgender Day of Visibility last week, and I especially want to thank the students who joined us for lunch today. I want you to know that we in this House may be the politicians, but you're the leaders. You are the leaders, so thank you.

But we also need to recognize that the work is not done. Rights are rights no matter where you live in Alberta or which school division you belong to, and I do commend the government and this minister for pursuing consistent policies across the province. My message to you is this: keep going. It's too important to stop now, and you have my full support for the path that you are on. At lunch earlier today the Minister of Culture and Tourism challenged all of us to speak up, to be allies of the LGBTQ community, and to take an active role in making change happen. I can assure you that on behalf of all members of the Alberta Party we will always be your ally. We will do everything we can to ensure that rights are rights for all Albertans everywhere.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Alberta Health Services

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All of my questions today will be about the serious issue raised in the resignation letter of the former CEO of Alberta Health Services, but let me first commend the integrity of Vickie Kaminski in writing that letter. The CEO of the largest organization in Alberta walked away from her \$600,000-a-year dream job without severance simply to protect her professional reputation from political interference. This show of integrity is an example of the best of Alberta's great public service.

My question is this: has the Premier read the damning resignation letter, and what will she do about it?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. No, I haven't read the exact letter, but I've certainly heard about it in great detail. Let me be very clear. Our government was elected to protect and promote public health care and to do so specifically by promoting public delivery of public health care. Those were critical issues that we ran on, that we spoke to Albertans on, and that we got a clear mandate on. Our Minister of Health has now followed the act, followed the roles and responsibilities of AHS, and has done her job to move forward on the very things Albertans elected us to do.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, last fall Vickie Kaminski sat in my office and committed to me that she would fix AHS. She believed she could make AHS more effective. I believed her. Just a few weeks later she was gone. Her resignation letter makes it very clear that detailed business cases were regularly overridden by this NDP government for ideological reasons. AHS has had five CEOs in five years. Political interference is rampant. Does the Premier still believe that it was a good idea to put her most ideological minister in charge of the health care system in Alberta?

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, I could not be more convinced of the rightness of the decision to have the current Minister of Health in that role.

Mr. Jean: In her resignation letter, Mr. Speaker, Kaminski says that she told the Health minister, and I quote: if all AHS activities are going to be micromanaged by the government and all decisions have to be reviewed and vetted by the minister before they can be acted upon, then there are simply too many decision-makers. End quote. I couldn't agree more with that statement. Can the Premier tell us what qualifications the Health minister has that would allow her to micromanage, review, and vet every single Health decision? Is the minister going to be the new CEO of AHS?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the Health minister was elected by the people of Alberta, and she was elected to oversee the spending of almost 40 per cent of our budget, not to hand it over to some self-made CEO who thinks that they get to operate independent of the very people who put that money into their budget. This is a function simply of the legislation that governs the relationship and the very practices and policies that AHS itself has. It is unfortunate that the former CEO did not read either of those documents.

The Speaker: Second major question.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, one part of the resignation letter is truly shocking. The former CEO of AHS says that she was instructed to conduct her business with the Health ministry in, quote, voice mode, meaning there should not be any e-mail trail. She got orders without substantiating documentation. She described it as, quote, an environment lacking in trust and transparency. It is very clear that this government is trying to do things in secret. What agenda is the Premier hiding by having her minister give political orders to top public servants without creating any records whatsoever?

Ms Notley: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is taking one comment and blowing it right out because, of course, there are loads of records, absolutely loads of records. Now, I

appreciate that the member opposite would probably prefer if I just sent him notes rather than getting up and speaking, but many people in the world do actually speak to each other. To suggest that they not speak to each other is really, really, quite silly. I suspect that the deputy minister has a phone in his pocket, I suspect that he uses it, and I suspect that that's the way many people operate with each other. The speculative comments that were included in the letter really are simply that.

Mr. Jean: AHS is the largest organization in Alberta. It employs 100,000 Albertans and keeps Albertans healthy. It is not silly. Yet we learn that its CEO would get cryptic e-mails from the Health ministry saying that instructions would be coming in voice mode. Albertans know that you cannot run a successful business without writing things down. This is a very important organization to Albertans, but this Health minister was trying to run AHS in voice mode to hide her political interference. Will the Premier acknowledge today that hiding things from Albertans is unethical and commit that it will never happen again?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that – I mean, there are a lot of issues here, but let me first of all remind and bring to the member opposite's attention section 8 of the Regional Health Authorities Act and the mandate and roles document of Alberta Health Services. I would suggest that it outlines exactly the kind of oversight that the minister has engaged in and should consider continuing engaging in. When you talk about political interference, I would suggest that the letter's admission that a critical decision affecting the people of Calgary was intentionally withheld until after the election is political interference.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, this voice mode issue is very serious. Albertans know that when someone wants to leave no record, it is likely because they are doing something wrong. Albertans know. This NDP government wants to do things in secret. It isn't the interests of Albertans that they're looking after. Running a government without a paper trail is simply not ethical. Will the Premier make public the full details of every single instance where the Health ministry asked AHS to operate in voice mode?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what our minister did do. When our minister came into the role, what she said is that going forward, we want to have evidence-based decision-making. So when we looked at decisions that had been made previously, we said that we want to see the evidence for that particular decision; we want to know why that decision was made; we want to consider all the facts. It was a little alarming to discover the number of decisions that had been made without any kind of written evidence, without any kind of written record. But that being said, that's exactly the way we're going forward. We are making evidence-based decisions. That's why the minister decided to reconsider the issue of the Calgary ambulance. That's good governance, and that's what we will continue to do.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Third major question.

Mr. Jean: Keeping secrets from Albertans is not right.

In her letter Kaminski details two examples of political interference. In one case: AHS ordered to the bargaining table just so the Premier wouldn't be booed at an AUPE speech. But she says

that there are also other examples. Apparently, there was political interference in linen outsourcing and laundry outsourcing. AHS is being stopped from changes that, quote, have solid business plans, are more effective and efficient, and would save significant public dollars. To the Health minister: what was Kaminski talking about?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what former CEO Ms Kaminski was talking about was section 8 of the Regional Health Authorities Act, where the minister gives directions to a regional health authority for the purpose of "providing priorities and guidelines for it to follow . . . and co-ordinating the work of the regional health authority with the programs, policies and work of the Government." Our government got elected on a clear decision that we would not promote the privatization of public health delivery in Alberta, that we would do the opposite, and that's what the minister is working on.

Mr. Jean: Kaminski told the AHS board that there was political interference in the decisions on Edmonton and north zone lab services. Let me paraphrase her letter: even though AHS has identified the right things to do and the right way to do them, AHS is being stopped. That type of political interference is very concerning and unacceptable. To the Health minister. What did Kaminski mean when she said: will the Health minister release the AHS briefing notes on lab service, that Kaminski referred to in her letter?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, as I said before, the minister very clearly made a decision that we wanted to see evidence for what was the best decision, so she sought out that evidence. As I said before, when we first took over this role, we discovered that there was no evidence. There was no written evidence to suggest that that particular issue was a good decision, so this minister set about getting evidence on which to base her decision. There is a review under way. That will be disclosed, and the completion of it will be happening very soon. We look forward to talking with Albertans about it because that's what good governance looks like. We are the ones elected to run this, not a CEO.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Kaminski also told the AHS board that the government is politically blocking, quote, workforce initiatives that are simply everyday good management practices. End quote. The CEO of AHS has accused the NDP government of interfering in everyday people management. Can the minister tell us what is going on here? Is this an example of what Kaminski called, quote, the ideology of the new government, that does not allow AHS to do what needs to be done and should be done?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, prior to the last election AHS was operating under a plan which did allow and plan for laying off thousands of front-line health care workers, including nurses and other front-line workers. After the election we said that we're not going to do that. That's not the way we're going to control costs in Alberta. Yes, the minister said that we want to know: how exactly are you going to save this money, and how many front-line service workers are you laying off? That's exactly the kind of questions that the minister does have to ask because that's what she was elected to do.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the leader of the third party.

2:10 Openness and Transparency in Government

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today Albertans learned a new Orwellian phrase: voice mode. Apparently voice mode is how the Health minister and senior staff avoid creating traceable paper documents surrounding their decisions for both Alberta Health and AHS and, by extension, avoid being open, transparent, and accountable to Albertans. To the Minister of Health: if you stand by your actions and characterize them as being governance rather than interference, why the attempts to keep them off the public record by using voice mode?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for this question, Mr. Speaker, and I'm very happy to answer in voice mode. We are on the public record. There are times when there certainly needs to be dialogue, where you can get much clearer outcomes and you can have the back and forth necessary to have a conversation. Some people like to communicate that as voice mode; I say, "I'll give you a call." Whatever it is, certainly it's important that we have an opportunity to have dialogue, respectful conversation, and that doesn't prevent anyone from putting things in writing after the fact.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, evidence-based decisions can't be made after voice mode because there's no evidence.

Yesterday we established that the environment minister eliminated the independence of AEMERA, an arm's-length review agency for the environment, by interfering; we heard that the tourism minister requires permission for people to talk to MLAs from agencies, boards, and commissions; and now we hear about voice mode at AHS. To the Premier: is making government less open, less transparent, and less accountable part of the change your government brings to Alberta?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to greater openness and transparency. Absolutely. There are a number of forums within which that has already happened. The all-party committee on democracy and accountability and transparency, something that, frankly, never existed in the previous 44 years: that is a wonderful, open forum for us to move forward on a number of these important issues, and we will continue to do so because we respect the right of Albertans to know about what's going on in their government.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the all-party committee will be documented and not in voice mode.

The government is currently reviewing all agencies, boards, and commissions, which we think is a good idea. One of the main focuses, of course, of agencies, boards, and commissions is to provide independence from political interference to protect the public interest. Again to the Premier: do you plan to gut independence of all ABCs so you can voice mode your way out of any accountability and transparency?

Ms Notley: Well, the irony of that, Mr. Speaker, is that many of those agencies, boards, and commissions by actions of the previous government are actually exempt from the very rules and regulations that would make them more open, more accountable, and more able to be reviewed by Albertans. It's very ironic that he would suggest that by eliminating any of them, we'd be reducing that. Nonetheless, what we are actually doing is that we're going to be looking forward to how we can get costs under control, get a little

bit of connection between what the public service is earning and all the friends and insiders and many of the ABCs created over the last four decades and, instead, work on behalf of Albertans . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Alberta Health Services

(continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Health services, the largest budget in government at \$19 billion, continues to be plagued by inconsistent governance, which is reflected in the high turnover of senior staff and continued low morale in the workforce. Allegations from Ms Kaminski suggest that the dysfunctional relationship between the ministry and AHS continues to erode confidence in the organization and threatens not only fiscal responsibility but, more importantly, quality of care, findings also made clear to me in the Premier's provincial addictions and mental health review. Can the minister tell us how she will improve relations between her ministry and AHS?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Certainly, public health care is public business, and I'm very proud to be a part of a government that makes sure that we don't placate our responsibility by pretending that we've got a business organization operating a business when, really, we're talking about essential public health care, which Albertans count on so desperately. Certainly, I have a very positive working relationship with my deputy minister, with the board, and with the interim CEO. I have to say that it's been a breath of fresh air, and I look forward to that continuing to be the case as we move forward.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister commit today in conjunction with the new board to survey Alberta Health Services staff to better understand current attitudes and concerns in relation to the organization? Yes or no?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the proposal. Mr. Speaker, certainly, it's an interesting idea. I want to make sure that I'm aware of what types of surveys there are currently in place and make sure that I have an opportunity to review those. As well, I make sure that I'm out on the front lines having opportunities to engage first-hand. During the two-week constituency break I was at 11 communities meeting with AHS leaders and front-line staff, and that continues to be a priority of mine as well as my associate minister.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, given that the government changed the rules for appointments to the board and appointed Mr. Richard Dicerni, then head of the civil service, to the AHS board, will the minister review this decision as a barrier to the kind of accountability and transparency and independence that are needed?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. Mr. Speaker, certainly, I'm very proud of the complex skills and the expertise that are around the table. Mr. Dicerni was selected because of his extensive experience understanding both the public service and Crown corporations. He has over 35 years of experience, and even

though he is retiring from the public service, he's agreed to stay on the board, and I'm very proud of that.

Certainly, the rules that were in place under previous boards of AHS were that you couldn't have any revenue from the government of Alberta, you couldn't be engaged as an Alberta Health or Alberta Health Services employee. I think it's important that we have expertise around the table, including health expertise and government expertise, and I am proud of the board we have.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Trade with Asia

Ms Woppard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been hearing a lot from my constituents, who want to share that if we want to be successful as we diversify our economy, we must expand and diversify our trade markets as well. Can the Minister of Economic Development and Trade update my constituents of Edmonton-Mill Creek and all Albertans on his recent trade mission to Asia and explain why he went there at this time?

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. My 14-day trade mission was to try and create and simply attract new investment and to increase market access for our energy, agriculture, forestry, tourism, and petrochemical sectors. Given the challenges that Alberta's economy is facing right now, it's absolutely critical that we expand our markets and opportunities for Alberta businesses to grow and move into other markets as well as attract investment dollars back home into Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Ms Woppard: Thank you, minister.

Mr. Speaker, given that many of my constituents have been affected by the economic downturn and are looking to this government for results, again to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: what tangible results did you get from this trade mission?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. I mean, this trade mission was absolutely critical, and there are quite a few tangible results that we got from it. First of all, we signed a memorandum of understanding with the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Commerce. This MOU supports investment and collaboration in sectors like environmental management and technologies, health, and infrastructure.

I signed as well an MOU with the Korea Importers Association and want to point out that Alberta is the only province in our country that has an MOU with the Korea Importers Association and that we're the third jurisdiction in North America. This is absolutely significant as far as increasing our opportunity to get our agriculture products . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Ms Woppard: Thank you, minister.

Mr. Speaker, given that we already have trade offices in Asia, again to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: how will opening a third international office in China help create jobs for Albertans and diversify the economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Absolutely. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. That was one of our three concrete tangibles from this trade mission, opening a new Alberta office in Guangzhou, in the province of Guangdong. Very simply, Guangdong province is very similar to Alberta in the sense that it is one of China's biggest economic engines and driving forces. That province alone is responsible for one-fifth of China's GDP. It is absolutely critical that we have staff there in Guangzhou not only to help support Alberta businesses with entering into the China market but, as well, identifying opportunities and attracting investment . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

2:20 Emergency Medical Dispatch Services in Calgary

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, Wildrose has risen in this House 10 times to highlight the issue of EMS dispatch services in Calgary. Calgarians deserve to have quality services when it comes to dispatch and to be kept in the loop on matters that will directly impact the delivery of those services. That's why I was so alarmed to discover the revelations of the AHS former CEO. Answers the Health minister gave in this House about Calgary ambulance dispatch do not reveal what is really happening, so I will ask the minister, plain and simple: what exactly is the government's plan for Calgary dispatch?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. Mr. Speaker, plain and simple, our plan is to continue to make sure that we have reliable EMS service and to improve it, actually, throughout Alberta, and certainly the best way to do that is to have a dialogue with the local community. When the mayor expressed concerns about the transition, I made it a priority to make sure that I can meet with him and have an ongoing dialogue, expose some of the evidence, and make sure that we come to the right decision. The members opposite have asked me to make rash decisions. I'm actually making sure that we have time to talk and work through the details, and I plan to keep doing that.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government just can't seem to help itself when it comes to meddling. Whereas in less than a year of governing they have no problem exercising political interference when it's to their advantage and given that we've learned that the Health minister was hiding facts about Calgary EMS and that we also know that she wasn't telling the mayor of Calgary the full story about a crucial issue, I want the minister to come clean and say when and what exactly the mayor was told about the dispatch plans.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. Mr. Speaker, this has certainly been an issue that's been ongoing for many years under the previous government. There were messages conveyed, including in the letter of resignation, that the last government said publicly that they weren't moving forward but that their plan actually was to move forward just after the election. Certainly, the mayor of Calgary didn't want that to happen, and I made sure that our government stepped up and asked for the evidence. We have an opportunity to go through it with the city, and the mayor is very grateful.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, seeing as the Health minister knew full well that AHS is locked into a lease of at least 20 years for the new EMS dispatch and given that we thought it was bad enough when there was a short-term problem of an empty building at \$60,000 a

month and whereas now we know that Albertans are on the hook for \$15 million – \$15 million – to move ahead with a Calgary EMS dispatch that the city doesn't want, why did the Health minister try to cover this up? Does she really think this is the way to run Alberta's most expensive ministry?

Ms Hoffman: Since the member opposite has been referring to Mayor Nenshi, I thought I'd actually put his own words on record. From a statement he just released:

Minister Hoffman, to her great credit, put the transfer on hold and has repeatedly promised that she would get answers to The City's questions about the 911 service change – questions which AHS had refused to answer over a period of [very] many years. Minister Hoffman did the right thing for Calgarians and she should be applauded for her actions.

... Minister Hoffman's putting a stop to these games is not "political interference," it's proper governance of Alberta's largest expense.

The Speaker: I'd just like to caution both sides of the House. Let's be cautious about statements that may be interpreted to reflect upon the character and reputation of members.

The Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Trade and Development Initiatives

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before in this Assembly, agriculture and forestry play an integral role in the diversification of our economy. I've heard from Alberta ag and forest industry producers that they're excited about exporting their innovative projects to new markets. Recently the minister of economic development travelled to China to talk to stakeholders there and promote Alberta industry. Although I got scooped by the member behind you, I would like the minister to tell what tangible results he got on this trip.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. I mean, agriculture and forestry are two of our priority sectors in addition, obviously, to our energy sector. At the moment we do a significant amount of trade, especially with Asia. I want to highlight the fact that, first of all, China is Alberta's second-largest trading partner; Korea is our fifth-largest trading partner. There's much more as far as opportunities to increase the amount of trade that we're doing. That's one of the objectives and one of the tangibles that we got out of this trade mission.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this trip to China led to promising new market expansion for Alberta's forest and agricultural industry, which I support a hundred per cent, to the minister: how are you going to be able to deliver our products to these new markets? Maybe use Zeppelins?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for his question. I mean, absolutely, when we talk about diversification, which I've spoken on a number of times, it's not just diversifying our products; it's also diversifying our markets. And the fact that we want to increase our opportunities for trade is absolutely critical.

Mr. Speaker, we're also looking at increasing our market access. That involves working with our different rail companies, our

different modes of transportation to ensure that we're getting Alberta products to tidewater and overseas into new markets.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Related to economic development, I would like to thank the minister given that he took my advice last fall and moved NADC to Economic Development, which was absolutely the right thing to do.

Now my question is: seeing that NADC has been a year without direction or leadership, when will this government appoint a new chair to NADC?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question, a very pertinent question. Absolutely, it's one of my priorities, to work with our different organizations throughout the province. It's very critical that we not only keep a watchful eye but that we're acting in a supportive way to support especially our entrepreneurs, businesses in northern Alberta. I think there are great opportunities to expand the great work that's already going on. So to the member's question: we will be doing this in a very timely manner.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Red Deer Regional Hospital

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The former CEO of Alberta Health Services doesn't trust this Health minister, and Albertans don't either. After major flooding shut down nine Red Deer operating rooms on March 1, Alberta Health Services first said: one or two weeks to restoration. Then later the minister said that three of these operating rooms would be running this coming week. Now we've learned from AHS documents that these rooms will not see full completion till May 31. The finish line keeps moving. Can the people of Red Deer trust this new timeline?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Certainly, the flooding that happened at the Red Deer regional hospital on March 1 as a result of a sprinkler system being unintentionally struck and causing flooding is certainly not something that could be planned for and certainly is something that we're responding to in a way that makes sure that patient care is the top priority. Making sure that you have operating rooms that are clean, sterile, and fit for operations is our number one priority. We are hopeful that we'll be able to get these online quickly, but obviously we're not going to put patients in unsafe situations.*

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, the minister said that Red Deer residents could get their surgeries done in Olds and Innisfail, but given that workers from these communities are reporting very few surgeries being added to their queues, can the minister explain why front-line workers in Olds and Innisfail are telling us that they just aren't seeing the positive benefits of this good-news announcement?

Ms Hoffman: I'd certainly be happy to follow up with the specific information that the member has raised in this Chamber, in voice mode or in e-mail, after the fact. I would like to have the appropriate information to be able to give the appropriate response in a timely fashion, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, there are operating rooms in other parts of the province that can accommodate elective surgeries,

*See page 446, left column, paragraph 6

including nearby communities but in other areas of the province as well.

Mr. Orr: Given that the minister has been accused of micromanaging and slowing down processes at AHS, it appears that the minister's political interference is hurting front-line care and increasing already dismal waiting times for patients in Red Deer. Even the doctors are, I quote, getting grumpy because they can't perform needed operations for patients. What does the minister say to the citizens of central Alberta as they see wait times getting longer while operating rooms remain closed?

2:30

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the question. I'd be happy to follow up with Alberta Health Services and the hospital administrator and find out what specifically is happening on-site. I think that's what's being asked of me, and that's what Albertans ask of me, to make sure I'm accountable for the system. Certainly, we want to make sure that when patients have surgery, they're not in a situation that makes it worse because they have contracted an infection. Making sure that those environments are sterile and fit for surgery is our number one priority. Urgent situations are moving forward, but elective surgeries have had to be postponed. As soon as those rooms are back up, we'll make sure we get people caught up as quickly as possible.

Organ Transplantation

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Health minister why our per capita transplant rates have been steadily falling over the past decade despite increased spending by Alberta Health Services. The minister refused to acknowledge the plummeting numbers and called it hysterical fearmongering. This isn't hysteria. Albertans are deeply worried about the troubling trend, and Wildrose shares these concerns. Could the minister cut the baseless attacks, care about Albertans, and tell us exactly what her ministry will be doing to restore Alberta as a leader in organ transplants?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. What I spoke to yesterday was the fact that the member opposite was saying a decade, but his research department was being very creative and picking nine specific years to show a point where there might be a blip in the data. I understand, Mr. Speaker, that that's what opposition researchers do. They try to find something salacious.

In terms of what's happening in neighbouring provinces, I'm really happy that B.C. is increasing their capacity so that people don't have to travel outside of province. I think that's important. Of course, in Alberta we want to continue to make sure that Albertans have access to transplants. We'll support neighbouring provinces, but certainly their province stepping up to the plate is not something that we should be condemning them for.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, this data the Health minister refused to look at comes straight from CIHI, which gets it from her own ministry.

Given that Alberta's average transplant rates have decreased 21 per cent over nine years while rates have vastly improved elsewhere and given that we have one of the most expensive hospital systems in Canada while spending far more than any other province on an age-adjusted per capita basis, will the minister finally accept the evidence from her own department, and more importantly what will you do about it?

Ms Hoffman: I'd be very happy to give the research department of the Wildrose a lesson in actually looking at, when your member is going to say a decade, making sure you look back at the decade, not picking specific numbers in a nine-year random sample. That is more sloppy math on the part of the Official Opposition. I think that they should be questioned on it.

In terms of what's happening here, what's happening here is the records in terms of liver transplants, lung transplants, life-saving surgeries, Mr. Speaker. Being disrespectful to those recipients and the staff is not a way to move the system forward. I am proud of them.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that I will be tabling this information today and given that the bottom line is that Alberta families suffer under the weight of a bureaucratic, inefficient, wasteful Alberta Health Services monopoly and given that we were once leaders in organ transplants and seeing that the system is clearly failing our patients and excellent front-line surgical teams, can the minister just put down her talking points and tell us: what you will do to get the resources directed to Albertans, who desperately need and deserve a higher quality of care than our broken system can deliver?

Ms Hoffman: I'm pleased to respond to your talking points, through you, Mr. Speaker, of course. I'm very pleased for the fact that I've signed up to be an organ donor. I imagine many members of this House have, including members opposite. It's important that we have living donors for opportunities where we can, as with partial livers or kidneys, but often in these situations it's very tragic outcomes that lead to the high number of increases. We're looking at small sample sizes, but there are hundreds of people's lives in Alberta that are saved every year through organ transplant. I'm proud of the system we have. I hope that members opposite think about public donation and public health care as they continue to move forward.

Physician-assisted Dying

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, our Progressive Conservative Engage document has already provided thousands of Albertans the opportunity to raise issues of concern. One of these is physician-assisted dying. This is a complex medical, ethical, legal, and moral issue, and people have strongly held opinions on this subject. There is a widespread understanding and desire that there will be a fulsome debate on this subject so that hon. members from across the province can express the concerns of their constituents. To the Associate Minister of Health: will you commit to Albertans that physician-assisted death will be debated here in the Assembly?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. Absolutely, we know that physician-assisted dying is a very, very sensitive issue, which is why our government has engaged with Albertans through an online survey as well as the online portal for sending in comments. At the close of the survey over 10,000 Albertans had submitted their views.

Additionally, myself and other members of this House are consulting with stakeholders to prepare a what-we-heard document so that we are able to bring forward a framework that fully represents the views of Albertans.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, no indication if we're going to debate it here in the Assembly.

Given that the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that physician-assisted suicide is legal and given that a federal panel on this issue has made a number of recommendations that many feel fail to adequately protect vulnerable Albertans against undue pressure to request this terminal procedure, what measures is the minister considering to ensure that Albertans facing this profound stage in their earthly journey have full access to palliative care and receive full counselling support as well as the opportunity to reconsider and renege on end-of-life decisions?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. Protecting vulnerable Albertans is a key part of any framework that we'll be bringing forward. To that end, we know that an individual is the one who's required to make the request of their physician and that they will be required to reiterate that request and that at any point in the process an individual may withdraw their consent and the process will be halted.

Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, many Albertans have also expressed concerns about doctors and medical personnel, who previously focused solely on healing and relieving suffering, now being called on to end the lives of their patients. Given the profound burden that this places on these professionals, none of whom have had training dealing with the mental strain of performing euthanasia, to the minister: working with the College of Physicians & Surgeons and the Alberta Medical Association, what measures are being developed to support medical personnel suddenly faced with this challenging ethical situation?

Ms Payne: I'll thank the member for the question. To date we've had 80 doctors who've stepped forward and indicated their willingness to participate in physician-assisted dying. Working with the college of physicians in Alberta – I had a meeting with them earlier today – we've been talking about different training modules that will be available as well as supports that will be available for any of the medical professionals that aid someone in the decision to end their life as part of their end-of-life care. As we continue to move forward with this issue in advance of the June 6 Supreme Court deadline, we will continue to work with our partners across health care.

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

School Board Autonomy

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I have heard concerns directly from both the Calgary Catholic and the public school board that the new MGA may challenge the autonomy of school boards and impact student learning. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what impact will the new MGA have on the autonomy of school boards and student learning?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for sharing the concerns from her constituency. The modernized MGA will be about building strong, sustainable communities, and that includes support for schools and for our children. No element of the new MGA will challenge the autonomy or authority of school boards. Instead, we are striving for greater collaboration among all the stakeholders to come together to build complete communities that serve Alberta's families. The Minister of Education and I have

met with a number of school boards from across Alberta, including Calgary and Edmonton . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental question.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that these school boards have also raised concerns around the development of city charters with Calgary and Edmonton and given that these boards have stated that they believe elements of these charters could potentially undermine the authority of school boards, again to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: can you please explain the effect that city charters will have on the authority of school boards?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to clarify that the MGA and the city charters are separate processes. The city charters are looking at potential enhancements in terms of creating and building better collaborative partnerships between the cities and school boards, none, however, which will affect a school board's authority, which both myself and the Minister of Education have reiterated to a number of school boards from across the province. It's quite simple. Municipalities and school boards serve the same communities, the same families. We want to support those collaborative relationships so that Albertans are served effectively and efficiently by their governments.

2:40

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and again in regard to the city charters: when will school boards, other stakeholders, and the public have an opportunity to weigh in on the development of city charters?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the opportunity to speak about the fact that both city charters and the MGA will be a very transparent process. The MGA will be presented this spring, but it is not final. Everyone, including our school boards, will have the opportunity to provide feedback before the final legislation is passed next fall. We are committed as well to openness and transparency on city charters. Any proposed changes for Calgary and Edmonton will be posted publicly for a prolonged period of time so everyone can view and provide feedback on the charters before the final approval of this government.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Grande Prairie Hospital Construction

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Grande Prairie hospital fiasco has caused a great deal of anxiety among the citizens of the Peace Country. They're worried that the NDP can't be trusted to get this project on track. Can the minister tell the people of the Peace Country when she first became aware of construction delays to the Grande Prairie hospital?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member. There are a number of problems with the project at Grande Prairie, and they originally stem from the announcement of the building of the hospital with a price tag attached, a political

announcement which then forced the department to design to the political announcement instead of taking a careful look at what the needs were, doing a business case, doing your design, and so on, and then announcing the project. So we've changed this process since coming into office. Now we scope out our projects before we make a political announcement, and that way we can keep . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Loewen: Given that these delays due to mismanagement by consecutive governments do nothing but continue to break the trust of Albertans, can the minister at least tell us if it was before or after she met with the MLA for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, the mayor of Grande Prairie, and myself on September 9?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. As I mentioned during a previous session and I'm happy to reinforce today, at that time what I said to the room of stakeholders – and I was happy to meet with them – was that I wasn't aware of any deadlines. That's absolutely fact. What I did do is that as soon as I found out there was going to be a delay, we scheduled an opportunity for me to call the MLAs and, of course, the mayor as well to tell them in person over the phone. Then afterwards we released a formal communication to the broader community. So as soon as I found out, I made sure I communicated it publicly.

Mr. Loewen: Given this hospital has been not only plagued by cost overruns, poor oversight by consecutive governments, and delay after delay and given it is apparent that only the Wildrose cares enough to stand up for patients and front-line workers, can the minister tell us here today if she has received any current information regarding any further delays, budget changes, or changes of scope of the hospital?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, what a ridiculous assertion. Only the Wildrose. What a ridiculous assertion. Furthermore, the assertion that consecutive governments are responsible for the problems of the Grande Prairie hospital is patently false. We are working very hard to reduce the costs of this hospital. It was built far too big. It was built with many problems because of lack of planning on the part of the previous government. We are working hard to clean up that mess.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Engaging in critical housing issues with constituents and stakeholders is a commitment of the PC caucus. Addressing these issues requires an overarching housing strategy, a clearly defined one-stop shop for private and nonprofit partners. We are proud of early strides our government took with respect to leveraging public funds to maximize outcomes in seniors' and affordable housing, but it is clear that more work needs to be done. To the minister of seniors: are you working on the development of an overall housing strategy which addresses the entire housing continuum geographically and demographically, and if not, why?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question also. All Albertans deserve to live

in a safe, secure home no matter what their income, and we in Alberta have a spectrum of services for people to support them, whether they're low income. We are as a government very committed to this. Certainly, in my career as a social worker I know that it's so fundamental. It's fundamental to the social determinants of health to have good housing, and we are absolutely as a government diligently working on this.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that one of the most effective ways to tackle affordable housing is to partner with the private and nonprofit sectors and given that multiple stakeholders are providing innovative and sustainable concepts in redeveloping and densifying underutilized properties in both rural and urban settings, the government would be wise, of course, to engage in leveraging these partnerships. To the minister: can you specifically outline for the House any current initiatives or programs from your ministry to partner with private and nonprofit housing entities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Just yesterday I met with the Horizon association in Calgary. They're a nonprofit agency. I met with Resolve. They're working for several nonprofit agencies in the Calgary area to make sure that there is affordable housing across the spectrum. I've met with many, many other stakeholders since being appointed to this ministry February 2. I just commend the member to be very alert during the budget because I think we'll have some very good news for him.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A little short on specific initiatives, but I'll take that as an answer.

Given that another issue to address within the housing continuum is the ever-present need for additional seniors' housing and given that our PC Engage document outlines a plan heard from multiple stakeholders to co-locate seniors' housing with other services and forms of attainable, affordable market housing and given that this would allow seniors to age in place as vibrant, active contributors within communities they built, to the minister: are you exploring new and innovative ways to fund capital investment or to deliver new concepts in seniors' housing, and if so, what are they?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We know the importance of keeping seniors in their communities, keeping seniors in their homes, keeping seniors in facilities that support their needs and making sure that they're integrated into the community. I again just support the member to be alert and watch for further details coming out very shortly.

Thank you.

Payday Loan Service Review

Mrs. Schreiner: Mr. Speaker, like many parts of Alberta, my constituency of Red Deer-North is working hard to cope with the challenges of the current difficult economic times, but we're seeing that in these tough economic times some Alberta families are still turning to payday loan services to help them deal with financial challenges. Last fall the Minister of Service Alberta announced a

review of the province's payday lending regulations, and since then my constituents have been anxiously waiting for action on this important issue. To the Minister of Service Alberta: can you update the House on what you heard from Albertans during this consultation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you for the question. The member is correct. We launched a consultation last October. Fourteen hundred people participated in our online survey. My department also held many face-to-face meetings with borrowers, community and nonprofit organizations, and industry, and we received in-depth submissions. We heard Albertans loud and clear. About 80 per cent of respondents overwhelmingly said that they want lower rates, limits on borrowing amounts, and want lenders to offer longer payback periods and allow for instalments. In response to this feedback we will be moving ahead with changes to better protect Albertans who use these payday loan services.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

2:50

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in many cases people who use payday loans can end up paying upwards of 600 per cent interest on their loans but given that I've heard from some companies who argue that the use of the term "predatory" is unfair, to the same minister: is this a fair characterization, and why are you introducing legislation on this issue when you could just change the existing regulations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. This is a very important issue. We feel that it deserves the full attention of the whole Assembly. It affects many Albertans and is important enough to warrant legislation. Six hundred per cent interest rates are predatory. Period. We want to end practices that expose Albertans to vicious cycles of debt.

Thank you.

Mrs. Schreiner: Mr. Speaker, given that in some communities payday lenders may be the only option for Albertans and given that these folks are worried about being able to make ends meet, again to the Minister of Service Alberta: will Albertans still have access to short-term loans that they may need to bridge gaps in their finances?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely. Our changes are to limit the excessive interest rates that are charged by payday loan companies. We will continue to allow for more reasonable lending so that Albertans who need these services will have access to them. We are also working with the Finance minister and community partners to put better lending alternatives in place. As Albertans we look forward to helping each other and doing so in tough times. These alternatives will help Albertans who just need a few bucks to get to their next paycheque. I'm proud of the action that we're taking on this, and I look forward to discussing this more in the coming weeks.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Minister of Health has requested an opportunity to supplement an answer given earlier.

Red Deer Regional Hospital (continued)

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's to a question raised by the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. It was mentioned in a question by the member that the operating theatres weren't on track to open. I'm pleased to inform this House and all Albertans that there are three operating theatres scheduled to open the second week of April. So they are indeed on track to open on time, and they will be safe.

The Speaker: You have the opportunity for a supplementary question, hon. member.

Not seeing that, I would advise the House that it appears we will not be able to finish the Routine on time. Is there a desire to have unanimous consent to continue?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I seek the unanimous consent of the House to continue the Routine past 3 o'clock.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Forgive the indulgence, but I forgot to mention that you do have 15 seconds if you'd like to leave.

Hon. members, 15 seconds has subsided.

Members' Statements

Health Care System

Mrs. Pitt: Albertans are worried about an NDP government that is more concerned about ideology than working in the best interest of patients. They have watched as a centralized superboard in AHS has grown more distant and uncaring about the concerns of patients, families, and our most vulnerable. The more power centralized in health care, the more patients have suffered every single time.

It started with doctor intimidation, queue jumping, and public inquiries that revealed a fundamentally broken health care system. In communities across Alberta it meant ripping effective ambulance and dispatch systems away from their communities, creating higher wait times. Emergency room wait times increased while wait times for key surgical procedures spiked. All the while, whether it's the previous government or our new NDP government, the only solution they offer is to dramatically increase spending without any concrete ideas to improve outcomes for patients.

Today we have the town of Sundre bubbling with anger over long-term care cuts and now in a damning letter from former AHS CEO Vickie Kaminski clear signs the government is not only ideologically interfering in our health care system but misleading Albertans on several key files. The letter shows the NDP keeping secret information like a 20-year lease space that cost \$750,000 a year to centralize Calgary EMS services. We heard that the government used labour negotiations to try and build goodwill for the Premier at a government-union AGM. We also found out that the government is on track to negotiate wage increases. We heard that the government is blocking innovative initiatives to save the health care system money while protecting front-line services.

What it all adds up to is an NDP government who is more interested in keeping secrets and interfering in a broken health care model. Albertans are tired of the experiments and the broken trust. They are sick of the secrecy, and they are angry about it. Albertans deserve better.

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

Dig Safe Month

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk about safe digging. April is known as the Dig Safe Month across Canada. Dig Safe Month coincides with the unofficial start of the spring digging season.

Every year thousands of buried lines such as cables, wires, pipelines, water mains, and sewer lines are accidentally damaged by excavators. As a result our everyday utilities – namely, heat, electricity, water, telecommunications, and Internet – along with emergency services are interrupted. These incidents lead to serious injuries and significant environmental contamination that add huge costs on public tax dollars. Hence, this campaign serves as a reminder to homeowners and contractors that they need to click or call before they dig because all these unnecessary risks are preventable.

Alberta was the first province in Canada to create a one-call service, in 1984. Thirty-two years later Alberta One-Call receives and processes over 500,000 locate requests from the digging community. Despite that, over 2,500 damages to underground infrastructure occurred in 2015, most because the person digging failed to click, which means failed to identify and locate the buried lines before they dug, and initiate the damage prevention process. Requesting a locate is free, and the notification centres are easily accessible through websites. In my constituency of Calgary-Glenmore awareness around protection of buried lines is an important issue due to the upcoming southwest ring road construction project.

Several members are sporting the Dig Safe pin to spread awareness. With us today are some members of the Alberta Common Ground Alliance, who have already been introduced in the House. They are working hard to keep Albertans safe by raising awareness of these issues.

Thank you.

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

Wellness Strategy

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's not-so-new government has racked up the highest deficit projections in the history of our province. So in our Engage document our PC caucus asks: how can we create a culture of increasing quality of life and improving health outcomes while decreasing costs?

The previous government designed programs and policies that were positive, proactive, and preventative. Through a rigorous province-wide consultation, the most comprehensive framework of its kind on Earth, Alberta's strategic approach to wellness was created, but we've heard nothing about this or other groundbreaking initiatives for aboriginal Albertans, students, employees, and seniors.

The NDP have made no commitments to continue hosting international wellness symposia, provincial wellness forums, and Alberta workplace wellness summits, which were previously supported by stakeholders clear across Alberta and all parties in this House. A few days ago the NDP canned the internationally recognized Healthy U campaign and shut down healthyalberta.ca. The minister in charge assigned the recently appointed Associate Minister of Health, not wellness, her first job: dealing with assisted death. With great respect I say, Mr. Speaker, that I fear this government is overlooking wellness.

Finally, the NDP has been silent on the Alberta Get Outdoors, or GO, Weekend, an act passed by all parties of this very House and which just happens to be this Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. GO has

been supported by every ministry in the past and organizations across our province, but the NDP has literally dropped the ball on this as well.

With skyrocketing rates of chronic health diseases of all kinds and ever-escalating health care costs, I implore the government to concentrate on root causes so that Albertans can be as happy, healthy, and out of the hospital as much as possible while decreasing health care costs and taxes.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

3:00

Tartan Day

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we celebrate Tartan Day, which recognizes Scottish heritage around the world. I do want to recognize the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, who's sporting his kilt today, and I am wearing the Calgary tartan, designed by the St. Andrew-Caledonian Society, a Scottish historical and heritage organization in Calgary. The century-old society has done an amazing job by recognizing and celebrating Scottish heritage in Calgary since the time of George Murdoch, and it presented Calgary with its very own tartan. It is now a symbol of Calgary that any person can wear anywhere they choose, wherever they like, whenever they like.

The colours truly represent the beautiful diversity of Calgary: red, the colour of the North West Mounted Police and a Calgary colour; blue for Calgary's rivers, the Bow and Elbow, that connect together; yellow for the prairies and wheat fields that are found in the east; grey for the Rocky Mountains found to the west; black for the oil and gas industry, that has made Calgary prosper; and white represents Calgary pride in the symbol of the white stetson and white hatter awards.

Many Scots were and still are vital in the building of Calgary, which was named after a small hamlet in Scotland. As a Calgarian I was proud to wear the Calgary tartan kilt when I was sworn into the 29th Legislative Assembly. This tartan symbolizes our history, where we have come from, and where we are going. Later on I'll be tabling five copies of a description of the Calgary tartan from the St. Andrew-Caledonian Society. I want to thank them for developing a unique piece of Calgary's history and especially thank Robert Henderson, the president, for ensuring that we, the elected officials in Calgary, are educated about this important historical footprint in our city.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all those of Scottish descent who have helped make our province the amazing place it is today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Citizens for Public Justice

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, today I am proud to rise to highlight the important work of Citizens for Public Justice, or CPJ. CPJ is a member-driven, faith-based public policy organization focused on ecological justice, refugee rights, and poverty elimination. With offices now in Ottawa, CPJ has a long history of working for the common good of society, and I'm proud to say that the organization has strong roots in Alberta and specifically in Edmonton. CPJ has been very formative in my own understanding of public policy through a social justice lens. The hours I have spent discussing, reading, and listening to faith-based public policy analysis have been instrumental in my own path towards choosing to seek election as an NDP MLA.

Through its 53-year history CPJ has remained a constant, active voice in Canadian public affairs, influencing public conversation around issues such as the Mackenzie Valley pipeline and Edmonton's recycling program as well as advocating for indigenous and ecological justice. Throughout the years politicians like Grant Notley have attended events as well as persons from all political persuasions. While I served on the CPJ board, we developed a policy in favour of a guaranteed livable income for Canadians. This was supported by politicians from diverse political parties, including former Conservative Senator Hugh Segal and NDP MP Paul Dewar.

Recently CPJ's work on climate change has gathered over 60 signatures of senior faith community leaders in Canada on a statement calling for action on climate change, poverty, and indigenous rights. I was proud to have introduced to this Legislature current and former board members and staff of CPJ. Mr. Speaker, I want to commend Citizens for Public Justice for their commitment to informing public policy and advancing social, economic, and ecological justice in Canada.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Lethbridge BioGas

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to share with the members a unique business that I recently toured in the great riding of Little Bow called Lethbridge BioGas. Opened in 2013, this is a waste-to-energy process where organic waste material is recycled to make other value-added products by employing an anaerobic digestion process as well as providing electricity to the grid.

When certain organic products are sent to the landfill from processing plants, the value of this potential energy goes untapped. It also breaks down over time and releases deadly methane gas. Every industry related to food processing has something that this plant can use to reduce this problem. Lethbridge BioGas employs proven technology and has a working solution. In partnership with producers they take manure that would have been previously land applied, mix that with other organic materials, and they use their process to safely remove the methane under a controlled environment. The end product is able to be applied back to the land. It's high in nitrogen and good for the soil. The methane that is removed is used to power two huge engines that have a generation capacity of almost three megawatts on a 24/7 basis that would power a town of 3,000 people. In Europe there are over 17,000 similar facilities.

Lethbridge BioGas is an example of an off-the-shelf design. This particular facility is big in technical terms but can easily be scaled down and tailored to the quantity of feedstock that is available. There are a lot of opportunities and potential for this technology. This just makes so much sense. Why aren't there more of these? There is a regulatory environment in place in Alberta that isn't set up to handle industry like this. We need to fix that. Members, rural areas can diversify by using these very scalable facilities, helping to grow and sustain Alberta's economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Bill 5

Seniors' Home Adaptation and Repair Act

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and introduce Bill 5, the Seniors' Home Adaptation and Repair Act.

This bill will help Alberta seniors receive the financial support they need to remain safe, secure, and independent in their own homes for as long as they choose or are physically able.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table the requisite five copies of the description of the Calgary tartan, which I had the fortune to wear at my wedding, my graduation both from college and high school as well as when being sworn in. A member of the opposition asked why I wasn't wearing it now. It hasn't accommodated the 30 pounds I've gained in this job.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two reports to table. The first one is the government's own information that the Health ministry gave to CIHI, the Canadian Institute for Health Information, which unfortunately clearly shows that over a 10-year period we have slipped 28 per cent in the number of transplants that we do. As our population has grown by a million people, we're doing, actually, less, and we are no longer a leader. It is very, very important to our citizens, so please take a look at the copy of this, and please sign your organ donation card.

Secondly, I have five pictures of a building that we think is the \$15 million boondoggle on Macleod Trail that Alberta Health Services has rented and paid for, a nice big building with not a vehicle or a person around it. I'd like to ask you to take a look at this as well. I have the five requisite copies, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any other members for tabling returns?

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a letter from the AAMD and C to the Resource Stewardship Committee dated January 29, 2016. Yesterday during question period the Minister of Transportation highlighted that although the strategic transportation infrastructure program, or STIP, was restored in Budget 2015, it is not necessarily for rural bridges as specifically suggested in our Engage initiative. Additionally, the government website on STIP states that funding won't be realized until at least 2017-18, and more interestingly the letter from the AAMD and C reads: "Comments made by Minister Ceci about not being able to afford all promises made . . ."

3:10

The Speaker: Hon. member, as I understand practice and precedent, you table a document rather than speak to the details. Could you summarize the substance of it and table it?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, as the letter stated, Minister Ceci said that all promises may not be able to be afforded. I'll table the requisite number of documents, and I'd like to thank the minister for promoting the Progressive Conservative Engage initiative.

Thank you.

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 4
An Act to Implement a Supreme Court Ruling
Governing Essential Services

The Chair: We are on amendment A3. Are there further members wishing to speak to this amendment? The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think I had the floor. I know that everybody was hanging on the edge of their chairs waiting for what I was going to say next at 5 to 12, when I was cut off, so I'll continue now.

Madam Chair, this amendment says to add "unless permitted by the essential services agreement," which is an indication that an agreement bargained across the table could vary this section of the legislation. As I started to say this morning, all of us in this room might have a different definition of what we would determine as essential work from nonessential work. That is at the heart of my argument here. Because of the fact of the wide range of important work done by Alberta civil servants, everybody's definition of what's essential will be different. Again, there are some obvious cases, a doctor or a nurse who's in the middle of a procedure with a patient. I think most Albertans if not all would agree that that is essential. There are other jobs that Alberta employees do that, while it's all important work, could be defined as other than essential.

The problem, Madam Chair, is those grey areas, areas that are really important but that somehow in the determination by the government – and I know the government will do their best to get it right. I'm not saying otherwise. But I say that even the government would agree, I think, that some things are almost essential. You know, you draw the line somewhere, right? There are so many different jobs that the 220,000 employees on the government payroll do. With the ones that are just right on the line of being almost essential, the government should probably support this in the event that they're not a hundred per cent right.

I know they're going to try to get it right – I give them credit for that – but if there is a situation where the health or safety of an Albertan or perhaps even the protection of a really expensive piece of infrastructure is suddenly at risk because of a legal strike action, then without this or some other change the government or the agency, that uses government money, wouldn't be able to bring in replacement workers to protect that piece of infrastructure, to protect that Albertan, to protect the public safety and good. Madam Chair, this is, I think, a responsible way for the government to say: we recognize that there may be unforeseen circumstances where something that is deemed nonessential is so important that during a labour disruption you'll want to bring in somebody else to look after those people or that piece of infrastructure. This, frankly, as opposed to being really at odds with the government's legislation, may save the government's butt in a circumstance that they honestly, sincerely, and despite their best efforts did not foresee.

For that reason I intend to support this, and I encourage other members of the House to do so. I think it's a responsible amendment made here in the Legislative Assembly.

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

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to put my thoughts on the record about this amendment. Bill 4 as presented sets out a framework to allow employers and employees to work together to determine who is and is not essential in the workplace. I believe the honourable minister has already spoken about this, the situation that the member who brought forward this amendment mentioned, where it might be agreed that temporary workers may be allowed. The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, I think, would potentially logically expect that allowing workers from the nonbargaining unit to be involved in the initial stages of those negotiations would perhaps be misinterpreted by the various bargaining parties or misunderstood and would potentially create a negotiation environment that might not be conducive to a good deal for both sides and might hamper the process.

For that reason, I will not be supporting this particular amendment. I believe the concerns that the member brought up have been addressed by the minister, and I don't believe this amendment is needed and might potentially be harmful. I will not be voting for this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and debate Bill 4 on national Tartan Day. I have no idea what tartan this is. My wife picked it out, so it can't be that bad.

An Hon. Member: Tip-top.

Mr. Cooper: No, I don't think it is.

On to important issues of the day and this particular piece of legislation and on to the issue at hand. I think there are just a couple of quick things that I'd like to point out. Just prior to the House rising at noon, we heard the hon. minister speak to a previous amendment that wasn't included or some concerns around whether or not it was included inside the scope of the Supreme Court ruling, so there was a decision amongst the government to hold off on making any movement and, in fact, keeping a fine in place that was, you know, set in the mid-80s. This government has said that this legislation needs to be updated, and we agree, but the rationale for not doing that was that it wasn't inside the scope of the ruling, and here we have another piece of the bill that is also outside of the scope of the ruling. It seems that the government wants to move in some areas that are inside and other areas that are outside of the ruling, so I do have some concerns around that particular issue.

3:20

When it comes to this particular amendment, the government, the ministers of the government are responsible for providing services to Albertans no matter what's going on in negotiations. I want to be absolutely clear about this, and I want to be absolutely clear that our discussion around the right to use replacement workers is not to get around negotiations. It's not to provide unfettered access to replacement workers but to acknowledge the fact that there very well may be circumstances that arise where both parties decide that that is an appropriate and fair measure and would then allow and ensure that Albertans could receive service.

An example, and I think the leader of the third party was moving in that direction: perhaps a boiler breaks down in the middle of the negotiations or strike, and there is no one able to repair that boiler, and there is significant infrastructure damage to that particular building. Perhaps it's in the middle of a very cold winter, and the whole building is going to freeze up. On both sides of the discussion there is agreement that it would be advantageous to get that done. However, the striking workers aren't willing. Whatever the case

may be, the point is that there are a lot of scenarios where it may be good to be able to have this at the discretion or the availability of the minister to try and negotiate it. Absolutely ruling it out does not serve Albertans well along the process.

I think it's a reasonable amendment. I think it's an amendment that is pretty measured. It's not hysterical, as some would call us. I think that it's important for ministers to remember that at the end of the day they are responsible for ensuring that the services are provided, and this could and should be considered as a reasonable tool that they may need in the eventuality of circumstances that are unforeseen.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. There are a couple of items that I've heard so far that I just want to take the opportunity to respond to. The first is the question of scope. You're absolutely correct. I have used the argument that we're trying to use a narrow definition, that we're trying to keep this to the Supreme Court ruling. Through reading the Supreme Court ruling, you can see that the consideration of replacement workers was part of it. It wasn't in their ruling per se, but if you press Control F, you can find that replacement workers were discussed or considered in three different places.

It was considered and discussed in our consultation, so we were able to engage the stakeholders and have a conversation about replacement workers and the impact that replacement workers have on that collective bargaining process. The Supreme Court ruling fundamentally was about making sure that the collective bargaining process is fair, balanced, and provides the right to strike to the workers, which they do require. Through the discussion about replacement workers the employers were able to express that replacement workers did not seem very likely, particularly during a dispute, because the skills and qualifications of a bargaining unit are not easily replaced. So that's definitely something to be considered. There were some employers that talked about replacement workers in case the negotiations of essential services were delayed until there was job action, but our government has decided that you must have those conversations and make those determinations upfront.

In our determination replacement workers are an important piece of this legislation. We have considered it carefully, making sure that this is an important step in how we're moving forward. That's my response regarding scope. Who is doing the work during a strike or lockout directly impacts how long that strike or lockout takes place. It directly impacts the people impacted, the public who might be using those services.

Now, in the case of emergency scenarios we have considered what that might look like. What we're asking the parties involved in an essential services agreement to do is to also consider that during the essential services negotiation. If an employer requires someone to do a function, then that should become an essential service under the essential services agreement that gets negotiated. That's the process we expect them to go through.

The wording of the replacement worker clause refers to the work of an employee on the bargaining unit that is currently on strike or lockout. In the scenario that we were just hearing regarding a boiler failing, for example in the case of an emergency, if that is work of the bargaining unit that is out on strike or lockout, the legislation allows the use of the umpire, that person who is on the ground to help make these decisions.

I'm not sure if I've spoken enough about the umpire in this system because it is a pretty key part of the legislation. The term "umpire" is used because, as in baseball, this is someone who is

supposed to be there, on the ground, making decisions in a very flexible and nimble way. Umpire decisions, rulings, you would say, will happen at 3 in the morning during a strike or lockout because these are high-pressure scenarios. Things happen. We need to make sure that essential services are protected. If there's a dispute about that, that will be dealt with within X number of days. The legislation talks about it. It can be escalated up to the essential services commissioner.

But that umpire on the ground, when that boiler fails, to help rule on if the bargaining unit should come back to fix the boiler because of this, this, and this implication: that will absolutely happen. As well, if the boiler being fixed isn't something that the nurses of HSAA typically do, well, the employer is able to hire someone because it's not the bargaining unit that's out on strike.

We really want to emphasize that during the negotiations of the essential services agreement – the legislation is really intended for the two parties to come to that table, negotiate together. The entire point of our approach, which is that co-operative centre approach, is for those conversations to be had well in advance. That allows, when a strike or lockout starts, for that confidence that the parties have negotiated and determined what needs to happen. In the case of something unexpected, the parties can amend their essential services agreement, the umpire can make rulings on the ground to adjust what's happening, or the commissioner can be involved, but ideally the umpire is what's going to happen in most cases. All reasonable scenarios so that services for Albertans are protected must be considered. We have confidence that in the mature and modern labour relations community we have in Alberta, we are going to be moving forward with this best approach.

My final thought on replacement workers is that the people who are best suited to provide services in the case of the health care industry are the professionally trained staff that are familiar with the needs of patients, the environment, and clients as well as the unique workplace. So bringing in other people, replacement workers in a health care setting, for example, could compromise patient care as replacement workers are not familiar with the unique needs of patients. Albertans want and deserve professionally trained and highly qualified staff that deliver the vital public services that they depend on. Potentially, replacement workers could put that at risk.

In fact, a scenario where replacement workers could be used to the negative impact of Albertans is if, for example, a union advocated for: oh, yes; we'll use some replacement workers because we're going to take all our best people out onto the strike line. You're going to end up having to hire people with maybe the same qualifications, but they don't know the environment well enough or they don't have the particular skill set potentially, so then you have people delivering the service that aren't as familiar with the environment.

My preference and how we've laid out the legislation is that during the negotiations we need to know who is going to do what work. We're going to have that negotiated by the two parties with the existing staff, with the bargaining units in play.

3:30

Those are the reasons that I do not support this amendment. I appreciate the thought that the opposition has put into this. It was considered by the government. It was discussed with the stakeholders at the consultations. Moving forward, I truly feel that adding any discussion of replacement workers into the essential services agreement will lengthen the negotiation process that it will take to negotiate that essential services agreement. It adds a whole other complicating factor.

I, again, look forward to hearing more discussion on this, but I do not support this amendment at this time. Thank you.

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just have one final question that I'd like to ask the hon. minister. Going back to the question of who would be – so if we have a boiler go down in an emergency situation, you've indicated that the umpire's responsibility would be to determine whether or not that is a five-alarm fire, as we like to call it, and if someone needs to come in off the picket lines or if someone needs to come in in terms of a temporary worker. This is the question that I'd like to know.

More importantly, I'd like to know this, Madam Chair. In the event that the process breaks down and this umpire is not able to move on something quick enough and there is a multimillion-dollar problem, who is liable at that point? Would it be the umpire? Would it be the government? I think that this would be an interesting quagmire to have to go through to figure out who would be liable.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much for the question. The first part of your question was around: in the case of an emergency how does that get decided? I really want to emphasize that the first way that gets decided is by the two parties discussing it, because the system is based on collaboration and on them working together. It isn't the umpire necessarily, first and foremost, particularly because the care and well-being of patients that are being served in a health care setting or even just the environment, the work environment – if something is going wrong, the employees impacted will know emergency status, what might make sense. They may not completely agree with the employer, but I anticipate a lot of disputes to be negotiated just between the two parties. If that doesn't work, then the umpire does step in and can make judgments or rulings as necessary. Absolutely, that's the process, but I really don't want to lose that co-operation based focus that is the focus of this legislation, to bring those two parties together to come to an agreement and to make sure that any strike or lockout is done in a safe way and continues to provide the vital services to Albertans. We can't lose that thread.

In the case of a theoretical multimillion-dollar – that something has gone terribly, terribly wrong. I couldn't speculate as far as liability just because it's such a hard thing to pin down. We don't know what scenario that might be or what that looks like. But I do know that all parties involved will be working to avoid anything like that. We are trying to minimize disruption while still respecting the fundamental human right to join a union and go on strike.

The Supreme Court of Canada ruling was very clear that we need to bring forward legislation that does that, that allows for strikes and lockouts. We've used the Supreme Court ruling in formulating our approach while talking to Albertans who are using the labour relations system, both employers and employees, consulting widely. I'm very proud of the essential services legislation that we've brought forward and the process that we are using. I think it's going to serve Alberta well. I call it an Albertan-made solution because there's nothing exactly like it in Canada, and we're getting a lot of positive comments and support on it.

I appreciate your feedback and your amendments and thank you for the question.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to stand in the House and speak against the amendment that the

Official Opposition, the Wildrose, have put forward. The question is as to why we would not allow replacement workers as part of an essential services agreement that is created between the employer and the employees. What the opposition doesn't understand is that in good-faith collective bargaining both sides come to the table and work on what each needs and wants, and the agreement would determine what workers are needed to perform those essential services, therefore making the need to allow replacement workers unnecessary. So this will be my opportunity to educate these members opposite that would support the amendment as to why it would be in the worst interests of patient care to support it.

To highlight, I would like to share my experience working for the Good Samaritan long-term care facility. I worked in geriatric care for a number of years. What you learn when you work in health care is that you are all in it together, that your strength comes from working as a team and that part of working as a team and part of teaming in long-term care is to have rotations through the teams of residents that you serve. At Good Samaritan we had four wings and four-week rotations on each, and this allowed you to learn the specific care for each resident. In the case of one staff being sick, if you needed to bring in someone to help, the rest of the staff had the experience to deliver quality care to those patients. In the case that you couldn't find someone, you had the rest of the team to pull together and take care of those residents.

If you bring in a team of replacements, you lose consistent care, and consistent care is the key to safety and dignity. Consistent care is critical in all areas of patient care. Areas such as meals and food: you need to know as a health care professional working in long-term care, as a caregiver for those people, what that person's choking hazards are. Do they need their food puréed? When I give a glass of juice to this person, does it need to be thickening level 1, 2, or 3? Residents eat at least three times a day, so they are at risk if you don't know their needs.

Sometimes it's less serious: how do you like your coffee? After working with all four wings, I knew exactly what each resident wanted. I knew how they took their coffee; I knew how they took their tea, if it was cream, milk, sweetener. I knew it for every one of 50 people, and I knew specifically what they needed for every meal. I could do that because I cared about the people that I worked for and that I worked with. Those things are simple, but they're important because these residents can't do it for themselves. They deserve just like you and me to have choice and quality of life.

Or bathing. I had a resident who always looked forward to my turn on her wing because I knew how she liked to have her hair washed. She was someone who liked a good scalp massage. But there are more serious issues when it comes to bathing. Do they have a fear of bathing? Do they need a more gentle approach? What's the sensitivity of their skin? As we age, our skin becomes more delicate, putting us at greater risk of burns in bathing. What are the transfer techniques that that person needs to get safely from their wheelchair into the bath or into a shower?

Or medication. What time? Which ones? What's the method of delivery that you use? Critical issues needing professionalism and familiarity.

Or toileting care, a thing that people don't really like to talk about but that is a critical facet of resident care. What's the time that you take them? It's not even just a matter of healthy hygiene, but it's maintaining skin integrity. You need to know their schedules because this helps give them autonomy, and you can mitigate potential harm that could be caused if you don't.

Sometimes a lack of care is not as easily identified. To underline this, I'll provide members with a couple of examples. I worked with a sister who had very specific needs. You had to make sure that she was busy. You had to make sure that she was kept on her correct

bathroom schedule. Most importantly, you had to ensure that that sister was not dressed too hot. That was a matter of dignity for her. Madam Chair, if you didn't monitor this on her behalf, you would run the risk of finding her naked as the day she was born, kneeling, holding onto the hallway railing, praying for our souls because she loved us. So it was in her best interests for us to know what she needed because we needed to be the people that maintained her dignity.

There's also an example of a gentleman that I worked with that you would think hated getting up in the morning, you would think he hated getting dressed, you would think he hated taking his meds, you would think he hated taking baths, but that was only if you were new. He suffered from dementia, so being in care and not being with family, it was imperative that you knew him and that he knew you. If you were to replace that critical person in that critical role, you're making this his problem, and that's not a burden that we are meant to do. We are meant to provide a good quality of life, good quality of care, things that are only managed through consistency – consistent people, consistent teaming – the investment that you make in the people that you work with and the people that you serve.

3:40

Madam Chair, I applaud this section of Bill 4 because it would prevent replacement workers and because I understand the issues. I bring my experience as a long-term health care worker to the table as a legislator in the Assembly in order to help those that are lacking some knowledge in these areas to be able to make a well-informed conclusion. That conclusion would be to vote against this amendment, and I encourage all in this House to do so.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to echo some of the comments my hon. colleagues have made already and the hon. minister as well. I want to talk a little bit about what I really believe we as legislators and we as service providers are obligated to do, and I think that's to provide a quality of care that's unparalleled anywhere else and to make sure that when we provide this quality of care, we're doing it with quality employees, quality people and making sure that we are consistent throughout all of this process.

While I understand that the spirit of this amendment and the intent of this amendment is not to impede that in any way and is not to get around negotiations, as the hon. member across had mentioned, I think that there are some very valid concerns with allowing the replacement workers clause into this bill. When we look at this – and as one of my colleagues had mentioned before, quality of care is important to make sure that you know the needs of the patients in the area. What that means is that in the case of when we are negotiating our ESAs, we must be able to negotiate our essential services agreements in good faith.

I think that by putting in a replacement workers clause, it becomes much more difficult to negotiate the ESA. Whether it's the bargaining units themselves or the employers, there's now another wild card part on the field, and because there's that wild card on the field, we're looking at saying: "We're going to have to push back how long this is going to take. We'll have to look at different provisions. We'll have to look at more things." All that does is prolong the negotiation process, and nobody wants that. We want to be able to provide that quality of care to Albertans everywhere.

These loopholes that we're leaving inside ESAs could cause significant problems for any bargaining unit that did want to go into strike action or for any employer who did want to enter into lockout

action. I think that the violation of that spirit of negotiation would be detrimental to Albertans everywhere because Albertans and Canadians, as we know, do have that right to strike. The longer it takes for us to negotiate those ESAs, the longer we'll leave Albertans without that right.

Madam Chair, I think that once an ESA is negotiated with or without these clauses if they were there, we would have significant issues with the length of strikes. As the hon. minister had mentioned before, umpires are available, and umpires will be on the ground to make sure that when there are significant problems such as a boiler exploding, we will be able to service those issues immediately, and we will service those issues with the people that know the environment, the people that know what needs to happen, the people that know the area.

If we were to bring in replacement workers instead, Madam Chair, I think this could severely hamper negotiations and extend the length of a strike or lockout action. What would that mean? That would mean, quite simply, that we'd be hampering the quality of care for Albertans because, as in the nursing example, if you are extending the lockout, then whether there are replacement workers or not, that means that they're running with fewer services. Albertans will be receiving fewer services during that lockout, and if we extend it by allowing replacement workers in – we know it to be true that when you bring replacement workers in, strikes last longer. If we were to extend those strikes, you are saying to Albertans: we are comfortable with letting you be without services for longer. I'm not comfortable with voting in favour of that. I am not comfortable with telling Albertans that I'm okay with them being on some reduced level.

Madam Chair, I think that every Albertan deserves the absolute best we can possibly provide for them. I believe that Albertans deserve the absolute best at all possible times. Once the ESAs are negotiated, we will know which employees are essential. We will know which employees need to be there to provide the basic level of care, and if there was some emergency, that was not expected, the umpires would be able to bring in the required persons to assist with that emergency. I do really, strongly believe that allowing these replacement workers would be impeding our duty, would be impeding our obligations as legislators, our obligations as service providers and would really hamper our ability to help and protect and serve Albertans everywhere.

Madam Chair, for those reasons I have no choice but to stand in opposition of this amendment. Thank you.

Ms Fitzpatrick: I, too, stand in opposition to this amendment. Yesterday – I think it was yesterday – I gave you an example of what happened on 9/11 when a strike line was taken down immediately when there was a national emergency. But right now I'll talk about, first of all, as several other people have said, that any time replacement workers have been brought in on any strike line, it has continued the strike for much longer than was necessary. It removed from the employer the necessity of sitting at the table and actually negotiating.

The next point I want to make – and I'll speak to this from my 32 and a half years of working in the public service. I took pride in my job along with everybody that I worked with. If there was an emergency, if something happened and there was a person on that line who had the expertise to deal with it, I'm telling you right now that we as members on that line would support that person going across the line to fix it.

I'll give you an example. I was on a strike line at Edmonton Institution a number of years ago, and as we were on the line, a person drove up in a car and went to the farm across the road from the institution. When that person drove up, I myself and several

other people on the line recognized who that person was. He'd been a former inmate who'd served his sentence, but we knew what his offence was. We knew his history; we knew about him. We also knew that the people across the road were now vulnerable based on what we knew about that previous offender. We immediately went to management, who were also out on the line, and we talked to them, informed them about what was going on. They immediately got the RCMP out to that farm and took care of the situation because workers have pride in their job and don't want to see anybody hurt or anything that shouldn't be happening happen.

We absolutely do not need replacement workers because the workers that work in those jobs do care about their jobs and do care about the safety of the public or anything that would be at risk. So I stand absolutely opposed to bringing in replacement workers and to that amendment.

Mr. Hunter: Madam Chair, I appreciate the comments that have been made. Perhaps if I clarify once again what this amendment is for, we can save multiple people from standing up and saying that this is about replacement workers. This is about mitigating potential loss to machinery, about potential multimillion-dollar losses. This amendment was never intended to allow employers or companies to be able to have replacement workers carte blanche.

I appreciate the comments that have been made, I appreciate the impassioned pleas, but this was not the intention of this amendment. So I hope that the members opposite understand that this amendment was specific in its intentions.

I'll leave it at that, Madam Chair.

3:50

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Yes. I've been involved in labour issues probably going on the better part of 38 years and the whole issue of taking clauses and – I call them muddying them because I've been at the negotiation table many times. Many times that you were in negotiations and you ended up adding the words "and," "or," "but," "because," and "why," it took away from the essential meaning of the clause, and you can twist it later so that the intent isn't even there anymore.

This has been done over many years. In our place of work we couldn't even agree on what "emergency" was because they thought they had the right to phone you at 2 in the morning and say, "I phoned you, so it's an emergency," in their opinion. These kinds of things have gone on over the years, and there are all kinds of things that employers have done.

I've participated, I'm sad to say, in many strikes across this province over many years. The worst one, I'll say, was the Gainers one. I don't know how many people in this room were there on that. [interjection] Yeah. I was, too, and it was ugly. Was it necessary on our part as labour? Yes, it was because of the issues and what was being pushed by the employers. It was the employer that decided that they could address the labour issue by replacement workers.

It doesn't matter whether you look at the strikes at Lakeside Packers down at Brooks, Fanning, Zeidler's, and so on and so forth. I mean, the list goes on and on, and it was always the same thing. It's important to understand that from labour's point of view, we have to make sure that when we put legislation in, it's going to protect the workers, protect the employers, and make sure we're doing the right thing so that somebody else can't read something else into it that wasn't there to begin with.

This amendment, in my opinion, is muddying this clause and creates indecisiveness as to the way it should read. So I'm opposed to it, as we should be.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to the bill? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to just point out from the last comment that was made there that in the event you were trying to not muddy the waters, I'm not sure if you would consider the size of this bill. I would say that this is actually doing exactly what you said that you don't want to see happen. So that's something to think about.

Anyway, we'll move on here. I have another amendment that I'd like to present. While the legislation as drafted did not adequately include a proper deterrent against waging illegal strikes or illegal walkouts, it also does not include an adequate deterrent against other violations under this act. A one-off sum penalty is not necessarily enough. Furthermore, it is entirely unhelpful if the monetary penalty faced by an individual is paid for by their employer or their trade union. Again, it is entirely unhelpful if a corporation or a trade union facing a monetary penalty can pay it without difficulty and without it being a deterrent.

Accordingly, I wish to propose an amendment, and I have the requisite number of copies that I would like to submit.

The Chair: This amendment will be A4. Proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 4, An Act to Implement a Supreme Court Ruling Governing Essential Services, be amended in section 33 in the proposed section 73 by striking out clauses (a) and (b) and substituting the following:

- (a) in the case of a corporation or trade union, to a fine not exceeding \$750 000, or
- (b) in the case of an individual, to a fine not exceeding \$75 000, which may not be paid on the individual's behalf by a corporation that employs the individual or by a trade union to which the employee belongs.

This proposed amendment simply recognizes that individuals should be responsible for their own actions, amending section 33 of the legislation by striking out the proposed section 73 and replacing that with fines not exceeding \$75,000, which may not be paid on the individual's behalf by a corporation or trade union.

It's clear from the wording of the legislation that the government does recognize already that, yes, individuals who are guilty of offences under this act should be penalized, but it profoundly defaces the spirit of the bill and what it intends to achieve in this section if a corporation or trade union of means is able to pay those fines on behalf of an individual.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for this amendment and for giving us the opportunity to consider it. Similar to discussions about amendment A2, the fine amounts and the process for how fines work in this legislation was something that had to be adjusted to accommodate the essential

services framework and some of the language. But the actual amounts as well in this case, the payment of particular fines depending on who may pay something or whatnot, is not what I would consider in scope and was not discussed at length at the consultations, particularly because essential services agreements are about avoiding any illegal strike scenarios through negotiations rather than using highly punitive fines in this case. The fine amounts, again, were not something that we had the opportunity to discuss.

I would say that suggestions such as this would be entirely appropriate as part of our larger review of the labour code, something that I hope to bring a process forward on and work on with the members of this House to determine what might make sense. I certainly suggest that that might be something that we do in the future or have a conversation about with major stakeholders and get into this larger issue.

But for our essential services bill, Bill 4, An Act to Implement a Supreme Court Ruling Governing Essential Services, we just need to focus on making sure that that labour legislation is fair to unionized employees and employers, making sure that essential public services are maintained for all Albertans. I think that we've done that through Bill 4.

I will not be supporting this amendment but would invite the member to potentially bring this forward as part of a larger labour code review. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

4:00

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise, as always, and speak to the amendment, an amendment that would create stronger penalties for other violations inside the legislation. We have heard on numerous occasions from the government side of the House that this bill is long overdue. When it comes to the Supreme Court ruling, we couldn't agree more. Ensuring that all aspects of that ruling have been addressed is certainly important.

We've also heard that this legislation has been the same for approximately 30 years. While a \$1,000 fine in the '80s may have been a significant one, it's certainly not as significant today. We had the opportunity to debate a similar amendment in a different section. The principle remains the same, that when illegal actions take place, it is important that there is a deterrent.

Now, I recognize that there are times when individuals will make decisions that they feel are necessary at the time. We've heard of many situations where those actions may be and quite likely were justified. The fine that is proposed by my hon. colleague from Cardston-Taber-Warner doesn't say that it will be \$750,000 or that it will be \$75,000 but that it would be up to. We learned earlier from the Minister of Labour that a judge would determine that. It's quite easy for a judge to hear the facts of why the decisions were made along the way that led an individual or union to act illegally. If in the judge's opinion it becomes justified, one could only imagine that the judge wouldn't then use the maximum fine amount, and it could be quite reasonable.

But it is important in all cases, particularly around essential services, that all parties count the costs, that they recognize that there are consequences for their actions. We have the opportunity while the bill is before us to ensure that it is as robust as possible. To let an opportunity go by – I think the former member for the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre used to say in this place all the time that oftentimes bills don't get back before the House for a number of years. So today is the day. Barring the government's decision to send this bill to committee and allow more fulsome and robust debate at committee, which, as we all know, I am consistently

in strong support of – but given that that's not going to happen, today is the day to make additional meaningful changes to the legislation. That's exactly what we are proposing here. It isn't a licence to use the maximum fine. When individuals break the law and can make a reasonable case, it's quite likely that the judge will respond accordingly. But when that doesn't happen, it at least provides teeth and deterrence.

The government, much to their credit, is attempting to put forward legislation that will create the best possible environment for negotiations. We've heard the minister refer on numerous occasions to the lead-up and negotiation in good faith. I think that's wonderful when all of those things happen, but we have to be realistic. There are times when it's not going to be as ideal. There are going to be times when people act inappropriately and illegally, and when they do that, they should be held accountable. That's exactly what this amendment does, and I strongly encourage all members of the Assembly to support the amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm just a little disappointed with some of the conversations I heard recently because we're talking about this not being 1980. I've cited the Bank of Canada's inflation calculator for this, and it has been determined that if we were to match the rate of inflation for \$5,000, it would only be about \$15,000, not \$75,000. The challenge is that, as the member who brought forth the bill alluded to earlier, this may not be the best time for us to discuss this. You know, ultimately, from time to time there are instances for safety reasons that individuals may need to move away from the workplace, and from time to time it may be individuals who are younger and naïve.

You know, the best example I've seen when I was working in the restaurant industry is that we had an unsafe piece of equipment. We had to make a judgment call because we had an employer who was not looking at the option to fix that piece of equipment. What we made the decision to do – and this was a very naïve decision because we did not know about the right to refuse – was walk off the job. Ultimately, our employer moved forward to remedy the situation. At the time I don't know if a heavy fine would have been necessarily the best option for someone who was of a young age to face.

With that being said, I'm not going to support this amendment on the basis that, realistically, we need to look at that as a potential challenge that we could be facing with this at play.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wish to speak to amendment A4?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill. Any questions or comments? The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, I'd like to make an amendment. I have the requisite number of copies here. I don't know; may I speak to it before the copies are out?

The Chair: Just wait until I see it.

Mr. McIver: All right. Of course. It has gone through Parliamentary Counsel. What I will say by way of background, with your permission until you see that, is that the minister said that there's going to be a larger labour code review. Yes, she's nodding. Okay. You can't see that at home, but she's nodding.

What I'm suggesting – I won't talk about it until I get permission.

The Chair: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Okay. I just got permission.

I move that Bill 4, An Act to Implement a Supreme Court Ruling Governing Essential Services, be amended in section 8 in the proposed section 95.41 by striking out subsection (3), which is the subsection disallowing replacement workers.

Madam Chair, the government is doing something important here, which I support. They are putting Alberta in compliance with the Supreme Court decision. Truly, bravo. Happy to support that. The section that I'm asking to be taken out is not part of complying with that Supreme Court of Canada ruling. I guess what I'm suggesting to the minister and to government is that if you want to consider this section, my recommendation is to do it as part of the larger labour code review. This is an item banning replacement workers.

4:10

I know it's fashionable with certain groups of people, but the fact is that when we've talked about this, members on the government side of the House have, I believe, agreed that this is about negotiating with a reasonable balance of power between the worker and the employer. To outright ban replacement workers really tips the scale one way beyond the level that is reasonable. As we've talked about, there may well be cases where public health or safety is in jeopardy, and in those cases it's important to be able to bring in workers to do the important work that's there.

There are so many important things that we do here as a province. We look after seniors. We look after disabled people. We look after sick people. We look after highways and roads that keep Albertans safe when they're travelling from point A to B. We plow those roads. We operate safety devices. We inspect workplaces to make sure that workers remain safe. There are so many jobs that after negotiation, whether they're considered essential or not, are still very important. In some cases they're life-and-death important; in other cases they're important for other reasons: to keep the economy going, to keep people safe, to maintain a good quality of life.

What this motion does is that it really says that the work that Alberta civil servants do is important. Passing this would be the House saying that we value the work that Alberta civil servants do, so much so that each time when those occasions come along and when there are labour disruptions, that situation needs to be evaluated on its own merits, and the government and the minister of the day, who – and we all recognize here that the current government is the one elected. Congratulations. Someday it will be another one, but right now it's this one. But the fact is that government is responsible to ensure ongoing health and safety, and this will help them to do that by not taking one of their options away when there's a labour disruption.

For that reason I will move this amendment. I'll ask the members of the House to support it, and I will sit down and listen carefully to what members of the House have to say about it.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for his comments in making this amendment. I think we have a difference of opinion regarding the scope on this. You did mention that it's not part of the Supreme Court ruling, but I think the discussion specifically around who is doing the work during a strike or lockout is critical. It needs to be discussed and negotiated inside of the essential services agreement so that we can make sure that our essential public services are being maintained

for Albertans. It's clear that we need to implement this legislation now.

For those reasons we've included this ban on replacement workers within the essential services agreement. Putting this into place now rather than deferring this piece until later – because I do see it as something that is in scope and that will become key in the negotiations between the employers and the employees as they set out their essential services agreement. We do not want replacement workers to lengthen any job actions or to lengthen the amount of time that it takes to negotiate an essential services agreement. We do need to make sure that this legislation is fair to all parties. The member referred to it as tipping the balance, and I do not agree in that case. When replacement workers were discussed with employers at the consultation, employers stated that in many cases they would never consider replacement workers because they don't have the skills, training, and knowledge that the employees and the members of the bargaining unit have.

It was discussed at consultation. We did consider it as we were preparing this legislation. I see it very much as an important piece of our essential services framework, to make sure that as the two parties come to the table and have this conversation, the situation on the ground during a strike or lockout doesn't spontaneously change through the hiring of replacement workers. In my mind, if we're asking both parties to come in good faith to negotiate in a mature and responsible way, making sure that what gets discussed at that negotiation is what happens is key, and allowing replacement workers says: you can discuss your essential services agreement now; when a strike or lockout happens, the employer can change the ball game. That doesn't make sense.

For those reasons I will not be supporting this amendment, but I'll thank the member and listen to additional comments.

The Chair: Go ahead, hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess I find myself rising to echo some of the sentiments of my colleagues from earlier with regard to replacement workers. I guess I can draw on my experience in my former life as a shipper/receiver at Lucerne ice cream. Certainly, I wouldn't say that shipping ice cream out is what you would call an essential service, I guess, depending on how you feel about ice cream. Maybe there's an argument there.

We spent a week on our own strike line. I guess for fear of maybe sounding like I'm tooting my own horn, I was very good at my position as a shipper/receiver. I ran a very, very efficient warehouse. We were able to move product out the door at a very incredible rate. During that week off – once I came back to what I thought was going to be, you know, cleaning up a few things here and there, I literally spent the next month trying to undo what had occurred in that simple week's time. I had asked management: who did you bring in? They told me that they had brought over a very qualified shipper/receiver to do my job. Of course, when I saw one trailer, that I knew was bound for Vancouver, and a load that I could do personally myself within about a three-hour period taking upwards of seven and eight hours to do, I question someone's perception about what they necessarily feel is a qualified temporary worker.

When we're talking, again, about ice cream, maybe it's not necessarily a significant thing, but translated into other areas of government and health care and whatnot, I shudder at the fact of what could be considered as a qualified temporary worker. I guess, you know, with that experience behind me, I don't think I can support this amendment, and I would urge my colleagues to not support it as well.

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Let me say this. We heard from the minister that these things need to be negotiated. Well, with all due respect, if you leave this section in, there will be nothing to negotiate because it will just be outlawed, so what the minister said needs to happen won't be able to happen if this section is in there.

Further, the other thing that I heard government members say – and I agree with them on this, just for the record – is that which jobs and which work are essential services and which are not needs to be negotiated. Now, Madam, that's important. I know the government will do your best. I know you will. But here's the interesting thing about negotiations. There are two people at the table. They're both defending their own interests. Sometimes people make mistakes. Sometimes one party is a better negotiator than the other party.

Because of that, despite the government's best efforts – and again I will give them credit that they will make their best efforts – with the number of positions, 220,000 roughly, paid out of the provincial payroll, if one of those positions is wrong in the negotiation between what's essential and what's not and there's a labour disruption where something should have been deemed essential and it wasn't, either because of an honest, well-intentioned mistake or one side of a negotiation being a better negotiator or having better information on that day, the possibility surely exists that something that's pretty darn important or essential will be deemed nonessential and, as such, be open to strike action. If the bill passes with this in it, then the government will by their own law be very much powerless to deal with that.

4:20

The other thing that I would remind the government: if you really feel that strongly about it, the time to do it might be at the larger labour code review, after the negotiations about what's essential and what's not, when the government can be more sure about whether they got it right, that one side didn't outbargain the other and deem something essential that shouldn't have been or not essential that should have been. Actually, there might even be a few months that go by where the government will have experience with the results of the negotiations and be able to look at it and say: "Wow. We negotiated to the best of our ability with the best intentions on behalf of Albertans, and somewhere along the way one negotiator had a bad day. Somebody made a mistake. Somebody's judgment wasn't as good as they would have liked it to have been." Then they'll be caught when there's a labour disruption and unable to undo that.

For the government, by supporting this, I'm offering you insurance that you don't end up looking bad later. If you're going to do this, you should do it later, after you have some experience, after you negotiate, after you, the employer, and the employees have the benefit of second thought. That would be an appropriate time to do it. This is an insurance policy, that you're throwing out the window if you leave this section in right now. As such, respectfully, I think I'm doing Albertans a favour, and respectfully I think I'm doing the government a favour by suggesting that they leave that insurance policy intact until they have a little bit of experience with this because this is a big change. If I'm not mistaken, there are well over 100,000 employees that are going to get the right to strike that don't have it now. That's a good thing, but with that many positions, that many job descriptions – none of us is perfect.

I don't know, but if I was in the minister's shoes or in the Premier's shoes, I was thinking that if I was going to make a change that big, that profound, I might want to have an insurance policy in

my back pocket just in case I get 95 per cent of it right and not a hundred per cent of it right. That's what I'm suggesting that the government do, to keep that insurance policy in their back pocket so that they can protect themselves if they're imperfect. No disrespect to the government. We're all imperfect. There it is. I'm trying to help.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you for trying to help. It's very much appreciated, and I'm happy to talk about this a little bit more because I want to make it clear that in the legislation if the negotiation is wrong, if we missed somebody who was essential – these are being negotiated in advance. To be clear, strike or lockout cannot happen until an essential services agreement is filed with the essential services commissioner. That means that the process needs to happen in advance of the collective bargaining process starting.

Again, negotiations for essential services are going to happen in advance, and if we miss something, if something's not included, we've actually got provisions within this bill that will help us to deal with those scenarios. Either party can initiate a renegotiation of the essential services agreement because something was missed. If something is missed, on an emergency basis, as some of the earlier scenarios discussed, on the ground those two parties can come to an agreement, and we've heard from some of my colleagues that that is what happens in most scenarios during a strike. Alternatively, the umpire can make rulings, and then the commissioner can come in and suggest adjustments. So we're not in the scenario where we write up this document and then everyone has to live by it and if something's wrong with it, there's nothing we can do.

The clause that's included and that we're discussing with this amendment is needed now because we are implementing the essential services agreement to fulfill a Supreme Court ruling. The timing on this is incredibly tight. We need to put in a system that works as soon as possible, and for that we relied on people with experience. We relied on people with experience to advise this government through the process. We made sure to consult the people who use this system on both the employer and employee side, those impacted, labour negotiators, mediators, arbitrators, and others within the labour relations world. While the hon. member is right to point out a lack of experience in myself as a new minister, we had a lot of experience that went into creating this legislation.

I am always happy to take good advice, as we've seen earlier today. Good advice is always welcome.

I would like to echo that this a public safety issue. We need to make sure that highly skilled, trained, familiar-with-the-environment people are the ones that are delivering the services to Albertans. We get the best results when we know that's happening, having staff that know the clients, understand the workplaces and the scenarios. If they're needed during a strike or lockout, then that can be negotiated.

To hear the language that leaving this in is an insurance policy for the government – it's an out in case something goes wrong – doesn't sound like going to a bargaining table in good faith. If one side has an insurance policy and has an out, I think the other side knows that, and I think it influences the discussions. We want our two parties to come to the table as equals. We want there to be respect and trust when we're talking about the essential services agreement and respect and trust as we're talking about collective bargaining because there are a lot of elements where we are in the same position or on the same side of the table. We want to serve Albertans. We want to have safe, healthy, and fair workplaces.

That's very important to this government. There's a lot when it comes to the negotiations that the two sides could be in agreement on. Respectful negotiations are key, and I think that's what we're striving for going forward.

We've got 150,000 employees that are impacted by this legislation, so it does impact quite a few people.

I appreciate the opportunity to talk about this legislation once more. I think it is made in Alberta and addresses some of our unique needs.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A5?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to the bill? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. When dealing with essential services legislation, it's absolutely integral that the precise definition of what constitutes an essential service is carefully considered. Any wording should be carefully considered and assessed based on what would and would not be included. Accordingly, there are some omissions in the government's definition of essential services that should be corrected. The current legislation only includes those services which, if interrupted,

- (a) . . . would endanger the life, personal safety or health of the public, or
- (b) that are necessary to the maintenance and administration of the rule of law or public security.

Without a doubt, we agree that any service that falls into these definitions should be considered essential, but there are important services that would not necessarily meet this criteria.

I wish to introduce an amendment to address this issue. I have the necessary requisite copies, that I would like to submit at this time.

The Chair: This amendment will be known as amendment A6.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 4, An Act to Implement a Supreme Court Ruling Governing Essential Services, be amended in section 8 in the proposed section 95.1 by striking out "or" at the end of clause (a) and by adding the following after clause (b):

- (c) that are necessary to prevent serious environmental damage,
- (d) that are necessary to prevent major deterioration of workplace machinery, equipment, or premises, or needed to secure workplace premises, or
- (e) that are necessary to properly manage the finances or investment funds of the Government of Alberta.

4:30

I believe that these amendments will ensure that essential services are better defined in order to better serve Albertans. Under the definition proposed in the legislation by the government, those who manage Alberta's significant investment funds and make important decisions based on when there are sudden market changes would not be declared essential nor would those who maintain machinery or help prevent serious environmental damage. We recognize the importance of the work done in these areas and that there are potential devastating consequences if they are all

suddenly off the job. This amendment helps ensure that Albertans are protected.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for this amendment and the opportunity to talk about the definition of essential services. As I think most people will agree, the definition of essential services is a key part of this legislation. It's critical, and it was something that the Supreme Court of Canada spent a lot of time discussing and considering. It's something that we talked about quite a bit in our consultations. There are three different types of definition of essential services across Canada: consequence-based, which is what we have here, where you describe the types of consequences or things you need to avoid through defining essential services; there's an enumeration approach, where you say that this role is essential, that role is essential; and there's the option of removing the definition entirely.

The enumeration approach of saying this is an essential role, that is an essential role was the style of essential services legislation that was happening in Saskatchewan when the Supreme Court ruling came down. Saskatchewan has since updated its essential services legislation based on the Supreme Court ruling. What they chose to do was remove the definition entirely. In Saskatchewan they don't have a definition of essential services. Rather the two parties need to negotiate and determine what essential is, without the legislation providing any guidelines or guidance. So that's how one jurisdiction chose to react to the Supreme Court ruling.

All other definitions have not been tested against the SFL decision of the Supreme Court. I think that that's really important to note because I know that some pieces of this amendment, some of these new definitions, come from other jurisdictions. They are in place in other places, but they have not been tested against the Supreme Court ruling. The only jurisdiction that has updated based on the Supreme Court ruling chose to not include a definition at all.

In the Supreme Court ruling – and I will endeavour to read just a little bit of this – it talks in paragraph 84 about the importance of knowing what essential services are. It talks about some previous decisions, and it reads:

These decisions have consistently defined an essential service as a service "whose interruption would endanger the life, personal safety or health of the whole or part of the population" . . . In my view, and without attempting an exhaustive list, persons essential to the maintenance and administration of the rule of law and national security would also be included within the ambit of essential services. Mere inconvenience to members of the public does not fall within the ambit of the essential services justification for abrogating the freedom to strike.

In our case here in Alberta what we are bringing forward now is a more narrow version. Specific words in any definition can be too narrow, can be too broad, or can cause insensitive interpretations. We are relying on the unions and the employers to work together to decide what is essential and potentially a neutral third party to help with that. In order for the neutral third party and those involved to make good decisions, we settled on a definition that focuses in on some of those key life, health, safety, public security discussions, taken directly from the Supreme Court interpretation, so endangering the life, personal safety, or health, that type of language. I would argue that our definition is very closely aligned with the Supreme Court of Canada decision and with our obligations under the international obligations, so the international labour organizations.

Employers aside from the essential services bargaining unit members must always plan for and make contingency plans for the

types of things listed in the amendment under (c), (d), and (e). They do so by the use of management employees and others. They do so by shutting down equipment that might be vulnerable. Specifically around (e) I'm concerned that it is very broad. Finances and investment funds of the province could extend to every clerk that's checking expense accounts. How do we determine exactly what that implies? I think it includes maybe more people as essential, where I'm not entirely certain that that's the intent. As well, the finances and investment funds of our province are largely handled by persons outside of the bargaining unit either because they're management employees or because they're employees excluded in section 12 of PSERA.

In order to create legislation that gives that power, that negotiating flexibility to the two parties, that allows us to make sure that we're truly dealing with essential services, and gives guidance to a neutral third party to make recommendations, our feeling is that by broadening the definition and including environmental damage, deterioration of workplace machinery, managing finances or investment funds, that's going too broad. I think mirroring the Supreme Court decision and keeping a bit more of a narrow focus and then relying on our two parties to come to an agreement on what is essential for each workplace is going to serve us better.

Again, I will state that through the consultation process with our various stakeholders, labour relations experts, unions, and employers there was a lot of discussion around this. In the end, the government chose to go with something that really closely matched the Supreme Court ruling.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to highlight a few things. I found the comments from the minister quite interesting, particularly around the fact that the only jurisdiction that has a quasi-tested definition – no jurisdiction has an actual tested definition – the jurisdiction that was first to respond and responsible, if you will, for the Supreme Court ruling in the SFL case, has no definition. So we're, you know, trying to navigate the waters in the best way possible. Certainly, we rarely consider following the lead of some of the other provinces in this country, but we certainly do see the environmental protection piece of this amendment in other jurisdictions.

Madam Chair, I think you can imagine a situation in a far-off, significantly rural portion of the province. In fact, you drive those areas of the province on a very regular basis. I think yesterday in the House you referred to driving 600 kilometres just to go and see a concert and then returning home because that's what people do in the north. So we can see a situation where there's significant cause for serious environmental damage with this definition. It wouldn't endanger life or public safety because of the remote nature of it or health of the public because of the remote nature of it or it wouldn't be necessary to the maintenance or the administration of the rule of law or public security but is potentially causing significant damage to our province. The breakdown in negotiations or a strike might prevent action on this because it's not deemed as part of the essential services definition.

4:40

As I mentioned, there are other provinces that have this parameter, and I think that it's one that we would be wise to adhere to. We on this side of the House would not want to see serious environmental damage taking place over a prolonged period of time because a service hadn't been determined to be essential, the same as there are people who manage the finances of our province who,

quite likely, aren't going to fall into the realm of essential services because of the definition that's been put forward in this piece of legislation.

There are times when the market has been extremely volatile, and it could potentially expose significant risk in terms of the costs that could be incurred by the province of Alberta if the financial management side of our province isn't considered to be essential. Now, we all know that there can be negotiation that would take place should they be considered essential, and then we can move the path forward. But the problem is that if it's not in the definition, we can get into a situation where the province could be losing millions and millions and perhaps tens of millions of dollars on a daily, weekly, or, depending on the length of the disruption, monthly basis, in which case it could move into the hundreds of millions, all because we don't have the definition quite right. So I think that this amendment is quite reasonable.

We have also used examples already in this Chamber today about some other areas that may be beneficial to be considered essential, particularly in the case of the deterioration of workplace machinery, equipment, or premises where should they fall outside of the scope, we could see significant risk to the province, particularly in the maintenance of our assets.

I think that today is a great day to have some discussion around exactly what should be included inside the definition. This is a very critical portion of the debate. It's something that we have the opportunity to get right today. While I recognize that there are some unquieties and some challenges with the fact that no definition has been tested, I think we ought to err on the side of ensuring a robust definition that includes things like the protection of the environment where there is serious environmental damage, to err on the side of preventing major deterioration of workplace machinery and equipment, and to err on the side of ensuring that the finances of the province can be managed through significant disruption.

We have a responsibility and certainly the ministries across government and the ministers have a responsibility to ensure that services continue to be provided. By accepting this amendment, it puts some additional tools certainly in the hands of the Environment minister, certainly in the hands of the Finance minister, and perhaps in the hands of the Infrastructure and Transportation minister to make sure that the needs of our province are being met no matter the state of negotiations that are taking place in the province.

We all, while we're in this place, need to be taking a very long view on our approach to public policy. We need to make sure that we are trying to foresee circumstances ahead of us that are going to have a positive impact on the province over a long period of time. Much of this bill does that. Much of this bill works to try and mitigate labour disruption while ensuring essential services are continued. It changes many things about the environment around labour negotiations, all of which are very important both to the province or to large employers as well as to employees and members of unions and Albertans in terms of their rights that we've seen granted by the Supreme Court ruling.

I encourage members on all sides of the Chamber to consider the ramifications that could exist if the definition isn't broadened, to consider the significant financial risks that we would be then placing our province under, and to consider the significant potential damage to infrastructure that could exist if this amendment isn't accepted and, in turn, these services deemed not essential. I encourage members on both sides of the Chamber to consider the amendment, to support the amendment to ensure that our province has the best possible definition moving forward. Should that definition be challenged, we would then need to deal with that at that time.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A6?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A6 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:47 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Gotfried	Smith
Anderson, W.	Hunter	Strankman
Cooper	MacIntyre	van Dijken
Cyr	McIver	Yao
Ellis	Rodney	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Nielsen
Babcock	Hoffman	Notley
Bilous	Horne	Phillips
Carson	Kazim	Piquette
Ceci	Kleinsteuber	Renaud
Connolly	Larivee	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Littlewood	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schmidt
Dach	Luff	Schreiner
Dang	Malkinson	Shepherd
Drever	Mason	Sigurdson
Eggen	McCuaig-Boyd	Sucha
Feehan	McKittrick	Sweet
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Turner
Ganley	McPherson	Westhead
Goehring	Miller	Woollard
Gray	Miranda	
Totals:	For – 14	Against – 50

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. Regardless of how many members in this place feel about the proposed legislation, how it addresses the needs identified by the Supreme Court decision, there is one thing we can all agree on. The aftermath of the Supreme Court decision is that the labour relations and employment law landscape in Alberta is significantly changed. We recognize that the government needed to put this legislation forward, but it is a significant shift from labour relations in Alberta. Accordingly, given this new experience there should be an onus on the Legislative Assembly to revisit this legislation after a time. There could be unintended consequences. There could be matters pertaining to vital, essential services that we have not yet considered. Frankly, we owe it to Albertans to always be mindful of essential services.

Accordingly, I am proposing an amendment, and I have the requisite number of copies, and I would like to present those now.

The Chair: This will be amendment A7.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm saddened to see that so many won't be able to hear how good this amendment is going to be. I move that Bill 4, An Act to Implement a Supreme Court Ruling Governing Essential Services, be amended by adding the following after section 34. It reads:

Part 4

Expiry

35. The amendments brought into force by this Act expire on April 1, 2021, and the affected provisions shall revert to the form that they were in prior to the coming into force of this Act, unless the Assembly adopts a resolution no earlier than April 1, 2020, that this Act not be repealed.

As members will note, this is not an ad infinitum call for countless reviews. An overt and frequent use of sunset clauses is merely red tape upon the machinery of government. That's why this amendment calls for a single revisit. This is a one-time obligation upon the government of Alberta to revisit this particular piece of legislation. In several years' time there will be feedback from stakeholders from all sides of the bargaining table about whether or not the final version of this bill to pass through the House got it right. Perhaps there will have been strikes and lockouts in which the successes and shortcomings of this act will have been on full display. Creating a particular window that requires the government to re-review the legislation, whether that is this government or a future government, is simply a common-sense measure when it comes to significant legislation like this.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to the member for this amendment. Albertans need to know that our vital public services will be protected in the event of a labour dispute. For this legislation we've held extensive consultation on essential services with employers, employees, and the public to make sure we get it right. The Supreme Court has ruled that if the bill expires, it will leave Albertans with either a void of no essential services exceptions or, given the language in this amendment where it reverts to this earlier form, then it would provide back to the compulsory arbitration phase.

But I'm also concerned that it says: "revert to the form that they were in prior." Knowing that this government would like to do some labour code reviews as the labour code is continually changed after this is put in place, how does that impact that need? When I do do a labour code review – let's say that that happens in, you know, six months – does that meet the requirements of this expiry? Does my larger labour code review mean that we've fulfilled the needs here?

5:10

I appreciate that the member opposite doesn't think that this is red tape because it's just once, but we've seen the members opposite propose sunset/expiry dates in the past, so it does feel a little bit like red tape although it is just the once. I don't think that this expiry date adds reasonable value. Again, I think it puts us at risk with the Supreme Court ruling if anything were to happen that removes our essential services legislation. It is the intention of this government that should there be needed adjustments to this legislation, to do that in a timely manner, not in a scheduled manner, waiting four or five years out.

For some of these reasons I will not be supporting this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think that the comments made by the minister maybe are a little misleading on this in that the law will still be the law. The Supreme Court ruling will still be the Supreme Court ruling. The point with the sunset clause is that it allows legislators to be able to revisit this issue based upon a lot more evidence, a lot more time having passed, and it's not an out because that Supreme Court ruling is still the precedent that is being set.

What this allows the Legislature or the government at the time to do is to be able to address this issue in a way where we have a lot more information, and I think that that's something that would benefit this government to be able to take a look at. This is just an option for them to be able to make sure that in the end, if it has to be tweaked, it still can be tweaked.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise in support of this amendment. I know that people on all sides of the House will be surprised by that, but I think what we have here is an important amendment that strengthens the legislation. One of the reasons why we got here, outside of the Supreme Court ruling, is that the fact of the matter is that this hasn't been done for 30 years. There are some significant challenges in the legislation because there was no requirement for the Assembly to act.

I know it's going to be hard to believe, but from time to time politicians are sometimes not that incentivized to deal with tough issues. They sometimes don't like to tackle the issues of the day as promptly as perhaps they need to, so what happens is that decades go by, and we have legislation that has the tendency to become antiquated. While the Supreme Court ruling is very unlikely to change, there are certainly many aspects of the legislation. While we've heard the minister commit to a more fulsome review, that may or may not happen. And I don't mean that because the minister is disingenuous in her comments. I just mean that there are often additional political pressures that wind up guiding a government's decision-making process.

I hesitate to talk about things that may not be entirely relevant to the amendment, but the political decisions that were around the presentation of the budget, a budget that is the fourth-latest presentation in the last 15 years, were very likely made because of political pressures. So if we don't have a firm timeline and a requirement upon the Assembly or perhaps the minister, from time to time we wind up in situations where decades go by and nothing has changed. The great thing about this amendment is that it would ensure that that doesn't happen.

What needs to continually be a process in this House is that we make a commitment to ensure that the legislation we're responsible for remains current, that it is in the best interests of Albertans: union workers, employers, the government, all of the stakeholders. When we pass bills with just a commitment, that commitment is from time to time not fulfilled, particularly when there are changes in government and the new government may be distracted by other tasks at hand. This requirement ensures that that won't happen. The minister is quite right that we don't want to see the province getting into any significant challenges with the legislation lapsing, so one can only imagine that the government of the day would ensure that that didn't happen.

I strongly support this type of legislation. I agree with my hon. colleague that it's not red tape. You know, the minister had said that it adds red tape. A very good case could be made that this isn't red tape but good governance. Our decisions have ramifications in the Assembly, and it's important that we review those decisions in

reasonable timelines, and I think the timeline laid out in the amendment is more than reasonable. It allows for the bill to be in place for significant contract negotiations to take place all across the province with some of our largest employee groups. At the end of that, we can come back and find out if the decisions made today accurately reflect the decision, accurately reflect the things that are inside the scope of the Supreme Court ruling and the large number of items outside of the Supreme Court ruling that have been included in Bill 4.

I encourage all members of the Assembly to support the amendment. I look forward to an additional amendment passing in this Assembly today. As we saw this great spirit of co-operation that took place earlier in the day, I hope that we can continue such teamwork.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wishing to speak to this amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A7 lost]

The Chair: Back on Bill 4, are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Mr. Hunter: Madam Chair, it's been a great day. Actually, maybe I'll amend that and say that it started out as a great day.

As my colleagues and I have previously stated, members who have reviewed the legislation will know that there is a disproportionate amount of power in a single commissioner who makes key decisions on essential services. Albertans, regardless of which side of the table they are on in an essential services negotiation, deserve to know that their interests are being served by a commissioner who is in touch with the situation in Alberta and with Albertans' needs. When things go wrong in essential services agreements or negotiations, when other avenues like going through umpires have failed, it's the commissioner that makes the call.

Alberta's labour environment is different than in other provinces. The employment and labour landscape is different than in British Columbia or Saskatchewan or Manitoba. While it's possible that there's someone in another jurisdiction who has valuable experience in essential services discussions, it is not the same as having someone from Alberta. For any government to unilaterally parachute in someone from out of province would simply betray the trust of Albertans. Only an Albertan will truly fight for Albertans' best interests.

For this reason I wish to move an amendment. I would like to present the requisite number of copies of an amendment speaking to this issue, and I do so at this time.

5:20

The Chair: This will be amendment A8.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 4, An Act to Implement a Supreme Court Ruling Governing Essential Services, be amended in section 8 in the proposed section 95.3 by adding the following after subsection (1):

- (1.1) The Commissioner must be a resident in Alberta for at least 6 of the 10 years preceding designation under subsection (1).

With this amendment we do recognize that many Albertans, like other Canadians, do migrate to other provinces for shorter or longer periods of their lives. They may still be gaining valuable professional experience elsewhere, but given the prescribed role of

the commissioner it's good common sense that the commissioner is someone who lives in Alberta and actually files their taxes here.

I think that out of all the amendments, Madam Chair, this is my favourite one, and one of the reasons why I would say that it's my favourite is because we have a lot of jobs that have been lost in Alberta; wouldn't it be nice to be able to keep at least one here?

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise on behalf of the outstanding people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills to speak to the amendment. I think that we have seen some significant changes in our province. We have seen some significant changes in the leadership of our province, and this role, the Alberta commissioner, the commissioner in the legislation, is a critical role in the future and in the functioning of the province of Alberta.

While we can recognize that there are lots of talented people that live right across this great land of ours, there are some uniques about Alberta. There are things that make Alberta unique. That is the actual definition of uniques, particularly for the good people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. In fact, I think you'll find that that is an Alberta-specific phrase, something that a commissioner that had spent six out of the last 10 years in Alberta would fully understand. It is exactly why we need to ensure that the commissioner is, in fact, an Albertan. We have some of the most talented people that live right here in our province, and I think it's critically important that we celebrate that.

Madam Chair, I've said many times in this place that the government of Alberta isn't what makes Alberta great; it is Albertans. It is Albertans that make Alberta great. In fact, Albertans have been making Alberta great in spite of the government, particularly in the last few years of the previous government. So I don't know why we wouldn't ensure that an Albertan fills this critical role of the commissioner.

We're not suggesting that people should never leave Alberta so that they can have a career here. We're suggesting that six out of the last 10 years is reasonable for an expert in the area to have a continued understanding of the issues of the day, to have full knowledge of the legislation, to have full knowledge of the current issues of the day in Alberta. I think it's critically important that we celebrate the success and the incredible talent that we have here in Alberta, to have a commissioner from Alberta. To ensure Alberta's interests, the interests of all of those engaged in the negotiation, including the government, workers, employees of the government, those providing essential services, and taxpayers, it's critically important that we have an Albertan defending the interests of all of those people.

That's exactly what this amendment would ensure, that the commissioner needs to reside in the province for six out of the last 10 years, and I think it's very reasonable. I think that all members of the Assembly should support such an amendment.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. I listened with great interest. Now, I did hear that Albertans make Alberta great, and in the context of this amendment I'm wondering if you give preference to those who've been here longer, six years out of 10. Are those the Albertans you're talking about?

The best person for the job of essential services commissioner is going to be someone who understands the law and the Albertan community. Absolutely. In my short time as the Labour minister I

have learned a few things, and one of those is that the Alberta labour relations community is tight-knit, relatively small. Everyone knows each other. They understand the unique needs of the Alberta labour relations system.

I can commit to you that I will be making sure that an Albertan is the person we select for the labour relations essential services commissioner, making this amendment not necessary. I mean, within the legislation we state that the commissioner is a member of the Labour Relations Board, and Labour Relations Board members are required to understand the unique environment here in Alberta. So understanding the Alberta labour relations environment is a key component of that. We will be selecting the best person for the job. As part of that, I will be engaging the labour relations community – that's a process that I've already begun because we will need an essential services commissioner sooner rather than later – talking to the community and hearing what makes sense.

I certainly hope that all members will support our new essential services commissioner once that person begins what will be a very tough job for the first few months, implementing and overseeing vitally important legislation that protects the rights of our employees to strike and protects the public service and those vital public services that we all rely on.

For these reasons, the fact that it's unnecessary and a bit odd, I will not be supporting this amendment.

The Chair: Cardston-Taber-Warner.

5:30

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. As encouraged as I am with the scout's honour, we will make sure we do the right thing in this situation. It's always better to make sure that you have the legislation in order to be able to get this right. What's interesting about this is that this is a reasoned amendment, yet it almost seems like the minister is stopping what she says she's going to do anyway. So I'm not sure why we shouldn't just pass this and get on with the work of the day.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would just like to say that finding an essential services commissioner, making sure we have the right person for this job is going to be an incredibly important task, making sure we get the right combination of people who can understand the labour relations environment and oversee an incredibly, vitally important service. If I find someone who's been a resident of Alberta for five years and I'm not able to make that person an offer because of this amendment, that would be a shame if that was the best person. I don't have an essential services commissioner in mind, but this type of a hoop that must be jumped through does not seem productive in selecting the best person for the job for Alberta.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just have a very quick question. Seeing how we're just chatting about the commissioner, what do you think is a reasonable timeline for the hiring of the commissioner? What do you currently have in mind?

Ms Gray: That is a very good question. We're currently getting a legal opinion on whether we can start posting now or if the legislation needs to be passed before we can do that. We want to make sure we do this properly. We're having conversations.

Certainly, the labour relations community, who were engaged heavily in the development of Bill 4, are aware that we need an essential services commissioner and that that position is coming up, so we can have a lot of great conversations about it. As far as posting and timeline, we're waiting on a legal opinion before we go there.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any further members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, just listening to the debate back and forth – and there are some good points on both sides, I guess – I had to stop and think here just a little bit about the fact that when we cast our net for a new Clerk, one of the things that we found was that the best person for the job was the person that we had home grown, the person that intimately understood this Legislature, not the other Legislatures, intimately understood the job that we have to do and how the various rules of the Legislature apply to us. We chose very wisely, and we can see the benefit of that, of choosing somebody that was experienced and talented and knew what we needed to have done here in the Legislature.

I want to contrast that with a similar decision that's been made in this province that some of my constituents have brought forward with some concern. We have a position in our province called the Chief Firearms Officer, and when we went to make the decision as to who that person would be, we allowed in this province for that individual to be appointed by somebody from down east. Many of the people in the hunting and gun community of my constituency have been very concerned with the fact that the persons or people that have been appointed to this position haven't understood the culture of Alberta and haven't understood what they needed to and how to interpret the Firearms Act in this province. They've been very concerned with the fact that somebody coming from outside, who didn't understand how things were done, was making decisions that would affect everybody's life in Alberta.

I can't help but think that that analogy or that situation, that case study example, is similar to what we're talking about here. All this amendment is asking us to do as a Legislature is to assure us that not only are we looking for a very competent and experienced person but somebody that also understands Albertans and Alberta and that when we start talking about essential services and balancing those rights to strike versus the right to protect public services, they understand what we want and what we have done in the past in this province.

So I would speak to this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just really wanted to stand and say one last time that I am going to be looking for someone who knows Alberta and is the best person for the job.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to this amendment?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A8 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:36 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Smith
Anderson, W.	MacIntyre	Strankman
Cooper	McIver	van Dijken
Cyr	Rodney	Yao
Gotfried		

5:40

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Miller
Babcock	Horne	Nielsen
Carson	Kazim	Piquette
Connolly	Kleinsteuber	Renaud
Coolahan	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schreiner
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sucha
Drever	Mason	Sweet
Eggen	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McKitrick	Westhead
Goehring	McPherson	Woppard
Gray		

Totals: For – 13 Against – 37

[Motion on amendment A8 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 4. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Mr. Hunter: I think I'm winning them over. I thought I heard a clap over there.

Madam Chair, when this legislation comes into force, employers and bargaining units for workers will be negotiating essential services agreements for the first time in Alberta. Given that essential services are vital and integral to the day-to-day well-being of Albertans, it's important that we get as much of this legislation right the first time as possible. As currently worded, Bill 4 does not allow for quick emergency amendments. It may be discovered in the middle of a strike or lockout while negotiations are ongoing that a certain service should have been designated essential but was not. Accordingly, there needs to be a mechanism that allows for a quick return of those services should such a situation arise. Any such provision should recognize the rights of workers but would also recognize that there is important work to be done.

That's why I'm seeking an amendment. I have the requisite number of copies, that I will present to the Clerk at this time.

The Chair: This will be amendment A9.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. The amendment moves that Bill 4, An Act to Implement a Supreme Court Ruling Governing Essential Services, be amended in section 8 in the proposed 95.45 by adding the following subsection:

(1.1) Upon the filing of an application under subsection (1), notwithstanding section 95.41(3), an employer may use the services of persons hired by the employer or supplied to the employer by another person to perform the work of those employees in the bargaining unit that is on the strike or lockout until such time as the Commissioner makes a declaration under subsection (1) or advises that a declaration will not be made.

This amendment will allow for temporary workers to get the job done should it need to be done. The legislation already does account

for back-to-work situations, as would be the case in a large-scale public health emergency such as SARS. Not every emergency would be of that size or magnitude but would be significant regardless given that it would pertain to an essential service. This amendment would allow for a short-term solution in those scenarios while negotiations are ongoing.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. I am rising to speak to this amendment because I think there might be a misunderstanding with the legislation. There is a mechanism built into this legislation so that if there is something happening on the ground and decisions need to be made, that's where our concept of the umpire comes in. This essential services framework, which is a made-in-Alberta solution addressing our province's unique needs, ensuring that the legislation is fair for unionized employees and employers and making sure that the essential public services are maintained, does this through a couple of mechanisms, including the use of an umpire. That umpire will be involved in the negotiation of an essential services agreement and will become familiar with the workplace involved. Likely someone who has worked in health care would be the umpire, the mediator/arbitrator for a health care environment, for example.

That umpire plays another role, and that is to make decisions or rulings in case of a need during a strike or lockout. In the scenario, as I understand your description, the umpire is the one who will come and, on the ground, make a call. The legislation refers to the questioning of the umpire's decisions. It could get escalated up to the commissioner, especially if someone disagrees. But we very much needed a mechanism that – if something was going sideways during a strike or lockout, it needed to be dealt with immediately, and that is where the umpire comes in. Again, the umpire, that terminology, comes from baseball. It's somebody on the field making the call immediately.

In this case, I am not going to support this amendment because the legislation already has this. I think that your introductory comments neglected to mention that this is another form of replacement worker in that you're allowing the employer to hire additional people during that strike or lockout, something that is prohibited in earlier sections, that we've had a few conversations around. I would mention that this touches on the replacement worker argument again.

But the key point in my mind is that this legislation, intended to protect vital public services, does allow for a mechanism so that if there's a change or something that needs to be done rapidly on the ground, that can happen.

Mr. Hunter: With respect, Madam Chair, I just need some clarity from the minister, if I could. If I understand you correctly, you're saying that the umpire has the ability and the right to possibly bring in temporary workers. My question is, then: you're going to ask a person that may not have the necessary knowledge of the industry to make a decision about whether or not these temporary workers would be needed in this situation whereas an employer, whether it's government, public, or private, would have the best understanding of the situation. That's my first question.

The second question that I have for you. If you are saying that the umpire's role is going to be – say, for instance, in the example of health care they would have a knowledge of health care. Are you going to have umpires for every industry that have an understanding

of every industry? I mean, we're talking about now creating a WCB or an OH and S. Is this the scope of what you're trying to do here?

Ms Gray: Thank you for the questions. I believe that I was misunderstood. There is a ban on replacement workers in the legislation. The umpire would not be making a ruling to hire someone for the employer. It would be, rather, to potentially ask one of the strike line employees to come back to fulfill that function.

As well, umpires are not necessarily going to be subject matter experts in every industry or field. Someone who is a skilled mediator/arbitrator could be an umpire in most scenarios. I did refer to an umpire potentially understanding health care scenarios because there are a few more technical or difficult to negotiate, where understanding some of the nuances could be more important, but I don't believe it's the case that we need highly specialized umpires throughout. Mediation and arbitration are the main skill sets. Umpires or people who could fulfill the role of umpires exist today in our labour relations system performing different roles. We have people who can do this job. It's going to be a new role, but it's going to essentially be mediation and arbitration in its focus. Someone who's done that before for health care might do that job again.

I hope that clarifies for the member.

5:50

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A9 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to speak to this bill, and in principle I've told you that I agree with it, but there's some conflicting information in this that speaks to a group of people that are near and dear to my heart, the profession that I come from, and that's emergency medical services.

Consider: it's the middle of summer. Your child is in the back, in the pool. They're playing, and they've drowned or nearly drowned. Is that not a public safety issue, that harm to your child and having an ambulance, a skilled professional there to save that child's life? Would you agree? Would the government agree? I think you would. I think all Albertans would.

We see in this bill that firefighters are an essential service from the start. Compulsory arbitration: rightly so. Police: compulsory arbitration. What's missing is paramedics, that are out on the street every day saving lives and providing essential care to people that are in pain, quality of life, until they can get further care. Mental health issues are on the rise, particularly now with the way the economy is, yet the government – and, believe me, I've worked all day on this to try to get them included as essential services. I can tell you right now that if I did a poll in this province, people would agree that emergency medical services should be an essential service along with firemen and police.

My question is to the minister. Minister, can you just fix this one nuance, and then when you get to the negotiation piece after the fact around the essential services, you can figure out what that looks like inside a bargaining unit? We have firefighters with their own union, police with their own union. We have an effective bargaining unit that represents two-thirds or more of the emergency medical professionals, and they do a good job, but this group or part of them can be hived off immediately by this government.

It's the right decision. We don't want to have to worry if the ambulance is going to show up or not. Everybody would agree, especially if you're the mom or you're the father and your child is nearly drowned, sick, with a broken leg, or in a car accident. They're essential to life. They are essential to making sure that when your loved one is in pain and they're crying and they're writhing in pain, the trauma that that brings to a patient – and I know there are other health care professionals. Our job is to take that pain away. Our job is to make sure that the community has confidence that when you call the ambulance, they're going to be there. There should be no negotiation. There should be no threat of a walkout, no threat of a strike for something that you need to save a life.

What I can't understand after all the work that I did in CUPE 3421 and all my brethren did before then to get parity with police and fire is why today this government can't recognize emergency medical services as an essential service to the life and well-being of Albertans. Now, I tried to make this so that this could be your amendment, so that you can make this decision. To be honest with you, anybody who has a special interest, whether it's a union or anything else, to leverage the skill and the responsibility that paramedics have shouldn't even come into question. The right decision, Minister, respectfully: recognize paramedics along with firemen and police as the core backbone of the safety and well-being of Albertans, I implore you.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee will now rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 4. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? Say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Madam Speaker, I move that we adjourn the House until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

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

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