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The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, November 10, 2016

Day 48

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Second Session

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

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Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 9

Alberta Liberal: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, November 10, 2016

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect, each in our own way. Let us give thanks for the precious gift of freedom and peace which we all enjoy today. We must remember those who fought for us to have those gifts. Without these brave men and women who sacrificed everything for our country and our province, we would not be able to enjoy the freedom and privileges we have now.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 28

Public Health Amendment Act, 2016

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to address Bill 28 here in Committee of the Whole. I want to preface my remarks by congratulating the Health minister as well as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud for bringing forward this piece of legislation. I think that what we see here is a very good measure and a very good attempt to bring forward a proactive preventive medicine measure, one that I think will truly improve health outcomes in our province.

I want to maybe go out on a limb a little bit here this morning by saying that I'm going to take a guess that I've probably administered more doses of vaccine than anyone else in the Chamber. Having been on thousands and thousands of occasions on the nonpointy end of the needle, I will tell you that vaccination is something that I feel very, very strongly about as a public health measure. I feel so strongly about it that I think it is extremely important that we do whatever we can in our province to improve the knowledge and the understanding of vaccination so that it is something that people understand more broadly.

I was dismayed a couple of years ago when there was a study released that indicated that over 1 in 5 Albertans still believed that there is a causative link between childhood vaccination and autism spectrum disorder. That, my friends, is something that all of us have a role in combating, the fallacy and the lie that that is. All of that, for those of you who don't know the background, came about as a result of a bogus article that was published in *The Lancet* in 1998 by Andrew Wakefield. That article has proven to be incorrect. That article has proven to be false. The fact that there are still folks – I'm going to talk about this in a second, about how, unfortunately, a lot of folks in society today take their scientific information from the world of celebrity. We've seen that problem in the debate that we've had with regard to Alberta's environmental record. We know that we've had prominent visitors come to our province and make

rash statements that are so completely false; yet, without naming names, they should perhaps have gone down with the *Titanic*, in fact, and they did.

Madam Chair, I want to say for the record that as a Rotarian one of the jobs we had in Rotary representing our vocation was to inform our fellow Rotarians about something that we would know within our vocation that might not be widely known amongst the rest of the group, and in many ways I consider our Chamber to be a little bit like that same sort of organization. We all come with our different skills and our different abilities and our different backgrounds.

We heard yesterday from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, who has a long and distinguished career as an oncologist, and he spoke very directly about the importance in a public health sense of vaccination. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, similarly, reiterated his comments, and I was very interested to hear him use the term "herd immunity" because I do know a little bit about herd immunity. Herd immunity, though, is a concept in public health that is extremely important.

Every year in estimates – and the Health minister will corroborate this – I ask about our targets, our vaccination targets, that we set out, and I ask why we fall so short of those targets and if the targets in the estimates in the business plan for the Ministry of Health are, in fact, reasonable or if they're, you know, something that we should adjust. She correctly says that these are the targets that have been set out by the World Health Organization that we have within Canada for childhood vaccination, and therefore that is what we should strive for.

Bill 28, in my view, creates a balanced approach to how we might improve our vaccination performance within our young people. I certainly applaud the government as well for crafting a bill that respects the rights of parents to make choices on behalf of their children with regard to vaccination. That is something that we have to respect. That is something that has to remain within the hands of parents because parents ultimately have to make choices on behalf of their children and especially in this case. We're talking about infants. Very clearly, parents are making all of the choices at that age and at that stage. Anything that we can do in this Legislature to allay some of the fears that are out there, the groundless fears about vaccination, I think is something that is very positive.

Vaccination has an actually very long history that goes back nearly 10 centuries, but it's probably best known for the more recent history that started with the British physician Edward Jenner. Dr. Jenner made the observation at a time when smallpox had a mortality rate of 60 per cent amongst adults and 80 per cent amongst youth that those that had common contact with cattle rarely developed smallpox, and if they did, their case of smallpox was considerably less severe than others in their cohort group. He made a guess without knowing a thing about virology, without knowing that viruses even existed, that there was something that people handling cattle were exposed to that in some way protected them against smallpox, and he was right. He was a keen observer of his patients, as good doctors are, and he made the conclusion that there was something – and he didn't know what it was – that protected people who worked with cattle against smallpox.

9:10

As it turned out, it was a related disease caused by a related virus that was nonfatal. In fact, it was the cowpox virus, and it was Jenner that determined that the cowpox vesicles contained something. Of course, he was living in a time before there were electron microscopes, so he could not actually see what that something was. He made the conclusion that there was something in the cowpox vesicles that protected smallpox patients. Before long he was actually treating early cases of smallpox with the extract, as we'll

call it, that was developed from these cowpox vesicles. Now, we know that Louis Pasteur then made a lot of great strides forward in terms of the development of vaccination.

For those of you who are interested in things like this, the word “vaccination” actually comes from the Latin root word “vacca,” which means cow. That is because the initial vaccinations were done from something that was derived from a cow. As a veterinarian, of course, I’m very proud of that.

But I do want to talk a little bit about the whole concern with regard to the adverse reactions. Vaccines are developed and have been developed over the years by pharmaceutical companies. I know that out there there is concern or there is suspicion about this thing called big pharma. I think that one of the things we have to recognize is that big pharma and the vaccinations that they have developed are part of the reason why public health has made such great strides forward. Vaccination is something that saves our health system billions of dollars a year, and if we could increase the numbers of people that are vaccinated, we could save our system literally billions of dollars a year. It is one of the most effective ways of reducing health care costs that is available to us. As a veterinarian who spent probably 80 per cent of my time in practice doing preventive health care as opposed to reactive health care, I can tell you that vaccination was a big part of it.

In this bill it talks about making sure that we have vaccination records for children attending schools and daycare and that those records be shareable. I think that’s critically important. To me, it’s bizarre that you can place a child in school with no knowledge of vaccination records whatsoever, yet if you want to board your dog in a kennel, you have to show proof of vaccination. Does that really make any sense? If you want to put cattle into a community pasture where there is commingling of cattle from different herds, you have to show proof of vaccination. If we’re doing it for cows and dogs, Madam Chair, we should be doing it for our children.

Madam Chair, I’m going to refer to a monograph or commentary that was published in 2015. Unfortunately, I only have one copy of this. I’m going to take some direction from the Clerk’s table as far as how I might be able to table five copies of this without breaking copyright law. It’s a commentary from the C.D. Howe Institute, and it’s entitled *A Shot in the Arm: How to Improve Vaccination Policy in Canada*. This is an excellent, excellent commentary. I would certainly recommend it. It’s only 14 pages long; it’s not overly technical. It talks about vaccination policy in Canada. It specifically talks about Alberta, and it talks about how Alberta could improve on what is right now an underperforming level of child vaccination. It gives a number of measures, many of which I think are embodied in the piece of legislation that we’re debating.

Specifically, Madam Chair, in the report, and I’m quoting now from page – well, I said that it was 14 pages long, and here I’m quoting from page 15. We’ll get that straightened out.

We believe that Alberta should consider adopting a model that mandates informed choice upon school entry or earlier. This means including enforcement mechanisms to encourage parents to decide one way or another. Such mechanisms could involve requiring written consent or refusal in infancy and again upon entering school, with proof of having spoken to a physician or nurse. Stricter measures would be financial penalties, similar to the Australian model, or the threat of suspension, as in Ontario.

I’m glad that we’re not looking at those. I think the first step is to try to encourage education and to allay the fears of those who still have doubts, who still are listening to some of the PhDs on *The View* who have opinions on vaccinations rather than on the overwhelming weight of scientific evidence that shows the benefit of vaccination.

Madam Chair, once again I’d like to commend the minister and the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, and I certainly appreciated the comments from my colleague for Calgary-Mountain View and his long experience in the public health field.

I can tell you that as someone who has administered vaccines to many, many patients and has seen adverse reactions in a minuscule number of those patients and in every case has been able to react and respond and take the necessary measures to ensure that that adverse reaction was taken care of and who’s accidentally vaccinated myself against any number of different dog, cat, and cattle diseases and carries titres against a number of different diseases that I’m unlikely to develop at some time in later life – I have been rabies vaccinated, as an example. That’s something we get standard as veterinarians, and, you know, quite frankly, with some of the patients I’ve dealt with and even now in political life, I’m rather glad I carry that protection.

Madam Chair, all kidding aside, I think this is a good piece of legislation. It is one that our caucus certainly supports. I would encourage all members from all sides and all parties within the House: for the sake of our health overall but especially for the sake of our young children let’s pass this, and let’s get on the ball with regard to educating Alberta’s public to make sure vaccination becomes more widespread.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. In regard to your tabling, if you could please just table the publication information, that would be sufficient. Thank you.

Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Hello. Thank you, Chair. Thank you very much for the point of view of immunization from the point of view of a veterinarian. As a teacher I have a lot of the same concerns. We see a lot of the issues that happen when we have someone who is not immunized in amongst the class when there is a vaccine-preventable outbreak of disease. Of course, the majority of the students are protected by their own immunizations, but you always worry, legitimately worry, that if someone is not immunized and they are not isolated, they can be carrying a disease well away from the classroom to people who are not immunized for any number of reasons. Infants, because they’re too young – you know, there’s a baby at home, and that child can be exposed to a disease. People with compromised immune systems can be exposed, and all of that is needless.

So as a teacher working in an educational system, the faster, the more quickly you have the information as to which students need to be isolated in order for them not to be spreading the disease, contracting and spreading, it’s really, really helpful, and it’s better for everyone. It’s better for society as a whole for sure. In that regard I totally agree with the thoughts expressed previously that this is a very good bill.

The other thing I want to mention – and we’ve brought it up before, some of us of in the older MLA crowd, that we well remember the days when we did not have the vaccinations and the immunization programs available, and we don’t want to go back there. [some applause] Thank you. So much needless, I mean, now preventable harm and death that we just don’t want to see reoccurring when it doesn’t need to happen. We have very good mechanisms to keep people from contracting many of these diseases, and we want to use them for that purpose. Basically, mechanisms that will help lessen the likelihood of harm being spread in our society, particularly to our children, is a pretty legitimate and worthwhile cause.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I hope everyone will support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

9:20

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Chair. Vaccinations. You know, the problem with the whole antivax community is the fact that we have a generation of people who didn't experience the hardships of these diseases when they proliferated back in the day. If we don't learn these lessons from our parents and our grandparents and our forefathers and mothers, then we're destined to circle back and relearn these harsh lessons because these are dangerous diseases. Let us remind people of what something as simple as the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine has provided or what we had when we did not have these diseases.

Measles. You know, everyone hears about it, but what are measles? You know what? These are all viruses. It'll cause you to have a fever, you'll get a rash, and you're going to get cold-like symptoms. Ah, that doesn't seem so bad. There are some ocular issues as well, so you get a bit of photophobia, so that means that the light is very impairing to you. More importantly, from measles you can get brain damage, and there is a percentage of people that actually died from this brain damage. If they did not die, they were impaired because that computer chip in our head, there, was damaged, so these people could not have good lives.

Mumps. Again, with every disease there's a fever. That's your body fighting these infections. They get headaches. Your glands will swell. But did you know that mumps will lead to meningitis? There's temporary and permanent deafness. I should go back. Does anyone know what meningitis is? I know there are some health care professionals in the House. Meningitis really is the swelling of the tissues that surround the brain and whatnot and our central nervous system, and when that swells, it impacts our nervous system and impairs things there. So mumps, again, is a very dangerous issue. I might also say that there is painful swelling of the testicles. I know; it's nuts. I know.

Rubella. There are very serious complications from rubella. Rubella is probably the worst one, and people don't recognize this. When your daughter grows up to become an adult and she's pregnant and she gets exposed to rubella, 9 out of 10 will get birth defects. It leads to brain damage of that little one. It leads to heart defects. It leads to liver, eye issues, deafness. So it's not just impacting the person that makes the decision not have that vaccination; it impacts that baby that's inside of them. Nine out of 10 women who get rubella during pregnancy will have a child that will be difficult to manage when they get older.

We've forgotten the lessons of our parents and our grandparents, and that's why we have to look to the history books. That's why we have to remember why these things came about, and we have to make proper, educated decisions on getting these vaccinations. Really, in the scheme of things, we would have had these things wiped out, and we wouldn't even be exposed to them, but unfortunately we are now, and that's a shame.

With that in mind, I do support vaccinations. Thank you very much. But I also do support the freedom for someone to say no. It is what it is.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is really a pleasure to stand here in support of this important bill, that has the support of teachers as well as parents and all of us. It's been very refreshing, actually, hearing the discussion, and I appreciate the contributions from all members of the Legislature. I only wish that we could inoculate this spirit of collegiality and co-operation into our other discussions such as on the carbon levy. What are the chances?

An Hon. Member: Let me write the budget, and you've got a deal.

Dr. Turner: We're waiting for a budget from you guys.

Anyways, the bill is aimed at increasing immunization rates. I agree with the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster that one of our jobs is to create the environment in which immunization rates are increased, and I think that this bill is going to do that through the dissemination of information about the benefits of vaccinations and immunizations as well as in the interdigitization of the various communication systems that allow our teachers to know which students may not have had their vaccinations. Those students can be excluded in the event of a preventable infection occurring in that community.

These amendments will also improve the services for immunizations. It's very key that we actually make the immunizations, vaccinations available to all Albertans and make it easy for them to get so that these sorts of situations don't arise. I think all Albertans want to be healthy. They want to be able to protect their children. If we make the services more available, that's going to be very positive.

The objective is to achieve full immunization through information sharing and to better protect Alberta students and their families in the event of an outbreak. I really do appreciate the input from all members that have spoken on this. I think that there are some very good ideas. I'm also very appreciative of our public health officials. We have a phenomenal public health system in this province. We need to give them the resources to get the job done well. We also have a phenomenal education system in this province and a system in the province that actually keeps track of the students in that system, and we can use both of those good systems to make the immunization rates better.

With that, I will again urge, as before, all members to support this important legislation.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Good morning, Madam Chair. Thank you so much. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak if only briefly. I know that it's hard for some members of this Assembly to believe that it can be brief, but I will do my very best.

Let me just begin by saying that I believe that children are our future, and it's important that we do everything that we can to set our children up for success. While there is still some significant public debate around vaccinations, I think that it's critically important that people have the access to information they need to make the best available decision. Much of this piece of legislation is around just that, around the ability for our public health officials to be able to communicate and allow parents to make the best choice possible.

I think that it's also very critically important that the bill still allows them to make that choice. I mentioned it yesterday, but I want to reiterate it today because sometimes in the course of public discussion what we're actually talking about can get derailed. What this bill does not do is require mandatory vaccinations. What it does do is takes many steps in the right direction of encouraging parents

to be aware of the decision that they're making. What it does is allow government health officials to directly contact folks and have a conversation around that. I think that those are reasonable steps that we can make to ensure that people have the information that they ought to when they make a decision as important as around their children's health, around vaccination.

I just want to reiterate a point, and I'm hoping that the minister might have an opportunity to respond to alleviate some of my concerns around the privacy of this information. The information that we're going to be sharing from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health is very sensitive and personal information. First of all, it's information about minors' health. It's information in many respects about a decision that a parent has made or not made, and that decision is a very private and personal decision that that parent might make. What we don't need to see is any sort of, first of all, breaches of privacy or any abuse of this information with respect to a decision that a parent might make for their child.

9:30

I think many members of this Assembly are aware, Madam Chair, of the bad track record of AHS on privacy breaches, and we've seen a significant increase in investigations. I know that the Privacy Commissioner has spoken quite sternly both to AHS and the ministry about the importance of keeping health information private generally. As we move towards expanding the amount of information sharing between Education and Health, much of which is very private and very personal information, I'm hoping that the minister this morning, at the conclusion of my remarks, would be willing to provide some reassurances that these issues have been clearly and robustly considered, discussed, and that a plan has been put in place on how this will take place, any potential consequences for breaches of that privacy. That way we'll have some reassurances.

As you know, Chair, I like to give the government the best opportunity to respond best, but I also am deeply passionate about holding the government to account. If, in fact, we'll be able to hear the plan today, I hope, and if the government hasn't done their job in respecting the privacy, respecting this information, then we, then, will be able to point back to this time and say: "You know what? The government hasn't fulfilled their commitments, and Albertans expect this government to do just that."

I will be supporting this piece of legislation and encourage my colleagues to do the same because much about the education side of this, much about parents being able to decide what's best for their children with the right information is, I believe, a step in the right direction, but there are some concerns. It's my hope that we can have some of those at least alleviated a little this morning.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills for his comments and his endorsement of the bill before us here today.

Obviously, we have hit a good balance. I can tell from the comments here today in regard to this bill but also from, I believe, the larger medical community and from education partners across the province. We had, in fact, trustees and representation at our announcement last week, and I was very proud to see their enthusiastic endorsement of this initiative that we've undertaken here. It's very important to note that we had parents, parent council representation there as well and so forth. You know, sometimes when you build legislation, those stakeholders' endorsements and then, of course, what we hear in debates in the House here help us

to gauge how we will move forward on any given legislation generally and then on this specific piece of legislation as well.

I know that from a health perspective it's absolutely essential that we are using the time available to us when we see an outbreak of a disease, that we act in a timely manner, and information gives us that upper hand to make the best use of time. Just to remind everyone about how this legislation works, how this initiative works, we are simply passing enrolment information over to Alberta Health Services for them to cross-reference with their immunization records.

In regard to privacy, in regard to the integrity and security of that information I would suggest that this is at least as secure as before. Both of those ministries and both of those lists are secure and protected by legislation and the law. I would suggest that, you know, we even actually have a double fail-safe mechanism here because we're passing information from two ministries, cross-referencing it over. On every level of the privacy that exists on both of those lists I would suggest that we have a very safe and secure method by which to undertake actions in the case of an outbreak of any given disease.

You know, just to fill in more information on that as well, detailwise, for students that are coming from other jurisdictions across the country and/or even from other countries, we are, again, passing that information over. Then we have an opportunity, I think, for both ministries to cast a second look on those individuals and that file so that, again, there's another level of sort of scrutiny that would help individuals to get the immunizations that they need to help keep themselves safe and our larger communities safe, too. It's a pretty good idea. I mean, it's innovative, and I think that it will help us over time – we can track this possibility – to in fact make our children safer in the province here.

You know, again, we have put that provision recognizing an individual's or a family's right to make a choice here, but I think that it's important, Madam Chair, to not – I mean, that's there. It's on the paper, it's in the bill, but, you know, I don't think we want to necessarily put a big neon light and sign around that nor make it particularly straightforward and just a matter of course for an individual or a family to do that. I think that part of this bill, again, is for people to take a long second thought about the implications around immunization, not to treat it frivolously. Nor should it be something that is decided on the spur of the moment or just by omission and/or some other choice that hasn't been backed up by some serious thought over time. Okay. I think that's important.

I know the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills emphasized that opt-out aspect of this very prominently in his speech. I think that, you know, we have to just remind you all here today, everyone listening, that this is a very serious decision that requires time and consideration and reflection and to reflect on the implications for an individual but for the larger community, too, because the only way that immunization works across the board is to ensure that we're getting as many people as possible. The implications are dire. We've heard speeches from other quarters here today. I mean, it can involve jeopardizing the health and mortality of thousands of people, potentially, so I think that needs to be part of our education here as well.

I know that the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills is a big fan of Whitney Houston, and he must have forgotten the next phrase from that very fine song.

I believe the children are our future
comma,

Teach them well [to help] them [find] the way.
We've got to get that part in there, otherwise it doesn't make any sense, right? You've got to have one to have the other. Just a little

lesson on, you know, quoting songs and so forth for the future, to help us find the way.

Thanks, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

9:40

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak in favour of this bill. You know, there's always a balance, in any legislation that we have, between trying to promote public safety and at the same time trying to protect individual rights and freedoms, and I think this bill finds that balance. I know that we've had a great deal of conversation about not requiring mandatory vaccination but at the same time working towards sharing records that would allow officials to be able to contact parents and to encourage them to do that.

I want to talk a little bit today. I very much appreciated the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster bringing in some of the history and medical science that lies behind the concept of vaccination. I enjoyed the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, with his vision for how we can co-operate in this House. I truly enjoyed that. I guess I'm really glad we've been spared from either hon. members actually standing up and singing this morning the verses from that very amazing song.

I do want to perhaps take this down a path that's maybe a little more personal. As a teacher I've had to help kids in my class that were sick. You know, obviously, when we're dealing with student safety, it's a very important issue, and I think this bill moves us towards more student safety with the idea of being able to identify those students that have not been vaccinated, making sure that, should an outbreak occur, they're not placing themselves in harm or danger by attending a school, for instance, during a measles outbreak. I think this sharing of information, from a teacher's point of view, is a very positive thing.

I know a very personal side of the story. I believe that this bill could have helped my father. My father contracted polio as a young boy. It radically changed his life. He moved off the farm at 13 years of age to go and be the first one in his family to finish and receive a high school degree. He was in school one day when his teacher noticed that he was walking a little funny. There ensued some doctors' appointments to find out that my father had had polio and that it had damaged the muscles in his back and his stomach and that he was developing scoliosis of the spine. So as a 14-year-old boy he had to travel by train all the way from Shaunavon, Saskatchewan, to Regina, where he had surgery to fuse his spine and then spent the next several years recuperating from this.

So when I look at this bill, I see a very personal side to this story. My father has always led a very active life. He's overcome that polio. He's got full mobility, and he would look back and say that probably that event in his life actually made him a better person, but he was one of the lucky ones. When we start talking about trying to achieve a rate of 97 per cent vaccination for the year for polio and we're only at 76 per cent, I think of some of the kids that could be very negatively affected, and I think of people like my father.

I can stand in this Legislature and say that I can support this bill. I think it's found a balance. I think it allows parents to be parents and to make the final decision but with the information and with the sharing of records that will allow for some public safety. So I will speak and will vote in favour of this bill.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I maybe have a few comments and questions in regard to this bill. While I think it's probably a good step forward in an effort to streamline processes and actually protect the public's safety, I do express some privacy concerns, which have been eased a bit by the minister's comments earlier.

One of the other concerns that I would have with this bill is the way in which parents and children are contacted by the Department of Health and how those conversations take place, if it'll be a contact to the parent or if it'll be a contact to the child. How can the minister offer assurances that there won't be intimidation tactics used by the public health officials when having these conversations? That is of great concern, especially if the information is from the department to the child. I do express some concerns there. While I feel like this is mostly fairly good, I'm hoping the minister can offer some assurances that children will not be coerced to make decisions, may or may not be offered the full scope of information. It is certainly a concern, and I hope to get some assurances.

That's it. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The clauses of Bill 28 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 29

Vital Statistics and Life Events Modernization Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Chair. It's a pleasure to rise this morning and speak to Bill 29, the Vital Statistics and Life Events Modernization Act. I spent a little bit of time reviewing the bill, and I'm happy to state that I'll be supporting this piece of legislation, and I would encourage all my hon. colleagues to do the same.

Madam Chair, society as a whole has undergone change, and it's important that the government routinely modernizes and recalibrates so as to ensure that it's in the best position to serve Albertans. I think about my own kids and how different their childhood is to mine. I, perhaps like you, Madam Chair, grew up in a time of VHS and bubble TVs. I remember having to co-ordinate with my family when I could use and get access to the Internet as when I was on the Internet, my family couldn't make any phone calls because of the dial-up connection. In fact, there was a period of time in my very young growing-up days, in grade 3, when I lived in a fairly remote part of this province, and we actually had a party line. Even before the invention of this fad they called the Internet, they had these party lines, where my three neighbours were all on the same phone line.

It's a very different world that my children are growing up in than I did. Madam Chair, I remember sitting down for a movie night with

popcorn and pop, only to discover that someone had forgotten to rewind the VHS. Let's just say that if I was to tell my kids today, "Be kind and rewind," they would have a very funny look for me.

9:50

Mr. Schmidt: That's the way your kids always look at you, Nathan.

Mr. Cooper: That's so true.

It's quite possible that there are some members, some of my esteemed colleagues on the government side of the House, that are also unclear with the statement "be kind and rewind." We used to have these big VHS tapes, and you had a special machine that you could put it in to rewind the thing because it was twice as fast as the VHS. Anyway, you get the point.

I also think about my kids and how they might react if their Christmas present was the complete series of *Gilligan's Island* on VHS. For the benefit of the Minister of Education this morning, I will refrain from singing the *Gilligan's Island* song or whistling it for you, but I do hope that it's now stuck in many of your heads here this morning.

The kids certainly would be shocked if the Internet access was only available through dial-up. Sure, technically it's possible to watch movies on VHS or access the Internet via dial-up, but it's not the most up-to-date system and certainly not something folks would categorize as convenient.

I think this bill is basically the government updating to buying a Blu-ray player or updating to the SuperNet. Albertans expect their government to be able to communicate with citizens in a modern and streamlined manner.

I'd like to highlight a few changes in this bill. I'd like to highlight the formal recognition of midwifery as a legitimate health care profession in the Vital Statistics Act. As you'll know, Madam Chair, the Wildrose caucus has long been an advocate of the expansion of midwifery services and their recognition as legitimate health care professionals. While I admit that this particular change may seem minor as midwives are already authorized to file a birth notice within the province, this bill amends the Vital Statistics Act to officially list midwives in legislation along with physicians.

Albertans have already been using midwifery services for many years, and frankly it's high time that the government formally acknowledged this great service they provide to thousands of Alberta couples. I know first-hand of the great work that midwives are doing right across the province. My brother and his family have five children, and they have benefited individually and collectively from the use of midwife services.

Now, I don't want to get too overly philosophical this morning, but there are some very, very unique and compassionate things in this piece of legislation. One of the most amazing things about humanity that I see every day is our collective ability to experience compassion for one another. Now, I know we've seen right across North America an unfortunate trend away from compassion and even here in our own province, but I have an incredible amount of hope and belief that we will continue to experience compassion for one another and that we will continue to provide compassion for one another. The dictionary defines compassion as, quote: a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for one who is stricken by misfortune accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate suffering. End quote. This bill proposes to introduce a little bit of compassion for individuals and families who are experiencing a difficult life event such as the stillborn birth of their child or the death of a loved one.

Madam Chair, you know that I'm a parent. My beautiful wife and I have three beautiful, extraordinary children. I could not be more proud of the individuals they have become thus far in their lives, and I look forward to sharing many, many more years of life with

them. Getting to see them learn to drive or graduate high school, get their first job, or get married will be wonderful experiences that I will be blessed to have. I cannot begin to imagine how difficult it is for the parent of a stillborn baby who should be celebrating one of life's most joyous occasions but instead has to make difficult choices like the name they wish to give their deceased child. At present we have a very cold and not compassionate process in which to handle this most horrific situation.

I came across a story in a paper recently of a network of photographers who are a part of an organization called Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep. This organization's mission is "to introduce remembrance photography to parents suffering the loss of a baby with the free gift of professional portraiture." This organization has over 1,700 photographers in over 40 countries around the world, including here in Alberta. One of the parents interviewed who accessed the services stated: "That night was the worst night of my life. But when I look at the images, I am not reminded of my worst night. I'm reminded of the beauty and blessings [my son] brought."

Bill 29 proposes to bring a little of that compassion to the process of recording stillbirths in Alberta. Parents will now have the ability to forgo naming their child right away or if they wish to at all. This flexibility is allowing each family the ability to process their grief in a manner that works for them.

Another change proposed by Bill 29 is commemorative certificates. Sadly, stillborn children are ineligible for a birth certificate. It leaves the family with no other document recognizing their child other than as a death. I can only imagine the painful memory that it must be for parents dealing with this unimaginable grief of the loss of a child. While the details of these certificates are yet to be hashed out, the idea is that a commemorative certificate will allow parents to obtain a ceremonial birth certificate. While the certificate itself has no legal standing, it will allow parents to honour their children in a much more compassionate way.

Madam Chair, I've never experienced the magnitude of a stillborn child. As you know, I have two adopted girls, and my family, too, has dealt with a number of challenges through the pregnancy process. Anything that we can do to assist individuals who are dealing with some of life's most challenging situations is something that I am more than happy to support.

I'm happy to see this government introducing compassion into how it deals with people going through difficult life events. This is one of the reasons why I will be supporting Bill 29. There are a number of very important issues that Bill 29 addresses, but for today I think I will leave it at that.

10:00

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on Bill 29, Vital Statistics and Life Events Modernization Act?

[The clauses of Bill 29 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Mr. Westhead: Madam Chair, I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Ms Woollard: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 28 and Bill 29.

The Acting Speaker: Does Assembly concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 24

Forest and Prairie Protection Amendment Act, 2016

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my privilege this morning to move third reading of Bill 24, Forest and Prairie Protection Amendment Act, 2016, on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

I want to thank all members on both sides of the House for the discussions that we've had on this very important piece of legislation. It's clear to me from the comments that were made throughout the debate of the bill that in general I think members are supportive of the enhancement of wildfire prevention, enforcement, and operational activities.

The modernization of this act is an important step in reducing the risk of human-caused wildfires. As was discussed earlier, approximately 70 per cent of wildfires over the last five years have been linked to human activity, and this legislation will introduce measures that will help reduce the risk of human-caused wildfires and enhance firefighting operations. These activities include strengthening penalties to serve as a deterrent, simplifying the process to restrict recreational activities when fire conditions are hazardous, officially designating March 1 as the start of the wildfire season, and clarifying operational roles and responsibilities.

During the second-reading debate and the Committee of the Whole we discussed various aspects of the legislation, and I'd just like to take some time now to address some of those discussion points to make sure that there's clarity on those points. During the debate there were questions about the provisions related to delegation of authority. We want to ensure that the front-line staff, who have the most experience with how this legislation works on the ground, have the ability to make decisions when it's appropriate as part of their day-to-day duties. Of course, higher level decisions will still be made by the minister as required.

In terms of the part of the bill that addresses the wildfire season, starting the season one month earlier than before will allow our wildfire managers to identify potential issues and ensure that fire permits are obtained earlier in the year. An early wildfire season start will allow our wildfire managers to be ready to respond when the spring comes. It won't in any way affect the contracts that we have in place. These contracts are multiyear, ensuring that the resources are available as needed, and can be extended in the fall based on hazard levels. Our government will continue to ensure that we have all the firefighting resources that we need to keep Albertans safe from the risk of wildfire.

During the last wildfire season the government enacted an off-highway vehicle restriction to help reduce the likelihood of wildfire started by exhaust or hot debris. This was done at the time using a provision of the act mostly reserved for forest area closures. The new provisions in the act will allow us to implement an off-highway

vehicle restriction in the same way that we do with fire bans currently. We are essentially simplifying the process.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I was incredibly pleased and honoured to be here to listen to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry introduce Bill 24 into the House on the same day that the Premier recognized the first responders from the Fort McMurray wildfire. This bill will help them to do their job, and I'm proud to stand in this House today for its third reading.

We will now move on to updating the act's associated regulations over the winter, in time for the start of next year's wildfire season on March 1.

Again I'd like to thank all of the members for their support of the bill and for the support of our wildland firefighters. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an honour to be cosponsor of Bill 24, the Forest and Prairie Protection Amendment Act, 2016. I feel it's a great bill, and I'm just so honoured to have the opportunity to be cosponsor of it. As we've heard from both sides of the House, this bill is well supported. This bill contains amendments that protect Albertans and their communities. This bill contains amendments that will strengthen our province's wildfire protection laws, amendments that will enhance wildfire prevention, and amendments that will give more support to our wildfire firefighters.

As we heard from the Member for Banff-Cochrane, approximately 70 per cent of wildfires over the past five years were triggered by human activity. Madam Speaker, this bill will strengthen penalties for violations and increase maximum fines for major offences for individuals or corporations, which will deter reckless and irresponsible behaviours. This bill includes administrative penalties focusing on industrial violations such as insufficient firefighting equipment on-site or failing to meet industrial operation precautions.

Amendments include improving the ability to restrict specific activities during fire season that could ignite a wildfire such as the use of OHVs, amendments that will improve the province's authority to prohibit actions such as drones, which interfere with firefighting operations, and operational amendments designating March 1 as the official start date of the fire season. That earlier start date will ensure wildfire preparations are well under way when they need to be. The amendments are supported by recommendations which were made following the reviews of major wildfires such as the 2011 Slave Lake wildfire and learnings from the past couple of wildfire seasons.

I would like to thank all those in the House who spoke to this bill. I appreciated your comments, stories, and your support. No matter how hard we try, I don't think that a single one of us could erase the images in our heads of what we watched from our televisions and computers just a few months ago: residents of Fort McMurray driving down the highway, flames on both sides of the highway, embers landing on the vehicles. We could hear the conversations of parents talking to their children, answering their questions, trying to keep them calm and trying to keep themselves calm, not knowing what was going to happen from minute to minute.

10:10

No matter how hard we try, I do not think that any one of us here in the House today could erase the images of our exhausted wildfire fighters, their faces blackened from soot, laying on the ground,

resting their bodies, trying to catch a short sleep before they went back towards the flames, or the images of volunteers walking from vehicle to vehicle handing out water and fuel so that families could keep driving away from the flames.

Madam Speaker, no matter how hard we try, we will not prevent all forest fires, but today is the day that all in the House can do their part to ensure the safety and protection of our Albertans and communities. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Bill 24, the Forest and Prairie Protection Amendment Act, 2016. I commend this government in its attempt at legislating more responsible behaviour in our treasured forests and prairies. Fire has been the source of so much that is good in human history, but it is also our biggest threat. Without fire, we wouldn't have the means to be warm. Without fire, we couldn't have cooked our food to a more palatable and digestible state. Without fire, we would have no development of metals and so many other technologies. But fire destroys, and Fort McMurray was only the latest of Canadian communities that were ravaged by fire. In most recent memory we have Slave Lake and we have Kelowna, and there will be more. Make no bones about that.

First off, I am concerned about our forestry department. Their job is to manage our forests, so even though the fire season was legislated to be April 1, I would hope that these professionals would be doing their due diligence 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. It would be more than a shame if it was identified that they put no effort into being proactive in their attempts at ensuring that Albertans are safe and that risks in their portfolios would be identified and plans made to alleviate these issues. It seems to me that this should be a daily chore for them. It would be just as bad if it turned out that they were literally handcuffed from moving ahead with any initiatives or regular operations that would involve the alleviation of threats because of a date on the calendar. It'd be a shame if the report that is due to come out in 2017 were to demonstrate gross negligence or a lackadaisical attitude towards fire prevention and threat suppression. Wouldn't that be a scary thought?

That said, if moving up the date by a month will empower SRD in an attempt at ensuring that they will have the time to assess and alleviate dangers, so be it. I will agree with this part of the bill.

Increased fines. The intent of the increased fines is, again, noble, but we just have to remember that it is a very difficult thing to prove that people have started a fire. It is very difficult. If the forestry department can identify the careless and negligent, all the power to them. This aspect is great, but it must be in conjunction with education.

Now, I see what the government side is currently doing, what with their spending money on advertising. I watch the commercials on the new carbon tax. I see the advertising on the climate change plan, and it's a lot of money to promote people to build gardens on the roofs, without using fall protection. Your own commercials contradict your ideological agenda. I can't believe that the government would choose to spend a lot of money on this propaganda when it could be spending this money on real things, like educating people on real issues like protecting our forests.

An Hon. Member: Climate change isn't a real issue?

Mr. Yao: Climate change is a real issue. My apologies.

Smokey the Bear is a mascot that everyone knows. The character Smokey the Bear is ingrained in our psyches, at least those of a

certain age, like that of the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and older. I do recognize that many of the folks on the government side haven't a clue of what I speak, so I will explain. Smokey the Bear is a mascot that was promoting safety and responsible actions in the forest environment stateside, but even Canadians knew of him as we were exposed to American television channels. His message was clear: respect the environment; respect the forest; watch out for dangers in the forest; be careful of your actions with fire; listen to the park rangers. Alberta and Canada need new mascots to carry these messages of safety. We need someone who will amuse, entertain, and educate people.

I find our government quite comical. I wonder how good the members across the way would be at promoting safety in our forests and warning of the increased fines. You're all charismatic, sharply dressed folks. You're fine ambassadors for fire prevention and smart forest practices.

But that said, we have to remember that education is the key here, and we need to have more education for people. Probably our most effective weapon against future forest fires is education. This bill doesn't really address that, but it does a little, and I will support it. Let us be clear that we do have a lot more to go if we want to prevent forest fires.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Are there any questions under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 24, the Forest and Prairie Protection Amendment Act, 2016. We live in a diverse province. It has miles of grassland, prairies and plains, thousands of acres of coniferous and deciduous forests. While most of our population lives in cities, even that population is never more than a short drive away from a rural landscape that will be dominated by those prairies and the forests. All of us enjoy this proximity to nature, and we all enjoy the beauty of our province. That's a part of being Albertan, being close to nature.

But the raw beauty that we live in can also be very dangerous. To live in Alberta is to understand that nature has a power of her own and that nature can turn our lives upside down in a very short order. Whether we are talking flooding and precipitation or drought and wildfires or any of a dozen scenarios that nature can throw our way, we understand that it is important to be prepared in this province. Just as we have to teach our children that being out in nature is one of the greatest experiences in life, we must also teach them to respect nature and to respect the weather and the terrain and the wildlife that occupy this province.

Bill 24 is about being prepared, and it's about being ready for the inevitability of nature in Alberta. There is a fire season in Alberta, and it is different every year. There are forest pests and biological realities that we must consider and that we must prepare for if we are to protect Albertans, Alberta towns, villages, forests, and prairies. In the recent past we've seen fire consume huge swaths of forest and major parts of communities. Indeed, the Flat Top Complex report helped to birth this bill. After the shocking Slave Lake fire we asked: how could we have done a better job? One of its recommendations was to update the Forest and Prairie Protection Act.

We've had to learn from these incidents that we need to plan in order to minimize the damages to Albertan communities through programs like the FireSmart program. The FireSmart program helps communities plan for and minimize the damage to communities and to homes, to industries and to the landscape by a wildfire, whether

it's preplanning, setting up fire suppression, water supplies, staging areas, evacuation procedures, or any of the myriad other logistical pieces that go together in being prepared to fight and to combat and to overcome and, if necessary, to flee a wildfire.

Communities can receive grants of up to \$100,000 per community through the FireSmart program to help communities minimize the damage of wildfires in their communities. I know that several in my constituency have received those funds. I can think of several, Cynthia being one of them. However, the cost to communities of the recent fires is in the millions, so one wonders just what this funding will do, really, to address it and what communities will be able to do to minimize that damage.

10:20

Bill 24 addresses the issue of wildfire preparedness in three main areas: amendments to the fines, empowering forest officers, and the clarification of amendments. Well, no one is arguing that these are not important areas to address. One wonders if this bill adequately covers these issues and if there are other pieces that should have been included in this legislation.

For instance, in section 17 the provisions for the fire season seem to be largely gratuitous. This period runs from April 1 to October 31 each year. While this bill provides for an earlier start date to the fire season, this does not really make much of a difference as 17(2) already gives the minister the ability to modify the fire season and to adapt to environmental conditions. So what does this provision actually change or do to our capacity to plan and manage forest fires? I suppose it encourages planning. But, then, what if this winter instead is a long one? Have we wasted resources? Wouldn't flexibility be better? Fire companies already had the winter to prepare for the upcoming season. Better planning seems to be the logic behind a firm date, and we will monitor whether that is effective.

One of the pieces of this bill which I support is the increased authority or the flexibility for conservation officers to use their judgment on the ground. I believe that this bill is trying to improve our ability as Albertans to be prepared for the inevitability of wildfires and to enable our officers to deal in a crisis with the critical decisions and responses that are necessary in order to protect life and communities. Being able to stop machinery or off-highway vehicle use if there is a perceived danger of wildfires makes sense. However, this provision presupposes that officers are in the right place at the right time to be able to see people using their ATVs in the backcountry and to take appropriate steps to prevent forest fires.

A concern I have about Bill 24 is:

Section 31.4(1) A forest officer may, without a warrant, seize any thing that the forest officer has reasonable grounds to believe harbours a forest pest.

(b) in subsections (2) and (3) by striking out "product" and substituting "thing."

This takes a reasonable "product" to a vague "thing" and makes this portion of the legislation fraught with possible misinterpretation. It is not unreasonable for an officer to be able to seize a product that harbours a forest pest. We are all aware of the damage that the pine beetle can do, and we all understand that certain noxious weeds can do great damage to our fields and forests and waterways, but replacing "product" and substituting "thing" is far too broad. Laws need to clarify the actions of government and citizens, and I'm not sure that this law does that.

The language in bills that will become law must use specific language. Laws limit our actions. They set boundaries. They help to clarify situations so that individuals will live to together in community in a harmonious fashion. When laws are vague, they can be open to abuse, to confusion, and they can be used by

overzealous government officials not to enhance public safety and security but to unnecessarily control the freedom that we as citizens should be able to exercise. Also, the increase in fines for companies and individuals when they leave unattended fires or leave an area with debris that could prove a fire hazard will hopefully make people think more carefully about their approach to fire safety. While this power already existed under the minister, giving the fire officer power to ask any commercial operation within a kilometre of public land for a fire plan, under threat of closure: this might be too broad. Were there really any complaints in the past with regard to this, and what's the appeal, other than the minister being the one to be able to order the closure?

Madam Speaker, my concern about this bill falls into a larger framework. The government has tried to make sense of the devastation from the fires of Slave Lake and Fort McMurray, and they have put this piece of legislation together, which may or may not make a difference to our communities and families across the province. This bill falls short of what we would expect if the government looked more critically to find the lessons in the Fort McMurray fire. For instance, the recommendations in the Flat Top Complex report are largely ignored, yet that report provides state-of-the-art analysis and ideas for reducing the risks. Updating this legislation is only one of the recommendations and perhaps the one that will have the least impact on the ground in a fire situation.

My larger concern, however, is that this government once again has failed to listen to other stakeholders in drafting and working this bill through the legislative process. They've certainly ignored the opposition. The opposition parties are not on this side of the House simply to speak against anything the government tries to do. We have a very real and important part to play in making sure that legislation that is passed by this House in fact will do what it purports to do.

There is expertise on this side of the House, that is repeatedly ignored by the government. We used the legislative process, debated the bill, and brought up ideas to make the bill better. We're not playing politics to hear ourselves talk. We do not stand up to address a bill in second reading or Committee of the Whole just to play out a part. As Albertans and as people who have been affected by fires in Fort McMurray and in other areas of this province, we have valuable insight and input to offer, yet as seems to be the norm with this government, they have largely ignored the input of the opposition.

Obviously, we need to do more to prevent the devastation of forest fires across the province, but our questions on whether this bill is on target to do that, our questions on whether the legislation is enough, our suggestions for implementing previous recommendations to prevent forest fires, and our concern that there is no mention or inclusion of new or evolving technologies that may provide safety to communities and families have been largely ignored. They are offered not in the spirit of grandstanding but in a sincere and concerned manner that speaks to our commitment to reducing or minimizing the risks of devastation from forest fires.

Our members, thankfully, have lived through such a catastrophe and have much to offer by way of recommendations to keep Albertans safe. We wish this government had listened more carefully to our suggestions. We still support this bill but want to remind the government that there is much more to do in preventing, fighting, and recovering from fires.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak on 29(2)(a)? Comments, questions?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this morning to speak on Bill 24, the Forest and Prairie Protection Amendment Act, 2016. There is nothing more devastating to a community than a natural disaster, never mind having a fire rip through your community. These devastations claim people's lives, homes, livelihoods, families, animals, and way of life.

We all sympathized with all the folks up in Fort McMurray when just last year a large fire ripped through their community, leaving homes, businesses, pets, and other important items behind to escape with just the clothes on their backs and, gratefully, their lives. Many lost things which can never be replaced, like our leader, who had to leave behind his family and all the precious memories of his late son, that were completely burned up in that horrific fire. In that same fire many, actually over 100,000 people, had to flee that horrific fire, narrowly escaping with their lives. Then there was the Slave Lake fire a few years back, in 2011 to be exact, which devastated that community. Thousands of lives will never be the same because of the loss from that fire.

10:30

The main parts of this particular bill deal mostly with amending fines and empowering forest officers to make quicker decisions in the face of a fire threat. There is not a whole lot here, but I'm happy to see some positive aspects that will hopefully prevent some tragedies and maybe curtail and help reduce the magnitude of potential fires. Increasing fines for individuals and companies will hopefully encourage some to think twice and decrease some of the incidents that happen.

In drier years and seasons helping companies to prepare by beginning fire seasons earlier is definitely a wise move, but I am just reminded of what happened last year in Fort McMurray when this government reduced the water bombers' contracts and reduced the overall budget. How will we prepare this year if the funds are not properly allocated? We can't continue making the same mistakes over and over and expecting different outcomes. Some proper planning and foresight needs to be taken into consideration. We hope that increasing fines will deter some of those who are careless, but just that alone will not deter all. I am sure you're quite aware of that. Things will happen.

While I am pleased to see that this government now takes fire prevention more seriously and is taking some steps to improve fire readiness – I'm saying that I can see that they mean well and want to do the right thing – I believe that more could be done. We could add some very important amendments to enhance this bill, especially now, since we are taking the time in this House to address these extremely important issues. I know that we are the opposition, but when it comes to matters such as the safety of all Albertans, I think that having all parties involved would bring about well-rounded discussions, especially expert advice received readily. I want to emphasize that. All of the devastation that one fire can create should give us good reason to review all the amendments and make sure that this bill is adequately equipped to be the very best of our ability. I'm disappointed that we won't be allotted that time to ensure a stronger review.

This bill is being amended out of a direct response to the devastating fires in Fort McMurray and Slave Lake. I'm disappointed that the questions we have raised were not answered, at least not very well, in particular by the minister, who hasn't answered anything at all. I really wish that we could take the necessary time to cross all the t's and dot all the i's so that we could tell Albertans that we took the time to make sure we had the best Forest and Prairie Protection Act review possible.

I ask you now: can we say that any of these additions would have prevented the fires in Fort McMurray and Slave Lake? We know

that the Flat Top Complex wildfire review committee submitted a 95-page report to the minister of environment and sustainable resource development in 2012. That report listed many recommendations. Many of those recommendations from that report were not used. The only recommendation that was used was to update the Forest and Prairie Protection Act. Interestingly, this recommendation suggested that definitions in the act needed to be updated. In section 31.4(1) subsection (b) proposes changing what can be confiscated from a "product" to a "thing". This section indeed gives officers too much power and does not define what "thing" might be. That causes me concern. We needed to narrow the scope of what the government included when they gave the forest officers the power to seize and destroy. This section seems to add anything, which is too extensive. I believe that more thought should have been put into this section, frankly, way more thought.

We also see the updating of administrative penalties – \$5,000 clearly isn't enough – and I do agree with the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry on that number, especially when you see all the destruction that can occur from a fire. It has to be enough so that people remember what it could cost if they are not responsible in lighting fires, an amount that would significantly hurt the pocketbook. They've got to feel it there, right in the pocketbook.

Mr. Speaker, more thought needs to be given, and even though I do support this bill, I still would have liked to have seen more thought and amendments to clear things up and create better legislation. I said "Mr. Speaker," and it's Madam Speaker. I apologize. I saw a little bit of a chuckle, and it's well deserved.

I understand that it was suggested that implementing all the recommendations from the Flat Top Complex report would have been around \$500 million back in 2013. Would that investment have reduced the damage that was inflicted by the Fort McMurray fire? FireSmart recommendations are just a common-sense approach.

So, Madam Speaker, while my colleagues and I do support Bill 24, the Forest and Prairie Protection Amendment Act, 2016, I would have liked to have seen some of the amendments my colleagues brought forth included and a bit more time taken to bring in additions and subtractions that would have strengthened this bill. I also hope this government does not think that this file is now closed, because this bill only scratches the surface of things we need to do to be able to prevent, fight, and recover from fires.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 24, the Forest and Prairie Protection Amendment Act, 2016. First of all, I would like to thank the government for bringing forward this piece of legislation. While it's certainly not as complete and fulsome as we probably would have liked to have seen, it's certainly a step in the right direction in a number of different areas.

I'd also just like to briefly thank the government for the way that they worked so well with the Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo during the Fort McMurray fire. It would be lovely to be able to – my colleague from across the way talked about a vaccine of collaboration. It would be great to see the same sort of collaboration that we have at different times like during the fire. I thought the Premier did a very good job both working with the opposition during that time and representing our province, frankly. So it's good to see that the government is

acting on some of the issues that have arisen since that time, and this bill is a small step in that direction. I do believe that there is a significant amount of work to be done.

10:40

Just recently my colleague from Cypress-Medicine Hat was speaking of a report down in that part of the province identifying some significant fire risks for the area of Cypress, in the Cypress Hills, a report that gives some indication that if there was to be a wildfire in that area, it's possible that residents on the hill and in that area would have less than 10 minutes to evacuate. So there is a ton of work that needs to be done.

I'm sure my colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre will speak about some of the older forests in that constituency and some of the risks that that poses. How we manage those forest assets is critically important. How we manage those assets both from an environmental perspective, a recreational-use perspective, as well as living in and managing the risk is so critically important to those regions and, in many respects, to our entire province because we are so fortunate to live in a resource-rich province. It's not just what's below the ground; it's also what's above the ground. We have a forestry asset that is the envy of many jurisdictions across North America, and we need to be taking all of the steps to ensure that it is managed well.

Just yesterday, Madam Speaker, we had the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky speak about Mackenzie county and some of the issues around the forested areas in Mackenzie county. From memory, I believe he spoke about 1.3 million hectares of land that is going to be tied up in the draft caribou management plan. All of these factors are so important in how they work together, be it wildlife management, wildfire management, forestry. It is a very complex environment that we function in.

We saw a number of pieces of this legislation, and as you'll be very aware, Madam Speaker, I was pleased to support this bill at all stages of its reading thus far and will continue to do so at third reading. It's important that we improve our fire readiness for all of our province, and it's tough to know exactly what the results of these steps will be. Will they prevent forest fires? It's tough to actually know, but it's important that we take the steps that we are able to take, the reasonable means that we're able to take to do what we can to minimize that risk. That risk will never be fully eliminated, but it is important that we do what we can to minimize the risk of forest fires.

There are a number of potential areas of concern, as have been mentioned by a lot of my colleagues in terms of the definitions. I recognize the government's position around a "thing" or a "forest product" and what a forest product is really already defined as and how that presents a risk to even being able to move something as simple as a pile of logs, which is clearly a product of the forest. But we still have some reservations around the possibility of the abuse of the word "thing."

Oftentimes in this Legislature, you know, politics is the art of what's possible. It may not have been possible to have a perfect definition, but it's important that we all work to do our best to ensure that the legislation balances the needs and requirements of forestry professionals as well as the freedoms that we all enjoy and that those that use the forests for recreation or for economic purposes are also able to do that. As has been highlighted on a couple of occasions with the use of the word "thing," does that leave the opportunity for abuse or the inappropriate seizure of things that really ought not be seized under the guise of pest control?

It's my hope that the government will continue to take proactive steps, whether it's truly implementing programs such as FireSmart, which was developed to reduce the negative impact of forest fires.

You know, I know that there was a lot of public discussion around FireSmart prior to the Fort McMurray fire and whether or not the resources were actually being expended that had been allotted to prevent fires. Sometimes a significant event can happen, and we get distracted by that, not allowing other areas that were engaging in the FireSmart program to really continue along there. Sometimes the worse thing that can happen is that we allocate resources to such an important program and then those resources aren't actually expended on that program. So our best intentions have gone awry in that we had the intention of preventing forest fires, but when it actually came down to the nuts and bolts of ensuring that the program is delivered upon, we failed in that area. Fire protection has multiple aspects. Prevention is certainly one of them, and we need to make sure that we are delivering on the programs where funds have been allocated because they have the real opportunity to reduce costs across a number of departments if we prevent these sorts of fires.

Let me just conclude, Madam Speaker, with a reminder or a reaffirmation of my support for the legislation. Oftentimes when I rise in this place, even if it's speaking in favour, it doesn't mean that it's only about heaping praise on the government but about the government's job to make sure that we get the best possible legislation the first time past the post. I'd like to thank the government for bringing it forward. I hope that the extension of the fire season as well as some of the discussion around fines will make a positive impact on our province, and I look forward to supporting this bill at third reading.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to the original bill? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today, of course, to speak to Bill 24, the Forest and Prairie Protection Amendment Act. As you know, Madam Speaker, I represent several communities that are in the mountains and within significant forest areas of our province. While my communities have been fortunate enough not to experience something similar to what happened in Fort McMurray or Slave Lake, without a doubt, we've had a few close calls along the way. It's a fear that many people within the communities of Sundre and Rocky Mountain House, in particular, in my riding worry about at certain times of the year. They have had close calls. I can think of times when people have been praying that the wind changed and didn't go the wrong way on us.

10:50

You know, first, of course, let me express my sympathies to my colleagues from Fort McMurray and all the people from Fort McMurray. I can't imagine the trauma that that has caused on their families.

You know, my family in 2007, roughly, 2008 lived through a fire. We woke up in the middle of the night, and a significant portion of our property was on fire. Fortunately for us, Madam Speaker, our living quarters weren't destroyed, but it was traumatic. My twins, my youngest children, Austin and Chyanne, were about three or four at the time. They still remember that night very, very clearly and probably will for the rest of their lives. It is really traumatic to see part of your life on fire like that. I think that it's noble that we would work to make sure that that doesn't happen to anybody in the future and try to prevent fires like Slave Lake and Fort McMurray.

With that said, Madam Speaker, I'm happy that we brought forward some legislation, and in general I support Bill 24 and the intent of what the government is trying to do with it. I'm glad that they brought it forward.

My communities, though, Madam Speaker, have a lot of old-growth fires. So what's happened – most of the big fires that I can remember in the last decade around my community may have been started by human causes or lightning, back and forth, different situation for each fire, but often the reason that they became so big and became so dangerous for our communities was because the forests were really, really old in that area.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, welcome.

One near my area called the Wildhorse Creek fire in about 2006 was started, I believe, from man-made causes. That's what they determined. But the reason that it took off so fast and became such a big fire was because of how old the forest was. It became an extremely dangerous situation really, really fast. If the forest was not that old, it would not have become as dangerous as quickly and would not have been as hard to control. This is the problem, particularly in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, which has such vast forest areas. The problem is trying to manage the issue between what's natural for the forest and what we have to do to try to protect lives and property and livelihoods and that those two issues are balanced.

I know that in the Ya Ha Tinda in my constituency, a place that's near and dear to my heart, there is evidence that our First Nations people were actually lighting fires in that area on purpose for centuries. What they would do is that most of the community would move on when they were done hunting in that area, and they would leave behind some people that would light the area on fire. If you've ever been to the Ya Ha Tinda, which is one of the most beautiful places in this province, you'll know that it's famous for its abundance of game, its beautiful landscapes, and all that. Fire was natural for that. We need to make sure that we're not only protecting property, which is what we're trying to do with this bill, have plans in place to try to prevent another Fort McMurray, another Slave Lake, but we also have to recognize that we're going to have to let the forest do its natural process. When we try to prevent that natural process, we actually create bigger danger for the communities that are associated to it. Kelowna, I think, would be another example, our neighbours to the west. That was a very, very old forest, and we saw how quickly that situation became dangerous.

I am disappointed that there isn't a lot of talk about that within this bill, and I do encourage the government going forward to have some further discussions amongst themselves, amongst the bureaucrats that are involved in forestry as well as the communities that are bordering our old forests.

The other thing I will point out, Mr. Speaker, in this bill, as many of my hon. colleagues have – it's a little bit troubling and disappointing that it's really only about forests, it feels like, with this bill. We've seen lots of prairie-type fires, and prairie fires can be extremely dangerous, certainly, for the same type of reasons. They can be just as fast. In 2015 during the last week of the general election – this was more in the foothills area, but it was outside the forest – I had to rush home from the other side of my constituency to be with my family to spray all the barns down and do all that stuff. It was the same thing: a fire that was moving across an area that had no forests, and it was coming very, very fast. Several of my neighbours lost homes in that situation. So it's a real threat. It really can happen. I think that until you've seen it, you can't fully understand how quickly a fire can move across large grass areas. Just like with the old-growth forests, we need to make sure that

we're addressing the prairie fire issue as well going forward, you know, so that we don't see that within our prairie communities.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Welcome back, Madam Speaker.

The last issue I want to talk about – and I'm disappointed that the government, Madam Speaker, did not move on this issue – is the issue of the time. I know that the third party brought forward an amendment to try to cap and make specific the time that a forestry officer would have to report back when making fire plans. It may seem simple. Why would forestry take this long? Is the opposition saying that the bureaucrats would try to drag it out? That's not what we're saying. I represent communities where we already know how far behind our forestry officers are in many things and how far behind our SRD officers are in many things.

I can think of two major forest reserve leases right now where the real estate sale has been held up for over a year because they're waiting on a plan. That's a significant thing for small businesses that are trying to move forward. I can think of a dozen grazing leases right now where the sale is being held up for the same reason, because they're waiting on reports. Now that we're going to be working so closely with the industrial areas and commercial organizations to prevent fires, it's a good thing. We also have to make sure that we're not limiting their ability to do business and that there are reasonable timelines for forestry to interact with them.

So with those things that I'm concerned are not in the bill and with the true encouragement of the government to look at those things going forward, I will say, though, that in general I'm very happy that we brought forward this legislation and will be happy to support it.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: My apologies. Not under 29(2)(a).

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members with questions or comments?

Seeing none, are there any wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would just like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 25 Oil Sands Emissions Limit Act

Mr. Loewen moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 25, Oil Sands Emissions Limit Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 25, Oil Sands Emissions Limit Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that it is necessary to have the recommendations from the oil sands advisory group tabled in the Assembly before the bill can proceed.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment November 9: Mr. Panda]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: We're on the motion, correct, Madam Speaker?

The Acting Speaker: No. We're on the amendment.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Would you like to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Nixon: Yes. Absolutely. I just wanted to make sure where we were at. Sorry, Madam Speaker.

As I have said before in rising to speak on Bill 25, I have deep concerns with this bill. This bill, in my mind and in many of my colleagues' minds and I think in the minds of professionals all across the industry in this province, is essentially just a cap on our economy, Madam Speaker. I know that you know that we have lots of concerns. I think you probably share with me the concerns for the things that are happening in our communities right now across our province, the trouble that families across our province have run into right now because of the economic situation. I think we can all sympathize with all of the families that are out of work right now, the stress that that is likely causing their families and our communities as a whole. I think of my friends and neighbours back home who have been affected by this economic situation, and it really troubles me. I'm sure it troubles the members opposite as they think of the people in their constituencies who have been impacted by the economic downturn. I certainly know that it does my caucus colleagues.

The reality is that that's what we face as a province right now. We've lost over a hundred thousand jobs in the last year. When you add in contractors, something that is a little harder probably to calculate but something that really impacts my community – many people across my community work in the contract business and in some way associate with the energy industry.

As I talked about earlier when we were debating Bill 25, Madam Speaker, the forest reserve outside of my constituency is a place that people all across the province gather on the weekends. It's quite a sight. If you ever get a chance to go up in a helicopter west of Rocky Mountain House or Sundre on the May long weekend, you will be pretty impressed at how many people they can cram into the forest back there. Then often as the weekends end, it gets smaller. There are certain people vacationing, but it's a lot quieter back there. For the whole summer, if you talk to the RCMP and fish and wildlife who are patrolling west of Sundre and Rocky Mountain House, this year it stayed packed with trailers and everything, and that's because people were out of work, so they just chose to go camping for the summer and enjoy their time with their kids. It really illustrated how many people are out of work. Somebody might say: well, they should be looking. But there just is no work right now. The fact that we would be considering a bill right now that would further cap our economy is troubling to me. It's troubling to me why we would do that when we see such tough times.

11:00

The other thing is that this bill is going to hamper investment going forward, which will limit the ability that we have to be able to get out of this tough economic situation and, in my mind, will just continue to prolong the situation that we find ourselves in. I think that we owe it to the people that are suffering in our province right now to be focused on trying to increase our economy and get people back to work, not trying to decrease our economy and limit people's ability to work going forward.

You know, there are some studies right now, Madam Speaker, or some numbers that experts have given us in regard to what the reduction would be of our economy going forward as a result of Bill 25. The predictions are anywhere from a \$153.41 billion to a

\$254.74 billion reduction in our economy. I think that sometimes when you're in our business, in the Legislature, we see these big numbers and they just become numbers on a sheet because we deal with so many of them. But that's a staggering number, especially when you look at the fact that if all of the pipelines that we want approved were approved today – and let's hope that happens – the estimated increase to the Canadian economy would be \$30 billion. Thirty billion dollars. It would be great, but the smallest predicted loss to the economy because of the bill this government is bringing forward, Bill 25, is a \$153 billion loss and even upwards of \$254 billion, so it could be considerably more.

How can we justify bringing forward at this time legislation that could reduce our economic activity that much, that could reduce it that drastically, particularly when we still haven't even seen the report that the government has commissioned on this very topic come forward? We haven't even seen that, so we don't even have all of the facts before us right now to be able to make a decision along those lines.

At the same time, when you add in the fact that 100,000 people have already lost work largely because of the reduction in our energy industry, you know, the fact that we're now seeing some trouble within our agricultural sector, which will compound the problem that we're facing economically in the province of Alberta, I think, Madam Speaker, it's reasonable to say that it's incumbent on the government to stand up and explain why they would want to reduce our economy this much and, ultimately, cost us more jobs at a time when we've already lost more than enough jobs.

I think that government members would agree, I would hope, that losing 100,000 jobs in one year on their watch is more than enough jobs to lose and that one of our top priorities right here, right now should be trying to spur our economy on, to get out of the way and stop making things worse, which, in my mind and in most of my hon. colleagues' minds, is what this government has done in regard to this economy and jobs so far. They've been able to actually make the situation worse by interfering. Most Albertans that I've talked to and, I suspect, that all members of this Assembly have talked to just say the same thing: please stop making it worse and, instead, work with us to reduce the red tape, get people back to work, get paycheques back to families, and help us. That's what they want to hear.

But this bill does not do that, Madam Speaker. This bill reduces the economy, caps the economy, and it causes a tremendous amount of difficulty for our industry going forward. The other thing about it is that it picks winners and losers. Many of the constituents that I've talked to don't want the government in the business of picking winners and losers in our industry. They want the market determining where we go. I think that any time we see the government attempting to get their fingers so far into the largest industry in our province, we have to be asking ourselves: why? Why would we do that?

Again, though, why at a time when constituents in the ridings of everybody in this Assembly are losing their homes at alarming rates now, when employers I know in my constituency – and the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon will also, I would suspect, say this as well, that there are many employers right now who are bidding work at a tremendous loss to their organization just to keep their employees working. They're doing what they can for our communities. They're doing what they can for their employees to try to survive this situation, to get us to the next stage so we can move Alberta back onto a prosperous footing. They're taking a loss in their company, sometimes a drastic loss, and they're just trying to hang on and not lay off their employees, because they understand the consequences to their employees' families.

We here in this Chamber should be at the very least thinking the same thing: what is the consequence of Bill 25 to the very people that are suffering so much right now across our province? It is significant when you look at how much money will be reduced from our economy going forward. We also have employees right now across this province – I've talked to many of them in my constituency offices – who have had to take pay reductions at work to be able to help their employers keep their businesses going. They've had to accept the fact that they've had to reduce their pay, often causing a tremendous amount of difficulty for their families back home.

So if you're one of those employees sitting in a community somewhere in Alberta right now and you're hearing that the government wants to cap our economy, cap production, limit investment trust further in the future, create instability in our largest industry, you have to be wondering: "What is my government doing? I'm trying to pay my bills. I can barely get my house paid for, and my government is trying to cap the economy, stop my opportunity to be able to find more work in the future, create more job loss, cause more contractors to go out of business." Madam Speaker, I think you would agree that that's a pretty reasonable thing for them to be asking.

One of the reasons why we wanted this bill to go to committee was because we wanted to be able to make sure that the industry and experts would be able to communicate to all members of this Assembly what exactly this bill would do, what exactly would be the consequences and the benefit of this piece of legislation to the people of Alberta, because, Madam Speaker, that is who we're here to represent.

We're not here to represent ideological organizations; we're here to represent the people of Alberta. Those are the people that sent us here. Those are the people that have entrusted us with a great responsibility to come here and continue to make our province the greatest place in the world to live, not to come here and limit the ability of their economy going forward, not to come here and cause more people to lose jobs, not to come here and pile on at a time when people are losing homes and banks are foreclosing on homes, not to come here at a time when employers are having to lose money just to send people to work.

This is all at the same time that we have one of the largest tax increases in the history of Alberta, that we're about to put on the people of Alberta, that we're about to put on the charity sector of Alberta, which is suffering terribly as well. Charities, as you know, Madam Speaker, are facing the perfect storm right now in our province. They're seeing a significant increase in demand for the services that they provide to the people of Alberta while at the same time seeing a significant decrease in revenue from donations and from the government because of the economic downturn that we face. We now pile a tax onto the charitable sector, through a carbon tax, that makes things worse for them, and now, with Bill 25, we're bringing forward a bill that's going to again make the economy even worse, cause more job loss, which is going to put more demand on our charities.

The food bank in Rocky Mountain House can't even keep up. The food bank in Calgary can't keep up. It seems to me, Madam Speaker – and I'm sure you would agree – that when food banks aren't able to keep up with what's going on in our province, maybe the province's elected officials' top priority should be the 100,000-plus people that are out of work. To me, it seems like that should be the highest priority of this House right now. Sadly, instead, we're standing here debating a bill that will make it worse for the very people that we've been sent here to help.

We still see no explanation from the government members of how they can justify reducing our economy by upwards of \$254

billion, not to mention the carbon leakage scenarios, which are very real, that the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake has done a very great job in this Assembly of articulating. There's been no response from the government at all, but . . . [interjections] I know. The postsecondary minister is indicating that maybe he has a response. I look forward to hearing it next, but I haven't seen it yet.

11:10

The fact is that we could do all of this – we could do all of this – succeed in reducing our economy, succeed in putting more people out of work, succeed in seeing more people lose their homes, succeed in more businesses being shut, more poverty, more frustration in our province. Also, on the other side we'll be seeing all our industries leave our province, leave our country, go elsewhere in the world, continue to produce their products, and employ people of other nations. Nothing but silence, Madam Speaker, and I know you've seen it. Nothing but silence from that side of the House on this issue. Nothing but silence. It's disappointing. It is.

We have a company in Sundre right now that provides water. It's been there for as long as I can remember. It provides water to all the local businesses, you know, in the big bottles. I don't know what you call those. I guess they're big water bottles.

An Hon. Member: Carboys.

Mr. Nixon: Yeah.

I had a coffee with the owner of that organization when I was last back in my constituency. He employs six people in the community of Sundre. It's not a large community, so an employer of six people is important to our community. He's having to lay off half of his staff. Half of his staff. That's why we should be voting for this amendment, to be able to give ourselves time to figure out why this is being brought forward, to make sure that the facts and the consequences for the people that we represent are clear and that we're making decisions, not rash decisions, Madam Speaker, but intelligent, thought-out decisions, with the full consequences of that decision that we're going to make on the table so that we can make the best decision possible for the people that we represent.

That's not unreasonable, I don't think, Madam Speaker. I'm sure you don't think it's unreasonable that we would do that. I know that you would be just as concerned about your constituents as I am.

You know, Meals on Wheels out of Olds. The other day my colleague from the Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills constituency, right next door to me, let us know that it's going to cost them about \$4,000 or \$5,000 more a year just because of the carbon tax. That's a significant thing to a small charity doing great work in the community of Olds. That's significant to them. We need them to do that.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a), questions or comments? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Well, thank you. My colleague got cut off there, and we were talking about a very valuable asset to his community. I think it's a really important piece of this conversation as to why we should stop and go back and maybe start again. I just think it's a really useful piece of this conversation, and I'm hoping my colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and all those other wonderful towns in a beautiful part of Alberta could tell us a little bit more about the Meals on Wheels and maybe some other valuable organizations within the community that just really, really feel like they're getting kicked and kicked and kicked. This is important, and I think this House needs to hear about that.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you to the hon. member for the question. What I was talking about was the tremendous impact that our nonprofit sector has on the social safety net of our province. They're important to us, and the fact is that they're seeing such an increase in demand on their services because of what's going on in the economy.

The reason this matters for this bill, Madam Speaker, is because this bill will further reduce the economy and put more pressure on those organizations at the same time that this government has chosen to tax homeless shelters, seniors' facilities – and this is what I really don't get – our school boards. We have to think about this. We take taxpayer dollars. We send them to our school boards to be able to fund education, which we all believe is important. They're already taxed and having trouble keeping up. We put in a carbon tax, which drastically increases the cost of heating the schools and drastically increases their biggest cost, which is transportation, so it drastically increases their bus costs. We don't increase anything for them in regard to the carbon tax we just put on them. We're now going to hire administrators to collect the carbon tax back from the same school boards that we just sent money to.

Now, I know that the hon. members have talked to their school boards because I share some of the school boards with some of the members across the way, and I know that the school boards have been very, very clear about their deep concern about the impact on them, on municipalities, and on charities. This goes to the core of what's wrong with Bill 25. We already have so much trouble that is going on in our constituencies because of what's going on with the economic situation. We already have a government who has made it tremendously worse on the nonprofit sector, on Albertans, moms and dads, and now they're going to pile on their ideological agenda with this bill and further reduce our economy, further cause more people to be out of work, put more pressure on the nonprofit sector just to hold things together, and in some places they're just barely hanging on. That's a fact.

All the while, Madam Speaker, they won't even rise in this Assembly and justify what they're trying to do. They won't take the time to get this to a committee and ensure . . . [interjections] I see that the member from Athabasca thinks it's really funny about people out of work, but I've been up to Athabasca recently. It's not that funny to them, I can tell you that. We need to make sure that we are getting this bill right, make sure that we're not wrecking our economy further. That's all that this bill is doing, and that's why we have to have a serious conversation because the people that you represent and the people that we represent are depending on us to get this right, not to make it worse for them.

Now, I know that the member from Hinton is heckling right now at me about this, but there are people in his constituency that are just as much out of work. I know because I back onto his constituency. They're suffering just as much as the people in my constituency, so this should not be a partisan issue. The fact is that people are hurting in our province right now – that's the fact – and this bill will further reduce the economy, further put more people out of work, and continue to make things worse, all at a time when the government that is bringing it forward has already made it worse for charities, made it worse for schools, made it worse for municipalities, and made it worse for Alberta families.

Instead, we could slow this legislation down. We could do it right. We could make sure that we understand the consequences and that we're making the right decision for the people of Alberta, not just rashly pushing through legislation without a thought to the consequences.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to rise today to speak on the amendment to Bill 25. You know, I support my colleagues in the views they've already expressed on this bill. I'd have less opposition to this bill if it was presented as an alternative to carbon tax rather than that the government would go through with the tax, but it means that they're going to go through with it. We don't want to see them go through with that tax.

This emissions limit is in addition to the carbon tax that this government is levelling on Albertans and Alberta businesses. A cap on emissions gives at least some semblance of being a measure to actually help battle climate change whereas a carbon levy seems to be just another tax that families have no choice but to pay. Ultimately, this emissions cap that our government is introducing is just one more signal among many others to Albertans and to investors that this government's priorities are, frankly, mixed up.

You see, Canada produces 1.8 per cent of global emissions, and Alberta's oil sands are less than 10 per cent of that, just a fraction. So even if we shut down development in the oil sands entirely, there'd be a negligible difference in global output. Globally, the demand for oil is increasing. We all know that. The facts are out there. This negligible difference would also not last very long because other jurisdictions would pick up the slack, and they're not always in places that have high environmental standards or ethical practices. Some are in war zones. Some are spewing out pollution and CO₂ and carbons.

11:20

Alberta is one of the best places in the world for our practices. I've heard some people suggest that Alberta is setting a good example to other jurisdictions by introducing measures such as a carbon tax or emissions cap. It's possible that this hamstringing of our resource sector will gently nudge other governments who are considering action, but the signal that is being sent much more powerfully is to investors, and that signal is that this government is not on your side.

We're an example to the world when it comes to democracy and human rights, and this world does have dictatorships. The oil-producing countries that don't see the value in democracy don't care about environmental leadership either. Got to think about that. We care, and they do not. They will take this opportunity to make more money and steal more of Alberta's investment instead because investment will travel where the money is.

This government's press release when this bill was released said that this cap is about repairing the province's reputation. Well, Madam Speaker, I'm proud of what Alberta stood for before this NDP was elected. Alberta leads the world with its exemplary environmental stewardship and commitment to worker safety in the energy industry. What kind of leader doesn't prioritize the well-being of their own people rather than enabling those they disapprove of?

In fact, Madam Speaker, wouldn't it actually be worse for the climate, globally speaking, if other jurisdictions start producing oil that Alberta doesn't because the world needs the oil? It would certainly be worse for human rights. If Alberta emits less per barrel of oil produced than other jurisdictions but is still prevented from producing more oil because a cap has been reached, then we have other countries picking up the slack to meet the global demand. I'd say that it would be better for us to compete with the least environmentally friendly businesses and outproduce them if we're

outproducing with clean technology and clean oil. I'd rather see us doing that and providing the world with the additional oil that it needs.

But no. Here in Alberta there are Albertans without work, praying for the economy to pick up again, and the government goes about introducing a cap for Alberta, what seems to be, frankly, an arbitrary number. Our economy is struggling, and now is not the right time to put restrictions on economic growth. Innovation is a good thing. What's stopping investors from going to other jurisdictions where they're rewarded for innovating and investment in jobs is welcomed?

Madam Speaker, the Official Opposition isn't against everything this government is trying to accomplish, and I think in many cases we want the same results or outcomes. We want clean technologies. What the Official Opposition is asking for is for this government to slow down and to not rush into decisions or implementation of new legislation. We need to take the time to have proper studies done and to think things through.

It's clear that this government has no intention, has no interest in providing everyone in Alberta with an economic impact study with regard to the climate leadership plan that they put forward. We've seen no studies about the impact that the premature closing of coal-fired electricity plants will have, no studies about the impact on workers at those plants and what it means for these towns, nor what the government is going to do about it. Do they care?

Alberta also needs the time to digest what the government is advocating for. So you come up with an idea, you come up with a plan, but you don't give Albertans time to digest what that idea is. Instead, it seems to just get rammed down their throats.

They also need time to adjust. The speed with which this government is trying to pass bills tells me that they aren't really interested in listening to what Albertans have to say. Bill 6 comes to mind. Minimum wage comes to mind. The carbon tax comes to mind. The NDP might say: we heard Albertans' concerns, and this is the answer. Well, it might be a concern, sure, but the NDP is then shoving their own solution down Albertans' throats without listening to what Albertans think and what the best solution is.

You know, I've heard time and time again in my constituency, in my riding, that this government has not consulted them. They've heard your message that, "Yes; we're consulting Albertans," but they're asking me: "How come I can't have my input into what they're saying? Where's that opportunity for me to be able to consult and give feedback?" I know that they've sent e-mails. They've sent letters. They've tried making phone calls. But this communication has not been a two-way street.

Look, we all want to live in a clean, healthy environment, and we want a sustainable, thriving economy. You know, when I used to go camping with my dad, we'd go to the campsite, and my dad would always say: we're going to leave this campsite as clean or cleaner than when we got here. I think that's what we as legislators are expected to do, to legislate and make sure that we're keeping this environment as clean, if not cleaner, and industry has been moving in that direction.

Industry in Alberta has been an example across the world, leaving the campsite, as it were, cleaner than it was 20, 30 years ago. But there are fair disagreements in how, the best way to go about attaining these results, and the appropriate timing for making these significant changes. It is not compassionate to kick people while they're down. I thought the left prided themselves on compassion. Where's the compassion when people don't have jobs and they're looking for answers?

Madam Speaker, this is an important piece of legislation. This potential law will set in motion a lot of different processes that counter many of the processes that Alberta has had here for many

generations. This is not to say that change at times isn't important. I think we can all agree that fresh eyes and fresh ears on any issue in Alberta is important. But this government promised to be more open and transparent than the government before it. I can't help but wonder if this government meant it then or if it was just an election idea that they have pushed aside as bill after bill is rushed through this House at breakneck speed. [interjection] Exactly. Thank you.

If this government thinks that legislation can have a significant positive impact so as to change our environment and the economy for the better, then it should acknowledge that legislation also has the potential to have a significant negative impact on both the environment and the economy, too. This is just logic. No jurisdiction with a bad economy has a good environment across the world.

Again, this is an important piece of legislation. Shouldn't we give it a fair amount of time for policy and research and deliberation with the stakeholders? Let's see what OSAG has to say. That's a fair request. The government should hear what the people and the industry think of what this piece of legislation could mean for the province. Doesn't the input of the people from this province who elected this government matter? After we've heard from OSAG this bill could be sent to committee.

11:30

Committees allow people with concerns an opportunity to share their thoughts, people that the government might have missed, in quiet consultations in advance of presenting the bill. We can talk about this stuff in committees. Then the committee can bring back the recommendations to the House and enhance the chance of doing the most good while creating the least amount of harm.

Madam Speaker, this act, the Oil Sands Emissions Limit Act, is directly related to the oil sands advisory panel created last summer. What was the point of creating the panel if the government is going to go ahead and enact legislation like this without hearing from the group first? You know, Albertans would like to know: why are we spending money on this? Why are we spending the time? Why are we putting in the effort without actually hearing from the panel? Have the recommendations of this group been predetermined?

There has been a lot of criticism about some of the members of this panel. I know that some of my colleagues talked about the appointed panel members last week. It is understood that there are industry reps on the panel, and most of the reps are the companies' government relations folks or environmental affairs folks. This is somewhat good news, I think. We want people with boots-on-the-ground experience to counteract the expected views of nonindustry members that spend their time expressing their disapproval of Alberta. A lot of other countries want what we have, and shame on us if we don't take advantage of our good fortune.

I think it's fair to suggest that appointing known radical environmentalists or anti-oil sands activists flown in from other parts of the country – and I'm assuming that these airplanes used fossil fuels; I can't imagine how else they got over here – to advise the Alberta government on its implementation of the climate leadership plan is a bit of a problematic situation in my mind. Even so, Albertans want to hear what the group has to say now that the government has gone out and put forward the panel.

People have told me that they think the NDP want to keep the oil in the ground. That's what I hear. I live in an oil area. The NDP isn't doing much to convince them otherwise or to calm their fears. If keeping the oil in the ground . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?
Comments or questions?

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment REA1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:33 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Cooper	Gill	Smith
Drysdale	Nixon	Taylor
Fildebrandt	Pitt	Yao

11:50

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Payne
Babcock	Hinkley	Piquette
Ceci	Hoffman	Rosendahl
Connolly	Horne	Sabir
Coolahan	Kazim	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Kleinstauber	Schreiner
Dach	Larivee	Shepherd
Dang	Loyola	Sigurdson
Eggen	Luff	Sucha
Feehan	Malkinson	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Westhead
Ganley	Miller	Woollard

Totals: For – 9 Against – 36

[Motion on amendment REA1 lost]

The Acting Speaker: We are now back on the original bill, Bill 25. Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm tired of this government. I'm tired of the ideological bent that this government is using in its messaging and its actions.

The Oil Sands Emissions Limit Act limits growth on our own industries at a time when we need to create jobs, increase the ranks of the employed, and initiate and dictate the conversations with other Premiers and provinces on getting pipelines built to tidewater. This arbitrary cap will benefit the large companies who already own many of the leases that will fill out the difference between the current capacity and future capacity. Many of the small players, small Alberta companies and Canadian companies, are extremely concerned that they won't be able to grow, that they will be literally squeezed out of the energy market, and this is a major concern in a free market. This government might have the best of intentions with its environmental initiatives and these attempts at getting social licence in order that we get acceptance for our products but quite honestly demonstrates a bit of naïveté on our end.

This government's other environmental initiative, a carbon tax in the middle of a recession, is an absolute crock. They've created a new tax in the name of the environment, but it's still a tax. Any tax that makes things more expensive in an attempt at reducing consumption in the name of the environment is still a tax regardless

of what you call it. This environmental initiative of limiting emissions in order to get social licence from other provinces and other countries is naive because every province in this country has benefited from the oil revenues that come from Alberta, and every other country that is condemning Canada for our natural resources are hypocrites because everybody uses petroleum products.

Virtually every nation that does have petroleum industries is worse than us in their environmental records. The United States, where there's so much well-funded resistance to our oil, is a prime example of this. In California they not only have the most emissions-intensive oil in the world but have petroleum industrial sites in the middle of residential neighbourhoods, yet we don't hear about them. They put tall walls around these industrial sites and line the exteriors with trees in hopes of mimicking a state.

We have hired guns in the Tides Foundation, mercenary groups that claim to fight for the environment but seem more like shells funded by the very oil companies that they claim to disparage.

Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Libya all export oil to the western nations, the so-called First World nations. These countries are known to stifle democracy and the rights of women. They have a vast difference in their classes of people. They deny basic human rights to so many, especially their immigrant workers. Yet England, Germany, France and so many others continue to buy product from them. None of these countries in the Middle East put limitations on their own products unless they're doing it to control global prices. Most countries prefer to grow their industries as they understand the needs of a good economy and money to function.

Whatever happened to ethical oil, ethical energy? Everyone jumped off that bandwagon when they realized the implications of limiting their access to energy, but they all did find a nice target to direct their hypocritical ethics towards. They feigned concern about Canada's energy industry, using left-wing tactics to their own benefit. It gives their own citizens the perception that their governments are environmentally ethical, and they have good feelings the next time they vote for their hypocritical governments. Do the members out of our government side, the NDP comrades, understand how they have benefited from our oil riches?

Those who worked in restaurants and cafes surely realize how much less in tips they would have made if there was no energy industry here in Alberta. The geologist from across the way probably wouldn't have experienced utilizing his education if it weren't for our oil industry's exploration investments. Would the environmental activist from across the way understand that she couldn't sit and sip her lattes with her professor and debate the finer points of a green Earth policy if it weren't for an industry that funded the very schools and universities that she hung out at while others worked hard in our northern communities, paying taxes on their hard-earned money?

The other side calls this emissions act a way of increasing competition amongst oil players, and they once again demonstrate that they haven't done any consulting, which is reflected in every bill that they've put out so far. They've consulted, all right. They consulted with the big four and are favouring those big players while squeezing the little guys out. It's a shame to see the activists from across the way who are so noble in their environmental cause look the other way provided these oil companies would stand with them hand in hand. I believe that term is called "hypocritical." This government speaks of the environment like they own it.

Truth be told, I've never met anyone that does not believe in clean earth, clean water, and clean air. All of my friends from Fort McMurray are very environmentally aware. We all recycle, we turn out the lights when we leave a room, and we have thermostats that are programmable, reducing energy costs. We have energy-efficient homes with high-efficiency furnaces. We have triple-paned

windows with proper insulation. But I cannot and will not apologize for living in a northern climate that goes from plus 40 degrees to minus 40 degrees Celsius.

We need to have homes that are carbon intensive to build because it's through science – do you know science? – and technology that we have designed engineered homes that require these plastics, that require these petroleum-based building materials that blend wood with glue and other miscellaneous building materials. You're right; we don't live around the equator, where they build houses made of concrete and steel and they don't have central heating because they're in a climate that doesn't require it. But I'll tell you what about our engineered houses: these engineered pieces provide the strength to support roofs that can hold up to our elements, the snow loads. We have fibreglass insulation. We have thick plastic sheets lining our houses to prevent moisture from entering our homes and exposing us to mould and mildew. I will not apologize for living in the north and lighting a furnace to stay warm, nor for living in a carbon-intensive home.

The point is that I feel we as Canadians are feeling the brunt of environmentalism, and it is unnecessarily impairing us from succeeding as a economy and, more importantly, as an influencer. You see, when we are at our finest and our economic engine is humming along, Albertans and Canadians put their kids through higher education. They invest in their future. It's because we want our children to have a better life than we did. We want our children to work in more prestigious professions and industries to ensure their financial viability and that these kids grow up into fine Canadians, albeit shielded from some of the realities as they didn't have to follow their parents and work in a mine or drive a limo.

They can learn the finer points in life and listen to their idealistic professors with tenure who can preach about the most virtuous aspects of our society, the most idealistic desires of mankind.

That's where Canadians can be most effective. Every backpacker that comes from this country – and there are many – are fantastic diplomats. We are worldly people with a good reputation throughout the world. Canadians volunteer across the world, and we work in orphanages, communal farms, rescue and respite operations in environmentally challenged areas. We have Canadians that volunteer to teach people about language, clean water, and sustainable families. This is where Canadians are most effective. It's countries in Central America, South America, Africa, Asia, and so many other areas across the world where there is far more wasteful pollution and contributions to global warming. They still burn their garbage. They still use so much plastic and leave it on the wayside. They do not recycle. We need to educate people in these countries and ensure that they do their part in contributing to a low carbon intensive world.

To that effect, I'll buy your ticket to some faraway, distant land so that you can educate the masses about their impacts to the environment and get them thinking more globally because here you're speaking to the choir. We understand global warming. We understand the intent of your . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2.1) the Assembly stands adjourned until 1:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875