



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, April 18, 2016

Day 16

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Second Session

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van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
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Party standings:

New Democrat: 54 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 18, 2016

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Let each of us reflect in our own way. Let us encourage the right to speak up for things you believe in, not only for those seated in this Chamber but for our constituents, especially our young children. It is important for them to know that their voice matters and that it can make a difference. Let us particularly remember the children of our nation who consider suicide as their only escape.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we now will be led in singing our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
 True patriot love in all thy sons command.
 Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
 Il sait porter la croix!
 Ton histoire est une épopée
 Des plus brillants exploits.
 God keep our land glorious and free!
 O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
 O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Press Gallery Centennial

The Speaker: Hon. members, as mentioned last Thursday, I would like to take a moment today to point out an important milestone concerning the Assembly's press gallery. One hundred years ago, through amendments to the Assembly's standing orders, members of the press were afforded their own gallery in the Chamber to observe the proceedings. In 1916 Standing Order 92 read: "A gallery shall be reserved for the use of press representatives only." The standing orders also provided that the representatives could come from registered newspapers and that the Speaker controlled the gallery and rooms adjacent to it, which were made available to the press.

Today much has changed technologically and, in fact, continues to change, and reporting is often instantaneous in the world of social media. But what has remained constant is the essential role of the press in helping to communicate and report on what happens here in this Assembly to constituents throughout our province.

I'm sure I speak for all members when I share our appreciation for the critical role that media play in this our sacred democracy.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the wonderful grade 6 class from the Airdrie school C.W. Perry and their volunteers and teachers. Would you please rise as I call your names? Miss Stephanie Wilson, Miss Ashley Woronuk, Mr. Brian Jackson, Mr. Roel Suasin, Mr. Daniel Fortier, Mr. Keith

Foord, Mrs. Sarah Machan, and all the kids: please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other school groups for introductions today? I would recognize the hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a group of students who are leaders from across our province, who are part of the leadership program Forum for Young Albertans. We are joined by their executive director Jason Stolz and four alumni of the organization, those being Kathyne Davey, Samantha Hossack, Tanya Hrehirchuk, and Loryn Marcellus, who are chaperons for this year's forum participants. Thank you for rising.

We also have 23 students from grades 9 through 12 who are immersing themselves in politics during their week-long forum in Edmonton, which is this week, sitting with leaders at both municipal and provincial levels. The students have travelled from across the province, communities like Fox Creek, Bonnyville, and Fort McMurray, and they're forming lasting friendships with the unique experience, which we are sure they will remember as one of their highlights from their junior high and high school experience. I ask that our guests from the Forum for Young Albertans who are here with us today please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. I had the privilege of speaking with the group this morning.

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, it is my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the folks who work in my office as the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and the staff who work in my constituency office in Mayerthorpe in the great district of Whitecourt-St. Anne. Our work relies so much on the support that we get from our staff. They ensure that both the minister's office and the constituency office run smoothly and efficiently. They also do a pretty good job of keeping me out of trouble, more or less. I would like to ask my constituency staff, Epiphany Dober and Florence Henning, and my minister's office staff, Melanie Gaudet, Alice Marouelli, Renato Gandia, Keith Gardner, and Tony Clark, to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly one of the bravest constituents in Edmonton-Castle Downs, Austin Post. I had the privilege of being at his birth and the privilege to introduce him to you today. Austin is only 11 years old but recently underwent a heart transplant. During the process and while waiting for a donor heart, Austin displayed an unbelievable amount of bravery and positivity throughout such a difficult time. Austin is joined here today by his mother, Christine, one of my dearest friends for over 20 years; his father, Ian Post; his sisters, Ashley Reisinger and Meleah Post. Throughout this whole process the family was constantly a source of strength, love, and support for each other during such an uncertain time. I'd ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege for me to introduce to you and to the Assembly the executive members of the Alberta chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. CPAWS is a society committed to ensuring a healthy and wild Canada, where people can experience and respect nature. Their tireless efforts have been pivotal in preserving Alberta's sensitive environments for the future. Most recently they've been integral along with the Alberta Wilderness Association in the designation of the Castle wilderness and Castle park area, protecting a vital watershed while concerns remain about off-highway vehicle traffic in those regions. Please stand as I mention your names. Joining us today are Pat Chan, Liv Vors, Alison Ronson, Gord James, Phil Nykyforuk, and Anne-Marie Syslak. Please give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

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

AdaptAbilities

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was my privilege to join AdaptAbilities, a nonprofit organization that supports families throughout the Edmonton area, for their Fun-raiser gala last Thursday, April 14. It was an incredible opportunity to hear about the positive impacts that they've made on our community while raising money to support the important work that they do.

AdaptAbilities has been providing supports to our city for over 10 years, offering one-of-a-kind programs and services empowering individuals with special needs to grow, succeed, and belong. Relief care and community specialists work together with individuals and families to create a safe and caring community, enriching the lives of those with disabilities.

Under the direction of founder and Executive Director Michelle Hordal, AdaptAbilities has grown to serve hundreds of families who were often turned away from other programs. Michelle and her team have worked hard to create a home away from home for their participants, designed to enhance each individual's recreation and motor skills, life skills, and creative talents. Their services and support programs are developed as per the needs and wants of individual participants by promoting citizenship, valued social identities, supporting real relationships, and personal development first.

I am proud to be a part of a government which is committed to supporting an inclusive society and ensuring that the rights of all Albertans are protected, especially our most vulnerable. Our government recently committed \$65,000 through the community facility enhancement program to help AdaptAbilities as they move to expand to a larger location. I would like to thank AdaptAbilities for their ongoing commitment in supporting the vulnerable in our community, and I would like to congratulate them on their brand new logo designed by Catapult Marketing here in Edmonton.

Thank you.

Carbon Levy

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, on the drive up from Medicine Hat to Edmonton I'm sure you saw the same thing as me: empty buildings, for sale signs, and vacant parking lots. I'm sure you drove past the oil service businesses that have closed their doors and the construction companies with no orders on the books. But what

might not be as easy to spot is a family struggling to get through a layoff or the children who won't be enrolled in their favourite sport or the charity forced to do more with less.

In response to such crippling financial and human costs, this NDP government has decided to take a bad situation and make it worse. With the implementation of a carbon tax that will bring massive price hikes across the board, Albertans will face even more hardship: hardships on their utility bills, at the gas pumps, and at the grocery store. The NDP's carbon tax is regressive, punitive, and damaging to every sector of the economy and everyday life. Imagine the shock that a fixed-income senior will get when they open their monthly bills and see an increase of 8 per cent on electricity and 50 per cent on natural gas. Imagine the struggling family that will now pay 10 per cent more filling up their vehicle on the way to school. Imagine the business desperately trying to keep its head above water while being pulled down by the weight of this new tax.

Perhaps the Premier doesn't need to worry about the price of heating her home or buying a car, but I can assure you that these problems cause pain, worry, and sleepless nights for my constituents. Quite simply, this government has chosen to dishonestly foist a harsh new tax upon a province that can't bear it, a tax that they kept hidden from Albertans. Mr. Speaker, it's time that the NDP stop putting the price of its own mismanagement on the backs of hard-working Albertans. It's time they stop governing against us and work for us.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Public Consultation

Mr. Ellis: In 2014 I had the honour of being elected as the MLA for Calgary-West. I put my name on the ballot because I believe strongly in serving my community and in serving Albertans. This is a great responsibility. If Alberta is succeeding, then it means that we the elected Members of the Legislature have done our jobs. This is the attitude of my PC colleagues, and I, too, have been working hard to bring this to the Legislature.

We reject the notion that as opposition it is our job to simply oppose the government. We do not believe that the responsibility of governing lies only with the government but that every single person in the Legislature carries this obligation as well. The Progressive Conservatives value professionalism and respect. We offer constructive feedback and common-sense suggestions. Our goal is to be the best legislators and best representatives that we can be.

I think that many of the issues facing Alberta can be resolved with plain old common sense. Many of the best policy ideas simply come from listening and talking with the people. Having the ability to interact with and gain insight from so many different people is a powerful tool at the disposal of every single MLA. Being prepared to listen to people and recognizing you don't have the answers should be the central qualification for this job. It is key for government to listen to the people on the ground who deal with the situations first-hand.

In the year and a half that I've been an MLA, I have learned that there are no magic spells for dealing with the issues and that no one has a monopoly on good ideas. I'm proud to be a member of the Progressive Conservative caucus, that is using this session of the Legislature to promote real, common-sense solutions to make sure this government is properly engaging with Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Organ and Tissue Donation

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The week of April 17 to 23 is National Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Week in Canada. It is my privilege to rise and speak about this important issue today.

I'd like to share with you Austin's story, whom I had the opportunity to introduce earlier. Austin is a brilliant 11-year-old boy, full of life, like most other kids his age, but one major difference is that the heart that beats inside Austin is not the one that he was born with. Austin was eight years old when he suddenly fell ill and was diagnosed with end-stage congestive heart failure from an unknown cause. This required further medical assessment, and he had to be placed on the transplant list. Thanks to the generosity of a grieving family and the expertise of the transplant team at the Stollery children's hospital, Austin is alive today. Austin says that he loves life and that so many of his days are what he calls his best days ever.

Mr. Speaker, while heart transplantation is not a cure, it is definitely a life-saving treatment. We have seen people with successful transplants enjoy a high quality of life for over 30 years. In Alberta the list of people waiting to receive a transplant is growing. Although the number of donors has increased since 2012, we still need more. In 2014 we had 13.6 deceased donors per million population compared to 9.9 in 2012. People are six times more likely to need a transplant than to become a donor, and only 1 to 2 per cent of people die in a way that would make them a potential organ donor. Tissue donation is equally as important as organ donation. For example, donated corneas can restore sight, and heart valves are life saving.

About 2,500 Albertans register every week to become organ and tissue donors. Just one organ and tissue donor can save up to eight lives and make life better for up to 75 other people. Today let's take a pledge to spread awareness to ensure that everyone who needs a transplant has the opportunity to receive one.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Between the city of Calgary and the town of Cochrane is a stunning piece of Alberta ranchland paradise. The area was first cut open to settlement and industry by the CPR back in 1883. Shortly thereafter Glenbow townsite was established, with a post office, general store, and about 150 residents. On the neighbouring hillside Glenbow Quarry was founded and excavated the very stone used in the building that surrounds us here, the Alberta Legislature.

The area later became a successful ranch under the stewardship of the Harvie family. Over 40 years ago Neil Harvie recognized that a sprawling Calgary threatened the surrounding countryside and passed on the vision to his children to preserve the land as a park. In 2008 the family made a generous philanthropic land deal through a unique partnership with the Alberta government and the Glenbow Ranch Park Foundation.

Last summer, in August 2015, I participated in a spectacular trail ride, the Ride for the Ranch fundraiser, with Andy Crooks, chairman of the board of the foundation. The tour was guided by Tim Harvie and took us on an intimate tour of the ranch. Tim pointed out the ruins of the sandstone quarry, archaeological evidence of teepee rings, described vegetation such as native

grasses and fescues, animal habitats, and explained the importance of preserving the area as an active ranch. Later that evening the journey was complete with the narration of cowboy stories by poet Perry Jacobson.

1:50

Glenbow Ranch provincial park protects 1,300 acres of parkland, river, and forest landscape along the Bow River. Residents of Calgary and beyond can benefit from over 30 kilometres of paved trails and pathways, which is part of the Trans Canada Trail network and system. I encourage all Calgarians to take full advantage of this sensational park at their very doorstep. As Tim Harvie remarked at the end of the trail ride: where else in the world can you sit on a grassy hilltop like this with a vast river valley sprawled out in front of you, backed by rolling foothills, and witness 50 miles of mountain range on the not-too-distant horizon?

I'd like to thank the Harvie family for their generous vision that has preserved this wonderful landscape for all Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Oral Question Period

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

Carbon Levy

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For many Alberta families life has never been more challenging than it is today. Thousands are out of work and struggling to pay their bills. Their main priority is putting food on the table and keeping a roof over their heads. On Thursday this government took a bad situation and introduced a budget that made things much worse for Albertans. A carbon tax makes the price of everything in Alberta more expensive for everyone, not just for gas and heating but also power bills, groceries, clothes, and rent. Will the Premier be honest with Albertans and give them the full cost of how much a risky new carbon tax is going to cost for families?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We certainly have been very open and will continue to be. The direct cost for an average family, including heating, gasoline, and electricity, will be about \$500. Two-thirds of Alberta families will be receiving rebates; 60 per cent of Albertans will receive a full rebate. So, certainly, this is very positive.

When it comes to doing accounting and math, I certainly think that the Leader of the Official Opposition, who had to recorrect his numbers in less than two hours this morning – I'd be happy to sit down with his research department and explain some of the math to them, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that this Premier just hit the typical family with at least \$1,000 a year in new costs. If you're lucky enough to qualify for a rebate, you'll still end up hundreds and hundreds of dollars poorer as a result of this carbon tax, brought in by this NDP government. Transportation companies already estimate that costs will rise by 5 per cent. For families it means that diapers, formula, hockey equipment, clothes, vegetables – anything moved in Alberta by truck – will be more expensive for Albertans. Why is the Premier downloading hundreds of dollars in new costs from this carbon tax onto Albertans?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We certainly take our responsibility and the evidence around climate change incredibly seriously. We know that what will be best for Alberta families is to be able to have a strong international reputation to get our pipelines built, expand our markets, and to make sure we move forward with a strong public service. The Official Opposition's proposal is to lay off at least another 22,000 jobs in the public sector. I'm sorry. That math doesn't add up, and Albertans know it.

Mr. Jean: Rebate or not, families that buy food, buy clothes, rent or own their own property will all see their costs go up. The cost of living for Albertans will go up under this government. Half of Canadians report they're barely scraping by and that losing as little as \$200 a month would bankrupt them. A carbon tax, that increases prices of everything, only makes things worse for everyone in Alberta. Only 10 per cent of revenue raised by the carbon tax is actually being returned to Albertans in rebates. Families will simply have to eat the rest of these new costs and new taxes. What does the Premier have to say to families that feel like they have just been kicked while they're already down?

Ms Hoffman: Our government knows that climate change is real, Mr. Speaker. Our government takes it seriously, and we are working to make sure that we have a reasonable plan, one that's modelled on climate leadership plans from other jurisdictions, that's reasonable and balanced, that actually creates meaningful change.

Mr. Speaker, 60 per cent of Alberta families will see a full rebate. That certainly is going to be very helpful to them. But, also, we're going to be reinvesting every other dollar in making sure that we have opportunities to diversify the economy, something that members opposite have no intention of doing.

The Speaker: The second main question.

Mr. Jean: Here's another example of how the NDP carbon tax will hurt Alberta families. The city of Calgary is estimating that this tax will cost them \$6.5 million a year. For cities across Alberta feeling the pinch, the Premier told them they get zero in return. I'm sure the Premier knows there's only one way for cities to pay for this tax, more borrowing or higher property taxes. Either way, it's Alberta families who will pick up the tab for this government's mismanagement. Why is the Premier downloading the cost of her carbon tax onto municipalities and onto Albertans?

The Speaker: The minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, if the budget papers had been read on Thursday, the Official Opposition would have noted that there is \$2.2 billion in new green-infrastructure investments that will be recycled straight back into the economy, supporting municipalities, supporting rural municipalities as well as large cities. Certainly, those investments are over and above existing investments and will help municipalities adjust.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, that's going to take a lot of adjustment. You see, the cost of the carbon tax doesn't stop there. School boards across the province need fuel to operate. Thousands of kids every single day take a bus to get to school. It's not uncommon for parents to actually have to pay hundreds of dollars in transportation costs every year for their children to go to school. This new carbon tax will only make things worse by forcing school boards to increase

these fees, to download other new costs to parents. What does the Premier have to say to the families who will be further punished by this NDP government for having to bus their kids to school?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, this government kept our commitment to ensuring stable, predictable funding for schools and for students and for the next generation of children in this province. It's certainly not something that the Official Opposition is at all interested in.

In addition to that, we will be reinvesting the carbon levy in a series of efficiency initiatives that can be used to defray the costs for school boards, municipalities, indigenous communities, and other communities, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jean: For Albertans already pinching pennies, the Premier's carbon tax will have a huge impact on fuel expenses. I'm not sure if the Premier actually knows this, but people do drive trucks for their livelihoods here in Alberta. The weather in Alberta also means that four-by-fours might be necessary from time to time. Trucks help Albertans move hay on the farm. They help move their tools to the job site even in the cities. For families, a larger vehicle is just a fact of life when you have to take kids to hockey practice or to ballet. Why is the Premier increasing the cost of living for everyday Albertans, and will she show leadership by changing herself from her own large Suburban to maybe a Smart car?

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we are mindful of the impact on lower and middle-income Albertans, which is why we are implementing a rebate that will apply at the full rebate for 60 per cent of Albertans, a partial rebate for two-thirds.

In addition, we have exempted marked gasoline and diesel – that is to say, purple – for agricultural producers, Mr. Speaker. In addition, there will be a full array of energy efficiency investments for all Albertans to avail themselves of.

The Speaker: The third main question.

Tax Policy

Mr. Jean: Albertans clearly know that this NDP budget is going to make things much worse. It will lead to fewer jobs. It will lead to a weaker Alberta economy. They know that this budget's carbon tax will have them paying more provincial taxes and more municipal taxes, more taxes on everything. They know that bad fiscal planning has lowered our credit rating and now makes borrowing more expensive for Albertans. Now they know that the Premier has considered a sales tax in Alberta's future. Why does this Premier reject any cuts at all but, instead, seems excited about a new Alberta PST?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta jobs plan takes a different path than the opposition would take. The path we will take will be to stand with Albertans. We will stand with Albertans by supporting families and communities, investing in infrastructure, diversifying our economy, and supporting Alberta businesses. They would not do that. They would cut supports to seniors, they would cut teachers and nurses, and they would abandon our most vulnerable. That's not the path we're going to take.

2:00

Mr. Jean: A direct question on PST; direct avoidance of the question.

Tax increases will only drive money out of our economy and jobs out of our province. When we look at the budget, it is clear that last October's tax increases will not bring anywhere near the revenue the NDP said they would. Nowhere near. Businesses are moving jobs out of Alberta. Wealthy individuals are moving to lower tax jurisdictions. Alberta will not be the most attractive place to invest when energy prices rebound, and now the Premier has chosen to signal that a sales tax is in our future. Why is the Premier so determined to drive investment and prosperity out of Alberta?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. During and after the 2015 election we said that we would not introduce a sales tax, and during the term of this government we will not introduce a sales tax. We'll honour that commitment. We committed to bringing back fairness to the PIT, the personal income tax, and corporate income taxes. We moved quickly to make that happen in June because this province was behind all other provinces in terms of a fair, transparent tax for PIT, so a marginal tax rate is the right thing to do. We brought that in.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Second supplemental. With respect, Opposition House Leader, I request that you direct your comments through the Speaker again, please.

Please proceed. Go ahead.

Mr. Jean: The Opposition House Leader, Mr. Speaker?

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

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has the most expensive government in Canada by a lot. When adjusted for population, B.C. actually runs its government operations for \$8 billion less a year than Alberta does. Think about that. If Alberta spent at B.C. levels, our deficit this year would be very, very modest. But, instead, the Premier wants to fearmonger and tell Albertans that any cuts to the budget would lead to thousands fewer teachers and nurses. Fearmongering. Albertans aren't buying it. They know this Premier won't do what needs to be done. Will the Premier commit to getting spending under control before she even considers a sales tax, and will she agree not to bring in a sales tax next term?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the Leader of the Official Opposition, who himself talked about the cuts of the '90s as something to be looking back on gloriously, recalls, but teachers were laid off, and nurses were laid off. Those are the plans of the past. The Official Opposition wants to recycle these failed plans. He wants to talk about cutting \$8 billion. That's almost the entire Education budget. Give me a break. That is not what the people of Alberta voted for. They voted for a stable, predictable government that's going to support them.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: The point of order is noted.

The volume is getting excessive.

I think we're on the first supplemental. Is that correct? [interjection] The fourth main.

Carbon Levy

(continued)

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know with the carbon tax that 40 per cent of that will be purely wealth distribution. We know that the carbon tax will increase costs to Alberta households. We know it will cost three times more to run and administer energy efficiency Alberta than the total amount being put aside for communities affected by the rapid phase-out of coal. What we don't know is what it will do for the environment. To the Minister of Finance: by what amount will your carbon tax reduce both emissions and energy consumption?

Mr. Ceci: I will jump up and say that I know the reduction in emissions by 2020. Thirty-five megatonnes is the forecast of the amount it will reduce the size of emissions. For the second part of the answer I'm going to turn it over to the environment minister to answer that in future questions.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to U of C economist Trevor Tombe, in 2018-19, combined with output-based rebates, the total tax revenue will only have 3 per cent returned to small business; 10 per cent returned to household rebates, which will not cover households' additional expenditures; 30 per cent for green infrastructure and energy initiatives. He says that we don't know yet the administration cost of the new tax. To the Finance minister: how many jobs will your carbon tax cause Albertans to lose? In comparison, how many can you actually say will be created, and when will you release an analysis of how you arrived at your numbers?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. On the matter of energy efficiency – we'll take that first – there are a couple of different ways that one can deliver energy efficiency programming. I'm not surprised that the previous government has no idea how that works because they did not do it and were the only people in Canada to fail in that regard. We have chosen to deliver these programs through a Crown agency. We could do it through a utility, but we don't have a Crown utility, so we will do it through a Crown agency. This is the leanest way to do it, and we will make sure that there are programs for small business, for municipalities, for individuals, for indigenous communities, and for rural communities through our energy efficiency investments.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that when the government calls it the jobs plan, the answer never included a word about jobs although they were directly asked about that.

On page 96 of the budget plan it estimates that in 2017 it will cost a couple with two children \$338, if you believe the government, and they'll get a rebate of \$360. To the Finance minister: how can \$22 possibly cover the additional cost of food, property tax, shelter, clothing, consumer goods, and all the other costs that will pile up on Alberta families as a direct result of your regressive carbon tax?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, of course, you know, all of this talk of indirect costs is based on some faulty math coming from the Official Opposition in which they took a three-year-old

study that is Canada-wide and that does not have any appreciation for the investments that Alberta will be making, does not have any appreciation for even the current or historical PC climate policies, and then projects that outwards. That is faulty reasoning. It was certainly faulty math on behalf of the Official Opposition. The fact of the matter is that we know that investments in energy efficiency are very quick ways to make sure we are putting construction workers back to work.

The Speaker: Thank you.
The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Budget 2016

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For the second budget in a row the Alberta Party is the only opposition party to create our own shadow budget. We prove it's possible to find a middle way, a better way than sacrificing the present with brutal front-line cuts or risking the future on massive deficits. Unfortunately, the impact of the ND budget is already being felt as Alberta suffered yet another credit-rating downgrade. To the Minister of Finance. I asked you last session whether you had calculated the cost of a potential downgrade. Given your plan to borrow more than \$50 billion, have you done it yet?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. You know, we all know that the collapse in oil prices has had a significant effect on our economy and put people out of work. The opposition would have us respond to this with significant job losses of nurses and teachers and by cutting back on investments in infrastructure. We believe there's a better way to move Alberta forward, and we are. Alberta's credit rating is still among the best in the country even with the low price of oil. This fiscal year we expect to spend 2.4 per cent of our budget revenue on debt servicing.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Party's shadow budget balances in four years, funds front-line services to match population growth, builds badly needed infrastructure, all of that without taking on unsustainable levels of debt. Again to the Minister of Finance. The Alberta Party's plan calls for per capita spending to come in line with the national average within three years. Do you have any plans to meet this target, and if so, when?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. You know, in the past the member opposite has provided us with some good ideas on how we can work together to move Alberta forward. Thank you for that. There are also some ideas here that we've already included in our Alberta jobs plan, some ideas in his shadow budget. We're freezing the wages, of course, of MLAs, political staff, management, government, and executive staff in agencies, boards, and commissions. We're working with the civil service to find savings every day, and we've reduced overall spending, unlike the third party, to 2 per cent per year going forward. We will not recklessly cut back on . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect, Mr. Minister, that wasn't an answer, so I'll take that as a no.

The Alberta Party's shadow budget, which I will table later this afternoon, respects the 15 per cent debt-to-GDP law this government passed just a few short months ago. Again to the Minister of Finance: given your plan to repeal the debt-to-GDP limit, do you have a new target, or is the sky the limit?

2:10

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. It's very clear in our fiscal plan that 15.5 per cent debt to GDP will be reached in three years. We anticipate staying under that if we are able to bend the cost on things like health services in this province and other programs and services, if we are able to see diversification take off in this province as we understand it will through Economic Development and Trade, and if we're able to invest all across this province with the biggest investment program for capital this province has ever seen, at \$34.5 billion over five years.

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

STEP Program

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Times are tough right now for all Albertans, and that's especially true for young Albertans. We know that youth unemployment across this country is at an all-time high. Summer is coming, and students in my constituency are looking for work. With the reinstatement of the summer temporary employment program gearing up to launch, can the Minister of Labour explain to us how this will help our current economic state and support businesses?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government committed to reintroducing the summer temporary employment program, or STEP, a program the former government cut. The Alberta jobs plan brings STEP back at a critical time for Alberta and for Alberta employers. With the economic downturn impacting the bottom lines of many businesses, our government knew it could do more to help. That's why STEP was opened to small businesses for the very first time, in addition to municipalities, nonprofits, school boards, and postsecondaries. This program provides a wage subsidy of \$7 an hour to Alberta employers hiring high school or postsecondary students, who, in turn, gain valuable . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Dang: Mr. Speaker, given that this initiative is so important for employers and small businesses, again to the same minister: what has the ministry actually done to ensure that there was adequate uptake and information being relayed to businesses so that as many as possible were able to apply?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We engaged employers, municipalities, nonprofits through direct engagement, advertising as well as social media. We know that Albertans were engaged because the uptake was through the roof. We received over 2,600 applications between January and February 29. We received a significant number of applications from small businesses, the newest category that we included in the STEP program. It was clear that Albertans sorely missed this program, that was cut by the former government, and were eager to take advantage of it.

Mr. Dang: Given the significant changes made to STEP under the new government, to the same minister: how much money has actually been allocated, and how many students do we expect this program to help and to actually employ?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We plan to allocate the full \$10 million that was laid out in the Alberta jobs plan. This year 1,184 applications were approved. Businesses across Alberta and across various sectors will have received their notifications as of last week if they were successful. As well, up to 3,000 student jobs will be funded through the STEP program this year.

Provincial Debt

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Finance tabled a budget that included \$56 billion of debt and a \$14 billion consolidated deficit. Soon we'll be spending more than \$2 billion a year on interest payments to the banks instead of on schools, hospitals, and roads that we need. This isn't just bad financial management; this is morally repugnant. Why is the minister making tomorrow's generation pay for today's reckless spending?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. We are doing what we think Albertans want us to do and what we ran on. We said that we would keep programs and services strong in this province, and that's what we're doing. Budgets 2015 and '16 keep funding enrolment, keep hospitals going, ensure that the capital spend is what this Alberta province needs, and we're going to do that because that's the right thing.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, when the Wildrose warned the minister that he would break his own 15 per cent debt ceiling just five months ago, he replied to us at the time, and I quote: we won't come anywhere close to the 15 per cent; I don't see where there's going to be an issue, like you the Wildrose do. Will the minister admit that he should have listened to the Wildrose now that he's going to break and repeal his very own debt ceiling law just four months, 11 days, and 14 hours after he passed it?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're dealing with a once-in-a-generation decline in our economy, two years of recession. The Wildrose did not predict it. The opposition over here did not predict it. The best minds and the people who are providing the economic forecast did not see this coming last July. They did not see it coming in October. We are doing the best for this province, and we'll continue to do that.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, the Wildrose predicted it, and he refused to listen to it.

The Premier admitted that she expected a credit downgrade from this budget. This is like knowing that there's a speed trap ahead and hitting the gas anyway. Is the Premier so ideologically committed to enlarging the size of government that she is willing to ignore the facts and take on limitless debt to satisfy her agenda?

Mr. Ceci: As I said to a previous question with regard to borrowing, Alberta's credit rating is still among the best in the country, even with the low price of oil. In this fiscal year we expect to spend 2.4 per cent of our budget revenue on debt servicing; B.C.

spends 5.5 per cent, and Ontario spends 9 per cent. We're well below those, and we'll continue to be well below them.

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

Budget 2016

(continued)

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our PC caucus, in a spirit of collaboration, made a \$4 billion challenge that reflects Alberta's culture of fiscal responsibility. The challenge provided means for cost savings that would have sent a message to Albertans and credit-rating agencies that your government takes deficits and debts seriously. Instead, we are aghast to see a budget that ratchets up spending and debt to unparalleled levels. To the Finance minister: why did you not even consider our PC caucus's well-thought-out recommendations to control spending?

Mr. Ceci: You know, I did engage briefly in your document, but I was kind of busy working on the budget for government and bringing that in. We also had thousands of Albertans, not unlike the opposition in the collection of information they provided, who through telephone town halls, e-mails to my office, and in our going around the province gave us their suggestions. Those, too, have found their way into our budget.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Finance minister misrepresents the limitation of his cost-saving choices to — and I quote from his budget speech — “firing thousands of teachers and nurses” and given that he is the only one talking about laying off teachers and nurses and given that there are efficiencies to be found in a \$51 billion provincial budget, Minister, are you seriously telling Albertans that there is no way of finding savings other than laying off teachers and nurses?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. The third party, in their election plan, planned on cutting nearly a billion dollars from health care. The Official Opposition in their address last week talked about returning to some of the proven mechanisms of the 1990s. Let's remember the 1990s. Let's remember teachers being laid off, nurses being laid off, the Calgary General hospital being demolished in that big plume of smoke. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. Albertans had a choice, and they chose our government because we believe in health care and education and protecting our future.

Mr. Ellis: That billion dollars had to do with administration and efficiencies.

Given that the Finance minister and Premier fail to credit our previous government for creating our low debt-to-GDP ratio, which they are now destroying, and given that business and individual Albertans have enjoyed the lowest overall tax system in Canada, once again thanks to the previous government, and given that Albertans recognize the carbon tax is an ideological effort at wealth redistribution, to the Finance minister again: why is this budget such a drastic departure from Alberta's long-held heritage of fiscal pride?

Ms Hoffman: There was a long-held heritage of electing the same government that made the same decisions time and time again. Albertans had a choice in the last election, and they chose a different vision. They chose a vision that would protect children, that would protect our seniors, that would continue to move forward and be environmentally and economically sustainable and reasonable.

Talking about pragmatism, certainly the Leader of the Official Opposition supported five consecutive deficit budgets. The only time he seems to oppose them is when he's on the other side of the aisle, Mr. Speaker.

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

2:20 Job Creation

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has had almost a year to produce a credible jobs plan. Instead, it has admitted that its first plan has failed, and now it has released its second attempt, that is no better than the first. When he was asked how the plan would create jobs, the minister couldn't answer, and the details are not in the budget either. To the minister: you told everyone to wait for the budget, but where are the details of your jobs plan?

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would encourage the member to look in the budget. I'll try to find the page number for you. Unlike the opposition over there, our government believes in diversification and believes that it's critical to moving our economy forward. Our Alberta jobs plan is very robust. We went out and met with many, many business leaders, industry leaders, experts, organizations, chambers of commerce, and they told us: there are a number of initiatives that you can do that will help get the economy going. And we've done just that.

Mr. Panda: Let me give you the page number. Mr. Speaker, I think the minister enjoys jumping up and down to tell us absolutely nothing. Given that page 10 of the budgets says that Alberta's unemployment rate will go up to 8 per cent but the minister says that he will create 100,000 jobs without giving details about how he is creating them, this is creating a lot of confusion. Will the minister tell us how the unemployment rate will still go up when he magically creates a hundred thousand jobs?

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, first of all, the more jobs that are created, the unemployment numbers will go down, actually, not up.

I'll give the member a few of our initiatives. Earlier today I talked about an investor tax credit, \$90 million over two years for an investor tax credit, that is being celebrated province-wide. This is something that other jurisdictions have brought in. It has been very successful in helping the job creators create jobs. This will create thousands of jobs by providing capital available to small and medium-sized Alberta businesses, much-needed . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Panda: Given that this government promises to create jobs but also says that the government doesn't create jobs, I'm not surprised that Albertans are confused and worried. Given that the NDP's job-killing carbon tax will cost small businesses far more than the 1 per cent tax reduction will save them and that the new investor tax credit isn't even accepting applications until 2017, will the minister tell us how he's going to create any jobs this year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll spell it out for the member. As I've said many times, government sets the right conditions to help economic growth and diversification. We believe in diversification; members opposite don't. I can tell you that we

have a robust capital infrastructure plan. We're spending \$36 billion over five years, which is going to create a number of jobs and fix much-needed infrastructure that the previous government failed to invest in and, quite frankly, that the Official Opposition wouldn't invest in. I'd love to know which hospitals, schools, and roads . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Government Policies

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are worried about job losses and the state of our economy. During the election I met Joan from Rimbey. Joan was concerned about the PC's proposed tax hikes. I saw Joan the other day, and now her husband has been laid off because of the NDP tax hikes. Only Wildrose is standing up for hard-working Albertans against these massive tax hikes. What evidence does the government have that says that higher taxes, more bureaucracy, and increased red tape leads to job creation and economic growth?

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm guessing that it's coming to me. I wasn't quite sure there. Let me clarify to the member that, first of all, the creation of this ministry was exactly to provide business and industry with a one-stop shop, one place to come to government, where we can work with the private sector to help them navigate, whether it's through forms or whatnot. We also believe that we want to simplify and streamline processes. But let me reiterate that on Friday of last week the Finance minister and the Premier announced our small-business tax cut, where we're cutting small-business taxes by . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that during the election I also met Stan, a small-business owner who has a few employees in the Sundre area, some of them right around the minimum wage, who since the implementation of the NDP's radical and risky economic policy has let one of his employees go so that he could keep the rest of his staff and given that that means another hard-working Albertan is out of a job because of this NDP government, when will the Premier learn that her risky economic manifestos have real-life consequences in our communities?

Ms Hoffman: Certainly, our hearts go out to any individual who has been impacted. The record low decline in terms of oil and gas revenues has impacted all of us, whether it's provincial revenues, where we've seen royalties go down by 90 per cent, or whether it's a family who has been impacted by the low price of oil. This is one of the reasons why we're doing the prudent thing and working to diversify our economy. The strategies of the last 10 years under both Conservative governments, federal and provincial, didn't get a pipeline built to tidewater, Mr. Speaker, and it certainly didn't help us diversify our economy.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I just wish to remind you: preambles are being included and ought not be. Please proceed.

Mr. Nixon: Given that this government needs to stop experimenting with radical economic theories and get back to the business of governing and given that we recently saw the consequences of its negligence when the environment minister

refused to heed Wildrose warnings about serious aeration concerns and because of that Alberta's lakes have now lost tens of thousands of fish, to the Premier: how can Albertans trust you with their jobs when your government can't even keep this province's fish alive?

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the question was about lake aeration. The Alberta Conservation Association's use of bubble diffusers instead of traditional surface aerators has resulted in a partial to complete collapse of a number of stocked fisheries. Environment and Parks is committed to managing fisheries to provide abundant and sustainable fishing opportunities. Through an MOU with Environment and Parks the Alberta Conservation Association is responsible for aerating many of our lakes to improve survival of stocked fish throughout the winter. This season, due to the ACA's concerns regarding section 263 of the Criminal Code, the ACA tested a bubble diffuser, and it did not achieve the results.

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

Budget 2016 (continued)

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP budget is an alarming departure from the fiscal responsibility that Albertans have to display in their lives every day. Six months ago this government legislated a 15 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio, which is a huge concern in and of itself, but now it has no ceiling whatsoever and there's no timeline or even an intention to ever pay it back. Last month Calgary-Lougheed constituents urged you to control spending. To the Finance minister: why have you ignored this advice from Albertans clear across Alberta, who simply want you to treat their hard-earned tax dollars with respect?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, this side of the House treats every tax dollar with respect. The 15 per cent debt-to-GDP limit that we have removed from the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act has been removed to provide the flexibility required to deal with the current economic situation. Unless they, you know, haven't noticed on the other side of the House, we're in two years of recession. It's the worst downturn this province has felt in a generation. We're dealing with that. That side of the House over here wasn't able to balance a budget with . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Rodney: With great respect, I'm not sure if either party over here knew that I was talking about everyday Albertans.

Now, given that finding efficiencies and savings in a \$51 billion budget is something the NDP simply did not care to do in this budget, which Albertans are calling many things, including irresponsible, unconscionable, and I daresay much worse, and given that Albertans directed their government to be fiscally responsible by controlling spending and investing strategically, to the minister. Before the budget and our Engage document our PC caucus offered you a \$4 billion challenge. Why did you ignore this, not just this but the advice of Albertans clear across this province, who are now forced to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Hon. member, when I stand, please sit.

Mr. Rodney: I am sitting, sir.

The Speaker: Excuse me.

2:30

Mr. Ceci: You know, the number of people who have come forward to say that they validate and are supportive of this budget is significant. Ken Gibson of the Alberta Construction Association said that we applaud the number of measures in Budget 2016, and he goes on to talk about a number of things that will put Albertans back to work and assist those very Albertans that you're talking about. The University of Lethbridge President Mike Mahon says that the destination project will make it possible for the government of Alberta to transform the University of Lethbridge so there are validators for postsecondary, for business, for jobs . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Rodney: We agree with infrastructure spending; we just would like to see a plan to pay it back.

Given that the NDP's fiscal left turn was so alarming that our hard-earned provincial credit rating was downgraded yet again – and this increases the burden on taxpayers by untold billions of dollars – and given that our municipal governments will face higher interest rates as a result of this, which they have no choice but to pass on to the same Albertans, which is an unmistakable message that the NDP is taking Alberta in the wrong financial direction, Minister, can you give Albertans one good reason why you think that this is a good idea in any way for any Albertans?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. I think the reason is that there won't be long hospital wait lines, there won't be crowded schools, and there won't be an absence of affordable housing throughout this province. Those are the things that we provide, the services to Albertans, and we're going to keep doing it.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, many families are struggling to find safe, affordable housing, especially during the current economic downturn. I understand that there are a large number of people on waiting lists for affordable housing programs, and that number is growing. My question is for the Minister of Seniors and Housing: what is the minister doing to address the waiting lists and help ensure vulnerable Albertans can find a place to live?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of seniors.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I share the member's concern about the number of families that are waiting for housing supports. I'm very aware of the need for housing for lower income Albertans. I can also tell the member that affordable housing is a high priority for our government moving forward. The fact that "Housing" has been added to my ministry's name is one sign that it is a higher priority for our government. We will continue to work with our housing management bodies and community partners to help as many people as possible.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Some affordable housing properties, like the townhouses in Londonderry

in Edmonton, are being closed because they are in very poor condition and no longer habitable. At a time when we are short of affordable housing units, why are these properties being allowed to deteriorate to the point where no one can live in them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member has touched on one of the key challenges that we face. Most of our government-owned or -supported housing stock is more than 30 years old and in need of significant maintenance and repairs. We inherited a \$1 billion maintenance and repair backlog from the previous government. We will ensure capital funding is targeted for repair and maintenance of existing units. Doing this helps us look after what we have and gives management bodies the ability to quickly turn units around to help address waiting lists.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the federal government has promised to invest in affordable housing, can the minister tell us if any of that money will be invested here in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to tell the member that our partnership with the federal government gives me much hope for the future of affordable housing. As the member points out, the new federal government has committed to invest in social infrastructure, which includes affordable housing. We have had discussions with our federal counterparts about these investments, and I expect that these discussions will lead to a definite plan in the near future. I look forward to working with my federal counterpart, and I am confident federal dollars will find their way towards Alberta's affordable housing.

The Speaker: The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Climate Change Strategy

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government created a climate leadership panel as a smokescreen. That panel clearly stated that a carbon tax must be made revenue neutral by offsetting reductions equal to the amount of the carbon tax. Instead, we have a scheme that will grow to cost Albertans an extra \$1,000 in taxes each year, financing government bloat on the backs of Alberta's poor, unemployed, fixed-income seniors, and others. Will this government do the compassionate thing and take a giant leap back from this harmful carbon tax?

The Speaker: The minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are many, many ways to describe the mischaracterization of what the Official Opposition is doing with these numbers, that are wrong. One could try wrong, one could try economizing with the truth, misrepresenting reality, grabbing numbers out of thin air. I think earlier today I called it intellectually lazy. It is also slovenly. It is also like throwing spaghetti at the wall. There's a noun to describe what they are doing; it starts with an L and ends with an E.

Mr. MacIntyre: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier, who is driven around in a Suburban, flippantly said that those who are feeling the acute impact of her government's costly carbon tax should just change their car and given that this NDP government doesn't seem

to realize that the lucky ones in our current economy have seen their hours rolled back, their wages decreased, never mind over 100,000 who have lost their jobs, when will this government realize just how damaging this carbon tax policy is and put an end to it before they destroy Alberta?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, when you answer the next question, I would like to draw attention to section 29 of the Standing Orders. Please adjust accordingly.

Ms Phillips: Understood, Mr. Speaker.

I would commend to the hon. member the Ecofiscal Commission Choose Wisely report. The analysis suggested that:

transferring between 3% and 9% of carbon revenues to lower-income households could fully offset this burden . . .

and that

. . . successful investments in innovation and emissions-reducing technology in Alberta would help improve the performance of the oil sands . . . Such improved performance would help to position it as a longer-term participant in global oil markets.

Mr. Speaker, this is about making our economy resilient for the future.

Mr. MacIntyre: Mr. Speaker, given that these hard-core socialists are using the climate panel's report as a smokescreen to destroy our resource economy, destroy our agricultural sector, impoverish our people through oppressive taxation, and force the redistribution of wealth into the hands of a bloated government, since the Premier says with her mouth that she repudiates the Leap Manifesto but given her actions against our job-creating industries and private-sector unions and farmers and our most vulnerable, we have to ask this question: how are her actions different from the Leap Manifesto?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, the characterizations of the hon. member are false. One of the reasons we know that is that the largest employers in the Leader of the Official Opposition's riding had this to say about it. For example, Shell Canada: "I firmly believe that Alberta's climate plan is a win for both the economy and the environment." CAPP: "Alberta's Climate Leadership Plan provides direction that will allow the oil and natural gas industry to grow." Cenovus: "I believe it will lead to Albertans and Canadians receiving full value for their oil and natural gas resources." CNRL: Alberta wins at today's announcement. Those are the validators for . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Investor Tax Credit

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, our caucus called for the introduction of a small business venture capital tax credit in our recent Engage document. In this we noted unconditional success in British Columbia, where every tax dollar generated almost \$2 of provincial tax revenue. However, my concern is that this government has injected a lack of foresight into an excellent formula, diluting chances of success. To the minister of economic development: why are you handicapping this program with a narrow focus on a handful of industries? Instead of choosing winners and losers, why not make it accessible to all of Alberta's struggling small businesses?

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, our government did listen to business and industry. I'm very proud to

have announced the investor tax credit, which will create thousands of jobs in our province, here in Alberta.

You know, it's quite rich coming from the third party. They had 40 years to do something like this and failed to whereas our government is committed. We have an Alberta jobs plan. There are a number of initiatives that we will be rolling out that will help Albertans get back to work and help create new sectors and build on our strengths, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that Albertans are getting dissed with this new Alberta disadvantage. Given that we heard this government campaign all through the election about how they would create 27,000 jobs with their job creation plan and given that they stuck with this method all through the fall only to scrap the plan without having created one job outside of the minister's office, one worries about the commitment that this government has to do their own job creation initiatives. To the minister: why are you delaying the rollout on this tax credit program until January 2017, and are you actually committed to following this program?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'm quite proud of the fact that our government throughout the fall went out and consulted with business and industry leaders, and they said to us: your initiative, the job creation incentive plan, is likely not going to incent new jobs. So they said, "You know, we have other suggestions on wiser, more prudent ways to help the economy move forward," and that's exactly what our budget is doing. We pivoted that program. We've dropped the small-business tax by 1 per cent, which is something that we've been talking about for many years. We've implemented it, and we now have an investment tax credit.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, congratulations on the one job.

Given that our caucus and the small- and medium-sized business owners across Alberta are now waiting for details on this program and given that this program does have the potential to be highly effective if utilized correctly, I would like some clarifications on a few details. To the Minister of Finance: what is the annual maximum tax credit for individual investors? What is the annual maximum limit for corporate investors? Can these tax credits be rolled forward if they are not used in their entirety during a particular tax year? Some details, please.

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question, a very good question. On our program that we announced today, throughout the summer and early fall we'll be consulting with stakeholders and industry leaders to ensure that we get the parameters of this program right. I can tell you, for example, that this program does exist in British Columbia. They have quite a low limit – I think it's around \$60,000 – that an individual can invest, and we've heard feedback from those that do business in that province that say that that cap is too low; it helps early start-ups, but it's not doing what it's meant to for medium-sized industries and businesses. That's why we will be . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Horizon School

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you about a place where hope, opportunity, and education meet. Horizon school is a jewel in the crown of the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and Chinook's Edge school division. The school is a provincial leader in educating students with special needs. Students at Horizon face a variety of challenges, including communication difficulties, physical disabilities, cognitive delays, and significant mental health challenges. The school provides world-class educational programming that is custom designed for the individual. Perhaps more important than leading the province in special-needs education is that it provides hope for families, an inclusive place for students to belong, and opportunities for the community. Over the past 24 months Horizon school has doubled in size and is bursting at the seams. I am so proud of the hard work of parents and teachers to continue to provide this critical school environment for so many students, as many students as possible.

As a province we have a responsibility to our most vulnerable, yet one of the largest stresses that parents face is considering what life will look like for their child after Horizon. Graduation for most students, Mr. Speaker, should be an exciting day, but for students of Horizon it comes with a new set of fears and challenges. Community organizations, parents, and other stakeholders are currently working to provide new inclusive opportunities for students that may include Horizon university or an educational space called the hub. It's my hope that the province will work closely with key stakeholders to be leaders in Canada to work to continue these educational opportunities.

To the parents of these precious individuals: keep up the incredible work you do. You make all of our lives richer.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table copies of a graph provided by Trevor Tombe, assistant professor of economics at the University of Calgary, entitled *Where Will Alberta's Carbon Tax Revenues Go?* It shows that 56 per cent of them will be spent on output-based results to large emitters.

The Speaker: Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the Alberta Party shadow budget 2016-17, entitled *A Better Way*. It balances in four years, accommodates for population growth, uses more conservative revenue forecasts than the government but still continues to build infrastructure, all without plunging Alberta into crippling levels of debt.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg your amusement for a minute. I have the pleasure to table five copies of the Brooks-Spruce Grove junior hockey finals. It is my pleasure to challenge the Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert to a friendly wager. I bet him \$100 to the winner's food bank and to wear the winning team's jersey in the Legislature at the first sitting after the final.

The Speaker: We'll have to talk about the jersey part.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to table five copies of the same schedule. Of course, the Spruce Grove Saints are obviously going to win because they started in St. Albert. How can two of the best communities lose?

The Speaker: The minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a document from the Asthma Society of Canada. The Asthma Society of Canada has chosen to give an award to this government based on the announcement of our coal-fired phase-out, indicating that they know "there is a direct link between the burning of coal and asthma exacerbations, hospital admissions, and untimely deaths, not to mention climate change." The Alberta government, in their words, "has responded to protect the health of all Albertans."

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of the Workers' Compensation Board agriculture sector information package for the 14 weeks ending April 9. This summary report contains updated information on employer operations, injury statistics, and the 154 accepted claims.

Thank you.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table this document issued today by Iron and Earth endorsing our government's support for training opportunities included in the Alberta jobs plan. Iron and Earth is an organization comprised of oil sands workers who want to transition into new jobs in the green-energy economy, and this is definitely an organization that has an impact in my riding. I applaud the vision of this organization, and we are honoured by this endorsement.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I believe there was a point of order that was drawn. The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today during question period during an answer that was being given by the Minister of Finance to a question, the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky shouted out: lies. Now, we should all know that that violates 23(h), (i), and (j) of the standing orders. As well, I'm looking at previous rulings that have been made by the chair in this Assembly. Since 2000 there have been 35 rulings from the chair with respect to the use of that word or words very much like it. That is unacceptable. I think that it is beneath the dignity of this House, and I would ask that the hon. member withdraw the remark and apologize to the House and to the minister.

2:50

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to rise. Certainly, Speakers in the past have ruled that this language is unparliamentary. I have a little bit of a hearing challenge today, so I'm not entirely sure if that word was used or not. Certainly, if that word was used – it sounds like it must have been – I would be happy

to withdraw it on behalf of my colleague and ensure he's aware of that being unparliamentary language. With that said, I understand that there have been times just in the past couple of weeks that that word has been used, particularly – well, it doesn't matter who. But it has been used. As you so rightly pointed out, sir, the minister of environment today was certainly leaning in that direction. Unless she was spelling the word "love," I would say that it was also inappropriate. For today I'm happy to withdraw and apologize on behalf of the member.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

Hon. Opposition House Leader, I'm pleased that you offered the apology.

I did not hear the remark, for the record. I did not personally hear it largely because, as I continue to remind you, it's that other words are being said. Trying to hear in here, it's the volume issue that continues to impair the dialogue in this place. I would urge both sides of the House to reconsider that as we move forward.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 204 Alberta Tourism Week Act

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to start off the debate on Bill 204, the Alberta Tourism Week Act. I want to first start off by thanking all of my colleagues, the people in my constituency, and supporters of this bill, who have encouraged me to think about this idea and help start a conversation and dialogue about creating a week dedicated to promoting tourism in our beautiful province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, This bill was born out of my conversations with stakeholders, with municipalities, and with many people who have told me that we need to find ways of promoting tourism in this province as a means of diversification. I've met with mayors and business and industry stakeholders in tourism across the province over the last several months, and the value of tourism and the value of these diversification opportunities has truly resonated with me. Time and time again I hear of the importance of supporting our tourism industry and promoting our tourism industry as an amazing opportunity to diversify our economy; not only that but so that we can be proud about our province because we have so much to be proud of here.

Mr. Speaker, our province has some of the most amazing man-made and natural heritage sites in the world. Some of my personal favourites include the pysanka in Vegreville, the perogy in Glendon, and, of course, the landing pad in Vulcan along with the *Star Trek* themed hotel. Whether it's digging for dinosaurs in the Canadian badlands or canoeing in paradise in the provincial parks, going ice-fishing with bannock in the bag, following the northern lights in Elk Island, driving the scenic highways in the breathtaking Rockies, enjoying international heritage in the August Heritage Festival, the Stampede in Calgary, Klondike days in Edmonton or still-standing grey and sagging pioneer homes and barns, mixed-wood forests, wind farms of Pincher Creek, and the centuries-old heritage of the indigenous peoples that we have here in Alberta, Alberta has it all. We are something to be proud of. We are something to be proud of that we should show off to the world.

Mr. Speaker, visits to these beautiful heritage sites is an \$8 billion industry employing over 127,000 people in this great province. Alberta is culturally and geographically diverse, a province with a multitude of opportunities for travel, tourism. The tourism industry contributes greatly to the economy, and the continued growth of this industry promotes that great economic diversification in Alberta. I think that a week-long celebration of tourism in Alberta will provide an opportunity for organizations, regions, cities, towns to collaborate and to promote the tourism that we want to show the world, to promote Alberta, and to promote this province.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I am bringing this legislation to the House today. The first week of June is traditionally Tourism Week in Canada. It's led by the Tourism Industry Association of Canada. This is a grassroots initiative that strives to bring attention to the economic opportunities available to Canada through travel and tourism and the public policy challenges preventing the sector from capitalizing on these opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, by embracing the vision of an Alberta tourism week, we will be contributing to the continued diversification of our economy and our shared goal to foster awareness amongst communities about the importance of tourism: its social, its cultural, and its economic value. The week would be an ideal opportunity to further showcase tourism in Alberta as a key contributor to the provincial economy, that helps to create jobs and encourages investments in all communities across our entire great province. It is a week that is already supported by the government of Canada and is celebrated in other provinces such as Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Newfoundland and Labrador. By creating an Alberta tourism week, it will allow our local stakeholders a specific outlet to promote our province and our local tourism activities.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that the government of Alberta, through Culture and Tourism, is proud to support the growth of tourism, especially by promoting our rural tourism activities. I am proud to be a part of and supporting a government that is working to diversify and strengthen this provincial economy. Tourism has been identified as an important contributor to diversifying Alberta's economy away from energy dependence and away from a roller coaster that takes away from our ability to provide services for Albertans everywhere.

As I've already stated, Mr. Speaker, currently tourism is an \$8 billion industry, and the over \$8 billion spent in Alberta by visitors supports 127,000 jobs and more than 19,000 businesses, including many small and family-owned businesses across the province. Rural tourism is a growing piece of Alberta's tourism industry and is already making that significant impact that we all strive to achieve. Having said that, there is always the potential for more growth, especially given our province's incredible natural and man-made attractions, events, and destinations. This bill will help not only tourism operators and organizations but municipal representatives in promoting Alberta's many tourist attractions. It will also help support the job creators such as our local eateries, our local coffee shops, our tour operators, hotels, and bed and breakfasts. Small businesses in all corners of our province will benefit.

Mr. Speaker, as rightly pointed out by the minister in the House earlier this month, I think tourism is a pipeline that brings people to invest in our economy. A week-long celebration of tourism in Alberta will provide an opportunity for businesses, organizations, regions, and municipalities to collaborate and to promote tourism across this province. I'm confident that this piece of legislation will grow this industry, making it an even bigger contributor to our economy to support that much-needed diversification.

Designating this tourism week in Alberta will contribute to setting a common vision in our province. It will encourage everyone

to join forces in collaborating and maximizing resources that celebrate the passion and commitment of Alberta's tourism industry while attracting even more visitors, even more investors and attracting those people so that we can broaden our horizons and we can show off the amazing province that we all love to call home. Mr. Speaker, it will help us to grow our visitor economy in this province to over a \$10 billion industry in 2020, which will allow us to become a diversified economy and allow us to support our entrepreneurs, support our local businesses, support our small companies and our employers.

This is why I'm very proud today to introduce Bill 204, so that we can move forward as a province and move forward to make sure that we are supporting our economy and supporting our communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm impressed by the scenic trip that you took us through the province of Alberta. You neglected to mention Medalta and the largest teepee in Medicine Hat.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

3:00

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I'd really like to thank the Member for Edmonton-South West for proposing a bill that does no harm. That's the first and most important rule of government, and I really hope that your colleagues will be able to follow suit and create one-sentence bills from now on that do no harm.

Let me say right at the outset that I will be in support of this bill. I think it's got a great intention. I do have to say, though, that as a feel-good bill the intention is somewhat called into question by the actions of the current government. A few days ago Albertans were hit like a truck with this government's horrendous deficit and carbon tax budget. Talk about slashing our credit rating and burning our future in orange flames. While the Alberta Council of Technologies recently released a report that stated that tourism in Alberta was our third most resilient industry, the budget isn't making things better; it's making them worse. So I do feel like the words of this bill are getting drowned out by the actions of the government.

Fortunately, with the low cost of the Canadian dollar people have been inclined to come to Alberta to see our gorgeous mountains and our beautiful plains and our peaceful lakes. Tragically, though, they're now full of dead fish, which may have to be cleaned up. I truly wish the environment minister had taken our advice and saved the fish in our lakes while she had the chance. Now that aspect of our tourism will be suffering as well.

There are other aspects of our tourism industry, though, that are thriving, or at least they were last year. This coming year will see an increase to the carbon tax, which will cancel out most of the benefits of a low dollar. The cost of fuel will increase thanks to the carbon tax. Alberta is a huge place. You can't just walk to most places. It's tough for most people, especially tourists, to walk from Jasper to Banff. You have to drive or bus or fly across this province to really enjoy its beauty. One of the major drivers of tourism to Alberta is direct flights from other countries. The carbon tax will increase the costs to those airlines. Will this discourage the flights available and then people from coming to Alberta? The carbon tax will make flights more expensive, reduce scheduled flights, and hurt tourism.

Promotion is great – I do agree – but realities are more sobering. Let's be realistic here: 95 per cent of our tourism dollar is generated by Albertans in this province. Our own tourists are going to be hit hard by restaurant prices increasing due to carbon tax and minimum

wage increases. The cost of food will increase because every aspect of harvesting the food and getting it to markets will be affected by the carbon tax and wage increases. Hotels and restaurants will become more expensive due to these increased prices. Tourism will be put off by the increased cost to their living and eating arrangements.

The low Canadian dollar and one week promoting Alberta will not be incentive enough to make up for the lost revenue our tourism industry will see these next few years. Promoting tourism is good. Helpful policy would be much, much better. Tourism in Alberta will be hurt by the damaging, risky ideological experiments our government is implementing.

I also question a little bit the member's choice of date for this tourism week. Last year we already celebrated the week. The same as this bill does, we promoted Canadian Tourism Week. As has been mentioned, Canadian Tourism Week does happen the first week of June. So why choose the same date again? Is it to compound the value? Is it to promote Alberta? Will this government, then, not acknowledge Canadian Tourism Week in place of Alberta tourism week? Will that encourage more or less tourism? We all agree that there's a need to promote tourism, but the real question is: has the Tourism Industry Association of Canada or the Tourism Industry Association of Alberta actually been consulted about this choice of time? I mean, they know their needs more than anyone else. Have they had their input specifically on that? Alberta is special. Should it be hidden underneath Canadian Tourism Week? Maybe it's a benefit; maybe it's not. Alberta should probably promote its own week and not be overshadowed by the entire country.

Two weeks of promoting Alberta might be better than one, the first promoting Canada, the second promoting Alberta alone. We could have chosen, say, for instance, the first week of December or Alberta's birthday and invited the world to celebrate a birthday party with us by encouraging them to visit our province. We could have chosen a week during July or August, when kids are actually out of school and people take their vacations. Ninety-five per cent of Alberta's tourism is local. People would be encouraged to spend the entire week here in Alberta during our warmest months, when they can visit with their children.

Consulting is the issue, and I think that with this overlap with Canadian Tourism Week, the whole issue stems back to the endless problem of this government not actually consulting with industry. The government didn't consult on Bill 6, didn't consult on the failed job-creation plan, didn't consult on Bill 203. Have they consulted anyone in the industry before creating this bill? There are lots and lots of stakeholders that have an interest in this bill: the Hotel & Lodging Association, sport tourism, Seniors Games, Alberta Sport Connection, and dozens and dozens of other industry players. They all would have had valuable input into this bill. Did the stakeholders want the member to promote Alberta during a week that would be overshadowed by Canadian Tourism Week? Has he consulted with them?

I also have a few questions regarding the cost that this bill will add to Tourism's budget. How will Alberta tourism week be promoted by the government? How much will it cost to advertise Alberta tourism week? Has the member actually even consulted with the minister to ensure that they will be able to afford to promote Alberta during this week? The Tourism budget is, I respectfully acknowledge, down in a difficult time, where the government is trying to find cost savings. Will the ministry be able to fund this, or even should it? The cost is completely unknown. How are we to know what the cost will actually be? Could there be better delivery channels for this initiative? The Tourism Industry

Association of Canada actually delivers the Canadian one. Why not the Tourism Industry Association of Alberta? Questions to be asked.

Of course, tourism is important in our province. I am in support of tourism, and like every other industry, it's important that we support tourism and ensure that it continues to create jobs in Alberta. Personally, I've spent weeks and weeks canoeing the many rivers and lakes of Alberta. That's my form of tourism. If there's one thing I know, it's that Alberta is a beautiful place, and it deserves to be promoted, so I will be supporting the bill.

Furthermore, my riding of Lacombe-Ponoka has a great deal of tourism in it and would benefit from tourism in Alberta being promoted. We have many museums that would benefit. There's a corn maze, berry-picking farms, and beef and dairy farms that allow visitation, open to the public. During the week we have all kinds of festivals: Lacombe Days, the Ponoka Stampede. By this bill the promotion of Alberta tourism in general would be beneficial for those festivals.

I'm glad that the Member for Edmonton-South West believes that the promotion of Alberta tourism is important. I just wish that he would have consulted with industry specifically on it: on the date, worked out some of the costs, questioned a little more carefully who should actually take the lead on this. But it is what it is. I encourage all the members to vote in support of Bill 204 and support tourism in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to speak in support of the proposed Bill 204, acknowledging a provincial tourism week. I wish to impress upon the House that Bill 204 gives rise to our ability to celebrate and engage our communities with each other, Canada, and the world.

Mr. Speaker, tourism helps the economy immensely. It is another aspect of diversification that stimulates the economy while promoting municipal, provincial, and stakeholder conversations. What more than proud Albertans are our constituents? Alberta is unique and, as such, has great capacity to showcase the beautiful landscape that makes our communities. The raw glory that surrounds us makes Bill 204 a tremendous opportunity.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, I am the MLA for Red Deer-North. Red Deer is the third-largest city in Alberta and has many opportunities to celebrate as well as capitalize on Alberta tourism week. Nestled in the hub of central Alberta, Red Deer has numerous opportunities to embrace a celebration of itself as a central component to our great province.

My city has just over 100,000 citizens, who are fortunate to enjoy the breadth of what Alberta has to offer. On a clear day we can gaze to the west to glimpse the splendour that is our mountains. Within the boundaries of Red Deer municipally, however, is an excess of natural beauty. Red Deer is committed to promoting and enhancing a healthy lifestyle. With more than 100 kilometres of easily accessible trails inside the city, we have championed the connections between Red Deerians and nature. Amongst the trails are variable landscapes supporting the beauty of the Red Deer River and its accompanying wooded areas.

If you follow the right trail, it will lead you to our remarkable Kerry Wood nature centre, a beautiful, nature-based playground that encourages those who visit to learn more about the area's wildlife, environment, extensive history, and interpretation centre. It is a testament to the beauty that our central Alberta gem has to

offer. Its versatility allows 85,000 annual visitors to enjoy its exhibits, programs, tours, and heritage regardless of age.

Mr. Speaker, we also have an extensive paved trail system that is enjoyed by joggers, walkers, and cyclists and is kept clear all year round. Some of these trails connect to our outdoor gym facilities. On a beautiful day you can see constituents strive for excellence as each contains 12 double fitness machines. All outdoor gyms have benches, playgrounds, and picnic areas that connect to our widespread trail systems.

Some trails lead to our beautiful Bower Ponds, a classic setting where Albertans can rent a kayak, canoe, or paddleboat if they don't have one of their own. Nestled in the beautiful north end of our great city, Bower Ponds hosts our Canada Day fireworks every year. An outdoor stage gives opportunity for entertainment to be enjoyed in the beauty that is Red Deer. Overlooked by the historical Cronquist House, a Victorian farmhouse, Bower Ponds is steeped in history.

Mr. Speaker, I can speak to so many aspects of Red Deer that would benefit immensely from the proposed Bill 204. All of our constituencies make up the beautiful province of Alberta. What I wish to touch upon, however, is our ability to showcase the natural beauty, historical sites, and tourist attractions which promote the vitality of our Albertans.

Job development is key to our government right now, and this engages sound governance through economic development. In Red Deer our government has committed to supporting the expansion of our airport, and that aligns with Bill 204 as we become a destination that is accessible. As the future home of the 2019 Canada Winter Games, Red Deer has much to gain from the proposed Bill 204. Why come to Red Deer? We are a destination and a point of departure. We are central to this great province and, as such, have much to share with the rest of Alberta, Canada, and the world.

Mr. Speaker and fellow members, let us remember that we are currently amidst economic challenges. Bill 204 is not just a fantastic opportunity to capitalize on the greatness of our province, but it is truly a remarkable occasion to engage our Albertans positively. Positivity is a very important element to Bill 204. It is the very essence of why we should showcase individually the hidden treasures that our constituencies have in a week that celebrates our great province. It engages us to be proud and to truly appreciate Alberta as a beautiful province with much to share with everyone.

Mr. Speaker, I support Bill 204, the Alberta Tourism Week Act, and encourage all of our members to support this bill as well. Thank you.

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

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm absolutely delighted to speak in support of Bill 204, the Alberta Tourism Week Act. I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-South West for proposing this bill, and I'd like to thank him very much, indeed, you know.

The constituency of Banff-Cochrane is arguably one of the most delightful constituencies in the entire province, I think. We attract tourists from all around the world, who come to see our mountains, our agricultural landscapes, our forested areas, enjoy all sorts of activities in Banff-Cochrane. But I know that this bill itself isn't just about Banff-Cochrane; it's about the entire province, and I'm absolutely delighted to be showcasing Alberta in this way.

Just before I get started here, I'd like to respond to a question that the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka brought up earlier about who was engaged in the consultations and who did we speak to regarding this. I know that the Member for Edmonton-South West had spoken to various mayors, people in Travel Alberta, people working in the

industry such as Brewster, a very well-known travel company, and, of course, many others. I myself have spoken to, actually, the award-winning CEO of Canmore Business and Tourism. He's won an award for an event that I was fortunate to attend just this past week, which I'll speak a little more on later. Absolutely, the people that I've spoken to that are very interested in the tourism industry, especially in my riding, were extremely supportive of this and especially the first week of June.

One of the reasons for that was that in Canmore and Banff during the summertime their rooms are full, and they actually don't need to promote tourism because they've got almost too many people to begin with in those times of year. So they said that the beginning of June was a very good time because, you know, their hotel rooms aren't full. It's a good time to get out in the summer. There are wildflowers, lots of things to do outside, so early June was an excellent time according to them. So that's why I'm standing in support of this.

You know, tourism week would give the industry even further opportunities to collaborate to promote tourism in Alberta. I know that the tourism industry is already very collaborative, that they work together. I understand there used to be a bit of an adversarial relationship sometimes between communities. For example, Canmore and Banff would often sort of fight each other for tourists, but they've come to a better understanding of how to work together in a collaborative fashion to support each other. It's not about competing for tourists in general. They just want to bring people to the region, so having a province-wide collaboration would be absolutely positive for the tourism industry.

It's a way that we can work together and maximize our return on investment, and, you know, promoting Alberta and sort of concentrating it, perhaps, around one week as a group effort is a way for us to make better use of our advertising dollars, I think. It's also a great opportunity to acknowledge Alberta's hard-working tourism industry. We can attract even more visitors and investors around the province.

I'd like to just talk about a couple of attractions that we have in Alberta. I know the Member for Edmonton-South West mentioned a few earlier. I think that promoting tourism in Alberta also gives us a great opportunity to tell the story of Alberta to the rest of the world, and we have a great story to tell here.

Our climate leadership plan is turning heads around the world. People are looking to Alberta and saying: they're finally taking climate change seriously. So, you know, people around the world are saying: hey, I want to go and see what they're doing there; like, what is going on in Alberta, and what is this great climate leadership plan that they've come up with? This is groundbreaking stuff, and it's certainly attracting a lot of attention.

One of the ways that that's attracting attention is through some World Cup events. In the Canmore Nordic Centre just recently we had a World Cup of cross-country skiing and a World Cup of biathlon. There were millions and millions of television viewers watching these events live on TV. A lot of the viewers are concentrated in Europe and Asia. Showcasing Alberta in such a way, in Canmore we had beautiful bluebird skies, you know, beautiful white snow, and incredible athletes just showing off their talents. People from across the world are seeing Alberta in this kind of light, and they're hearing about our climate change plan, and they say: I want to go and visit that place; that place looks pretty awesome.

3:20

Another part of the story that we can tell through promoting tourism is through the Fort McMurray Oil Sands Discovery Centre. This is, you know, an excellent facility up near Fort McMurray. It

tells the story of our incredible energy sector in the province and all that we have to be thankful for, for the wealth that it's generated for our province and the jobs it creates.

We have stories in the energy sector that go back even further; for example, in Drumheller the Atlas coal mine. I believe they're doing some refurbishments and some community fundraising for refurbishing some of their infrastructure there. This tells the story of Alberta's coal mining past. If you haven't been there, I'd really encourage you to go to the Atlas mines. They have a working model of a train. You know, it's an incredible site to see. You can actually go in the old tippie and everything like that. It's marvellous.

Similar coal mining stories would be found in the Frank Slide in the Crownsnest Pass. It's a tragic event, obviously, that happened, but it has to do with our mining history and how resilient Albertans are, that we can go through disasters like this and, you know, still pull together and support one another.

We're fortunate here in Alberta to have Wood Buffalo national park. It's actually Canada's largest national park. It's also one of the biggest national parks in the world. This is a way for us to preserve our natural landscapes, work towards our conservation targets that have been set out in some respects for looking at interconnected spaces and protected spaces.

Another great attraction is the Royal Tyrrell Museum. This tells the story of Alberta's geologic past. We've got fossils and dinosaurs that people come from around the world to see in the Royal Tyrrell Museum and do research right there in Drumheller.

Of course, you know, I have to mention some of the amazing attractions in Banff-Cochrane. In Bragg Creek, my hometown, they have festivals throughout the year at various times, Bragg Creek Days, where they've got parades, incredible local vendors that are promoting some of the talents of Bragg Creek residents.

The charming town of Cochrane has MacKay's ice cream. Now, who here hasn't been to MacKay's ice cream? [interjections] So, you know, there you go. It's a charming little downtown. They've tried to maintain that real western feel in the architecture of their buildings. They have a lot of independent shops downtown. It's a great place to walk around with your family.

The village of Waiparous, just sort of to the west of Cochrane, has incredible off-highway vehicle trails for people to take their trucks and ATVs and whatnot on. This is another way that we can tell the story of Alberta and get people to come and experience what it's like in the forests of Alberta. You know, you can get on your ATV and go for a quick drive and see some incredible natural landscapes.

Of course, I have to talk about Ghost Lake. The Ghost Lake reservoir is another wonderful natural asset, of course, a man-made asset. It provides incredible recreation opportunities to people in the Calgary region. It's one of our best medium-sized reservoir water bodies where people can go water-skiing and sailing, that kind of thing.

There's the Stoney Nakoda Resort & Casino just at the doorstep to Kananaskis country. It's an incredible facility. The First Nation there is looking at that as an economic development opportunity for the nation. They've been quite successful. I understand that even during the economic downturn they're still doing quite well, and that's great news to hear. I know they're looking at possible expansion around the casino in terms of having an RV park and a gas station, coffee shop, and whatnot.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today on Bill 204. It's enjoyable every once in a while when all

members of the Assembly can find some agreement to latch onto, and certainly the intent of Bill 204 is positive. It has the potential to strengthen an industry that is already thriving.

I think what's important is that we all just take a moment to breathe because in this province it's very easy – you need to remember to breathe because when you don't, you can miss some incredible opportunities. Certainly, as we look across and around the province, we have a province that, in fact, does take your breath away, Mr. Speaker, and it is a province to be celebrated. From all around the world people come. People come to see this great land that we've been fortunate and blessed enough to call home, and it's not a responsibility or a blessing that we should take lightly because there are so many others who would love to be here, would love to be in this great province that we all call home. So when we have a chance to do things that allow us to share our community with others, I say that those are the types of things that need to be supported, and certainly tourism week has the opportunity to do that.

One of the potential challenges here, Mr. Speaker, though, is that if we get tied up or spend more focus and energy on just one week, it may divert some of our attention away from the rest of the year. I know that the good people at Travel Alberta have certainly done some great work in the past. That doesn't mean that Travel Alberta hasn't been challenge free, but they do some incredible work. So we need to make sure that we're not adding to the mix that would detract from the wonderful things that take place the rest of the year. Now, it's quite possible that inside the confines of Travel Alberta they'll have the capacity to move the Alberta tourism week forward, but I think that it's important that as we pass legislation, we do ensure that we're not passing on undue burden, that the return may or may not be there.

Now, in this case I certainly hope that it is there because I think what can happen is to expand that industry. While we are at a time where many people are talking about diversifying the economy, one of the things that the government ought to do is – and I recognize that this isn't a piece of government legislation. Generally speaking, one thing that we as legislators should do is look at our strengths and focus some of our time and attention on those strengths. I think of things like the agriculture and forestry sector, our number two industry. I believe that our number three industry is in tourism, so there is a real opportunity to work to diversify that economy, to take advantage of some of the things that are going on in the marketplace when it comes to the low Canadian dollar and encouraging our American friends to come and experience all that Alberta has to offer. We have an incredible place to share, and we ought to do that with as many people as we can from all around the globe and certainly from all across the country.

Now, I would be remiss if I didn't just mention that while the Member for Banff-Cochrane does a fine job of defending his constituency, I think we should all agree that the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills is outstanding and, in fact, has so many great things to offer people from corner to corner and coast to coast and right around the world, whether it's our honey production or our mead production or the incredible number of innovative agrifood businesses that we have, that are so interesting that people actually come from all around the world to tour them, whether it's the postsecondary institutions that bring people to our province or the incredible number of day trips that can take place right in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills for people to come and visit.

3:30

I think that it is a nice opportunity for us to join together and to support a piece of legislation like this. But I think it's important that

we do everything we can as legislators to support tourism right across the province all year round as we focus on ways to create environments and to strengthen industries that do so much for this province.

I'm pleased to support Bill 204, and I look forward to the rest of the debate and to seeing this bill proceed through the legislative process.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 204, the Alberta Tourism Week Act. I would like to commend the Member for Edmonton-South West for proposing this idea as a way to promote the many tourist attractions that we have here in Alberta and, in doing so, to support small businesses, who are the job creators in the province and help to diversify our economy.

Now, our province has some of the most amazing man-made and natural heritage, as you've heard from the speakers before me. However, today I wanted to speak about the world-class sporting events that we host and that bring tourists from Alberta, Canada, and the world to our communities. As this Assembly knows, myself and the Member for Edmonton-Centre are a bit fanatic about cycling. I am proud that the world is starting to recognize our wonderful roads and scenery, that provide for fantastic amateur and professional events. For example, for the last 20 years the Tour de l'Alberta has been held on the last day of the Tour de France. For 20 years this amateur tour, with distances from 50 kilometres to 185 kilometres and over 1,400 riders, has showcased the French communities outside of Edmonton such as Morinville, Legal, Bon Accord, and Gibbons.

For the first time this year the tour will start in another great francophone community, the community of Beaumont, and meander through Leduc county and visit Strathcona county. I would like to invite all of you on July 24 to join myself and, hopefully, the Member for Leduc-Beaumont in taking part in this cycling ride. There is no better way to discover rural areas than by cycling through them and discovering the joys of the yellow canola fields, the cows and the horses that follow your bike, and the occasional moose, fox, or coyote watching you.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Last Friday a professional Tour of Alberta was announced for 2016. This professional tour, that has 120 riders from all over the world, will start off in Lethbridge and end up in Edmonton. Last year the tour began in Grande Prairie, went to Jasper, and brought the amazing scenery of one of the national parks to millions and millions of world-wide cycling fans. I know that in Canada we're more into hockey than cycling, but – believe me – cycling is huge in Europe and many other parts of the world. While the peloton, which is the technical name for the group of cyclists, did not have an encounter with a black bear for a perfect tourist photo shoot last year, I can say that in the second year, while the peloton was going through Strathcona county, it was followed for a while by a huge moose. This was such an incredible way to demonstrate what Alberta has to offer to Europeans and others.

The Tour of Alberta is very unique as it is the only professional cycling race in Canada apart from one in Quebec. This event has for the last three years brought tourists, cycling teams, and fans from all around the world who have the opportunity to discover our wonderful province and, of course, spend tourist dollars here.

Another event is the Birkebeiner, which is held every year in Cooking Lake-Blackfoot provincial park in Strathcona county. This is the premier event for cross-country skiers. This event, with a

variety of distances, is only one of three held outside of Europe. Many participants come to our region from across Canada and Europe. This event is geared to both professional and amateur racers and also to people like myself who ski recreationally. I think that in past years they've had about 1,200 cross-country skiers who have skied the race. There are also miniraces for families, and it's been my pleasure to volunteer to sweep these races, knowing that the five-year-old who participates in this race may become the professional racer who wins medals for Canada in the future.

In my own riding of Sherwood Park we have hosted a variety of national sporting events that bring visitors and their tourist dollars to the community. This year we hosted the Olympic wrestling trials, with the winners going to Rio de Janeiro to represent Canada, and in 2014 we hosted the Canada 55-plus Games, which saw over 2,000 athletes compete furiously for medals and the pride of their province. If you've never seen a 55-plus athlete compete for their province, you know, it's just incredible how dedicated you are to actually winning the older you get. I have to say that when you have 2,000 athletes who are 55-plus who come to your community to participate in something, you know that the hotels and the restaurants and so on are very happy with that.

At the end of April my riding is hosting another world-class event. It is the Grand Slam of Curling. While I look forward to watching the curling and cheering for the Albertan teams, I also know how important this event will be in my riding of Sherwood Park, especially to the hospitality industry, that has lost a lot of its room usage due to the downturn in the oil and gas sector.

While I have no agritourism businesses in my own riding, I am very aware of how important this type of tourist attraction is to rural Alberta. Yesterday I visited a local agritourism business, Prairie Farms, located near Bon Accord. This business contributes to the local economy through employing many local residents and helps families understand how food grows and hosts and supports a sustainable-food feast. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, who was one of the promoters of the agritourism business when he was in cabinet. I see tourism week as an opportunity to promote the diversity of products grown in Alberta, be it the bison, the saskatoon berries, elk, rhubarb and raspberry wines, and, especially, the chefs and the restaurants that promote world-class meals using these products.

Madam Speaker, while some of us see Alberta as a place of our national parks and wonderful sceneries, I see Alberta and the promotion of tourism as promoting cycling and triathlon events and wrestling events and supporting our hospitality industry. I would once again like to thank the member for having put this bill to suggest that we have a tourism week.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I've had a request to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests. I will need unanimous consent, so I'll ask one question: is anyone opposed to reverting to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you a group of grade 6 students that have come for a visit from Captain Nichola Goddard middle school in the riding of Calgary-Northern Hills. They are accompanied by

their teachers, Lindsay Gorday, Darren Grant, and Lindsay Wolkowski, and three parents as well. You'll also notice that many are wearing the purple sweaters for the Captain Nichola Goddard sports team, the Phoenix. I ask you all to please stand while my colleagues give you and your group the traditional warm welcome of this Legislature.

The Deputy Speaker: Welcome.

**3:40 Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 204
Alberta Tourism Week Act
(continued)**

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills, you happen to be next on my list.

Mr. Kleinstuber: Well, thank you. Amazing how that worked here. Okay.

Madam Speaker, I rise today to discuss thoughts on private member's Bill 204, the Alberta Tourism Week Act. As a few of you might know, I've been an airline employee for the last two decades, and in my spare time I packed as much leisure travel as I possibly could into those years. I have frequented many popular tourist destinations and hot spots. Other times I have discovered some that were off the beaten track. Some of these little vacation gems are some of my favourite trips.

Madam Speaker, each year travellers come to Alberta to visit our parks, visit family and friends, and check out the outstanding landscape this province has to offer. Tourism helps to diversify the economy and creates lots of jobs and encourages development investment in communities all across Alberta.

Madam Speaker, I represent an electoral district on the northern edge of Calgary. We're well known for our hills, our trail systems, and, of course, our hospitality sector. However, many of my constituents are employed in the tourism industry through the neighbouring airport and all the industries related to its operation such as air traffic control, border services, ground services, and in-flight services, to name a few. More air traffic and flight arrivals mean that more people will have employment opportunities in tourism-related industries.

Calgary Airport Authority recently opened its fourth runway, in 2014. The runway is 4.2 kilometres long and 600 metres wide and is the longest runway in Canada. Needless to say, Calgary has clearly laid out the asphalt welcome mat to the world. With the expansion efforts at Calgary airport, airlines have taken notice. Beginning June 30 of this year, Hainan Airlines announced that it will offer direct service between Beijing and Calgary. The airline will start with three flights a week and will add an additional flight later in the year. Stephan Poirier, the chief commercial officer of Calgary Airport Authority, was quoted as saying that the new service would bring an estimated 600 jobs and contribute to an annual economic benefit of \$75 million to the Calgary region.

New global markets are taking an interest in this province's abundance of travel experiences, and these efforts should be supported as much as possible. As the Member for Edmonton-South West mentioned earlier, tourism in Alberta is currently an \$8 billion a year industry, with over \$8 billion spent by visitors in Alberta annually. More than 127,000 jobs and more than 19,000 businesses, including many small and family-owned businesses, were supported across the province.

Madam Speaker, Tourism Week in Canada is lead by the tourism association of Canada. This generally commences annually on the first week of June. Many other provinces, such as Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, and British Columbia, already have a tourism week. In the case of Saskatchewan and possibly others it coincides with Canada Tourism Week. By creating an Alberta tourism week, local stakeholders could have access to a specific outlet to promote our province and add to our local tourism activities. As mentioned earlier, this could complement the efforts of the government of Canada as well.

Madam Speaker, it might surprise you to know that I grew up in a small town, Wellington, Ontario, with a population of about 1,200 people in the community of Prince Edward county. Among the many tourist attractions that the county offered, we had Sandbanks provincial park, a famous beach known to many in Ontario and Quebec. As we grew up, we were educated in the school system and taught about the ecosystems and the history and the touristic opportunities that came with living so close to such a wonderful landmark. As well, some of the best summer jobs for high school students were at the provincial parks.

Later in life I became a ski instructor in Zell am Ziller, Austria, and there are many parts of the program to becoming a ski instructor. First, was that I physically trained to ski. The course was intense, especially with jet lag. There was also an academic piece to the training as part of the program explained the theory of positions and ski movements as well as emergency procedures such as injuries and what to do in the case of an avalanche. Finally, there was a section on tourism and hospitality. For the duration of the ski season I became a host for the tourism board of Austria. The point I'm making here, though, through both of these examples is that everyone is involved in tourism, whether you grow up and live beside a tourist attraction or become employed in the industry directly.

Tourism week could also have a component to it that recognizes and brings awareness to all people involved in the tourism sector. Similar to Saskatchewan Tourism Week, this could be done by appreciating the efforts of many of the communities that organize special activities. This could also be an opportunity to educate students on the value of landmarks in the communities that they live in. Finally, it could educate and reward those that work on the front lines and give such a memorable experience to our visitors. I think that a week-long celebration of tourism in Alberta would provide an opportunity for organizations, towns, and cities to collaborate and promote tourism in the province.

Madam Speaker, by embracing the vision of an Alberta tourism week, we are contributing to the continued diversification of our economy and our shared goals, to foster awareness amongst communities about the importance of tourism and its social, cultural, or economic value. I believe that Bill 204 will not only help the tourism operators and organizations and municipal representatives in promoting the many tourist attractions but also support job creators such as local restaurants, coffee shops, tour operators, hotels, bed and breakfasts, and other small businesses throughout this province.

I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-South West for his efforts in bringing this idea forward. I'd be happy to support this bill in second reading, and I look forward to further debate on this topic.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize next the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a valuable topic that we have here today. In my previous iteration of my life in the Chamber I, too, was a critic for tourism and the development of it in the province, and I came to know and learn of the value that it brings to the province. Coming from a sparse rural area and, even so, the diverse constituency of Drumheller-Stettler, I've come to know the value of this benefit to our constituency and indeed to our province.

Madam Speaker, in Drumheller-Stettler and indeed in Drumheller there have actually been many movies made with the extreme terrain that the badlands provide. As a result of that, there are a group of municipalities that have joined together to create what's known as the Canadian Badlands tourism association, and actually, as we speak, they're meeting in Drumheller right now at their annual general meeting. It's a good diversification for the area. Out where I live, in the openness of the prairie, there are many ways that we need to diversify our economy.

One of the things that I brought forward to the minister – and the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster knows some of my questioning to him in the budget estimates – was as to the delivery model of some 50-plus million dollars in this province. The delivery model of this province primarily and generally is based on a government form of assistance, and I've come to learn and know that in many other jurisdictions that is not necessarily the case. Certainly, there are other and variable methods of bringing tourism forward, but wholly the licence of tourism in Alberta is through a government delivery model, and sometimes that may not necessarily allow for all the options that are available.

If I could just give people some idea of some of the things that go on in the province. The Royal Tyrrell Museum in Drumheller is only one of three museums, not unlike the Royal Alberta Museum and the Glenbow Museum in Calgary although those museums are not and do not have the interactive model of the Tyrrell museum. Of the three brothers or three family members of those museums, the Tyrrell museum, Madam Speaker, is always the museum that makes the most money. They actually pool all their resource revenues together, and the Tyrrell museum happens to be for whatever reason – and I believe it to be the interactive model – the rich cousin that supports the other two. Now, is that necessarily the way that it should be done? It seems to be the government's idea that that's the case.

3:50

But 15 miles away from where I live is the potentiality, Madam Speaker, of an Indian artifact find and dig known as the Bodo archaeological site. The scientist who has done some of the exploration at this site says that it has and may have as much significance as Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump. Now, this facility is sitting there languishing because of the lack of government involvement and, with our financial economic implications that we have now, probably will, not unlike the reserves of artifacts in the back of the Tyrrell museum, have some 25 to 50 years' worth of artifacts that are simply going to be collecting more dust. If there was some interactive way that a philanthropic organization could allow the development of these artifacts and finds to come forward beyond government regulation, there could be economic development come forward in many diverse locations, including not necessarily in my constituency but in Battle River-Wainwright. That is what it's called. I live right on the boundary, on the border.

I want to implore and make it known to other members of the Chamber that there are other delivery models available and possibilities to come forward for these types of developments that do not necessarily always need or require government funding but could have a change of government policy to allow these

developments to come forward in a way that would increase the revenues that come forward from that.

That's primarily one of the reasons why I wanted to make my comments known. To the Member for Banff-Cochrane: I know that he has spectacular vistas, but I also believe that we have spectacular vistas in the prairie scenery, in prairie landscapes.

Mr. Schmidt: Those mountains don't block your view.

Mr. Strankman: Well, on the comments about blocking your view, I'd just like to relate a story of an aviation friend of mine who was flying to Brooks one day and happened to spot upon the horizon what he perceived to be a dinosaur. It was early in the morning. He was making a flight down there to get his aircraft inspected. As he got closer, Madam Speaker, and after some 15 minutes of peering over the dashboard of his aircraft, he realized that actually what was going on was that a balloon was being brought to life for a photo opportunity. Ladies and gentlemen, that photo opportunity – my friend was the first person to see it – actually became a cover photo shoot in *National Geographic* magazine. As he circled the thing many times, the gentlemen who were also airborne in a helicopter and hoping to get the photo radioed him and told him to move on because he was goofing up the photo opportunity.

I just wanted to let you know, Madam Speaker and other members of the House, that there are other delivery models available for tourism in the province, and we need to expand them. The idea of bringing forward more tourism is a diversification model that's renewable, sustainable, generally green friendly except when it comes to the requirement, the need for those horrible oil-laden bike paths that use asphalt for their delivery. We have many other ways to create revenue in the province.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Starke: Madam Speaker, thank you so much. I'd like to first of all start by commending the Member for Edmonton-South West for this bill and especially commending his enthusiasm for tourism. Through members' statements and questions to the minister involved, he has shown that tourism is something that he cares deeply about, and I appreciate that. I think it's good.

In addition, Madam Speaker, at least in the time that I've served, this is the first time that here in the Chamber we've had two hours to talk about tourism. As a former minister of tourism, parks, and recreation that does my heart a great deal of good.

Madam Speaker, I'll tell you the reason why it's easy to be positive about tourism. As a former minister I can tell you that I quite freely confided to my colleagues in cabinet and my colleagues across the nation that being tourism minister is the best job ever. It's the best job ever, and being tourism minister in the province of Alberta is the best job ever because we have in this province something that we can all be tremendously proud of.

One of the reasons that we're all so passionate about tourism and why, I would suggest, all 87 of us could stand up today and speak to this bill is that unlike a lot of our other industries, that may happen in only certain parts of the province, tourism happens everywhere. In all 87 constituencies across our province there is something to offer visitors. Now, those visitors may come from nearby, they may come from across the province or across the country, or indeed those visitors may come from around the world. Indeed, the tourism industry in Canada, I would suggest, was largely born right here in Alberta when William Cornelius Van Horne said on the completion of the CPR that since we can't export the scenery, we'll have to import the tourists. It was that vision, Madam Speaker, that really got the tourism industry going.

I'd like to again thank the Member for Edmonton-South West. I'll have to confess that I was a little bit cynical when I first saw this bill. I'll be supporting the bill, but to the member: don't take any offence to this, but in designating a specific week to promote tourism in Alberta, I question just how much good that will actually do. I don't think it will do any harm, and it might do some good, but I really don't know that it will have the effects because, indeed, tourism is something we really should be promoting in this province 52 weeks of the year, not just one week in June.

Beyond that, Madam Speaker, tourism is something that, quite frankly, our tourism industry is trying to expand outside of traditional times of the year. Our tourism industry is very, very busy in June, July, August, and into September. It's also quite busy, especially in areas where there are winter resorts, in January, February, and March. But it's the shoulder seasons – it's April, May, right around this time of year, and October, November – where tourism actually slows down a fair bit. One of the big challenges of tourism is its cyclical nature. It goes up and it goes down, yet you need to have skilled staff, skilled workers in the industry, and because of that variability in demand, one of the things that the tourism industry has worked very hard on is developing ways to make that demand more consistent.

Now, I said that there are a lot of things to be proud of in our province in the tourism industry, and there certainly are. There are 17 UNESCO world heritage sites in Canada. Fully five of them are right here in the province of Alberta. One of the things that really was a concern to me when I was tourism minister was that not very many Albertans had visited all five, and not even very many Albertans could even name all five. So for the edification of the folks here, the five Alberta UNESCO world heritage sites are Wood Buffalo national park; the Rocky Mountain national parks, Jasper and Banff; the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park; Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump; and Dinosaur provincial park, near Brooks. In addition to that, we have a sixth site that is being considered, which I hope is named soon – there's been a tremendous amount of work done on this by Alberta parks officials – and that's the Writing-on-Stone provincial park, Áísínai'pi provincial park, in the very deep south of Alberta. If you've never been there, I will tell you that you have to go. It is absolutely breathtaking.

Tourism is something that happens everywhere, and tourism is something that we can agree on, not just for its economic benefit. The economic benefit is wonderful – as the member said, \$8 billion, with 127,000 people employed – but the other number is really important, 19,000 businesses. If you do the math, that's roughly six people per business, so it truly is something that is delivered by small businesses right across this province. For every Banff Springs hotel or Hotel Macdonald, that employs hundreds of people, you have countless businesses that are one or two or maybe three people, and they're proud of the story they tell.

The other thing that I love about tourism is that tourism, in my view, is one of the most effective ways – and it's been said – to tell Alberta's story, and we tell that story proudly to other Albertans, to people from across Canada, and indeed to people around the world.

One of the things we sometimes talk about is establishing social licence. What are the ways to establish social licence so that we can continue on with the various things that we try to do in Alberta? Well, one of the most effective ways, in my view, of establishing social licence is by creating ambassadors and by creating people who love this province because they visited here. I will tell you from having hosted many, many international visitors to Alberta that one of the most effective ways is to have them come here for a visit. Not only does it create ambassadors; it creates investors. There are a lot of people who have invested in Alberta whose first

encounter with the province of Alberta was on a visit, and they found the province beautiful. They found the province an incredible place to have an opportunity for future investment, and as a result they invested.

4:00

Well, let me turn my attention now to, specifically, tourism week. Tourism week, if it was implemented, would indeed piggyback onto the Tourism Industry Association of Canada's Tourism Week, which has been practised in this country for the last five or so years. When I spoke to the chair of TIAC, she wasn't entirely sure how long it had been going on. What is interesting to me is that Tourism Week in Canada was brought in in response to a federal government cut to tourism funding, and it was to let the federal government know just how important tourism is to their industry. I can't help but think that there's a certain level of irony there because the hon. member wants to bring in tourism week in Alberta three days after the provincial budget cuts tourism funding by more than 10 per cent.

The reason that's important is that tourism is self-funding in this province. I want to say that again. It's self-funding. Not a nickel of taxpayer dollars goes into tourism. Tourism is completely funded by the funds that are collected through the tourism levy, the 4 per cent pillow tax that we pay on hotel bills. The multiplier effect of those funds that are created was estimated in 2012 at being 19 to 1. For every \$1 of tourism levy funds invested into tourism, the return in economic impact, in fact the return in taxation revenue to the province is \$19.

So to me it is unfathomable why this government would siphon away funds from the tourism levy, which have increased by 5 per cent in the last fiscal year, and cut tourism funding by 10 per cent. I recognize that we have to tighten our belt in some things, but every day we're told about how economic diversification is happening or it's something that should happen, and tourism is held up as one of the shining examples of that. How are you supposed to do it when you are starving the goose that lays the golden egg?

Madam Speaker, while I am in favour of anything that advances tourism in our province and I am in favour of a measure like tourism week, I would suggest to this government that they would do better by fully funding tourism and do what was always intended: take the tourism levy and fully dedicate it to tourism promotion and product development in this province and not have funds siphoned into general revenue.

One other thing happened on Thursday that I think is a tragedy for Alberta tourism. The Alberta Strategic Tourism Council was dissolved. This group of 17 industry experts, including the friend of the Member for Banff-Cochrane, the award-winning CEO for Canmore-Kananaskis who was on that council – that council of industry experts has been disbanded, and we've lost now the ability to consult with them on important tourism issues.

So while I support this private member in terms of creating a tourism week – and I think it's great. We should celebrate tourism all year round, but if we want to focus it on a week, I'm fine. But I really wish that this government would support tourism in more meaningful and productive ways that, in fact, will support and promote tourism as an economic diversification driver in our province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak in favour of Bill 204, put forward by the Member for Edmonton-South West. I thank him for bringing forward this

bill and giving us the opportunity to discuss the many great tourist destinations in our province and, as was ably noted by the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, the many benefits it brings to our province, which, of course, he knows well from his time working in that portfolio, in which he accomplished many great things. I have previously thanked him, and I thank him again.

Just to comment on a couple things that have been mentioned by our friends across the aisle, I agree with the Member for Banff-Cochrane in regard to the questions around placing the week in early June. I know for myself here in Edmonton-Centre and in the city of Edmonton, certainly, we have a very crowded slate of festival events and many other activities which begin roughly around mid-June and run through the summer. So I think that placing this tourism week in early June would provide an excellent opportunity for us to celebrate tourism and begin to promote and look forward to the events that occur here over the summer months.

There was also some concern that was raised by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills that this could potentially take away focus from some of the larger efforts towards tourism during the rest of the year. The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster also mentioned that he had some concerns that this might not have a significant impact or that it wouldn't necessarily be something which Travel Alberta would be able to add a lot more to. I certainly recognize the concerns that are being raised there. I think, in general, this is a great opportunity for Travel Alberta to partner with a lot of our other community organizations which are also looking to promote tourism. I don't see this being, specifically, a burden that would have to land only on them.

I know in my own work I have the honour of sitting on the Downtown Vibrancy Task Force here in Edmonton-Centre. I'm on that task force along with members of the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation, the city of Edmonton, and the Downtown Business Association. Certainly, it has been an education for me, and I'm so grateful for that opportunity as I've had a chance to see the work and the effort that all of these individuals put into promoting tourism here in the city of Edmonton and particularly within the downtown core. These are people, I believe, who would embrace this opportunity of a tourism week to work with Travel Alberta and to be able to bring forward some of their own initiatives and some of the work which they are currently doing to be able to help celebrate how tourism benefits our province.

Certainly, I know that it's a real benefit here in downtown Edmonton in many areas. For example, downtown Edmonton has only 16 per cent of Edmonton's hotel space, but in 2014 it captured 28 per cent of demand in the city. That generated \$420 million in direct expenditures, helped support over 6,800 jobs, and produced \$208 million worth of tax revenue.

Downtown Edmonton offers a lot of things to people who want to come to visit. We have amazing culinary destinations. In fact, downtown Edmonton's culinary scene has never been stronger. It's rapidly expanding. It's home to 15 per cent of Edmonton's restaurants. Whether it's Italian, Mexican, Portuguese, Spanish, French, Japanese, Ethiopian, or Lebanese, if a cuisine exists, you can probably find it at a restaurant in Edmonton-Centre.

For me personally, one of the things that I love most about downtown Edmonton is its promotion of arts and culture. There are many opportunities for tourists coming to our city to explore. We have the Winspear Centre with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, a fantastic, beautiful, acoustically perfect space. I've been told by many who have performed there and who have conducted shows there that it is one of the finest concert halls in the world. We have over a dozen galleries, including the Art Gallery of Alberta. We're soon to have the Royal Alberta Museum, and the new Royal Alberta

Museum will in fact be the largest museum in western Canada. We have the Citadel Theatre.

We have many, many – and this is of personal excitement for me – music venues. At a time when Edmonton has lost many music venues, we've gained many new ones. We have many classic ones here such as the Starlite Room, the Needle Vinyl Tavern, 9910, the Mercury Room, the Church of John.

And we, of course, have the city of Edmonton archives at the Prince of Wales Armouries.

I know that the members of the Downtown Vibrancy Task Force and EEDC here in Edmonton have been working very hard to bring many sporting events to the city. They've been very pleased to participate in the Tour of Alberta, which, again, thank you to the member who spent many years promoting that and bringing that here to our city. They brought in the Red Bull Crashed Ice event last year, which brought thousands of people into the streets of downtown Edmonton. That was a fantastic event as well. We have the Edmonton Marathon, which starts outside of the Shaw Conference Centre. Of course, now with the building of Rogers Place, we will soon be home to the Edmonton Oilers and the new Ice District. We look forward to the many opportunities that's going to bring to us here as well. [interjections] We look forward to some eventual wins with that as well, absolutely.

We're home to over 37 festivals, including the Taste of Edmonton, the street performers' festival, the Cariwest Caribbean arts festival, the Edmonton International Jazz Festival, Hip Hop in the Park, the Works Art and Design Festival, and Edmonton Beer Fest.

From downtown Edmonton we have immediate and close access to Edmonton's river valley, which at 7,400 hectares is the largest stretch of urban parkland in North America.

Of particular interest to me as well is something I've been working on for a while. I've had the opportunity over the last year to work with the Edmonton live music initiative as well as some folks from Alberta Music and the city of Edmonton, and I've had the opportunity to learn about the Alberta music cities initiative. This is an initiative that was brought forward by Alberta Music along with the new National Music Centre in Calgary, Music Canada, and the Scotlyn Foundation. This is an initiative that's focused on building the music industry across Alberta and promoting Edmonton and Calgary as cities known for the quality of their local music scenes. We know how music drives tourism in such jurisdictions as New Orleans or Austin or other places like Nashville that have become known as music cities. I believe, Madam Speaker, that Edmonton and Calgary have the potential to become known for the same.

4:10

Right here in Edmonton we have an enormous wealth of resources. We have MacEwan University, which I'm proud to say is relocating their arts and music program to Edmonton-Centre in 2017, which produces an amazing calibre of musicians. We have so many talented people here in this city. We have the quality venues I mentioned, so many fantastic festivals like the Edmonton Folk Festival, Interstellar Rodeo, the Edmonton Blues Festival, and the Up and Downtown Festival, which all work to incorporate Alberta performers. We have talented performers that come from our province like Corb Lund, Joe Nolan, Shout Out Out Out Out, and the Wet Secrets, folks that are getting international recognition.

An Hon. Member: Nickelback.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, yes. We have others that we don't speak of so much as well.

The opportunity to celebrate an Edmonton tourism week offers us the opportunity to continue to work with groups like the music city initiative and others to promote the arts and culture of our province and to showcase that and have the opportunity to celebrate it not only with people that we would want to bring into the city but people within our city. We can have the opportunity to show them so much more of what they could come out and enjoy and where they could be spending their own dollars here within our city, supporting so many of our tourist attractions and opportunities.

With that, I'd like to thank again the Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing forward this bill. I look forward to supporting it and to the opportunities to continue to work with the folks in the Downtown Vibrancy Task Force and so many others to continue to promote our city as a fantastic place to visit.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Sucha: I just want to pull out my notes, Madam Speaker. I don't want to allude too much to some of the elements that were talked about before, but one of the things that I've spoken about is that I'm a proud born-and-raised Albertan. Growing up in the early '90s, when we dealt with a recession similar to the one that we're experiencing today, a lot of how we travelled on vacations was based around the stay-cations, if you will. As a young Albertan I got a great chance to really see this province from a very unique perspective.

With that being said, avoiding the clichés, like saying West Edmonton Mall or Heritage Park or the Calgary Zoo, I thought it'd be prudent for me to really share these amazing experiences that I had because I think that right now with the way the Canadian dollar is sitting and how a lot of Albertans are avoiding that travel to the United States just on the merits that it would cost a lot more now than it did two or three years ago, it's similar to how it was in the '90s. You know, some of the early thoughts that go through my mind are my visits to Drumheller, which I enjoyed as a child and now get to bring my children to, which I'm very fond of, too, and my visits to Canmore or Banff. I can spot a child of the '90s if I simply say: Banff Candy Store. They all know what I'm talking about.

You know, I had a great opportunity to really go camping in areas like the Cypress Hills. Trust me, though, I spent most of my time on the Alberta side. We used to go to Carseland provincial park and went camping in that area as well, and it was neat. I always was baffled by the fact that my parents would point at the Bow River and say that that cut through Calgary. At the time, I would not believe them. There was a lot of visiting of the Crowsnest Pass. I would spend a lot of time visiting Frank Slide, and I marvelled at Turtle Mountain located there, too, and visiting the Hillcrest Mines and learning about the Hillcrest mining disaster as well. That was pretty neat to see as I experienced the history that was vast to this province.

My uncle, actually, was partial owner and managed a hotel in Lloydminster, actually on the Alberta side of Lloydminster, and he led me to where I pursued a career in the hospitality industry. As we are very well aware, during these economic hard times in certain cities like Calgary and Edmonton the hospitality industry is having a little bit of a struggle, specifically in the downtown cores, so one of the things is for us to really encourage those people to travel throughout Alberta and, not only that but for those that are travelling abroad, who are going to the Rocky Mountains, which is seeing a tremendously busy year, find ways to encourage people, as they're coming from the United States or coming from abroad to

Canada, to stay that extra day when they're going to the hubs like Calgary and Edmonton.

I think that if we really promote a lot of the tourism that we have here in Alberta – and it's amazing, when I see people who've only lived in this province for two or three years, that some of them are unaware of the great things like the Frank Slide or the giant egg in Vegreville. I think that really driving this awareness – and it doesn't have to be expensive awareness. We've all seen the trends that come from social media and retweeting and sharing your favourite aspects of your childhood, similar to myself, how in leaps and bounds it costs nothing but can lead to a tremendous amount of return for different companies. We saw that with the ice bucket challenge, a prime example of that.

That being said, I want to applaud the hon. member for this private member's bill. When I heard about it, I started thinking of these fond childhood memories that I had as well and, to be quite frank, that I am grateful I get to share with my children now. So I stand here to support the bill in second reading.

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

Mr. Gotfried: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I'd like to rise today and commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West for his insightful approach to this industry, which is of great interest to many Albertans at a time, particularly, when we're focusing so much on diversification.

I've been blessed and privileged to have spent about 20 years of my life in a career in the tourism marketing business for an international airline, which gave me a lot of opportunity and experience not only to promote tourism but to be able to talk with people around the world on what's important to them and what's of interest to them. I spent a lot of time promoting travel outbound from Canada to parts of Asia and Southeast Asia and other parts of the world, but I was blessed to have the opportunity, in meeting all those people, to always promote Alberta, which is, of course, near and dear to all of our hearts.

Now is an incredible time for us to leverage our diverse and world-class tourism assets. I think that this is an opportunity which we should always be driving towards, but of course we have a rather unique opportunity right now as Alberta is, unfortunately, on sale. The tourism assets we have are world-class. It is time to invest in our future, and it's time for us to invest in a hopeful future which is going to support some of the hard work done by the tourism sector – groups such as Calgary and Edmonton tourism, obviously Travel Alberta, the airport authorities of both Calgary and Edmonton and some of the smaller centres – bringing in flights finally from places like China and different parts of Asia and around the world.

It's even more important that we work hard now to maintain those flights because having been in that business, I know that the worst thing that can happen is that you attract a flight in and then you lose it because they rarely come back. Now is an opportunity for us to offset the fact that we have a challenge in our own economy, which is likely to translate into a reduction in outbound tourism, which, of course, sends our dollars out of the country, a time for us to take advantage of that excess capacity and bring people to Alberta, maintain those flights, and bring in the revenue that those people bring.

Of course, I think the other benefit is that when people come here for tourism, they maybe come here for short stays, but there are many people from around the world who, when they come here, look beyond that. They look for opportunities to invest; they look for other opportunities. Is this a place to send their children to school? Is this a place to buy recreational property? Is this a place to buy a business? Is this a place to emigrate to? Those are the fringe

benefits of tourism which I think we need to keep our eye on as well and an opportunity to do so with tourism week.

The other thing that we need to think about is the hotels that are now suffering. In spite of whatever we do within the tourism sector, the honest truth is that the 80-20 rule typically has applied to most of the hotels, particularly during the latest boom, which is that Monday to Thursday is when they generate about 80 per cent of the revenue, and then Thursday or Friday to Sunday is when they can offer all kinds of deals and opportunities to the tourism marketplace. Typically they don't want to displace that during the week when the market is robust. We do have an opportunity now, again, with Alberta being on sale, where those hotels are actually looking at promoting tourism and leveraging that opportunity seven days a week. Sadly, that's the truth of the current economy.

4:20

Tourism is always a key pillar of diversification. I think that we have a strong and robust infrastructure in place. We have passionate people in the industry who have invested not only their own personal skills and time and knowledge but many of whom are small operators who have invested their own capital and taken big risks to do that. We have, I think, an obligation to work with them to help them to diversify that. Again, with the low Canadian currency and an opportunity where there's very little competition for capacity, this is an opportunity for us to do that. You know, really, it's an opportunity to take small advantage of that soft business market and that soft business traveller market, which is what, of course, drove some of our average room rates to some of the top in North America over the last few years. Those are things for us to keep an eye on.

I've also been blessed to be involved with a group called Skål. It's world-wide, international travel and tourism. There are chapters in Calgary, Edmonton, and the Canadian Rockies: 17,000 members world-wide, 400 clubs in 80 countries. During my involvement I was president of that organization in years gone by, and I've been bugging the people there to make an opportunity to do a world congress here in Alberta, to bring in people, industry leaders from around the world. That's one of the groups. I'll encourage the Edmonton, the Calgary, and the Rockies clubs to work together to do that, to promote Alberta as an opportunity to bring world leaders, who tend to have great influence around the world, to see what we have here in Alberta. I think that's a great opportunity.

Many other organizations, as I referenced before, the tourism authorities – unfortunately, the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council, as we know, has been disbanded, which is sad, but there are many organizations out there to work with, not the least of which, of course, are those who represent the youth within the marketplace. Obviously, SAIT and NAIT have tourism and hospitality programs, and through the Skål organization we've invested in many scholarships over the years, which have helped to nurture that next generation. I think that an obligation for anybody who's in tourism is to always mentor and work with those up-and-comers in the industry, who really are going to be the lifeblood in the future of what we're doing.

Another concern I have, of course, is convention facilities. We've seen a lot of focus on the need for convention facilities. Sadly, I know Calgary is now, I think, the 11th-largest convention facility in Canada, and that's a sad, sad statement. You know, I guess the good news is that the Calgary Stampede is expanding their facilities, but it's not a downtown location per se, and that's often what a lot of the conventions are looking for. So I think those are some of the things we need to look at investing in, not only encouraging the private sector to do so but also looking at where we can assist in making that happen.

I was lucky enough to be at the Economic Developers conference just over a week ago, and I noticed that Pomeroy Lodging, which is actually headquartered in Grande Prairie, where my esteemed colleague is from, but with hotels across the province, are looking at expanding their convention facilities there in Kananaskis, which I think is, again, good for all Albertans as an opportunity. Of course, that was the Economic Developers of Alberta there. If you talk to them, they are about economic development, they're about tourism, whatever will work for them to promote and enhance what they're doing.

Tourism week is an opportunity which I think we need to embrace. It's another opportunity. As the esteemed Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster pointed out, it's always an opportunity, and if we have a chance to promote that, we should take it. I think everybody in this room, everybody in Alberta – I think there was a promotion many years ago about being a tourist attraction. I think we all have to be tourist attractions. I think we all have to be tourism promoters as well wherever we go, wherever we travel. Be proud, as I know we all are, of this province, of the natural resources and the opportunities we have for people to visit and see things that they won't see in their own backyards, and that's not just the natural resources but the cultural resources that we have here as well, that I think we're all too humble about.

You know, this is an opportunity, I think, for us to invest in the future. Again, I'd like to see the tourism levy being pushed toward promoting this. We do have an opportunity to do so. I'd like to see us invest although within very tight budgets we need to take this as an opportunity for further diversification. If Bill 204 helps that, then I think that that's a good thing.

I would like to hope, obviously, that we have the support of this entire House – obviously, we have the Culture and Tourism minister, we have Finance, we have Economic Development, and we have Infrastructure, who all have to keep their eye on this ball and work towards ensuring that we have an opportunity here to diversify, to grow, and to strengthen us while we have Alberta on sale – and that we can support not only the flights that we have now and maintain them but that we can grow those in the future in the Asia-Pacific market, which is all-important to us in the future.

I will be supporting this bill. Again, I thank the member for bringing it forward and for the opportunity here to speak about the importance of tourism in Alberta. Thank you.

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

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am honoured to rise today and speak to Bill 204, Alberta Tourism Week Act. First of all, I would like to thank the Member for Edmonton-South West for proposing such a brilliant way of promoting tourism in the province of Alberta. The bill is an excellent gateway to promote the amazing tourist attractions of Alberta as well as the small businesses that extensively contribute to diversify our economy and create jobs. I'm very proud to say that in my constituency of Calgary-Glenmore we have a number of attractions that bring people together from the city, province, country, and the world. Those big attractions include Heritage Park, Weaselhead park, North Glenmore park, South Glenmore park, and Glenmore Sailing Club.

We have discussed many attractions in the province, and I would like to focus a little bit on Heritage Park specifically because it's a very unique park we have in the province. It gives a very unique experience to its visitors and tourists. For example, touring Heritage Park is like living the history of Alberta, no matter if it is dining, entertainment, education, recreation, or a special occasion. One cannot miss a moment. Going back in time, the visitors of the park experience the diversity and rich culture of Alberta as it culminated

over time. In fact, the park is the pride of our province as it is a true example of how the west was once.

Whenever visitors go to Heritage Park, they feel that they're experiencing something that they cannot find somewhere else. It's basically bringing the province of Alberta all together in many forms. It has festivals going on all year-round, and every festival is representing a different culture or representing different values or something unique that you would experience. Also, it's a hub where indigenous communities get together as well because Heritage Park is right beside Tsuu T'ina Nation, and they work in collaboration a lot, so promotion of indigenous culture is also very dominant through that park.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Around Heritage Park there are many trails that allow people to come and visit and experience Glenmore reservoir as well. Walking or biking right beside the reservoir is an amazing experience. I myself go there quite often. Seeing the beautiful sights around that area is a commendable experience. There is a cliff right beside it that adds a beauty to the place that is hard to find in the city. At the same time, all four places that I mentioned before – for example, North Glenmore park, South Glenmore park – are also connected through Glenmore reservoir. In North Glenmore park we have canoe rentals available. We can see many people canoeing around, kayaking. Many competitions, even dragon boat races, take place every year in North Glenmore park. It is an amazing opportunity to celebrate diversity in our province because that's an excellent way to learn about Chinese culture. At the same time, at the dragon boat races they represent different cultures by allowing different groups to do performances on the same day, and through the entertainment every culture tells a story, which allows us to connect with each other.

I also mentioned Weaselhead park. Weaselhead park has a lot of history because it is basically a division between Tsuu T'ina Nation and the constituency of Calgary-Glenmore. It talks about the time when there was an army that used to use that place for their purposes as well as how it connects to the history of indigenous communities. It's a beautiful park. It was initially man-made, but over time due to its ecosystem and ecology it evolved into a natural park. Now it is known as a natural park, and its history and beauty make it a very unique attraction for the residents.

4:30

I also mentioned the Glenmore Sailing Club. That is a place where we have the opportunity to see many yachts, and it allows people to learn about sailing. Yachts are available as rentals as well, so this gives a very unique experience to the citizens of Calgary to enjoy seeing the mountains while they're sailing and also to enjoy the liveliness of Heritage Park. As I mentioned, all these parks are connected in such a unique way. That anybody who visits Glenmore reservoir gets to experience so many things at a time is hard to describe in words.

This was very specific to Calgary-Glenmore, but if I zoom out a little bit and look at the province as my other colleagues have been talking about, we are blessed with so many attractions. Either natural or man-made, they just are amazing. That helps make Alberta a very unique province and different and a very attractive place to be.

I have lived in different parts of the world myself, including Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and I grew up in Ontario. I can say with confidence that when I was living in different parts of the world and when I interact with people from different parts of the world, Alberta is seen as a very beautiful and attractive place, and people talk very passionately about how much they would like

to visit Alberta. Alberta has rivers. Alberta has mountains. Alberta has history. Alberta has diversity. Alberta has culture. Each individual riding has so much to offer. In fact, if I spent so many minutes talking about my own riding, we can imagine that if all the members sitting here in the Chamber start talking about their constituencies and the attractions they have, then I think we would definitely need more than the three, four hours that we are spending right now. The list goes on.

Also, when I've been to Banff or when I've been to different parts of the province, I have seen many tourists coming from all over the world for various reasons. Sometimes they would just come because they want to have a quiet moment. They are working on a book, for example, so they would probably go to a place like the Banff arts centre, where they could rent a place and just stay and work on their projects. At the same time, there are people who would just come for skiing. There are so many reasons why people would want to be in Alberta and want to have that experience.

Travelling is important. I can also share from my experience because I have not only lived in different parts of the world; I have been in different parts of the world as well. I could see that whenever I appreciated something or some kind of attraction or in any kind of experience that I appreciated, I noticed in depth how thoughtful people were when they designed something, even if it is a man-made attraction, having that convenience for tourists to be there and thinking about how we can make it more inclusive or how we can design it in a way that it would cater to families, it would cater to couples, it would cater to individuals so that different groups could enjoy the experience of being in that place.

By having this week of tourism, we're actually not only promoting the tourism of Alberta; we are actually encouraging all the industries in Alberta that are involved in tourism and other small businesses and giving them ideas of how they can get involved to diversify our economy. If they know that this is the week when we are expecting people coming from different parts of the world and different cultures, then they would consider having more modifications, innovation, and they would consider having more ideas. When there are ideas and creativity, then we are basically allowing our artists, allowing our businesses to think outside the box and to be in that competition. Once we have that competition going on and people striving for the competitive edge, then this will help build the reputation of Alberta's tourism in the world. Once we have that level reached, then basically that will help boost our economy because there will be more travellers coming in.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Cortes-Vargas: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to rise and speak to the private member's bill presented today. It's absolutely something I'm in favour of. It also gives me an opportunity to talk a little bit about my riding and its wonderful opportunities there, as many members have already done. Recently in Strathcona-Sherwood Park the Beaver Hills initiative was recognized by UNESCO as an internationally, world-renowned biosphere, so it's now designated for ecotourism, which is an absolute accomplishment, and it also protects the land there.

Something that hasn't been discussed as much – you know, it's great to promote tourism but also to link it back to mental health. Having been in social work before and studying the importance of relationship with environment, one of the best things about the environment, Mr. Speaker, is that it doesn't actually require a connection with the amount of money that you make. The environment is something that is available to everybody, and that makes it one of the best resources that we have.

Opening up a tourism week not only promotes the great resources that we have in our communities, but it does something that recently the social work program in MacEwan University recognized. One of its main pillars is on the environment. The reason for that is that you're seeing a difference that is being made by people connecting to their environment in a nonhierarchical manner, in a way that builds a relationship in the way that many of our aboriginal leaders have demonstrated for many years. By building that relationship and creating that connection, it actually addresses some of the mental health issues that are all over our province, Mr. Speaker. So recognizing those opportunities – and sometimes all it takes is to demonstrate what resources are available to you when you're looking for a place to go with your family, with your friends, to go out and know that.

In Strathcona-Sherwood Park you can go and tour all sorts of really great lands and see something that is recognized by the world as being a place that needs to be protected for ecotourism. Also, to demonstrate the great food, you know, Open Farm Days is an opportunity for people to go into farms and visit those very farms that have our food and create that relationship, especially for people in urban centres, who don't get that opportunity every day. It provides that initial opportunity to develop that relationship. Again, that relationship is really essential to creating an overall strong mental health society, and it can't be lost. Yes, tourism is a great industry, but overall we need to address it in multiple facets, and this is one of the ways that we do it.

I mean, at the beginning of being elected, I was meeting with the president of the conservation society, and he was showing me that he had a book with a whole bunch of information on camping sites: the costs, the places that you need to go, and, you know, connecting those people with the resources, making it simple. The more barriers that you put towards people, the less they'll travel. Really, at the end of the day, promoting that pride in our local economy and things that we have to offer promotes a connection to our community, and that also is great in building a strong family unit.

With the work that is already being done, something like this just highlights that and gives it a space to shine and gives it a space for people to be there and to access that information, which, at the end of day, sometimes is what's needed. I remember that that was part of our conversation of how to highlight – they have a wonderful book. You know, it's pages, pages long, but people don't know about its existence. They'll search all over Google and try to find the camping sites that are most searched. But at the end of the day, if we start looking for other ways to express what is available to people and what the resources are locally, it also provides the opportunity that, you know, if you're struggling right now, you can still travel and you can still have those experiences. It's great for a lot of reasons.

4:40

Also, I would say that, you know, the Edmonton region has a very strong couch surfing community, and it's a community that is known in the world. Part of it is that you host somebody as they come in, and then you show them the great things that are a part of your area. If I were to host somebody in Strathcona-Sherwood Park, I would take them to the winery in the area. I would take them horseback riding. I would take them to just view the wonderful sights of this bioserve. Those experiences are something to promote in different ways, having an opportunity to connect with people that want to see those things. Mr. Speaker, that's something that people at all ages are interested in. Travel is something that completely engages people, and it opens up your way of living. It just opens up your daily activities that you get kind of lost in.

Tourism is a way of opening up and expanding conversations and meeting people that you might have not met.

You know, back to the mental health portion that I was saying before, I have the Dreamcatcher ranch in my constituency. It's a connection to animals within therapy, animals as a therapeutic modality. It provides a connection, again, going back to nature, a way of connecting that is a way that people find very relaxing. It's an important element of our daily living.

There are so many places in my constituency where you can see these things: the great food that is to be had, a lot of local food that is being promoted in the area, and restaurants that are starting to pop up and demonstrate that they want to showcase that local cuisine, what the farms are offering and items of that nature. Something like this really allows us to promote things locally and promote what we have to offer and give a space for people all over Alberta to really know what their options are when they're talking about Alberta tourism.

Mr. Speaker, really, again, I'm absolutely thrilled that this private member's bill is with us here today and that we get to discuss it and that I get to mention the wonderful things that happen in my constituency. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms Drever: I would like to start off by saying: how could I not support Bill 204? I commend the Member for Calgary-South West for his hard work on this bill. As someone who was born and raised in this beautiful province, I've had the pleasure of participating in many events that help promote all the culture and diversity Alberta has to offer. For as long as I can remember, growing up in Calgary I would go down to see the Calgary Stampede parade with my friends and family, and afterwards we'd go down to the grounds and check out the rides and the games. It was truly an honour to be part of that parade last summer. It definitely fulfilled a childhood dream for me.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is blessed to be a culturally and geographically diverse province with a multitude of opportunities for travel and tourism. The tourism industry contributes greatly to the Alberta economy, and the continued growth of this industry will in turn promote economic diversification in Alberta.

In my riding of Calgary-Bow I am so proud to have Canada Olympic Park, whose ski jump can be described as one of the most recognizable attributes in the city of Calgary. During the 1988 Winter Olympics, Canada Olympic Park was the primary venue for many different sports, including bobsledding, luge, figure skating, hockey, freestyle skiing, just to name a few. Calgary was the host to athletes from all over the world. In 1988 Calgary, with a population of 657,000 people, was put on the world map. As it stands today, people from all over the world are still taking advantage of all the great things COP has to offer.

COP is also the home of Canada's Sports Hall of Fame. Canada's Sports Hall of Fame was established in 1947 and was moved to Calgary in 2011. I had the pleasure of touring this museum, which is located at Canada Olympic Park. It is a joy to spend a day or two exploring what the museum has to offer. The hall of fame also offers programs that allow students to experience the museum's 12 galleries and to try over 50 hands-on interactive activities, including shadowboxing with Lennox Lewis, 3-D goalie and backcatcher experiences, sport challenges, rowing, wheelchair racing, and more.

Some of the items on display include Terry Fox's shoes, in which he dipped his foot in the Atlantic Ocean, a hockey stick with Wayne Gretzky's misspelled name on it, and the Calgary number one torch, which was used to light the cauldron at the opening ceremonies of

the 1988 Olympic Games. This museum is a perfect place for people of all ages. Throughout the exhibit you can interact with statues of honoured members. For example, you can see Herman Smith Johannsen, the famous cross-country skier, in action. He finished his last race at the age of 75.

Today COP is one of the landmarks in Calgary. It is a unique site. It provides a place to ski, ice-skate, cross-country ski, and, in the summer, to mountain bike and zip-line. For the residents of Calgary it provides a place to train Olympic athletes, host events, and bring award-winning snowboarders like Shaun White – he was here recently – to our slopes.

Mr. Speaker, I am so proud that I have the opportunity to represent them here today in the Legislature, and I'm also so proud of being part of a government that is working to diversify and strengthen the political economy. As mentioned, tourism has been identified as an important contributor to diversifying Alberta's economy away from energy dependence. This is why I stand in the House to speak in support of this bill, and I applaud the Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing this idea forward.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 204?

We have no one left to speak, hearing none. I would call upon the Member for Edmonton-South West to close debate.

Mr. Dang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to stand today and hear the support of all of my colleagues from both sides of the aisle for Bill 204. Bill 204 is one of those bills that we really can all get behind because we all believe in Alberta and we all believe in selling Alberta to become the absolute best that it can be. Like members opposite have mentioned, we do really want to be pushing Alberta every single day of every single week, and I really do believe that the Alberta tourism week will become one of those tools we use, one of the pieces of the puzzle that we can use to promote Alberta and create that diverse and vibrant economy that we speak about.

I just wanted to make some comments around what I really believe the Alberta tourism week will be able to highlight, because we do know that Budget 2016 made commitments to tourism. Budget 2016 made commitments such as investing in our world-class tourism facilities, with the expansion of the Calgary Zoo, with Fort Edmonton Park, and the Royal Tyrrell Museum. Mr. Speaker, these projects will attract more visitors to our province and enhance our reputation at home and abroad to ensure that accessible travel opportunities are available for families right here in Alberta.

4:50

Alberta tourism week will be something that we as communities, we as Albertans, we as citizens can rally together and rally behind. Mr. Speaker, it celebrates our passion for Alberta, and it maximizes our resources and our opportunities for Alberta. Our tourism industry will be able to attract even more visitors and more investors to our province. Each year visitors flock to Alberta's parks and attend our world-class sporting facilities, our world-class events, and our world-class communities. Alberta tourism week will be able to promote these important attractions and will help to build long-term success for the tourism industry province-wide.

Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to have been able to introduce a bill that will commit to diversifying our economy, that will commit to making sure that Albertans stay employed. Those 19,000 businesses, those 127,000 jobs, that \$8 billion that we're talking about, all of these very important not statistics but people, jobs, and lives that we are talking about in Alberta, the people that we must

support as legislators, will be supported by the Alberta Tourism Week Act. I'm extremely excited that we are able to utilize this bill to push forward and sell our province, that we all can be so proud of. We all can go and say that we voted for something that we will be able to present to the world and show to the world that we are the greatest province in Canada, that we are a great place to visit, and that we are somewhere that we can be excited to show off.

Mr. Speaker, being cognizant of the time here, I will be absolutely optimistic that all members of this House will absolutely support this bill. Thank you, all, so much for speaking about it today.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a second time]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to seek unanimous consent of the House to proceed with Motions Other than Government Motions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Educational Delivery Choices

504. Mr. McIver moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to affirm its commitment to allowing parents the choice of educational delivery for their children, including home, charter, private, francophone, separate, or public education programs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me. It's my honour to rise and talk about my motion, Motion 504. Now, this is something that I feel strongly about, and it's something that I think is really consistent with Alberta. The purpose of the motion is to simply have the government confirm what they're already doing. In fact, I'm asking the government to give Alberta parents the assurance that the choices they have today in educating their children will remain, the assurance that education will not go backwards in Alberta and that students can continue to benefit from the many options of education available for delivery today. Alberta has one of the best education systems in the world. [some applause] I agree, and we should all pound on that one. The PC caucus encourages this government to keep it that way. I know that the government wants to keep it that way.

Choice in Alberta education, including home, charter, private, francophone, separate, and public education programs, is about meeting the needs and interests of children so that they can reach their full potential and choice for parents to decide which school is choice for their kids. This motion encourages the government to ensure stable and permanent access to choice in education and to bring a sense of stability to students and their parents. These choices contribute to a robust system that respects the diversity of backgrounds and interests among Alberta children.

It is essential that all Alberta schools, whether they be public, private, separate, charter, home-school, all the choices that exist today, provide students with safe and inclusive learning environments. Anything other than that is unacceptable. Mr. Speaker, I didn't feel with what I've just said that I was going to have a really hard time convincing members of this House because these are things that we have talked about: safe and inclusive

communities, safe and inclusive schools, and recognizing the value of children to the future of Alberta.

One of the things that I think we all agree on here, again along those lines, is that all children are equal. But I think we can also agree that all children are not the same. Different children require different choices, different options. Some have special needs, and some have additional needs, other than other children's. Some children learn very well in one way and not so well in another. Sometimes we need to make sure that they can reach their full potential and the very best chance and opportunity that they can to live the most full life. To contribute to the top of their potential, to become the best contributors they can to Albertan and Canadian society, sometimes some kids need a little bit different education.

Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. Some kids are so very gifted that in a classroom that would be considered run of the mill or expected for most Alberta kids – for some Alberta kids that are gifted, that's too easy for them. And why would we as parents, why would we as Albertans, and why would we as legislators hold those kids back?

Of course, one of the things that really matters is that all kids are special. They all deserve to have the best chance. Who better to evaluate them and to work to decide for those kids what the best course of education is than their parents?

I recognize, too, that even there, even with this, while all Alberta kids are equal, they're not all the same. Some have two of their birth parents at home, some have one, some are lucky enough to be adopted, and some are living in other situations. But they, too, deserve the same chance as every other Alberta kid to have those that love them the most, those that know them the best, those that co-exist and live with them and care for them and put them to bed and feed them be able to have input into the way they're educated, because those are the people that love their kids the most.

Mr. Speaker, again I will emphasize that this is about doing what's best for Alberta's children. This is about putting Alberta's kids in the position to fully participate, to become – to borrow a phrase from the military – all they can be, and to fully access every success that they could possibly have. I don't think anybody in this Legislature is going to argue with that. I really don't.

The reason I bring it forward, Mr. Speaker, is because I've heard from a lot of parents from around Alberta. We have asked the Education minister about this in the past: are you going to continue to provide the choices? I'm comfortable enough in what I'm saying that I don't think the minister is going to argue with me – if he does, I will table documents – about the fact that he has stood up in this House and has said: we are going to continue to provide those choices. But there's been once or twice where he's said: for now. Or he's said: in this year's budget. I see he's not even arguing that, so that's okay. We're still getting along here, and there's no reason why we need not.

5:00

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, a lot of parents have said: well, what does that mean? There's an opportunity for, hopefully, the minister and the government to stand up and say: we're committed to this. While I guess I'm not sure they're going to do that, I'm surely hopeful that the minister and the government are going to say: we're still committed to that choice for parents in the way they educate their children. It appears from the budget that the government put on the table on Thursday that they are. At least, it looks to me like they are going to continue to fund the different choices that Alberta parents have now, and I think that's a tremendous, tremendous reassurance to Alberta parents.

I'm hopeful, Mr. Speaker, that members of this House can come together and say to Alberta parents: your kids are important; we believe in your ability and your right to make choices on behalf of

your children's education. Again, parents are a gift to those kids, and those kids are a gift to parents. I sincerely hope that members of the House can agree with this motion, which continues to give parents the choices that they already have – that they already have – in how they educate their children.

I thank you, all members of the House, for your attention. I will sit down and listen. I sincerely hope that I can look forward to the support of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to rise and speak to this motion in the House today. I am a teacher by trade, so I believe I share everyone's belief that education is really something extremely fundamental that can change lives, that will make the province better, that can make Canada better if it's something that's done well. I think that we do currently offer an amazing amount of choice in our system to parents, and I have some examples that I'd like to share about that.

I was a teacher in the CBE, the Calgary board of education. I do just want to mention the amazing, incredible job that the Calgary board of education is doing within the public system to offer choice to parents. The Calgary board of education has programs for exceptional and complex needs. They have gifted-and-talented programs. They have French immersion, a Spanish bilingual program, a Mandarin bilingual program. They have arts-based schools, they have sports-based schools, they have science- and inquiry-based schools, they have international baccalaureate programs, and they also have trades programs. And those are just a few. The Calgary board of education has responded incredibly well to parents' desires to have choice for their children.

I can speak to that a little bit personally. When I was teaching, I taught at the Alice Jamieson girls' academy, which is an all-girls program for grades 4 through 9. That's a program of choice within the Calgary board of education where, if parents so choose, they can send their girls to school in an all-girls environment. I think it has wonderfully beneficial effects. I taught math and science, and I have never been so privileged as to see so many girls just really excited about math. You know, that's something that doesn't necessarily happen in regular mixed-gender environments. It really has a huge amount of value. It has a huge amount of value in terms of self-esteem building, in terms of peer support, in terms of getting girls more involved in STEM, science, technology, engineering, and math. It really has a lot of benefits.

What was special about my school was that it wasn't only a girls' program. My school was housed within Stanley Jones school, which is a large, hundred-year-old sandstone building. Within that same school there were three operating programs. There is the Alice Jamieson girls' academy. There is the deaf and hard of hearing program, which is for exceptional students. It also housed a regular K through 6 elementary school.

The reason that that came about was because parents who lived in that area wanted to keep their regular K through 6 school, but there wasn't enough enrolment to be able to keep the whole building open, so the Calgary board of education brought in these alternative programs to keep the school filled. Now it's filled to huge amounts of capacity. We lost several of our rooms over the course of my tenure there – our computer room, our science lab, our library – to classrooms. The building of new schools, hopefully, will soon alleviate some of that issue. But it was an incredibly successful program, an incredibly successful program of choice, within the Calgary board of education.

I only can speak to the Calgary board of education, but I know that there are other school districts that are doing an amazing job with that as well. I can point to, you know, the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills' comments about Horizon school earlier today, which is also a public school doing incredible work for exceptional students.

I just wanted to highlight that there is, in fact, a huge amount of choice available within our public system.

At this time I'm going to bring forward an amendment to this motion. Now, if there are questions about the ability to do this, I do have examples where this has been done a whole bunch of times in the past, mostly in 2007, it looks like. The motion has been stamped by Parliamentary Counsel for approval.

Do I wait to read it?

The Speaker: If you would read it while it's being passed out.

Ms Luff: Okay. What this motion is doing:

Ms Luff to move that Motion 504 be amended as follows:

- (a) by striking out "affirm" and substituting "support public education, including francophone and separate schools, while affirming";
- (b) by adding "and" after "charter,";
- (c) by striking out "francophone, separate, or public";
- (d) by adding "in such instances where they offer alternatives not available in the public system" after "programs".

If I just read the whole thing, it makes a lot more sense. The amended motion would read as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to support public education, including francophone and separate schools, while affirming its commitment to allowing parents the choice of educational delivery for their children, including home, charter, and private education programs in such instances where they offer alternatives not available in the public system.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

The Speaker: He has a point of order.

Point of Order

Admissibility of Amendments

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, I guess, first of all, the first part of the point of order is that under the standing orders it's extremely unusual and irregular for a private member's motion to be amended. In fact, I cannot remember an instance where this has been allowed or has happened in the Legislature. Part of that is because of the very limited time that we have to debate these motions. We have one hour; that is it. It has always been the practice of the House that we debate the motion as it is presented in the Legislature.

Second – and I'm sitting next to the mover of the motion – is that it is the mover's opinion, and it's certainly my opinion as well, that this amendment substantively changes the intent of the motion. Of course, an amendment is not allowed to do that. An amendment can, you know, make changes or alterations, but this substantively changes the intent of the motion. I would suggest to the hon. member, with all respect, and certainly to you, Mr. Speaker, that this amendment to this motion is out of order and should be disallowed at this time.

The Speaker: Could I just have a moment to read this myself.
The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Amendments have come forward to motions other than government motions many times in

the past. I would agree that it hasn't happened, you know, in the recent past, but it has happened. I can also indicate, as the member has mentioned, that the amendment coming forward has been reviewed and approved by Parliamentary Counsel. Now, on those amendments to nongovernment motions that happened in the past, it happened on April 2, 2007, a motion that was amended by the current third party. Again, a motion, Motion 507, was amended on May 14 of the same year, 2007, and Motion 511 and Motion 515 in 2007 as well.

Mr. Speaker, it has happened. It is, I would agree, a little bit out of the ordinary, but it is not against the rules of order.

On the member stating that it is a point of order because it substantially changes the motion, I don't believe the amendment does. It still revolves around the affirmation and the sustainability, speaking to the nature of schools, especially public schools. I don't think it does change the intent.

I would look forward to your ruling, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

5:10

The Speaker: The Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would speak to this amendment. I believe that it actually does substantively change this motion, that when we take a look at the nature of education, this is about parental choice. This is not about whether or not the government has the ability to decide whether this is substantively different or whether the parents should have the right to this kind of an educational option or choice. That's the whole nature of this motion. It's about providing parents with the choice to make these decisions about their children's education, not about the state granting permission.

I believe that this substantively changes this motion. I believe that when we take a look at the nature of some of these independent schools, some of the charter schools or the alternative schools, they should not be held up to whether or not some bureaucrat or some individual decides whether or not this actually meets a definition of whether it's available in the public system. These people that are asking for these alternatives in their children's education are there because they want to see an alternative that is unique, that meets their desires for their children. Therefore, this amendment is substantively changing this motion and should not be accepted.

The Speaker: Member for Calgary-Lougheed, have you new information you'd like to submit with respect to the amendment decision?

Mr. Rodney: With great respect, Mr. Speaker, I would not be standing up if I did not have new information.

That's exactly what this is designed to do. It is true that this changes the intention to a great degree. But let's face it: it was great to speak for two hours on the tourism bill, and we had support from all sides of the House. This is not about a PC caucus or a third party or the opposition. This is about the students and the parents of Alberta.

The new information I'll offer you at this point, sir, is that I happened to be in the House on those occasions. The hon. House leader on duty at this time has brought up that they were favourable amendments. They were friendly amendments that were accepted by the mover to make the motion even better than what they had originally intended. They were never done with the intention of changing the original motive of the motion.

I'll be honest. As a former educator myself and a parent and an advocate I have a speech ready. The fact is, as my hon. colleague from Calgary-North West has pointed out, that we have very few devices in opposition to, you know, put forward any sorts of

agendas. Under private members is one of them. We had two hours a short time ago on tourism. We only have one hour now, and this is winding down the clock, that is now down to 46 minutes. I would like to read my speech and get on to the original motion. I would actually encourage the mover of the amendment to rescind this and speak to the original motion, perhaps outlining ideas why she may not vote for it instead.

The Speaker: Something new with respect to the point of order? Is that correct? Substantive?

Mr. McIver: Yes, I believe it's very substantive, Mr. Speaker. On the amendment passed out by the hon. member – I'll only read as much as I need to – at the end of the first line: “urge the government to support public education.” Then it has “affirming” below that. Well, support can surely be interpreted as financial support, and I believe that's what it means here.

Of course, with a private member's bill it can't be a money bill. It cannot. If it has to do with money, it's no longer a private member's bill, Mr. Speaker. It cannot require the government to spend money or not spend money.

On top of the other good arguments from my colleagues on why this should be out of order, also another reason is the fact that this makes it a money bill, which is, in my view and, I think, according to the rules of the House, out of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I need to first advise that the clock stopped at the time the point of order was raised, so you are not consuming time. In an ideal world I might have taken more time to do this, but a point of order has been raised with respect to the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East to Motion 504. That amendment makes several changes. You've all received a copy of that, a form substituting just some of the points.

Now, I'm advised that in *Beauchesne's*, sixth edition, page 175, paragraph 567 states that an amendment to a motion may seek to “modify a question in such a way as to increase its acceptability or to present to the House a different proposition as an alternative to the original question.” At paragraph 578 the same book notes that “an amendment proposing a direct negative . . . is out of order.” It is argued that this is what is happening with this amendment. In this case, however, I find that the purpose of the proposed amendment is to modify Motion 504 to present the House an alternative to the original question. The amendment is not a direct negative. Accordingly, I find that the amendment is in order as moved.

Point of Clarification

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, point of clarification. I rise under Standing Order 13(2), which reads, “The Speaker shall explain the reasons for any decision on the request of a Member.” I've also received a copy of the notes that you've liberally quoted from just now. I'm fascinated and puzzled, actually, that we should have such a completely drawn-out set of notes here given to us that clearly anticipates the challenge to this amendment. I guess my question as an hon. member to you as Speaker under 13(2) is to explain to the House, sir, when you first became aware of this amendment. You must have known ahead of time in order to have prepared the notes for this ruling, which was distributed to us before the ruling was actually even made. In fact, our first word of any amendment was just actually as the hon. member introduced it.

5:20

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm not exactly certain how you obtained the piece of information that you have. I was advised by

my table officers, and I did make a decision based upon a precedent, as cited in the decision that I made, and I would ask that . . .

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, no. You made the ruling before you heard people make their arguments. That's a fact. This was printed out before people stood up in this House and made their arguments. I know because I had it in my hand, and it's in *Hansard*. This is not the way you run a Legislature. I'm sorry. I know you're unhappy with me, but I'm unhappy with you. When you make a ruling before you hear the evidence . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, would you please sit down?

Mr. McIver: No, I will not, not unless you reverse your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member . . .

Mr. McIver: I will not sit down unless you reverse your ruling.

The Speaker: Hon. member, respectfully, could I ask . . .

Mr. McIver: Respectfully, I will not sit down unless you reverse your ruling. I'm happy to explain this on the front page of the newspaper tomorrow.

The Speaker: Hon. member . . .

Mr. McIver: I will not sit down unless you reverse your ruling.

The Speaker: I'm asking you one final time if you would sit down.

Mr. McIver: My answer will not change, Mr. Speaker. I will not sit down unless you reverse your ruling, that you made before you heard the evidence presented in this House.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I received this, handed to me by one of the pages. Lest there be any suggestion that I had any notice of this coming to me – I did not. I did not receive this, and I am curious how this was received by you. That's another matter that needs to be discussed within the House in terms of practice here. You can only accept the word that I saw this at the same time.

Finally, therefore, you've made your request, that's conditional. I'm sorry. Unless you sit down, I'm going to have to ask you to leave the House.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I will not sit down unless you reverse your ruling.

The Speaker: Then I must ask that you leave the House now. Would you do that?

Mr. McIver: No, I'm not. You need to reverse your ruling, Mr. Speaker. This is not how it should be done. Rulings should be made after hearing the evidence, not before. I had this typed up in my hand before the evidence on the point of order was even presented.

The Speaker: As I continue this conversation with you, hon. member, in this particular context I recognize that we are breaching the past precedent and practice of this House, as I understand it. It seems to me, sir, that you ought to sit down so that we do not have to ask you to physically leave the place.

Mr. McIver: If you change your ruling, I'll be happy to sit down, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'm not sure that you as an hon. member can hold the House – the Speaker represents the entire House – to a condition

on a point of order, and that's, in fact, what I understand you are doing, hon. member. You're asking that the House, which the Speaker represents, based upon a belief, an allegation – the Speaker's honour has been brought to bear. You're saying that the Speaker received a ruling from staff prior to me making a decision. You can accept or not accept my word. I can only give you my word as an honourable member that I received this now from a page.

Mr. McIver: I believe I'm upholding the dignity of this House, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: By doing so, sir – one final time could I respectfully ask that you either sit down or leave the House?

Mr. McIver: I will sit down when the ruling is reversed, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'm afraid I cannot do that. I would ask that you respectfully leave the House with the Sergeant-at-Arms.

[Mr. McIver was escorted out of the Chamber by the Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms]

Debate Continued

The Speaker: I believe that we are back to the amendment.

Ms Luff: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Really, I don't believe that this changes the intent of the original motion. All that this amendment does is that it affirms our commitment to public education. In fact, the current way that the charter school regulations are worded is that the regulations state that charter school applications should only be approved in instances where proposed programs are not available in the public system. Those words currently exist within the way that charter schools are set up. So I would not say that this amendment particularly changes the intent of the original motion, sir. I do want to speak to a couple of really excellent examples where charter schools are providing a service that is not currently available in the public system.

I have a charter school in my riding, Almadina Language Charter Academy, that serves ESL students. Now, ESL students are served within the Calgary board of education, but this is a school specifically for ESL students that also offers an Arabic language program, which is not something that's currently available within the Calgary board of education. They do an amazing job. Their teachers love working there, their kids love attending there, and it's really providing a core service. They have a very long wait-list. Parents in my riding of Calgary-East really like this school. They like that their children can go and that it specifically targets children with ESL needs. Their test scores show that the scores of the children who attend this particular school achieve far higher than they would be expected to given their socioeconomic status and also the status of their language. I mean, that's an example of a charter school that's doing amazing work.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Connect Charter School in Calgary is also doing amazing work. It is a very intense, inquiry-based program that is doing a really good job.

There are some really excellent examples of where charter schools are providing a service that is not available in the public system, and this amendment simply speaks to the original intent of how charter schools were set up while also affirming our commitment to allowing parents to choose however they want to

educate their children, simply affirming that we have a strong commitment to public education.

I think that's all. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any others to speak to the amendment? The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Certainly, I'm happy to say a few words on the amendment. Certainly, as well, it's very important for everyone to understand, judging by the two budgets that we have just passed in the last six months and all of the work that we have been doing, that we affirm our commitment to all forms of education in the province of Alberta as long as they're providing high-quality education that we regulate through the Ministry of Education.

We are, quite frankly, very concerned to make sure that we have all the capacity in our education system that we can. We have a growing enrolment in our schools, Madam Speaker, and certainly we are in the midst of a very large infrastructure build in regard to schools as well, the largest infrastructure build in history, quite frankly, in this province. Those are all indicators that we need all the capacity that we have available to us.

I certainly in the last 11 months or so have found wonderful examples of charter schools and private schools and home-schooling that are providing education choices for parents and children in our province. I mean, this is a very important point that I say every time I'm with people. Of course, you can judge us on the actions that take place in regard to funding that has happened and will continue to happen as well.

5:30

What is important – and I think the amendment speaks to that – is to talk about the regulations around starting new schools, starting new private schools and charter schools and so forth. You know, it's always important to remember that we do provide public funding for these schools as well. It goes through a regulatory process based on public funds, and being responsible for those public funds is very important. Our ministry works through those processes to ensure that there is a standard of education that's being met and that we are looking at ways to supplement education as it stands in the province as well.

The amendment simply is a manifestation of the regulations that already do exist when we do make an evaluation on a new private school or a new charter school as well. In the 11 months that I've been minister, I mean, we've made deliberations on both of those things. I have re-established licensing for charter schools, and I've evaluated other new applications as well through our ministry, using the criteria that is available to us. I think that's an important distinction for people to understand, and that's certainly part of the reason that, I guess, this motion is important and useful and that that distinction is made in the motion as well.

We, of course, are very proud of the steps that we've taken to ensure that our children have a high quality of education, especially during these difficult economic times. As minister I know how important stable and predictable funding is for our students, our teachers, and our education partners. The budget we just released on Thursday ensures that every new child entering our schools in the fall will be funded for that enrolment. They will have the teacher, the physical space, and the support staff that's available for them to succeed.

We know that the restoration of funding, which includes all forms of schools, Madam Speaker, has led to the opportunity to hire at least 740 additional teachers, protecting 800 support staff jobs. Now with this new budget from Thursday we can see another 360

teachers and 260 support staff hired. Of course, this is an important commitment and definition of commitment, quite frankly, and I think that it's been very well received indeed.

On Friday last week I held a phone conversation with public, charter, and private school boards after we released our budget, and what I heard on the other end was very pleasing indeed. They were very happy with our choices for funding and the hope for the future that that entails. I think that making sure that we establish funding and have long-term, predictable funding is what school boards have been looking for for a long time, and I think that our budget on Thursday was a reaffirmation of that as well.

It is obvious that I am an advocate and a product of public education, but I also recognize that there is very good work that does take place in charter and private schools as well as home-schooling. As a good example, I had a chance to meet a student and a principal of Boyle Street Education Centre, which is a charter school here in Edmonton. The students attending Boyle Street are often vulnerable and survivors of difficult circumstances, so the dedicated staff at this charter school go out of their way to support these youngsters and provide them with the tools they'll need to succeed.

A number of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students attend Boyle Street, and the centre works to make sure that its courses are culturally relevant. It's a school that's also a leader, Madam Speaker, in regard to developing policy to support all students, including those in the LGBTQ community. In that policy work teachers are actually involved and working very closely with the students, and it has a very positive effect on their learning and retention rates and graduation rates.

Certainly, as I travel around the province, we see examples of private schools that provide for students with severe special needs. You know, we value every step of the way the provision that these schools make for the children that they are responsible for. There are lots of great examples out there.

I say from beginning to end that we reaffirm that the needs of our 659,000 students, probably more as we speak, are paramount, and I look for the capacity, the stability, and the security that our fine schools do provide. Always we're working to adapt, and always we're looking to improve. But, certainly, everyone must hear my words and understand our affirmation of funding in support for different forms of schools as long as the quality and the standard that we expect from those schools does not waiver. I think that is a message that everyone should make sure they do understand.

Now, I've also spoken to my public school boards, which includes Catholic school boards, and challenged them, you know, to look to make sure that they provide alternative programming as well. I know Edmonton public has set a very high standard for offering alternative programming in their schools, and I think that it paid off very well in regard to the choices that parents have across the city. I know that the evolution of alternative programming is at different places and times around the province, but the more that we can challenge school boards to offer different choices, then certainly that is very helpful for the children and for students and parents and families, to have that level of high-quality choice available to them.

Madam Speaker, it's always a balancing. We know that it was not easy, by any means, to find those dollars to fund education, but this caucus, our cabinet, and our Premier reaffirm to me time and time again that we invest in education every step of the way during difficult economic circumstances or not because that's just who we are as Albertans, that's who we are as a community, and we certainly cannot waiver from that position. So you can watch us and look at the budgets – two budgets in six months – that reaffirm that

commitment, and moving forward, we will continue to do so as well. I've heard very strong and positive reaction from our partners in education – the school boards, parents, students, teachers – and I certainly am grateful for that input.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon on the amendment, followed by Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think we're all a little shocked at what has happened in this Chamber today. I would speak to the amendment – and I will be speaking to that amendment – but I want to start addressing it in this fashion. I believe that today, now more than ever, in Alberta we need educational choice and we need flexibility to choose and to allow parents to choose the educational choice and delivery method for their children.

I don't know if you've looked up the Treasury Board and Finance statistics with regard to immigration into this province, but I have. This province has consistently captured double-digit shares of Canada's immigrant population since 2009. Alberta has been attracting a large number of immigrants. As a matter of fact, we've been the destination of choice for immigrants into this country, Alberta.

5:40

It's because of that that we all recognize in this House we're a multicultural province and that we need to have this discussion about what educational choice will look like, and this amendment speaks to that educational choice. We in this province represent every language, religion, colour, political persuasion that you can think of. What ties us together isn't an ethnic sense of nationalism; it's a civic sense of nationalism. Albertans are tied together by our commitment to democracy, to the ideas of freedom and of equality, of personal conscience, and the right to religious freedom. It is these democratic values that draw us together, and it's probably why I'm so concerned about this amendment to the motion.

You see, I believe that Albertans are committed to these values. It's these values that tie us together, and they're the key to being in community in Alberta. Of all of the values that we uphold in this province, freedom is one of the greatest. We have a clear understanding and commitment as a province to a balanced understanding of freedom, a responsible freedom that understands that every citizen must be free to speak to their conscience, to raise their family, to pursue their own faith, and to do so within the balance of community. I don't believe that this amendment to this motion speaks to that.

It's a delicate balance that we have in this province, but we've exercised that balance in innumerable ways, and we've done it very successfully. We've encouraged all Albertans into a social compact that will allow for freedom, bound by a commitment to live in community in such a fashion that we respect all of our individual rights, including the rights of parents to decide how their children will be educated in this province. Not the state, not with any recommendation or guidance or final say by the state as to what we can or should not be able to have, but in a reasonable fashion to meet the needs of the parents and the students as they see fit in this province.

The Wildrose Party will support the motion, but we will not be supporting this amendment because we do not believe that this amendment fits with that vision of education, with the rights that we believe we should all have as Albertans. We believe that our system of education must reflect the historical respect for diversity and for parental rights that we have created in this province. There

are many ways to teach and there are many different communities that we have, and we expect our education system to be able to serve all of those communities, in all of their diversity.

It should be no surprise that we must craft an education system that will reflect the diversity of this province. We need an education system that will continue to serve a multicultural province, one that respects parental rights and choice and one that will be flexible enough to serve the different communities within this province, and this amendment attacks that. One thing that the PC government almost always did well was to encourage respect of parental choice in education, and we cannot let that principle erode. I believe that this amendment attacks that principle.

Alberta is a model of educational diversity in Canada and around the world, and we must support that vision of education, Madam Speaker. We have a diverse system with public schools, Catholic schools, home education, charter schools, alternative programs, independent schools, and all of it is driven by parental choice, not by the state. Taken together, they meet the needs of Canada's diverse community. Alberta has been a world leader in supporting educational choice within school boards and according to the priorities of the parents and the interests of the children, and that is what we need here. Not this amendment.

Indeed, Alberta's publicly funded system, I believe, is amazing in its diversity. The Fraser Institute has spoken to that, saying, "Generally speaking, Alberta offers the greatest degree of school choice in Canada." This needs to be maintained. We need to maintain an education system that has been able to meet the needs of all of our diverse communities, and that is why I want to be able to speak against this amendment, Madam Speaker.

We learned this early on in Canadian history. If nobody else across the aisle has learned it, we've learned it in the rest of Canada. Faced with a nation that was divided by French and English politics, in a nation that was being divided, we saw it happen in 1890 in Manitoba, Madam Speaker, when the English Protestant school system was going to be imposed on a French Catholic population. Out of this controversy was established what we call in our Canadian history the Laurier-Greenway compromise, a compromise that said that where numbers warrant, where there is significant interest by the parents to have a particular style of education – in this case in Manitoba, a French Catholic education – they would be able to have that. This was not driven by the state. It was the antithesis of that. It was the state recognizing that educational decisions are made by the parents, not by the state.

While the government currently says that they will support choice in education, what we have now is a question as to whether or not they actually do. The Minister of Education has stated quite clearly, Madam Speaker:

I think it's a bit duplicitous that we actually direct public funds to a private school, but that's a discussion for another day.

I guess we're having it today.

Why spend \$10,000, \$20,000, \$30,000 on a private school when you probably get a better education in the public school down the street?

Madam Speaker, to quote the Premier: "Our caucus is steadfastly opposed to private schooling and particularly steadfastly opposed to public dollars supporting private schooling."

So what this amendment speaks to cannot be held in isolation. It must be taken in the context of the things that have been said prior by this government and by the members of this government. It was with great interest that I was waiting to listen today to see what the members from the opposite side of the House would say. I guess we have got a very clear statement. They believe that it is not the parents. Rather, in this motion we see that it says: "where they offer alternatives not available in the public system."

Mr. Barnes: Who decides that?

Mr. Smith: That, I guess, is the job of some bureaucrat or somebody in government.

This amendment assumes that the public system has a priority. The very nature of this amendment attacks the very concept of the idea of parental choice. This motion is actually about freedom, the freedom of parents to decide, not the state, not the government.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by Vermilion-Lloydminster if there's time.

Mr. Malkinson: Madam Speaker, I'll pass for the moment. Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Well, Madam Speaker, I see this afternoon's proceedings as being a tremendous lost opportunity. It disappoints me. Really, what we wanted to have this afternoon was a discussion about a principle that, as the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has articulated, has long been something that has guided education in this province, and that is parental choice.

5:50

There have been concerns since the election of this government on the part of many parents across our province that in some ways those choices or that ability to choose would be eroded. Now, the Education minister, to his credit, has stated in question period that that is not his intent. He has said not equivocally in terms of going forward, but he has certainly said for the time being that those choices would still be made available. But for parents across the province the ability to have that choice is something that they need to have affirmed to them, and this motion gave government members the opportunity to do that.

In fact, because it's a private member's motion and because it's a free vote, if there are some members of government caucus that don't agree with the statement, they could vote against the motion. I think that given the diversity of the province of Alberta there would be some who would applaud them on making that decision to vote against the motion because they have a fundamental disagreement with the notion of parental choice. I will tell you that on behalf of parents who make choices that are alternate to public education we make them with the greatest of care, Madam Speaker. I can assure you of that and that we are concerned that members of this government do not necessarily honour that ability to make that choice.

Now, I spoke out in this Legislature in October 2012, and I'm quoting here from *Hansard*. At that time the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was speaking to government Bill 3. We were speaking that night about choice in education, and I'm going to quote. I'm going to go back a little bit in his quote because what we were talking about were some of the changes that had been made when Bill 3, the Education Act, was reintroduced. He's referring to basically some of the information we received from groups like charter school parents and home-school parents. The hon. member said: "I think it's deplorable. I think that it is pandering to fringe groups in our education system, and the vast majority of students who participate in the public school system will suffer as a result." Specifically, just to get the full context of the debate, he was referring to home-schoolers.

I saw it as recently as Monday night at the Alberta School Boards Association, when I had a school board trustee come up to me and say: "You know what the problem with our public school system is? It's those home-schoolers. It's those parents that make decisions to home-school their kids." I looked at that trustee and said: well, you probably picked the wrong guy to say that to. My wife and I

were blessed with two sons, and they were home-schooled K to 12. The one is currently completing a master's degree in theology, having finished a bachelor of arts degree in applied arts and philosophy. The other one has a bachelor of arts degree from the University of Calgary. I think they've turned out okay.

We made those choices, Madam Speaker, specifically because when my wife told a public school teacher, who was a friend of ours, that our oldest son had taught himself to read and that he was reading at a grade 9 level by the time he got to the age of three, that public school teacher told my wife: you know, I used to really enjoy teaching students like Roland, but now they're just a problem. That's what we were told, that our son, if he went to public school, would be a problem, a problem in the class of a teacher whom we respected for her ability and her passion for teaching. After that, after many tears were shed, my wife and I made the decision that we would home-school our children. There have been times when we wondered if that was the right decision, but we made that decision.

My problem with this amendment, Madam Speaker, is that I have a problem with the phrase "commitment to allowing parents the choice . . . for their children, including home, charter, and private education programs in such instances where they offer alternatives not available in the public system." Parental choice becomes conditional. It becomes conditional upon proving – and I'm not sure to whom or how – that those alternatives are not available in the public system. What would we have had to do? Would we have had to subpoena that teacher to appear in front of some sort of tribunal in order to get permission to home-school our sons? That's what we were told.

You may not want to believe that. That's fine. That's your prerogative. But my wife and I were told that our gifted son would be a problem in public school, so we chose an alternative. We didn't want to create a problem for a teacher or for a group of students, and we home-schooled that child. We home-schooled both of our sons, and throughout it was not just our choice as parents; it was their choice. Every year we sat down with them and said: "Do you want to continue on this path of home-schooling, or do you want to attend public school? That option is available to you." And every single year they chose to be home-schooled.

That choice is available in Alberta. That choice is funded in Alberta. Alberta and British Columbia are the only two provinces that actually fund home-schooling. In some European countries it's illegal. It's illegal to home-school in Germany. It's illegal to home-school in Sweden. And it's stunning to me that this amendment would move us closer to a situation where you have to prove to someone – we don't know who; we don't know how – that a certain course or type of education is not available in the public system. That's what the amendment says.

Instead of having a debate, as the original motion would have had, talking specifically about affirming parental choice and all of the variety of choice and allowing hon. members to speak to that either in favour or opposed – that's what private member's motions are for. It's a free vote. You can vote opposite to the person sitting next to you. That's okay. That's fine. But instead of having that, we

have this amendment that fundamentally changes this motion because now it makes parental choice conditional. It makes parental choice only an option where the parents can prove that the choice they want to make is not available in the public system.

Madam Speaker, that fundamentally changes what we're talking about here. I think, quite frankly, it sends a shiver down the spine of every parent in this province who chooses to educate their children in a manner that is not in keeping with what is preferred by that side of the House, and that indeed is a sad day for this province. If parental choice is removed from parents in Alberta, if the opportunity guaranteed by the United Nations that parents shall be the primary deciders of how their children shall be educated, removing it from parents and handing it over to the state, handing it over to somebody who decides whether the conditions in this amendment are in fact being satisfied, that will send a shiver down the spine of every home-school parent, charter school parent, private school parent in the province.

It didn't have to be that way. We could have debated the original motion, and we could have had a split in all caucuses for that matter, because some, perhaps, wouldn't have supported the motion in all the caucuses. Instead, we have this amendment that has fundamentally changed it and has fundamentally changed it into a situation where parents will only have the opportunity to choose these nonapproved courses, these nonapproved streams of education that have always been available purely on the choice of the parent because they now have to prove that that's not available in the public education system.

Madam Speaker, that's a sad, sad statement, and I can only think that observers of this debate today will be very disappointed in that.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I don't know where to start. It's been quite the afternoon. You know, we've seen things this afternoon that we might never see in this Assembly again. That's certainly my hope. But the big challenge that we face is understanding who is in charge of the education of our children, and that's what we were doing this afternoon.

In fact, today my children happen to be in the gallery, and if you can believe it, Madam Speaker, they're at school. They are currently learning. I would imagine that some day I'll describe exactly what transpired this afternoon, and they will be surprised at what happened. They'll be surprised that the government moved an amendment that at the end of the day, should it be passed, would take away parental choice, would potentially expose those who choose to educate their children in alternative manners to not have that same choice.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but pursuant to the standing orders it's now 6 p.m. and we do have to adjourn the House for the afternoon. The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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